ABSTRACT

JOHNSON, ORIANA TINIQUE. The Role of Racial Identity, Parental Socialization, and School Connectedness on the Academic Experiences of Gifted Black Female Adolescents Attending Predominantly White Schools (Under the direction of Dr. Jessica T. DeCuir-Gunby).

This narrative inquiry study was designed to explore the academic experiences of gifted Black female adolescents attending predominantly White schools. In addition to considering the role that racial identity, parental socialization (i.e., racial/cultural, academic, and gender socialization), and school connectedness play in these academic experiences, using a Critical Race Theory lens, this study investigated the ways in which gifted Black female adolescents’ academic experiences at predominantly White schools are impacted by: (a) the relationships they share with their teachers, peers, and other school personnel; (b) the curriculum, and (c) their involvement in school activities. Findings indicate the gifted Black girls’ internalization of their parents’ racial, academic, and gender socialization messages enhanced their racial, gendered, and academic identities, influenced their motivation to achieve, and led them to resist pejorative stereotypes about Black females by adopting a resilient “prove them wrong” mentality. Further, the gifted Black girls’ levels of connectedness to their predominantly White school environments was increased when they became involved in school activities, developed positive adult and peer relationships in school, and engaged in culturally relevant curriculum.
The Role of Racial Identity, Parental Socialization, and School Connectedness on the Academic Experiences of Gifted Black Female Adolescents Attending Predominantly White Schools

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
North Carolina State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Curriculum and Instruction

Raleigh, North Carolina

2018

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DEDICATION

To my babies, Kiajé and Logan,

and to all the gifted Black girls who fight for their voices to be heard every day. Continue to show off that #BlackGirlMagic!

In loving memory of my Grandma Glossie and Aunt Nita, who were unable to physically stand by me through the end of my doctoral journey, but who are beaming proudly from Heaven.
Oriana Johnson was born in Durham, North Carolina in 1983. The middle child sandwiched between two brothers, Oriana grew up a tomboy who enjoyed playing video games, building things with her Lego’s, playing with toy Tonka trucks, and playing any high energy sports, but absolutely hated dresses. A child with a large imagination, she developed a love for reading, writing, and drawing early, and began to write and illustrate her own short stories at the age of 7. After acting out a short scene for a local television producer at the age of 8, Oriana was asked to come aboard a local children’s television show, Kid Vids, to serve as a recurring character and host of the show. Over the years, Oriana would dabble in several different extracurricular activities, including intensive training in tap, jazz, and ballet for 16 years and piano for 8 years; performing with a competitive dance company for 6 years; serving as cheerleading captain in high school and competing in local, regional, and national cheerleading competitions with her Varsity cheerleading squad; writing, co-directing, and acting in plays at church; and, competing in local-, regional-, and state-level 4-H public speaking and MSEN oratorical contests, and becoming the North Carolina state 4-H public speaking champion in 1997. In 1998, Oriana received her first role as a featured extra in a horror movie, The Rage: Carrie 2, which initially sparked her interest in filmmaking. Considering a future career in law, architecture, and child psychology prior to her senior year in high school, Oriana decided on filmmaking for college after applying to NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts Summer High School Filmmaker’s workshop and choosing to forego her acceptance to the Presidential Classroom Scholars program, which was taking place at the same time. Following her undergraduate career in film and television production, Oriana went on to pursue a teaching career and taught for three years in the Wake County Public School System, which eventually led to her decision to pursue
a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction. Oriana enjoys creative writing, traveling, dining at Italian restaurants, attending comedy shows, and spending valuable time with her son, Kiajé, daughter, Logan, and fiancé Brandon, in her spare time.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I give all praise to God as he has continued to bless me on this journey. When I first made the difficult decision to leave my full-time position in pursuit of my Ph.D. as a single mother on a research assistantship stipend, I knew that I was stepping out on a leap of faith. God pushed me every step of the way and allowed me to continue my journey despite financial hardships that came along the way.

To Dr. DeCuir-Gunby, my advisor, who took a chance on me prior to even beginning my doctoral journey. You have been a wonderful advisor, mentor, inspiration, and second “mom” (but much younger, of course) throughout this journey, and I am most honored to call myself your advisee. I hope to one day be blessed with your level of brilliance and talent as I engage in rigorous research and go on to face new endeavors.

To my son, Kiajé, who spent countless evenings after a long day at school attending graduate classes with me (three nights a week!) when I was unable to find affordable childcare; who missed out on home-cooked meals on nights that it was too late for me to cook; who gave up extracurricular activities and much-needed vacation time to, instead, accompany me to the public library over break and on the weekends so that I could study or write. As a single mother for the majority of my graduate career, you were my rock, my inspiration, and the reason I sacrificed EVERYTHING and stepped out on faith, leaving my full-time job, to pursue my Ph.D. I feel most honored to be your mom!

To my father, Calvin, who pitched in financially when I first left my career in teaching so that I could work on my Ph.D. for four plus years. I want to thank you so much for stepping in and picking up Kiajé from school for me and making sure that he was well-fed and completed his homework so that I could attend my evening classes.
To my mother, Joyce, who was the first one to show me the value of education and the first person who encouraged my love for writing. You instilled in me—and continue to do so—the importance of obtaining an education for the past 35 years. From sitting in your classroom at North Carolina Central University as a little girl and watching, in awe, at the seemingly effortless way in which you captured your college kids’ attention with both your commanding presence and undoubted passion for teaching even though you weren’t even a hundred pounds soaking wet at the time. You were the first to receive your Ph.D. and I suppose I am now following in your footsteps, so you have certainly made an impression!

To my brothers, Lil’ Bit and Cal, for always having my back, for motivating me, and for believing in me. I love you! You are the best brothers a girl can have! To my grandparents, Granddaddy Chris and Grandma Eunice, uncles, aunties, cousins, niece, and nephew, you have all inspired me to keep pushing and make the family proud.

To all of my amazing committee members, Dr. Grimmett, Dr. Manfra, and Dr. Wiseman—you have been the most uplifting and supportive committee. I thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedules and agreeing to be a part of my committee. I am honored to have each and every one of you on my committee. As a side note, it feels especially exciting whenever someone asks who is on my committee and I proudly state your names and am able to gloat at how impressed everyone is that you have all come together and formed “The Perfect Committee”. I know that not only are they as impressed as I am by your intellectual prowess, but also your unique contributions to the field of education.

To Dr. Grimmett, I thank you sharing with me your passion for filmmaking and being supportive of my pursuit to utilize filmmaking as a form of qualitative research. Even though
you did not know me prior to me asking you to be a part of my committee, you were still willing to serve.

To Dr. Manfra, I thank you for all of the courses you have taught me in qualitative research and curriculum theory and development. I didn’t realize, until writing my comprehensive examinations and later, my conducting my dissertation research, how much I truly learned from you during and how invaluable the critical readings in curriculum theory were to my research and how much they enhanced my critical thinking abilities.

To Dr. Wiseman, I thank you for not only expressing your excitement about my research and helping me to understand that what I am doing is important, but also for the valuable readings you have been eager to send me that relate to various visual research methods. Finally, I cannot thank you enough for all that I learned in your Intro to Qualitative Research course in the summer of 2015. I found myself using so many of the qualitative techniques we explored in your class.

To Dr. Gray, I thank you so much for helping me choose NC State’s Educational Psychology program to pursue my Ph.D. I am most thankful for your willingness to always be available, your eagerness to include me on research projects in an effort to enhance my research skills, and motivating me to be successful in all of your quantitative research courses. I find your enthusiasm to pursue rigorous research to be an inspiration.

To Dr. LaTricia Towsend and Malinda Faber at The Friday Institute. Thank you for all of your guidance and support throughout my journey. Your mentorship has meant so much to me and I have learned so much under your direction.

To my besties for life, Carima, Kioni, and Quwana, my close friends Ambrosia, Cali, Letisha, Myesha, and Ngwe, and my cousin, LaTorya, for always being a strong support system.
You ladies have all stood by me and been great friends since…forever. To see how close we have all remained over for well over a decade only confirms just how much of a *true* friend each of you are.

And to the love of my life, Brandon, for constantly providing me with words of encouragement and inspiration, allowing me to vent, without judgment, through the stressful periods of comprehensive examinations and dissertation data collection, analysis, and writing. You eagerly read my rough drafts (even though you are a finance guy) and provided me with invaluable constructive criticism whenever I asked for it. You watched Kiajé during the evenings and weekends so that I could run all over town collecting interview data, and never stopped believing in me or my work. I am grateful to have you in my life.

To Latonya, Callie, Whitney, Laila, Pauletta, and Angela—the ladies I formed friendships with during my time at State. You each exude excellence and I am so happy to have been able to share this academic journey with you. Whether we have traveled together, worked together on papers or journal articles, vented to one another, or simply grabbed lunch or dinner after class, you have each helped push me through and made the experience even more pleasant. You are truly the epitome of #BlackGirlMagic!

To Becca, Sunny, and Vadna—my Ed Psych partners-in-crime—you both have been nothing short of amazing as we have pursued this journey in the Educational Psychology program together since 2014. I thank you for your unwavering motivation throughout this process and your passion and commitment to effecting change in today’s current educational climate.

And To the gifted Black girls and their parents, who gave up so much of their time to participate in this dissertation study: You have become my inspiration and I am both amazed by
your unique gifts and talents and flattered that you were willing to share your stories with me.

This dissertation is dedicated to you.
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PROLOGUE

To Be a Gifted Black Girl in America: My Story

If I were to describe my experience as a gifted Black girl in America using three adjectives, I would describe it as *unwritten, hushed,* and *buoyant:*

*Unwritten*

My experience is an unwritten, yet powerful one. Hidden by the countless narratives of gifted females who are White and gifted males who are Black *and* White, my story remains untold in the majority of the literature. My voice has been silenced, unheard…my story, unwritten. Nonetheless, my experiences are very real and my stories may just stupefy you, so they need not be discounted. I have been victimized by the intersections of the three identities I find most salient to me—my race, my gender, and my giftedness.

“*My, your aspirations are high...*”

I was 7 years old when I first realized that my skin color might have affected the way my teachers perceived me. At 7, the world was filled with possibilities. I didn’t realize that my skin color might unconsciously or consciously influence the way teachers, peers, or other school staff viewed me. I didn’t realize that my dreams could be “too big” for a girl with my skin color…

*I still remember the smirk on Mrs. Lamon’s face when I stood in front of her second-grade classroom and professed my future aspirations to attend Duke University and become a pediatrician. After muttering under her breath in a dubious tone, “My, your aspirations are high,” she quickly instructed me to return to my seat and walked to the other end of the classroom. I recall standing there near the whiteboard, my feet firmly planted into place, still in*
shock that my own teacher felt that my dreams of attending a prestigious university and becoming a doctor were possibly beyond my reach. Even at the age of 7, I was quite the precocious little one. I was reading *Charlotte’s Web* independently and consistently outperformed the majority of my peers on most academic tasks. With this precocity came a heightened sense of awareness and an undercurrent of emotions that suddenly swept through me as I stood there, afraid to return to the purple table with my peers like Mrs. Lamon had ordered. It was at that very moment that I realized just how different I was. When Becky, who lived across the street from me, had her turn to tell the class that she wanted to be a teacher when she grew up, Mrs. Lamon’s face beamed with pride, perhaps because she, herself, was a teacher. Perhaps it was because Becky had the same hint of blue in her eyes as Mrs. Lamon when she took off her reading glasses. Similarly, when blond-haired Ethan spoke of becoming an NFL player and heart surgeon, she clasped her hands together excitedly. Perhaps she thought boys were better than girls in science careers. Either way, I could sense that Mrs. Lamon viewed Becky and Ethan very differently from the way she viewed me and, for some reason, she didn’t seem to believe in my dreams the way that she believed in theirs.

But the singling out didn’t end with Mrs. Lamon. In third grade, I earned the highest score on the California Achievement Test, scoring in the 99th percentile in both math and reading. Baffled by the results of the test, school personnel felt that my mother—then a high school teacher—had given me the answers to the test. Humiliated and threatening to file a lawsuit against my predominantly White elementary school, my mother initially opted against efforts by school personnel to force me to re-take the test. But her proud persona eventually reflected a “Let’s-prove-them-wrong!” attitude. In the end, my mother agreed to allow me to retake the test, and I did so—but a different version.
I was alone in the front office of my elementary school, watched closely by the school psychologist and school counselor. I felt like a bug under a microscope. Every move I made, every answer I bubbled, was being examined closely and possibly even questioned. As nervous as I was with everyone watching me, my confidence began to wane. My “spidey” senses told me that the odds were stacked against me because no one truly expected me to do as well on the test as I had done originally. Clearly, little Oriana wasn’t as smart as her test score made her out to be. Something was wrong. It was an anomaly. The gifted girls at Southwest didn’t come in the color Black. They were White, maybe Asian, but never Black. I continued to take the test, heart beating rapidly, sweat beginning to pour from my fingers as they gripped the Number 2 pencil tightly. I could remember my mother’s eyes as she stood in the front lobby of the school building as they escorted me in. “Prove them wrong!” I could hear her chant to me, though her lips never moved. “Show them exactly what you know,” I could see her eyes urge. I gained a sudden burst of confidence and focused on the test in front of me. The test administrator read the directions aloud once again. The puzzles in front of me came into focus. It was all just a puzzle. A game. All I had to do was put the pieces together, just like I so effortlessly did whenever I went to my grandfather’s house and played with the many puzzles he would have sitting in boxes on the coffee table in his living room, leaving my brothers and cousins and I busy for hours while our parents chatted about adult things that were none of our business. I just needed to find all the missing pieces and connect them. I started to zip through the test, to the test administrator’s dismay, finding the missing pieces to each small puzzle. I was told to slow down. But I didn’t. I knew the answers. I knew where to find the answers. It was somewhere in my brain. Suddenly I knew I had just proven them wrong. Yes, I had proven them all wrong! When the test was over, I jumped up, giddy with excitement and eager to return to my classroom just before recess.
Thrilled because I just knew I had done well and would make my mother proud of me. And she was. My mother was still asked to return with the results of my IQ test administered by my pediatrician, who was dually certified as a child psychologist and pediatrician. Having scored a perfect score on the re-test and showing an IQ score above 130, I was immediately admitted to the Academically Gifted (AG) program in both Math and Language Arts for the upcoming school year. Gifted education, it suddenly seemed, was designed with exclusivity in mind. In fourth grade when I attended my first AG class, I suddenly realized why they had made it so hard for me to get into the program. I was one of only two Black students in my English Language Arts class, and in Math, I was one of just about four female students—White or Black. I knew then that gifted education was segregated. It wasn’t intended for little girls who looked like me. Despite the many obstacles my mother and I had to circumnavigate in order for me to have a chance at receiving an enriched curriculum, I still had to continue to endure my hardships, unlike many of my school-aged peers. The pathway to acknowledging my giftedness was just one.

Although the stories I tell of my experiences are unique to me, they are likely not uncommon among other gifted Black girls. However, their stories as well as mine remain untold. This narrative inquiry study is an attempt to privilege the voices of a population that has been marginalized and silenced by the literature: Girls who tell of experiences of racism, racial discrimination, and sexism in schools; girls who tell stories about their fight to access gifted education services; and girls who tell us what it means to them to be gifted Black girls in America.
In my own experience, I am not quite sure whether I would have achieved a positive Black identity had I not been equipped with the cultural socialization messages I received from my parents as a little girl and throughout my adolescence about the countless contributions of People of Color. Nor would I have been able to so keenly detect and challenge the omission of the voice of People of Color in the school curriculum and curricular materials implemented by my teachers throughout my K-12 schooling. Instead, I might have internalized the negative stereotypes and images portrayed by the media or, perhaps, assumed People of Color were not gifted and, therefore, had not made any significant contributions to society because I almost never saw them portrayed in a positive light. In my schooling experiences, I was rarely afforded the opportunity to engage in multicultural curricula that did not involve a few isolated celebrations of popularized African Americans, such as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., during the month of February. Critically acclaimed books selected for my advanced classes that had been deemed “Great Books” were not penned by “great” Black authors. I did not have the opportunity to engage in a curriculum in which the narratives of People of Color were centered until my college years at NYU, when I finally had the opportunity to select my own courses in Africana Studies, Sociology, Politics, and English, for example. For me, my K-12 school years seemed to be all about teachers making all of the decisions—deciding what curriculum to teach, what knowledge was important for us to learn, and even telling us what was “right” without asking for our input. The contributions of People of Color were often not admitted into the school curriculum. In fact, teachers of color and men were rarely admitted into the classroom, or so it seemed in the predominantly White schools I attended where the majority of teachers throughout my K-12 years were White females.
The day I embarrassed my third-grade teacher, Mrs. Schleich, by accepting her sarcastic offer to teach the classroom, I realized just how marginalized People of Color were in the school curriculum. Although I skipped to the whiteboard in excitement with a yardstick in my hand in an attempt to model my teacher’s day-to-day behavior, I still could not understand why it was so important for us to observe and respect the holiday reserved for Christopher Columbus who she kept claiming “discovered” America. Just moments before, I had raised my hand in objection, calling out, before she ever had the chance to call on me, that Christopher Columbus did not discover America because it was already inhabited by the Native Americans when he arrived. Her face turned as red as her curly hair and after my little teaching act she wasted no time in calling my mother about my behavior. Little did I know that this would only be one time among many that I felt that the collective experiences of People of Color were either buried, fabricated, not respected as valid knowledge, or omitted altogether in the school curriculum.

I soon got the sense that my voice was not meant to be heard in the classroom. My objection to what was being taught was ignored or silenced, or I was even punished for stating an opinion at times. It seemed my femaleness came with the expectation that I was to assume a quiet and passive position on topics, especially in math and science classrooms. My outspoken nature in middle and high school was often shunned by teachers and even caused teachers to request parent-teacher conferences throughout the year. And if I dared speak out against the teacher who said “This is what happened, this is what is right, this is what you need to know”, I would surely reap the consequences of punishment. Because I received a gifted label early, many teachers simply ignored me in the classroom while racing to help the students who “didn’t get it”. Oftentimes, I would find myself bored, unchallenged, and seemingly left to fend for myself. Ignored and hushed.
Because I was provided with regular cultural socialization messages in the home and taught all about the origins and significant contributions of my Black ancestors before slavery and after freedom, —and even from a Biblical context—through direct teachings, multicultural and Afrocentric books, movies and television series, Kwanzaa celebrations, and African dance, at 8 years old, I had a profound sense of culture and America’s historical legacy of oppression of People of Color. While I attended predominantly White schools throughout my primary and secondary school careers I arrived home from school each afternoon to a home decorated with Black art paintings and sculptures. At Christmas time, my mother would go out of her way to find a Black angel to put on top of our Christmas tree and ornaments with Black angels and Santas. You would think that school would be the biggest culture shock ever, but truthfully, it wasn’t. Even though everything I was being taught started to feel whitewashed to me by the time I was heading to high school, the cultural socialization messages and information that I had been exposed to throughout my life caused me to sort of expect it. Even though I flipped out in Honors English my junior year when Ms. Buchanan had the class read The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn aloud one day and slowly pronounced the word “nigger” while looking at me—the only Black student in the classroom—with a timid look on her face just before she said it, I still maintained a resilient spirit in my approach to learning and achieving. In Mr. Cooper’s AP English IV class the following year, I questioned his book list and felt the same boredom I’d felt throughout my school career when reading the required summer reading by James Joyce, entitled A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man. While his very first lecture to our class was about how the required literature on our syllabus was superior to many books being read in other English IV classrooms in terms of rigor and language and were carefully selected by him
to ensure our success for the college classroom next year, I couldn’t help but notice that not one of the texts he had chosen—which included *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* along with some *Shakespeare*, *Emily Brontë*, and *Faulkner*—were by or about People of Color. It certainly made me consider the ways that the knowledge of People of Color had been discounted, distorted, invalidated, and obliterated; and it caused me to work harder to challenge the dominant discourse after experiencing years of reading social studies texts that centered on slavery as the primary contributions of African Americans to U.S. History and required readings in English class from old White men who utilized dehumanizing language and mockery to characterize Black people. Additionally, it also made me even more interested in finding Black literature that might not have been valued in Mr. Cooper’s or many other English teachers’ eyes who held strong beliefs about the value of the Great Books and classical literature, but still had similar rigor and required a substantial amount of metacognitive thinking. *Paradise* by Toni Morrison, a Black author greatly influenced by the work of William Faulkner, whom we were reading in class, was my initial turn. In my spare time, I tasked myself with reading books by authors like Toni Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston, James Baldwin, and Ralph Ellison. I found that it was, indeed, the most rewarding hobby that I had tried to date. By the time I reached college, I was so tired of the acultural math textbooks that had nothing but math problems and the History books that clearly centered His-story over women and People of Color and included Blacks to mostly discuss slavery and the Civil Rights movement, that every Africana Studies course that I could fit into my schedule, I did. By the end of my sophomore year I had learned about African American Vernacular English (AAVE), pan-Africanism, Black women’s writings, and African American history to 1875. The socialization messages that I received in the home environment since youth made me even more curious about my Black culture, instilled in me a strong sense of
racial and ethnic pride, and caused me to engage in academic behaviors—even when finding no engagement with the curriculum—that led to academic resiliency and achievement.

The socialization messages that I received as a young gifted Black female shaped how I experience and respond to the world. The experiences of my past have led me to adopt a resilient spirit in nearly everything I set out to accomplish in life. Being told no has always made me work harder. But perhaps that is also a just a part of my stubborn nature. Being told I cannot do something only makes me want to prove the claimant wrong.

Academically, two years after I graduated from college, I went on to attempt a Master’s degree (on a full-time basis at least one semester) while working a full-time job with a toddler in the home. Although I had dreams of attending Columbia University for graduate school, my commitment to still remaining in close proximity to my son after work forced me to give up that dream and, instead, attend graduate school at a university that offered me more options in terms of my class schedule and location. Nights were often filled with staying up well past midnight to study or finish papers just so that I could spend valuable time with my young son when I finally made it home from my hour and-a-half long commute in from my job in Manhattan. Shortly after I ended the 10-year relationship with my son’s father and suddenly became a single mother, my son received his official diagnosis for Autism and required additional supports in place in order to thrive academically, behaviorally, and socially. Nonetheless, I maintained our household, continued to perform well in the classroom and receive great teacher evaluations, and effectively managed our busy schedule, which was now filled with additional extracurricular activities. I later went on to pursue a Ph.D., knowing the odds were stacked against me as I left my job to attend school full-time as a single parent of a son with special needs with very little savings to fall back on. But this resilient nature has been a part of me for so long; it’s all I know. While I
may, indeed, live up to the Strong Black Woman stereotype, I cannot afford to give up, cannot afford to NOT succeed. I was taught early to persevere in the face of adversity. My varied experiences as a gifted Black girl in America have taught me that I must always remain strong, try to stay at least two steps ahead, and always fight for my voice to be heard.
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Although the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) has dedicated a special focus group on gifted females and several researchers have acknowledged not only the critical shortage of the literature on this population in relation to gifted male students, but also the disturbing yet perplexing achievement gap between gifted males and their female counterparts, there is still an even greater shortage in the amount of literature being disseminated about gifted Black girls. Ford (2010) first raises the concern that due to the fact that factors such as underachievement and lower than expected occupational attainment plague gifted females, in general, it is particularly important that we draw our attention to gifted Black females who, unlike their White gifted female counterparts, must also grapple with the distinct nature of their identities as “Double Minorities”—being both Black and female and, thus, doubly oppressed, or “The Invisible Gender” (Myers, 1989; Scott, 1990). These girls, Ford (2010) contends, are at greater risk than White females for underachievement, dropping out, and school failure (p. 315). Hence, it is imperative that research be conducted to center the experiences of such a marginalized group of learners.

The Problem Statement

The paucity of critical scholarship on Black girls’ academic experiences in predominantly White contexts, in general, and gifted Black girls’ academic experiences in predominantly White contexts, in particular, is rather concerning. The importance of the academic experiences of Black girls continues to be devalued and diminished. It is almost okay to conclude that Black girls have been forced to maintain a cloak of invisibility in the context of critical scholarship as research on Black girls has largely been minimized to issues related to Black males and White
females (Chavous and Cogburn, 2007; Harmon & Ford, 2013; Neal-Jackson, 2018; Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Thomas and Jackson, 2007). Even more concerning is the fact that the majority of the literature on Black girls that does exist focuses on negative issues such as teen pregnancy, juvenile delinquency, and aggressive behavior (Brown, 1993; Dixon, Schoonmaker, & Philliber, 2000; Edwards, McArthur, & Russell-Owens, 2016; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Sanders & Bradley, 1995). While these issues, too, are important, they attend to the problems that plague many Black females who largely hail from urban, low-income areas while failing to consider the issues plaguing the educational experiences of the steadily growing number of Black females who attend schools in more racially diverse or predominantly White settings and the gifted Black girls who are more isolated from their same-race peers. These females, too, have barriers that they must overcome in an effort to experience better academic outcomes that may ultimately lead them to more fulfilling life outcomes. Moreover, gifted Black females, in particular, are at a higher risk for underachieving due to the cultural mismatch with their school contexts which may lead to additional factors that include “(1) inappropriate identification practices; (2) lack of racial diversity among students and teachers; (3) feeling alienated from classmates; (4) fear of “acting White”; (5) low teacher expectations; (6) mismatches between African American students’ learning styles and teaching styles; and (7) lack of a multicultural curriculum” (Harmon & Ford, 2013). Hence, future scholarship efforts that investigate the educational experiences of gifted Black females must be prioritized to assist researchers in interrogating and gaining further insight into the specific issues that plague young women in this school context, and furthermore, offer educators and policymakers more comprehensive research-based suggestions for education reform, in general, and gifted education reform, more specifically.
The Purpose of the Study

The scope of this narrative inquiry was to examine the academic experiences of gifted Black female adolescents attending predominantly White schools. This study considered: (1) how the academic experiences of gifted Black female adolescents attending predominantly White schools are shaped by their: (a) racial identity; (b) receptiveness to parental socialization messages (i.e., racial/cultural, academic, and gender socialization); and (c) levels of school connectedness. In addition, this study closely investigated how aspects of these girls’ perceived connectedness, including their relationships with teachers, peers, and school personnel, connection (or disconnection) to the curriculum, and involvement in school activities, impact their academic experiences at predominantly White schools. In order to perform a thorough investigation of this phenomenon, this study utilized a Critical Race Theory Framework.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory

A group of predominantly White neo-Marxist, New Left, and counter-culturalist intellectuals who emerged within the legal academy in the late 1970s formed a movement that sought to expose and challenge the laws and legal practices of neutrality that permeated every level of America’s judicial system (Brown & Jackson, 2013). By exposing the biases reflected in the notion that “legal reasoning was neutral, value-free, and unaffected by social and economic relations, political forces, or cultural phenomena” (Brown & Jackson, 2013, p. 12), these Critical Legal Studies (CLS) scholars effectively demonstrated the many ways in which American law and legal institutions served and legitimatized an oppressive social order by enforcing, reflecting, constituting, and legitimizing dominant social and power relations through social actors who believe that their decisions are neutral and based upon an objective process of legal reasoning.
(Brown & Jackson, 2013). However, despite CLS scholars’ development of important insights into the functioning of the legal process, in the mid-1970s, a new group of Critical Race Theorists—including Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic, Gary Peller, Cheryl Harris, Angela Harris, Patricia Williams, Mari Matsuda, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Charles Lawrence, III, Harlon Dalton, and Neil Gotanda—critiqued the CLS movement’s lack of the inclusion of the struggles of People of Color, in general, and Black people, in particular (Brown & Jackson, 2013), or its interest in addressing the concerns of People of Color (Dalton, 1987; Matsuda, 1987). Cornel West (1993) notes, for example, that:

…critical legal theorists fundamentally question the dominant liberal paradigms prevalent and pervasive in American culture and society. This thorough questioning is not primarily a constructive attempt to put forward a conception of a new legal and social order. Rather, it is a pronounced disclosure of inconsistencies, incoherences, silences, and blindness of legal formalists, legal positivists, and legal realists in the liberal tradition. Critical legal studies is more a concerted attack and assault on the legitimacy and authority of pedagogical strategies in law school than a comprehensive announcement of what a credible and realizable new society and legal system would look like. (p. 196)

Further, Critical Race Theorists were upset by CLS scholars’ dismissiveness of legal rights, which were most significant for People of Color whose voting rights and access to integrated public spaces were granted and enforced by the Supreme Court (Brown & Jackson, 2013). Critical Race Theory exposes, analyzes, and challenges the fundamental role the law plays in both constructing racial differences and perpetuating racial oppression in American society (Epperson, 2004).
Since its conception in the mid-1970s, Critical Race Theory (CRT) has rapidly spread beyond the legal studies arena (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), including the field of education. Looking upon Critical Race Theory as both an epistemological and methodological tool to help analyze the experiences of marginalized populations across the K-12 and higher education landscape, the framework of CRT has been routinely applied to complex and multifaceted educational scholarship following its introduction to the field by the pioneering work of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) and Solórzano (1998) (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). However, education scholars wishing to utilize the framework of CRT are reminded to honor the legal genesis of CRT by coupling their work with legal literature in an effort to avoid weakening the potency of CRT’s praxis, and thus, failing to link theory to practice (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Tate, 2005). These new scholars should also be mindful, education scholars in CRT warn, of over-theorizing or being lured by the attractiveness of CRT’s storytelling element and utilizing narrative that excludes the critical aspects that the stories intend to illustrate (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2013).

While there are no common or agreed upon principles or methodologies of Critical Race Theory to date, scholars engaged in using CRT in their work are typically unified by two common goals: (1) to critique and to gain a better understanding of the construction and perpetuation of the hegemonic White ideology in America, and (2) to fundamentally disrupt the link between racial power and the law (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Stinson, 2009). However, most Critical Race Theorists adopt some form of a combination of the six central tenets of CRT proposed by Delgado and Stefancic (2001, p. 7) and Ladson-Billings (1998), including (1) permanence of racism (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefanci, 2001); Ladson-Billings, 1998); (2) counter-storytelling (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Matsuda, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002); (3)
interest convergence (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001); (4) Whiteness as property (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Harris, 1993); (5) critique of liberalism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1998); and (6) intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

In 1992, Derrick Bell released the national bestseller entitled, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism*, effectively coining the principle. In his book, he sets forth a proposition that he asserts will be easier to reject than to refute:

Black people will never gain full equality in this country. Even those herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than “peaks of temporary progress,” short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance. This is a hard to accept fact that history verifies. We must acknowledge it, not as a sign of submission, but as an act of ultimate defiance. (p. 12)

What the late “Father of Critical Race Theory” (1992) essentially set in motion was the idea that racism is a part of the normal order of things in society and, as a result, People of Color—namely, Black people—will never be granted access to the equitable distribution of rights, property, and opportunity. This idea echoes both Delgado and Stefancic’s (2001) notion of racism as normal, not aberrational, but a commonplace, everyday experience of most People of Color, whose practices are so deeply embedded in the “ordinary business”, or routines, practices, and institutions, of society, that they will effectively work to keep minorities in subordinate positions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). It further indicates that these rights denied to Black people (and many People of Color) are a result of the social construction of race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2013), which works to grant privilege to the dominant White race in American society.
Critical Race Theory acknowledges that the individual and collective experiences and knowledges of People of Color have value, are valid, and are essential to the analysis of racial inequities due to the fact that they center the voices that are traditionally obfuscated by the narratives of Whites. The notion of the “unique voice of color” maintains that the varying histories and experiences of oppressed people are able to communicate to the dominant White group about matters upon which they have no existing knowledge or understanding (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). When exposing the limited ability of legal scholarship to reveal the integral nature of racism and racial subordination in American society for People of Color, critical race theorists employ methods such as “legal storytelling” and counter-narratives as a form of revelation (Brown & Jackson, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2013). By conveying the ubiquitous nature of racism and racial discrimination through the art of storytelling, chronicles, and counter-narratives, critical race theorists are able to effectively challenge the claims of neutrality in legal discourse and make visible the racial biases deeply embedded in America’s law and culture (Brown & Jackson, 2013). Counter-storytelling can also effectively translate to the field of education and other fields as a methodology used to privilege the voices of racially oppressed groups to reveal what life looks like from their point of view (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013).

The third tenet, the theory of interest-convergence, proposes that the “interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it convergences with the interests of whites” (Bell, 1980, p. 523). Bell (1980) articulates this theory as it relates to the fourteenth amendment, maintaining:

…the fourteenth amendment, standing alone, will not authorize a judicial remedy providing effective racial equality for blacks where the remedy sought threatens the
superior societal status of middle and upper class whites. It follows that the availability of fourteenth amendment protection in racial cases may not actually be determined by the character of harm suffered by blacks or the quantum of liability proved against whites. Racial remedies may instead be the outward manifestations of unspoken and perhaps subconscious judicial conclusions that the remedies, if granted, will secure, advance, or at least not harm societal interests deemed important by middle and upper class whites. (Bell, 1980, p. 523)

In other words, in order for Black people and other communities of color to experience racial equality, White people must be the ultimate beneficiaries. These interests are not necessarily a desire to help Blacks, but rather a result of the self-interest of elite Whites, as both Bell (1980) and Delgado and Stefancic (2001) assert. Further, Delgado and Stefancic (2001) note that the difficulty in eradicating racism, which “advances the interests of both White elites (materially) and working-class people (psychically)” (p. 7), lies in the power of White privilege, even for the White working-class and poor who believe that they are (but are not necessarily) reaping the same benefits as their White elite counterparts.

The notion of Whiteness as property extends from the power structures that are deeply engrained within American society’s fabric and systems. Critical Race Theory examines how the existing power structures in American society are based on White privilege and White supremacy. These power structures work to perpetuate the marginalization of People of Color. In other words, in American society, Whiteness functions as power and property. As sole beholders of all property (i.e., legal rights) in the United States, many privileges are extended to the White dominant race group, even across socioeconomic backgrounds. Harris (1993) argues that the law has a proven property interest in protecting Whiteness, as demonstrated by the legal legacy of the
seizure of Native American lands and enslavement of Blacks. Hence, not only is Whiteness a self-identity in the intrinsic, personal, and psychological domain, or reputation in an individual’s internal and external identities, it is also legally recognized as a property interest (Harris, 1993). Therefore, Whiteness is a traditional form of property in the sense that it defined the legal status of a person as slave or free and Black or White based upon the one-drop rule. In the modern sense, Harris (1993) maintains, it is not necessarily objective, definable, or identifiable from the social context, because it is inherently constructed by society and situated within social relations. For example, even in the post-Civil Rights era, People of Color are still fighting for the so-called inalienable rights granted by the U.S. Constitution. However, the White-over-color ascendancy that permeates every system in America rejects the idea that People of Color will ever acquire the same level of access to the social advantages and exclusive benefits that come with being a member of the White race. Whiteness as property, thus, is the sole contributor of sustaining the advantages and disadvantages that persist across racial lines.

The fifth tenet, critique of liberalism, exposes the strong notions of neutrality, objectivity, and colorblindness firmly entrenched in the judiciary system. It is the tenet upon which critical race scholars critique the Supreme Court’s claims of maintaining the illegality of the law to take note of race in legal decisions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Legal discourse argues that the law is neutral and colorblind. Yet, critical race theorists challenge this legal “truth” by examining the ways in which liberalism and meritocracy function as a vehicle for self-interest, power, and privilege (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993). However, rather than operating to protect substantive rights (e.g., food, housing, education), the law operates to ensure that rights are almost always procedural (e.g., to a fair process), resisting programs that assure equality of results in favor of, instead, applauding the affordance of equality
of opportunity for the American people as whole (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Critical Race Theory acknowledges that the stories of both liberalism and meritocracy are told from the perspective of those with wealth, power, and privilege (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Hence, these narratives do not reflect reality and, instead, paint an inauthentic picture of meritocracy. For example, meritocracy is based upon the notion that anyone who works hard will be able to attain wealth, power, and privilege. However, this is a myth due to the fact that systemic inequalities stemming from institutional racism limit those who are not in the position to draw on the available resources, such as cultural capital (Yosso, 2005), that comes with White privilege, from fully accessing wealth, power, and privilege.

The sixth tenet of CRT, intersectionality, was introduced to the field of Critical Race Theory by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991), one of CRT’s principal founders and organizers, as a critique of the ignoring of intragroup differences by identity-based politics (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). This concern led Crenshaw (1993) to maintain:

Feminist efforts to politicize experiences of women and antiracist efforts to politicize experiences of people of color have frequently proceeded as though the issues and experiences they each detail occur on mutually exclusive terrains. Although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices. Thus, when the practices expound identity as women or person of color as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling. (p. 1242)

Before proposing three types of intersectionality—structural intersectionality, political intersectionality, and representational intersectionality—she goes on to share,
This process of recognizing as social and systemic that was formerly perceived as isolated and individual has also characterized the identity politics of African-Americans, other people of color, and gays and lesbians, among others. For all these groups, identity-based politics has been a source of strength, community, and intellectual development. (p. 1241-1242)

This argument made by Crenshaw (1993) reveals that while the shift of identity politics from the individual to focus on groups is important, the lack of the homogeneity of identity groups yields the need for a focus on the intersecting structures of injustice that individuals are affected by. Hence, Crenshaw (1995) proposes three types of intersectionality: structural intersectionality, political intersectionality, and representational intersectionality. Structural intersectionality occurs when different social groups (e.g., Black people) are created and organized by social structures that interact to produce unintended effects (e.g., domestic violence shelters refusing to admit non-English-speaking women due to lack of bilingual staff). Political intersectionality occurs when political movements that are fighting for justice of different groups (e.g., feminism and antiracism) interact to exclude the interests of a subgroup or inadvertently reinforces another form of injustice (e.g., a police department’s refusal to release domestic violence statistics by race for fear that they will be selectively interpreted by the public as failure of the department to address a domestic violence problem in minority communities). Representational intersectionality occurs when images depicted about a group distort the group’s complexity (e.g., controlling images of Black women).

While women of color are equally marginalized by both their race and gender and experience both racism, sexism, and the interesting pattern of both, the storied experiences of these women are marginalized in the discourse (Brown & Jackson, 2013; Crenshaw, 1991;
Harris, 1990). Intersectionality points to the need to examine the oppressive natures of People of Color’s multiple identities and perspectives, including their race, gender, social class, and sexual orientation, or any other identities positioned in the intersection of two or more categories (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Delgado & Stefancic, 2013; Harris, 1990).

In our society, intersectionality is a difficult concept to both grasp and study, especially given the fact that our society is often organized along binaries: black or white, east or west, poor or rich, left or right (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Delgado and Stefancic (2001) echo this sentiment when discussing the problem with the black-white binary: “That paradigm, the black-white binary, effectively dictates that nonblack minority groups must compare their treatment to that of African Americans to gain redress” (p. 67). However, the complexities of our identities are often more complicated and cannot be adequately explained along binary lines. Our multiple identities include our race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, and religion, among others, and may even react with one another as our identities intersect. The role of critical race theorists is to examine the various identities and categories upon which individuals of color identify with or belong and investigate ways in which they may be simultaneously operating.

Finally, critical race scholars in education, more specifically, uphold a strong commitment to scholarship and social justice as they seek to explain the realities of race in a dynamic, ever-changing society (Tate, 1997). As they argue the inclusion of “A Commitment to Social Justice and Praxis” as one of the central tenets of CRT, Parker and Villalpando (2007) assert that the importance of CRT being a “social justice project that attempts to “link theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community (p. 52).

Consequently, Stovall (2004), draws on Parker and Villalpando’s (2007) assertion, concurring that linking CRT to practice is imperative:
For principals, teachers, and researchers with a social justice agenda, the question becomes “since we know this about racism, what do we do?” In this sense CRT poses a call to work. It’s one thing to know and analyze the functions of race. It is yet another to engage in the practice of developing and maintaining a school with an anti-oppressive, anti-racist agenda in an age of conservative educational policy. (p. 10)

Specifically, in this study, I focus on three key tenets of CRT: intersectionality, Whiteness as property, and counter-storytelling. In this study, intersectionality was used to examine the oppressive natures of the multiple identities and perspectives of gifted Black females, who are equally marginalized by their race and gender and, as a result, experience racism and sexism (Crenshaw, 1989). Because experiences brought on by the intersection of these girls’ racial and gender identities are also likely to influence their identities as gifted students, I attempted to address the multiple intersecting identities of gifted Black female adolescents (e.g., race, gender, giftedness, social class, etc.) and examine how each of these identities are impacted by their schooling experiences. Next, by acknowledging the permanence of racism, or racial realism, I utilized the CRT tenet Whiteness as property (Harris, 1993) to examine the ways in which institutional racism embedded in the structures of schooling reinforce and maintain hegemony in the policies and practices of public schools in America, both predominantly White and majority minority schools, and, thus, impact the schooling experiences of gifted Black females, specifically. By questioning the legal policies that have been passed nationally, statewide, and locally, that have had a negative effect on the schooling experiences of students of color, in general, and gifted Black female students, in particular, I examined how the endemic nature of racism causes teachers and other school officials to form deficit beliefs and implicit biases about the inherent nature of gifted Black females’ abilities, inequalities, behaviors,
language, and attitudes, and how these beliefs are based upon the unconscious notion of White superiority, privilege, and property. Because *counter-storytelling* is used as a methodology to privilege the voices, or narratives, of racially oppressed groups in order to reveal what life is from *their* point of view (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). I centered the counter-narratives, or counter-stories, of gifted Black female adolescents and utilized counter-storytelling as a methodological tool through a documentary, social justice approach following the research study.

**Significance of the Study**

Both previous and current research and theoretical models fail to consider the many inequities that exist in gifted education today. By failing to address the significant racial and gender disparities that continue to exist in gifted education, minority female students, in general, and Black female students, in particular, have faced marginalization in not only the literature on gifted education, but also policy decisions regarding gifted education. This narrative inquiry study is a vital attempt at centering the voices of a marginalized population—gifted Black females—who are vastly underrepresented in gifted programs across America and who are continuously overlooked in current research on gifted students and gifted education. By focusing on the intersecting nature of race and gender during the adolescent period, in particular, this study builds upon the scant research literature on gifted Black females during a time in their lives when their multiple identities become increasingly salient. Further, by investigating the academic experiences of gifted Black female adolescents attending predominantly White schools, specifically, this study contributes to the scarce literature on African American adolescents—both gifted and non-gifted—who attend school in non-urban, majority White schools and examines
the ways that racial identity, parental socialization, and school connectedness impact the experiences of African American students in these school contexts.

**Researcher’s Bias**

As I began this dissertation study, I understood the importance of discussing my potential biases as it related to this narrative inquiry. This area of research is so important to me because I am, in a sense, the gifted Black girls that I am seeking to better understand through this study. Of course, many of our experiences are likely quite different. At the age of 8, I tested into the Academically Gifted program at my predominantly White elementary school as a result of my exceptionally high score on the California Achievement Test (CAT). Despite my gifted identification, I faced many barriers and experienced racism, sexism, and racial discrimination in the classroom and school setting on several occasions throughout my K-12 school years. However, I believe the messages that I received at home inadvertently prepared me to continue to thrive in the school context despite the adversities I faced as a result of my sex, the color of my skin, and my intellectual abilities.

Hence, I acknowledge that my personal background as a gifted Black female and classroom teacher of several potentially (but not identified) gifted Black females, as well as an awareness of the literature on gifted Black students, inevitably influenced the interview process as well as the interpretation of the data. Further, I believe that my knowledge of this population’s struggles evoked in me a certain level of empathy for the gifted Black females I interviewed. Importantly, given my similar background to the participants I chose to study, the interview process and even the ways I chose to interpret the data I collected were likely impacted by my
conscious or unconscious expectations of hearing about similarities in the experiencing of these
gifted Black girls’ various obstacles in school.

On the other hand, the similarities between my background and the participants I studied as well as the empathy that I likely felt for this group of participants may have also assisted me in leading participants to freely share their own stories. Further, my professional background as a classroom teacher may have provided me with the skills necessary to establish a strong rapport with the girls and engage them in opening up and exploring themselves from a more in-depth perspective, especially through their artistic creations. Consequently, in order for me to clearly articulate the voices and perspectives of the gifted Black females (and their parents) interviewed to the best of my ability, it was imperative that I make every effort to account for my particular interpretations during this entire length of this study.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Within this chapter, I discuss the literature that has assisted me in understanding the significance of studying gifted Black girls attending predominantly White schools. Drawing on multiple discourses, this chapter is designed to bring light to the complexities in understanding such a unique group of student learners. The first section, *The Complicated Nature of Giftedness and What It Means for Black Students*, discusses several issues impacting the identification process in gifted education programs throughout the United States, including inequitable testing practices and teacher bias, both of which greatly limits access to gifted programs for Black and Hispanic students, in particular. The second section, *The Shaping of Gifted Black Female Adolescents’ Identity During Adolescence*, goes on to highlight key developmental processes that gifted Black females must undergo in order to sustain a healthy identity during the adolescent period. *School Connectedness and Adolescence*, the third section, discusses key factors that facilitate or impede school connectedness during the adolescent period. In addition, a discussion follows about the impact attending predominantly White schools has on Black and Latino students’ level of school connectedness. The fourth section, *Social Experiences of Gifted African American Adolescents in School*, details the various social networks gifted Black girls navigate in the school context. The final section, *The Impact of Parental Socialization on African American Adolescents’ Identity Development in School*, examines the various parental socialization methods that African American parents communicate to their sons and daughters, which inadvertently allows them to develop and sustain healthy identities as they navigate school contexts and society-at-large.
The Complicated Nature of Giftedness and What It Means for Black Students

“Although 60 years have passed since “Brown vs. Board of Education” (1954) legally ended segregation in school settings, schools are now more segregated than ever before, including their gifted programs.” - Donna Ford, Ph.D. (Ford, 2004)

Intelligence testing is one of the most commonly applied methods for identifying gifted children (e.g., Horn, 2006), given the fact that, among the various conceptions of giftedness, high intelligence, more generally, and fluid intelligence, more specifically, is the commonly accepted component of giftedness (Stemberg, Jarvin, & Grigorenko, 2011). However, according to Friedman-Nimz (2009), the identification of gifted children is, more often than not, guided by practical reasons rather than conceptual reasons. Teacher nominations of gifted students, for instance, is a method frequently used to identify gifted students in practical settings (e.g., Adderholtz-Elliot, Algozzine, Algozzine, & Haney, 1991; Feldhusen & Sayler, 1990; Neber, 2004), and these nominations represent one of the largest groups of gifted students in the practical context (Kornmann et al., 2015). Unfortunately, studies have shown that many of the children nominated by their teachers as gifted and deemed eligible for gifted programs do not have high intelligence, an essential component of nearly all definitions of giftedness, and do not achieve intelligence scores comparable to the typically recommended intelligence scores by theory or those cutoff scores that are typically used in the process of identification of gifted children (e.g., two SD above the mean; e.g., Kornmann et al., 2015; Neber, 2004; Zeidner, Shanizinovich, Matthews, & Roberts, 2005).

Arguably, while these teachers also have more direct interaction with their students and may, in fact, have the opportunity to detect characteristics that a single test score on a given day
may not account for, other factors may also facilitate their judgments about a student’s giftedness or intellectual abilities. Although this may present opportunities for students whose test score alone may not reflect their true academic abilities, research has shown that relying on teacher nominations of giftedness may present obstacles for Black and Hispanic students, who remain the least referred population for gifted programs (Diette, 201; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Ford, 1998, 2003, 2013; Francis, 2012; Grissom & Redding, 2015), although Hispanic students’ underrepresentation has improved over the years (Ford, 2010), and are disproportionately underrepresented in gifted programs across America, with Black students leading underrepresentation in gifted programs by more than 48% and Hispanic students underrepresented by 38% nationally (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Office for Civil Rights, 2012). Moreover, out of all other groups, Black students are the least referred for gifted programs by educators (Ford, 2010). Hence, based on this underrepresentation, at least 253,000 Black students should be identified as gifted, according to Ford, Grantham, and Whiting (2008). In accordance with these disappointing statistics, at least 500,000 Black and Hispanic students who are unable to access the curriculum, programs, and services unique to gifted education, are not being challenged in the schools they attend to reach their full academic potential (Ford, 2010). These vast inequities have been articulated for years through countless statistics reported by The Office for Civil Rights (2012), a sub-agency of the U.S. Department of Education whose many roles include monitoring the composition of both special education and gifted education programs across the country. However, few efforts have been made to increase equity in the identification of gifted and potentially gifted students of color.

Even more concerning is America’s historical legacy of racism and racial discrimination on the basis of a White-over-color ascendancy, which permeates the educational system, from
the policymaking process to teacher attitudes in the classroom. Given the steadily growing minority population of students who, more often than not, attend public schools where they are culturally different from the teachers who teach them, administrators who guide and discipline them, and school counselors who counsel them, it is not difficult to understand the many ways in which their race or ethnicity may be considered a badge of inferiority in the eyes of their majority White school personnel. Coupled with this deficit thinking is the immediate attention placed on the disparities in achievement between Black and White and Black and Hispanic students, in particular. As opposed to considering ways in which this unwavering gap in achievement between Black and Hispanic students and their White and Asian counterparts may be directly influenced by factors such as teacher bias and pedagogical style (Ford, 2013; Grissom & Redding, 2015; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015), culturally biased tests and other instruments that solely measure school-related abilities (Ford & Harris, 1990; Ford, Harris, & Winborne, 1990; Ford & Helms, 2012; Freedle, 2003; Green & Griffore, 1980; Laundra & Sutton, 2008; Peterson, 1969), monocultural curriculum (Alenumah-Nimoh, 2016; Au, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Yosso, 2002), and colorblind policies and inequitable practices (Heitzeg, 2014; Jay, 2003), the blame is almost always placed on a problem with the individual student (Chambers, 2009). What this too often communicates is that Black and Hispanic students carry with them a deficiency and are, thus, intellectually inferior to their White counterparts—a message deeply rooted in America’s history of intelligence testing and deficit beliefs about non-Whites’ capacity for learning based on their physiological composition (see e.g., Terman, 1906).

Ford (2010) identified four primary (but not only) categorical roadblocks to representation of Black and Hispanic students in gifted education that are symptoms of deficit thinking (Ford, 2003; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Frazier Trotman, 2002),
colorblindness (Milner & Ford, 2007), and White privilege (McIntosh, 1989): (1) lack of teacher referral, (2) students’ differential performance on traditional intelligence and/or achievement tests, (3) stagnant and outdated policies and procedures for labeling and placement, and (4) socio-emotional concerns and eventual decisions of Black and Hispanic students and their primary caregivers (Ford, 2010). Consequently, Ford and her colleagues (2018) authored a Bill of Rights for Gifted Students of Color, representative of a culturally- and equity-grounded holistic approach designed to dismantle inequities in gifted education and advanced learner programs by supporting and advocating for students of color. The Bill of Rights for Gifted Students of Color directly tackles issues related to advocacy for gifted students of color, and equity in access to programming and services, gifted education evaluation and assessment, gifted program evaluation and accountability, curriculum and instruction, and pedagogical practices of educators (Ford et al., 2018).

When educators adopt substandard beliefs about their students’ culture, language, values, customs, and traditions, among other things, and find themselves blinded by the low expectations and stereotypes they harbor about their Black and Hispanic students, they are unable to focus on the strengths and potential of these students, which ultimately leads to their lower rates of referrals of Black and Hispanic students for gifted education screening and placement (Ford, 2010; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). Sadly, this deficit thinking pervades every aspect of gifted education, including the proposed definitions and theories of giftedness, instruments selected to measure giftedness in students, criteria used to determine which students qualify for access to gifted programs, curriculum and instruction offered to students, teacher-student relationships, policies and procedures (e.g., low teacher referral), and placement (or lack thereof) (Ford, 2010).
Another systemic barrier to gifted education access that continues to lead to the underrepresentation of Black and Hispanic students is the lack of acknowledgement of color in learning, curriculum, instruction, and assessments by educators, whether intentionally or unintentionally (Ford, 2010; Ford, Moore, & Milner, 2005; Milner & Ford, 2007). Because all gifted children are not the same, as articulated in the goals of gifted education, it is not realistic for educators to treat them as if they are. Instead, they must focus on both the similarities between students of color and their White counterparts as well as the uniqueness that embodies their cultural differences.

Equally problematic is White privilege, which greatly contributes to the exclusion of Black and Hispanic students from gifted education programs (Ford, 2010). Based on the notion of individual meritocracy, White privilege permeates gifted education by serving as a form of property that grants White students entitlement to the benefits of social and cultural capital, including language, values, customs, and traditions, that are valued and held as normal and standard in White America. These benefits advantage Whites, while disadvantaging others. Black and Hispanic students who are not granted access to gifted education are unable to benefit from the enriched educational curriculum provided in gifted education programs that will afford them opportunities to obtain the social and cultural capital they need to be successful in life. In fact, countless commissioned reports, legal cases, and reports disseminated by the Office for Civil Rights show the educational disparities between Black and Hispanic students and their White counterparts as it concerns teacher quality and expectations, level of instruction, and access to fiscal, physical, and educational resources (Ford, 2003). These disparities, coupled with countless other issues, clearly indicate the discrimination many Black and Hispanic students face
in schools that directly hinders their motivation, achievement, and opportunity to participate in and benefit from gifted education programs (Ford, 2003).

While many studies suggest that gifted education programs provide the best possible learning experience for all students, regardless of their racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic backgrounds, research also indicates differential student experiences for ethnic minority students in majority-White learning contexts (Briggs, Reis, & Sullivan, 2008; Ford, 1998; Henfield, Woo, & Bang, 2017; Yoon & Gentry, 2009). For instance, many studies have shown that ethnic minority students often report negative experiences in gifted programs, including discontentment with the lack of ethnic diversity represented among teachers and students (Fries-Britt, 1997, 1998; Jackson, 2014). These findings may cause one to wonder whether or not gifted programs are beneficial for all students, especially given the fact that few studies have investigated the academic success of ethnic minority students enrolled in gifted education programs (Henfield et al., 2017). While it is clear that these students face great difficulty in predominantly White educational contexts, in particular, there is little evidence to support the academic benefits of gifted programs—often set in majority-White contexts—for ethnic minority students, such as Blacks and Hispanics (Henfield et al., 2017). To investigate this and attempt to contribute to the literature on the benefits of gifted programs for underserved populations, Henfield and colleagues (2017) conducted a meta-analysis of studies examining underserved youth who have participated in gifted education programs and found that gifted education programs do, in fact, have a positive effect on underserved youth, with gifted programs starting in high school being the most effective.

Given the complicated nature of giftedness and the countless inequities that continue to persist in gifted education policies, practices, and programming, culturally different students, in
general, and Black students, in particular, will continue to face numerous adversities in their schooling experiences. Unless we work to equitize gifted education through new gifted education reform initiatives (see, eg., Ford et al., 2018), more inclusive and comprehensive definitions of giftedness and identification practices that move beyond IQ testing and teacher nominations, and better prepare preservice teachers with the curriculum necessary to question and dismantle their implicit biases about culturally different groups and properly identify culturally different students for gifted programs, gifted education programs will remain largely White (segregated) and unequal.

**Toward an Inclusive Definition of Giftedness**

Given the complex nature of giftedness and the wide-ranging beliefs about what giftedness is, defining giftedness is certainly no easy feat. In fact, it has taken nearly a century for scholars to understand, measure, and explain giftedness, given the fact that many theories and empirical investigations of giftedness have complemented or clashed with conceptions of talent or the mechanisms of talent development (Subotnik et al., 2011). This has led some to even propose that giftedness is simply a result of endless practice and/or social advantage (Subotnik et al., 2011, p. 4).

Historically, giftedness and gifted education has customarily referred to giftedness and high intellectual abilities interchangeably. From this perspective, giftedness is somewhat fixed and innate in quality. In other words, if one is born gifted, he or she will always be gifted, despite the fact that they may never actually achieve (Subotnik et al., 2011). However, in order for this giftedness to be identified in an individual, cognitive assessments or IQ tests must be consulted (Robinson, Zigler, & Gallagher, 2000). Gifted individuals, in this context, are believed to possess
superior reasoning abilities that allow them to be successful across all academic domains (Subotnik et al., 2011). On the other hand, some scholars believe that intellectual ability is not the sole factor in influencing academic achievement (e.g., Dweck, 2012; Freeman, 2005; Olszewski-Kubilius, 2000; Renzulli, 1997; Winner, 1996; Worrell, 2010) despite the fact that giftedness is primarily attributed to general intelligence (g), the common factor measured on intelligence and ability tests. This particular notion of giftedness as general intelligence is reflected in the policies and practices of states and districts across the United States when determining how giftedness should be defined and measured (Council of State Directors of Programs for the Gifted and the National Association for Gifted Children, CSDPG/NAGC, 2009; Subotnik et al., 2011).

Early and modern conceptions of giftedness have found many gifted individuals to be particularly superior in their volitional, emotional, and social functioning in addition to their intellectual functioning (Cross, Cassady, Dixon, & Adams, 2008; Dary, Whalley, & Starr, 2009; Neihart, 1999; Roedell, 1984; Roeper, 1982; Schetcky, 1981; Strang, 1985; Terman, 1925; Watson, 1965); yet, these individuals’ qualitative differences as a result of their giftedness also inadvertently yield their highly sensitive nature and, thus, require ongoing socioemotional support, special programming, and understanding (Callard-Szulgit, 2003; Fonseca, 2011; Mahoney, 2011; Neihart, 1999). Still other perspectives of giftedness move beyond the sole reliance on measures of innate intellectual abilities to consider other psychological variables, such as creativity, task persistence, and motivation (Renzulli, 1977). Proponents of creative-productive forms of giftedness (manifest in recognized high level performance and innovative ideas)—giftedness that lies outside the realm of school-house giftedness (manifested by high test
scores), believe that school programs are responsible for seeking out and cultivating creative-productive forms of giftedness in students (Subotnik et al., 2011).

Following a study of gifted individuals beyond both the academic arena and school years, a fourth perspective of giftedness emerged. This perspective situates giftedness in the arts as well as athletic and other competitive domains. These individuals are thought to demonstrate exceptional ability with the honing of their natural talent through private training, coaching, and lessons (Bloom, 1985; Bruner, Munroe-Chandler, & Spink, 2008; Cote, 1999; Ericsson, 1996; Jarvin & Subotnik, 2010; Kay, 1999; Kay & Subotnik, 1994; Krampe & Ericsson, 1996; Liu, 2008; Wylleman & Reints, 2010; Yarrow, Brown, & Krakauer, 2009). While scholarship in these domains has significantly increased over the past three decades, rarely does discourse acknowledge the value of training in the context of gifted and talented programs, even when schools also implement sports and arts programs (Worrell, 2010).

The final perspective highlights the importance of two environmental factors—practice and unequal access to opportunities—in outstanding performance, thus, dismissing the role of ability (e.g., Colvin, 2008; Coyle, 2009; Ericsson, Prietula, & Cokely, 2007; Shenk, 2010). For example, Gladwell (2008)’s thesis, *Outliers: The Story of Success*, links 10,000 hours of practice to the process of becoming an expert by citing the scientific literature (e.g., Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Romer, 1993; Simon & Chase, 1973), historical figures, and modern-day success stories to support his argument. Proponents of this perspective of giftedness often maintain the importance of advantageous chance factors (e.g., being the oldest in an age cohort participating in a sport activity or entering school) or “being in the right place at the right time in history” in order to reap the benefits of business opportunities or modern-day innovations (e.g., Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, etc.) (Subotnik et al., 2011).
Drawing on each of these perspectives of giftedness, Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, and Worrell (2011) attempt to provide a comprehensive definition of giftedness:

Giftedness is the manifestation of performance or production that is clearly at the upper end of the distribution in a talent domain even relative to that of other high-functioning individuals in that domain. Further, giftedness can be viewed as developmental, in that in the beginning stages, potential is the key variable; in later stages, achievement is the measure of giftedness; and in fully developed talents, eminence is the basis on which this label is granted. Psychosocial variables play an essential role in the manifestation of giftedness at every developmental stage. Both cognitive and psychosocial variables are malleable and need to be deliberately cultivated. (p. 3)

Ultimately, Subotnik and Colleagues (2011) argue that gifted individuals be given opportunities to develop their gifts and talents by society, although they must take some initiative for their own talent and development. Moreover, they argue, gifted education’s primary goal should be outstanding achievement or eminence so that these individuals not only experience high levels of personal satisfaction, but also make significant creative contributions that will provide our society with unimaginable scientific, aesthetic, and practical benefits in the future (Subotnik et al., 2011). Their proposed comprehensive definition is an important first step in providing a definition useful across all domains, that truly acknowledges the various perspectives about giftedness, while still recognizing the necessity of ability for giftedness, while understanding that mere ability is not enough for one to thoroughly develop a special talent (Subotnik et al., 2011).

In this study, I will utilize the definition proposed by Subotnik and her colleagues (2011) to define giftedness. I believe that this definition is more effective in potentially identifying high-ability and high-achieving Black and Hispanic students whose potential for giftedness may have
been initially overlooked as a result of lower test scores and lack of teacher nominations for
gifted programs. Further, the inclusiveness of this definition recognizes the importance
psychosocial variables play in the manifestation of giftedness. This may have powerful
implications for the potential identification of gifted Black students, in particular, who may be
initially excluded from gifted programs due to external and internal factors, such as educators
working from a deficit model, that lead to their underachievement.

**Deficit Thinking and the Impact on Black Girls’ Education**

Relatively little scholarship exists that considers the ways in which norms centered on
race and gender influence how school settings respond to Black female students, or how these
students adapt to the treatment they receive in their schools (Chavous & Cogburn, 2007; Hines-
Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017). Further, research that has been conducted to examine the ways
that gender influences schooling for girls and women has only investigated White, middle-class
student populations and, thus, does not necessarily translate to the experiences shared by Black
girls and women (Chavous & Cogburn, 2007). Moreover, it is no secret that schools, like many
institutions in America, have been depicted as patriarchal settings (Weiler, 2000; Weis & Fine,
1993). Although, in this setting, females typically perform better than their male counterparts,
they are often viewed less positively than their male counterparts and given less social power in
the classroom (Belenky et al., 1986). Coupled with the dominance of a White cultural hegemony
that is reinforced in schools in America—especially predominantly White schools—and the
academic stereotypes around gender that influence educators’ views of boys as more inherently
able and intellectually superior, although less effortful, compared to females (Beyer, 1999),
Black females, in particular, must also contend with racial stereotypes about Black people in
America that may also be gendered (e.g., images of oversexualized “welfare mothers”) in the classroom (Chavous et al., 2007). While Black males are often perceived as less intellectually capable than their Black female peers (Ferguson, 2000; Irvine, 1986; Noguera, 2003) and also receive more frequent and harsher disciplinary treatment from their teachers and other school personnel in relation to their White male peers and female peers (Davis, 2003; Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017; Noguera, 2003), it is Black females who are likely to experience negative treatment based on their teachers’ perception of both their gender and racial group (Chavous et al., 2004; Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017; Irvine, 1986; McAllister & Irvine, 2000). In this case, Black girls are often encouraged by their teachers to take on less academic or leadership roles in the classroom and, instead, are often asked to take on social caring roles that are consistent of the matriarch stereotype of Black women (McAllister & Irvine, 2000). These preconceived notions and stereotypes that are uniquely related to Black girls’ gender and race, can inadvertently shape how these girls are perceived and treated in the school context and, importantly, affect their learning and development (Chavous & Cogburn, 2007). For example, Black girls may find their Black womanhood stigmatized and devalued in schools where standards of femininity and behavior are based upon White, middle-class women (Brown, 1993; Fordham, 1993; Giddings, 1984; Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017; Weiler, 2000).

Black girls can be negatively impacted by “the unfeminine connotations attached to strength, persistence, expression of anger, and intelligence” (Brown, 19993, p. 10) that are communicated in schools across America, inhibiting the understanding of Black girls who have been socialized in the home to believe that these are positive and functional attributes as opposed to negative ones (Chavous & Cogburn, 2007). Further, as Brown laments, Black female students are often placed at a lower social status within the school setting despite the fact that many of
these girls have successfully developed a positive sense of self-worth within the context of sexism and racism (Brown, 1993).

Mainstream femininity norms are often reinforced by teachers and other school personnel in schools when they mislabel culturally acceptable expressions of femininity (Brown, 1993; Fordham, 1993; Lei, 2003; Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995; Weiler, 2000). For example, these educators often negatively label Black girls who resist the dominant cultural image of girls as “perfect” (i.e., White, “good”, quiet) by being loud and aggressive toward their male peers and school personnel. Consequently, these girls are negatively labeled and find that they are negatively treated based on teachers’ and other school staff’s treatment toward them (Chavous & Cogburn, 2007).

While some Black girls’ “loudness” has impeded their academic performance, other high-achieving Black girls have risked masking their identity as Black women by becoming silent and, instead, adopting gender attributes valued in their school context (Fordham, 1993). On the other hand, Hubbard (2005) found that Black adolescent girls’ academic resilience was a result of their willingness to challenge the discriminatory treatment they faced as opposed to becoming silent through collective efforts, such as protesting against unfair treatment in their respective schools. Unfortunately, little is known about the various ways Black girls express their Black feminine identity in academically adaptive ways, and instead focuses on attributes related to Black womanhood that lead to academic risk (e.g., Fordham, 1993, Stevens, 1997) (Chavous & Cogburn, 2007).

Harboring negative views of Black females’ manners, behavior (e.g., attentiveness), intelligence, and even beauty, has been linked to lower expectations for Black female students as well as lower referral rates for advanced courses (Francis, 2012; Morris, 2007). This differential
treatment has been found in studies where teachers of Black female students provide less positive feedback to their Black female students, for instance, or interact with their Black female students briefly and only during task-related contacts (Frazier-Kouassi, 2002). Further, teachers are also less likely to ask their Black female students to assist their peers with academic tasks (Frazier-Kouassi, 2002) or praise them for their academic pursuits (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). In fact, Black girls are more likely to receive fewer feedback statements from their teachers and fewer opportunities in class than any other race-gender group (Grant, 1986; Irvine, 1986).

Furthermore, findings also indicate that Black female students are more likely to be subjected to attempts by their Black and White male counterparts that force them into service roles in the periphery (Grant, 1986; Irvine, 1986). Not only do these girls face lower expectations from their teachers of their academic abilities in relation to their White female counterparts (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Scott-Jones, 1987), they are also more likely to experience racist remarks from their peers (Scott-Jones, 1987). Moreover, Black girls are more likely to experience harsh disciplinary action in schools where teachers and peers harbor stereotypical beliefs about their attitudes and behaviors (Evans-Winters, 2005; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010).

When examining teacher-student interactions, research indicates that these relationships hardly get better as Black girls transition from the lower elementary grades to the upper elementary grades, where Black girls not only experience significantly less total teacher feedback but also are given fewer response opportunities in the classroom, a pattern not found in other race-gender categories (Irvine, 1986). This only further marginalizes the Black female student, who begins to expect less from her teachers in return (Frazier-Kouassi, 2002). And by the time she reaches middle school, the benign negligence she has received since her early
schooling years, has relegated the Black female student to an almost “invisible” status, where she often finds herself working alone and left out peer friendship networks (Irvine, 1986).

The Shaping of Gifted Black Female Adolescents’ Identity During Adolescence

While adolescent identity development, itself, is a multi-faceted construct, I argue that one’s adolescent identity construction cannot be discussed without first describing the development of the self in adolescence. Unfortunately, identity development theorists acknowledged in the academy (e.g., Erik Erikson, James Marcia, G. Stanley Hall, etc.) are disproportionately White and male and, therefore, the universality of their adolescent identity development worldview must be questioned. Assuming that all adolescents—whether male, female, Black, White, or Asian—undergo identical developmental processes during the adolescent period is impractical. For instance, gifted Black female adolescents undergo major changes in their identity during adolescence, not unlike their non-Black and non-gifted adolescent counterparts; however, they must also cope with racism and other societal ills (Brittian, 2012) due to the interaction between their race, gender, and giftedness during a period when their identities start to become so salient. Hence, it is essential to also consider how aspects of their racial, gendered, and gifted identities may account for developmental differences in their identity development. This section will highlight the developmental processes associated with gifted Black female adolescent’s racial, gendered, and gifted identities, and conclude with assumptions regarding the intersection of these three identities.
Racial Identity Development

Black adolescents, in particular, are subjected to increased exposure to racial discrimination during their search for their personal and social identities. Unfortunately, the racial discrimination that they often experience during the adolescent stage, when both their race and the racism on People of Color become increasingly salient, propels them into exploration of their racial identity (Tang et al., 2015). Whether these adolescents will develop a positive or negative racial identity is largely determined by their ability or inability to cope with racism and prejudice (Harmon & Ford, 2013). An often ignored but critically important variable related to self-concept among Black students, racial identity development plays an important role in the psychological adjustment, academic motivation, and achievement of Black students (Ford, 1996). Struggling to straddle the cultural expectations of their racial group with the expectations of the dominant group, gifted Blacks students tend to experience even more psychological and emotional problems than their non-gifted counterparts (Ford, Harris, & Schuerger, 1993). Hence, in an effort to confirm their group membership in the Black community, some gifted Black students may inadvertently adopt an “anti-achievement ethic” (Granat, Hathaway, Saleton, & Sansing 1986, p. 166) as a result of their belief, and intentionally underachieve, drop out, or fail to reach their academic potential, especially when attending predominantly White schools where their confusion over which culture to support increases (Ford, Harris, & Winborne, 1990; Ford, Harris, & Schuerger, 1993; Patton & Townsend, 1997).

Two key perspectives have developed since the theory’s infancy: the mainstream approach and the underground approach (Gaines & Reed, 1994, 1995). The mainstream approach comprises of early racial identity literature focused primarily on the universal aspects of group identity, while viewing African American racial identity within the context of African
Americans’ stigmatization in American society and, at the same time, dismissing the role of culture (Allport, 1954; Clark & Clark, 1939; Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990; Horowitz, 1939; Phinney, 1992). In other words, universal aspects of the African American group identity have been the primary focus of this approach (Sellers et al., 1998).

The underground perspective, on the other hand, emerged from a group of mainly African American psychologists in the late 1960s who attempted to emphasize the uniqueness of the oppression and cultural experiences of African Americans by redefining African American racial identity (Baldwin, 1984; Cross, 1971, 1991; DuBois, 1903). In 1971, Cross developed the underground perspective’s most widely used model of African American racial identity, the Nigrescence model, or “Negro-to-Black conversion” theory—the essence of Black racial identity that characterized nigrescence as a five-stage process that included the pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment stages (Cross, 1971).

Following the initial development of Cross’s Nigrescence model, two more revisions were made after the development in the early 90s and early 2000s (see, e.g., Cross, 1991, 1995; Cross & Vandiver, 2001). Two of the most pronounced revisions are Cross’s distinction between group and personal identity (e.g., reference group orientation and personal identity) and changes in the number of stages and identities manifest within those stages (Vandiver et al., 2002). Reference group orientation (RGO), for example, refers to one’s social group memberships, while personal identity (PI) refers to general features of one’s personality, such as their traits (Cross, 1991; Vandiver et al., 2002). Further, the stages of Black racial identities describe overarching themes of each stage rather than representing identities (Cross, 1991; Vandiver, 2002) as they do in the original model. While these revisions took place in later years, the model that is cited most often and utilized empirically is Cross’s 1971 theory (e.g., Narcisse, 1999; Thomas & Speight, 1999).
Pre-encounter. Blacks who enter the initial stage of racial identity development adopt a White worldview that causes them to think and behave in ways that negate their Blackness (Cross, 1971; Ford et al., 1993). For gifted Black students, being perceived by their same-race peers as “acting White” due to the fact that they embrace characteristics of the majority culture or take on an achievement ideology may cause them to enter the pre-encounter stage (Ford et al., 1993; Patton & Townsend, 1997). Blacks who find themselves in the pre-encounter stage typically suffer from low self-concept, confusion, apathy, self-deprecation, and are often detached from their Black culture, according to Butler (1975).

In Cross’s (1991) revised model, the Pre-Encounter stage is characterized by two identities: (1) Assimilation: when a Black person upholds a pro-American RGO and doesn’t find their race salient to them; and (2) Anti-Black: when a Black person harbors a negative stereotypical mindset about the Black community. Cross (1991) also describes this as Miseducation. In the expanded Nigrescence model (Cross and Vandiver, 2001), one’s identity emerges from the Anti-Black, or Miseducation, identity described in the revised model developed by Cross in 1991: Self-hatred. The Self-hatred identity differs slightly from the Miseducation identity in that it characterizes a Black person who views themselves negatively as a result of their race, whereas Miseducation characterizes a Black person who views the African American community, in general, negatively.

Encounter. The second stage of nigrescence, the encounter stage, is characterized by Blacks’ wish to be part of the “human race” rather than associate themselves with a specific racial group (Cross, 1971; Ford et al., 1993). When individuals enter this stage of nigrescence, it is often as a result of a race-related incident that is inconsistent with their frames of reference (Ford et al., 1993). Hence, they reevaluate their self-image and experience uncertainty about who
they are. For gifted Black male and female students who attend predominantly White schools, in particular, they are likely to enter the encounter stage when they experience rejection by White peers because of their skin color (Ford et al., 1993). Further, as their race becomes more salient following these types of encounters, Black students find themselves more readily accepting of their Black identity, which places them in the immersion-emersion stage of racial identity development (Parham, 1989).

In the revised Nigrescence model, the Encounter stage is largely the same. However, in the revised model, this stage describes one’s process of reexamining their RGO rather than describing an identity cluster, as the other stages do (Vandiver et al., 2002).

*Immersion-Emersion.* The third stage of racial identity development might be characterized as the antithesis to the pre-encounter stage. During this stage of transition to Blackness, Black individuals adopt a new frame of reference—Blackness. As they begin to cling to all elements they deem a part of Black culture and identity in an effort to discard an invisible identity, they may find themselves involved in risk-taking behaviors or experiencing a state of euphoria, rage, or effrontery that may lead to destructive behaviors (Cross, 1980). Gifted Black male and females may find themselves emphasizing their Blackness by supporting all-Black events, wearing all black attire, or they may intentionally underachieve in an effort to avoid being perceived as selling out to the White community (Ford et al., 1993).

According to the revised Nigrescence model (Cross, 1991), after an individual has experienced cognitive and emotional discomfort shaped by the reexamination of their RGO, they enter the Immersion-Emersion stage. Two themes are characteristic of this stage: Intense Black Involvement and Anti-White. Individuals who over-romanticize the Black experience are believed to be in the Intense Black Involvement Black racial identity of the Immersion-Emersion
stage. Those who have an Anti-White Black racial identity are recognized by their rejection and potential demonization of White culture (Cross, 1991; Vandiver et al., 2002).

*Internalization.* Cross (1978, 1980) describes the internalization stage of racial identity development as a time when the Black individual becomes more secure and complacent with their identity and takes on a bicultural, pluralistic, and nonracist identity. Regarding themselves positively, internalized gifted Black students learn that embracing a strong achievement identity is not synonymous with the dominant culture or a threat to the maintenance of the Black community (Ford et al., 1993).

In the revised Nigrescence model (Cross, 1991), the Internalization stage is the final stage of nigrescence and encompasses three identities—the Bicultural identity, Multiculturalist identity, and Black nationalist identity. One who possesses a Biculturalist identity is described as an individual who has achieved Black self-acceptance and actively focuses on their cultural orientation (e.g., nationality, gender, sexual orientation, etc.). Those who have a Multiculturalist identity commit themselves to building and strengthening coalitions beyond the Black community. Finally, Black Nationalists concentrate on empowering the Black community.

*Internalization-Commitment.* In the final stage of racial identity development, the Black individual becomes more politically active, or social justice-oriented, and is inspired to bring about change in the Black community (Ford et al., 1993). While gifted Black females may move between stages sequentially, subsequent race-related incidents may trigger oscillation between stages of their racial identity development or they may remain arrested at the same stage.

In an attempt to integrate both the mainstream and underground perspectives, Seller and his colleagues (1998), introduced the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) in an effort to not only provide a conceptual framework for understanding the importance of race in
the self-concept of African Americans, but to also examine the qualitative meanings African Americans attribute to being members of their racial category (i.e., Black race) (Sellers et al., 1998). The MMRI assumes that: (1) identities are both stable properties of an individual as well as a situationally determined construct; (2) individuals have various identities that are hierarchically ordered; and (3) the way in which an individual views their racial identity is the most valid indicator of their identity. In sharp contrast to the Nigrescence model, the MMRI does not deem one’s racial identity as healthy versus unhealthy, and, rather, makes an assessment of an individual’s racial identity by associating certain identities with more positive outcomes (e.g., higher self-esteem, psychological well-being) than others (Sellers et al., 1998). Further, instead of proposing whether an identity is “good or bad”, the MMRI acknowledges the importance of considering the ecological environment associated with an individual’s identity prior to evaluating its adaptiveness (Sellers et al., 1998). The final difference between Sellers and Colleagues’ (1998) MMRI is its concern with the racial identity status of an individual rather than the development of an individual’s racial identity (Sellers et al., 1998).

Four dimensions comprise of Sellers and his colleagues’ (1998) MMRI, including racial salience and centrality, racial regard, and racial ideology. In sum, racial salience refers to “the extent to which one’s race is a relevant part of one’s self-concept at a particular moment or in a particular situation”, while racial centrality refers to the extent to which an individual’s normative definition of self includes their racial group members (Sellers et al., 1998, p. 24). The third dimension, racial regard, which is divided into two sub-dimensions, refers to an individual’s positive or negative feelings about their Black racial group membership (Sellers et al., 1998). The first sub-dimension—public regard—is defined as the extent to which an individual believes that others view the African-American community in a positive or negative
manner, and the second sub-dimension—private regard—is defined as the extent to which an individual has positive or negative feelings towards the African-American community in addition to how positively or negatively an individual feels about being Black (Scottham, Sellers, & Nguyen, 2008; Sellers et al., 1998). Finally, the fourth dimension of MMRI proposed by Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, and Chavous (1998), racial ideology, is an individual’s beliefs, opinions, and attitude about the way members of the race should act (Sellers et al., 1998). Four ideological philosophies comprise of an individual’s racial ideology: (1) a nationalist philosophy, which emphasizes the uniqueness of being Black and is characterized by an individual’s preference for (a) being a part of social environments that include other Blacks, and (b) supporting Black organizations; (2) an oppressed minority philosophy, which emphasizes the similarities between the experiences of Blacks and other oppressed minority groups; (3), an assimilation philosophy, which emphasizes the similarities between Blacks and mainstream American society; and, (4) a humanist philosophy, which views everyone as belonging to the same race, disregarding distinguishing characteristics, such as race, gender, and class (Sellers et al., 1998).

Gender Identity Development

According to Cosse (1992), gender identity is “the way one organizes one’s sense of maleness or femaleness— influences and perhaps even directs the developmental pathways followed by males and females” (p. 7). Additionally, Cosse (1992) notes that males and females are likely to have both a different set of criteria for achieving an enduring sense of self as well as a different mode of self-growth. Allen (2004) contends that individuals are not born into a gender; rather, they are socialized as either male or female through their interaction with others.
Similar to cognitive development, gender identity also has developmental stages through which individuals proceed. For example, between ages 1 and 4, toddlers embrace a gender fluid identity; however, due to increased gender socialization in the home and school contexts, their gender becomes quite rigid during early childhood when gender rules become strictly enforced. It is during this time that children believe that their clothing or toys make them a boy or girl (Kerr & Multon, 2015). However, as they transition into later childhood, they begin to understand their biological sex is stable (Kerr & Multon, 2015; Signorella, 2012). Hence, lifelong gender roles are developed through the internalization of cultural messages (Boston & Baxley, 2007). Importantly, these gender-role orientations can especially play a significant role in Black female adolescents’ psychological functioning (Thomas et al., 2011).

Empirical evidence suggests that female adolescents, as a whole, experience a loss of voice, self-confidence, and positive identity as a result of society’s ascribed gender roles and, thus, strive for identification and acceptance within specific groups (American Association of University Women [AAUW], 1992; Orenstein, 1994; Phillips, 1998; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). For example, gifted females who internalize American society’s view that being “bad at math” is an attribute of their female gender role—despite decades of research that shows no evidence of differences in math ability by sex—may embrace this stereotypic belief (i.e., develop a stereotype threat) and veer away from STEM courses because they assume they are less capable of being academically successful in these courses due to their gender (Dai, 2002; Kerr & Multon, 2015). Moreover, they are less likely than their gifted male counterparts to enroll or become involved in highly challenging academic opportunities, which may account for a smaller number of gifted females taking the most academically rigorous pathway (Byrnes, Miller, & Schafer, 1999; Kerr & Multon, 2015). Hence, the development of gender identity is not attributed to the
dichotomy of male and female, such in the tradition sense, as it is a spectrum of beliefs and emotions (Kerr & Multon, 2015).

For Black female adolescents and their gifted counterparts, the intersection of their race, class, and gender promotes a deeper awareness of their multiple identities (Thomas et al., 2011) and acknowledges the complexity of their multiple identity factors as opposed to focusing on single identity factors, such as race or gender. Thomas and colleagues (2011) believe that Black females’ healthy identity development and psychological functioning can be accounted for by their gendered racial identity (i.e., the intersection of their gender identity and racial identity), an aspect of their social identity. This is believed to be due to the fact that Black female adolescents and their gifted peers must recognize the prevalence and reality of both racism and sexism in their lives in order to develop a healthy identity (Thomas et al., 2011). This is especially important in helping these girls gain a resilient spirit through self-determination and strength when faced with the adverse effects of oppression and stereotypical images of Black women (Thomas et al., 2011).

_Gifted Identity Development_

Mahoney (1998) maintains that a gifted individual’s well-developed sense of identity and knowing their giftedness is a critical component of the development of the self. What it means to be gifted and how to develop their potential is an important part of identity development in gifted individuals. However, few models are available to assist in shaping and honing these identities in the gifted (Mahoney, 1998). Hence, Mahoney (1998) presents the Gifted Identity Formation Model in an effort to help counselors explore and strengthen gifted individuals’ identity formation and enhance their healthy identity development. An individual’s gifted identity is
shaped or influenced by four constructs, according to Mahoney (1998): validation, affirmation, affiliation, and affinity.

**Validation.** The validation of an individual’s existing giftedness by the individual, him or herself, or others, is the first construct of a gifted individual’s gifted identity formation. A gifted individual’s growth or development is dependent on the relationships they share with their parents, teachers, self, and institutions and persons in positions of authority (Mahoney, 1998). Further, the parental awareness of their child’s gifts is a form of validation that can be observed through their advocacy for their child in gifted programs and enrichment opportunities that will allow their child to gain a better understanding of his or her giftedness and develop their behavior from a gifted perspective (Mahoney, 1998).

**Affirmation.** The second construct of gifted identity formation, Mahoney (1998) maintains, is affirmation, and requires acknowledgement of the gifted self from the supportive individuals in the lives of the gifted individual. This continual reinforcement of the many nuances of a gifted individual’s giftedness from learning, experiences, parents, teachers, environment, and enrichment is an ongoing interactive process between the gifted self and the world, reinforcing an “I am gifted” affirmation in the self (Mahoney, 1998). A negative affirmation can develop as a result of the absence of this reinforcement. Additionally, affirmation may also originate in the family of origin and, thus, value structures can both be consciously or unconsciously passed on generationally. When these values do not support the intellectual gifts of the gifted individual and they are met with negative affirmation, these values may become ingrained in a gifted individual’s identity and need further exploration in order to be brought into awareness (Mahoney, 1998).
Affiliation. A gifted person’s alliance or association with others who share similar passions, desires, and abilities is their affiliation, the third construct of gifted identity formation. When a gifted individual is able receive fellowship or integrate into a group or society without losing their sense of identity, or self, they will face optimal outcomes. Moreover, the affiliates with whom they associate themselves with must support their giftedness (Mahoney, 1998). Relationships with peers, siblings, and colleagues are highlighted in affiliation and support individuation and the development of the self as a whole by encouraging separation from the family of origin and parent (Mahoney, 1998). In gifted affiliation, uniqueness is embraced and people are valued for it. Gifted individuals at this process of gifted identity begin to assume a higher level of self-appreciation and acceptance and often find relief from alienation and isolation (Mahoney, 1998).

Affinity. The final construct of gifted identity formation is affinity. In affinity, the gifted individual begins to establish a sense of purpose in life (Mahoney, 1998). Affinity allows gifted individuals to shape their gifted attributes through appropriate challenges and stimulation. However, unmet affinity needs may stifle the identity process, creating angst, powerlessness, and alienation from the world and their peers (Mahoney, 1998). Affinity is a significant construct in that it can drive affiliation, the development of the gift, and can also relieve the existential angst often associated with being gifted (Mahoney, 1998).

Intersecting Developmental Processes that Shape Gifted Black Girls’ Identity

When gifted Black female adolescents ask questions regarding their identity, they must uncover multiple layers of their identity in an effort to gain some notion of who they are, the social contexts in which they might fit in, and what values they might embrace, among other
things. As they begin to consider the impact their race, gender, and giftedness have on their effort to establish who they are and where they belong in the world, they are likely to engage in the process of role experimentation, engage in social comparison, and establish either a positive or negative ideal self. These three distinct, yet akin, processes may not only significantly impact how gifted Black females identify with their race, gender, and giftedness in the school context but may also be directly or indirectly influenced by the school environment in which they navigate daily. Further, gifted Black female adolescents may simultaneously belong to at least three different group memberships: the mainstream, the African-rooted Black culture, and a status-oppressed racial/ethnic group (Grantham & Ford, 2003; Murrell, 2009). Hence, they must successfully negotiate the requisite identities, values, and expectations of each group membership (Lee, Winfield, & Wilson, 1991). Unfortunately, gifted Black females may face high levels of stress, less effective study time, and reduced academic recall ability—factors that impede academic performance—when struggling with their biculturality in a society where the frames of reference for White and Black cultures are diametrically different (Boykin, 1986; Gougis, 1986; Lee, Winfield, & Wilson, 1991).

The major challenge facing gifted Black female adolescents is learning how to successfully integrate their identities as Black individuals, gifted individuals (Ford, 2010), and females into their self-concept. Further, due to the distinct nature of their identities as double minorities—being both Black and female and, therefore, doubly oppressed—they must also contend with their Black womanhood. However, it is their race and ethnicity that is often most salient due to the race-related stressors, such as prejudice, discrimination, stereotypes about the intellectual inferiority of Blacks, and the overrepresentation of negative images and stereotypes of Black women and culture in the media, that begin to manifest themselves more clearly during
adolescence and permeate their views about who they are—and even how they look—at home, in the school context, and in the public arenas in which they navigate. Spending the majority of their time each day away from their families in an environment (i.e., the school) that rarely challenges the notions of White superiority—reflected by the organizational structure of its staff, colorblind tracking, disciplinary, and pedagogical practices, and Eurocentric curriculum—may prove equally frustrating for gifted Black female adolescents. Hence, finding themselves marginalized in many non-Black, male-dominated environmental contexts, especially, by both their race and gender, and oftentimes, by their social class and giftedness as well, gifted Black female adolescents not only face the stressors of the biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional adaptations typical of the adolescent period, they also struggle to negotiate their varied identities as Black, female, and gifted beings. Gifted Black females who hail from lower socioeconomic households may also struggle with their class identity.

For gifted Black female adolescents, their race, especially, becomes increasingly salient as they travel beyond the comforts of their immediate familial environment and spend more time in public spaces (e.g., movie theaters, malls, restaurants, schools) where they are often perceived by their phenotypic features (Sellers et al., 2006). As they begin to spend their time away from home with family members who look like them, they place themselves at greater risk for experiencing overt and/or covert racial discrimination. Additionally, as they begin their transition through the stage of rapid growth and development, characterized by Hall (1904) as a period of “storm and stress”, and find themselves equally oppressed by their gender, they are forced to grapple with evaluating their sense of self in a White-dominated, patriarchal society where they have been depicted as inferior to both their White male and female counterparts.
Examining the processes by which the intersecting axes of racial and gender stratification shape racial identity construction requires one to use a “multiple jeopardy” approach (King, 1988) to highlight the complex ways race, gender, and class interact with one another in various contexts and at different levels of analyses given the fact that when encountering any socio-historical event, one identity (i.e., racial, gender, class) may become more salient than the other (Rockquemore, 2002). This has a unique bearing on the identity development of gifted Black females, which, in turn, affects their healthy psychological functioning and presents unimaginable obstacles for them in the school context, especially. Therefore, maintaining a positive sense of their multiple identities will help gifted Black female adolescents form an identity that meets their biological, psychological, and social needs.

**School Connectedness and Adolescence**

Characterized as a period of “storm and stress” (Hall, 1904), adolescence marks a stage of rapid cognitive maturation, physical, and social development. Additionally, it is a developmental period in which adolescents are constantly struggling to negotiate their varied identities as they are faced with important decisions about their role in both school and home contexts (Eccles et al., 1993; Erickson, 1980; Gray et al., 2015). To this end, adolescents must cope with insurmountable obstacles in both their school and home lives. Drawing on the notion that adolescents’ psychological needs must be met by their social environments in order for them to experience increased success and motivation, Eccles and Midgley (1989) theorized that the school climate could be a major contributing factor in influencing these motivational and behavioral declines, coining their theory stage-environment fit theory. Hence, adolescents’ developmental needs must be satisfied in order to overcome the challenges they are faced with
both at school and at home (Eccles et al., 1993). In the school context, for example, adolescents enjoy opportunities for participation in decision-making, self-management, and being provided with choices. In addition, they value the relationships they share with both their peers and teachers and are strongly impacted by the perceptions they believe their peers and teachers have of them. In fact, educators—including teachers, administrators, counselors, and coaches—are essential to an adolescents’ developmental ecology (Chhuon & Wallace, 2014). Teacher and parent trust is also particularly salient to adolescents’ developmental needs, with parental influence being slightly higher during adolescence for African Americans (Daresbourg & Blake, 2014).

Work in a variety of disciplines has documented the significant role school contexts play in inviting students to achieve. In order for students to be successful, they must be behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively engaged, argue Wang and Eccles (2013). Because behavioral engagement involves how students act toward school and learning, behaviorally engaged students tend to demonstrate positive conduct while in school and avoid disruptive behaviors (Wang & Eccles, 2013). Emotionally engaged students have an interest in school activities. As Wang and Eccles (2013) note, when a student is cognitively engaged, their mental efforts are directed towards learning. In addition, they may use self-regulation strategies to help them master concepts and exert additional effort into comprehending complex ideas. Overall, how students behave, think, and feel is directly influenced by their sense of academic self-concept (Wang & Eccles, 2013). Hence, it is important that the school context create an environment that promotes high expectations for all students and enhances students’ self-schemas through a plethora of social opportunities and rigorous, yet engaging activities.
For students, feeling a strong sense of connectedness to the school environment (e.g., teachers, peers, administrators, curriculum, activities) is essential in fostering in them a sense of belonging. Although the term has been a hot topic of discussion amongst educators and researchers, alike, due to the nature of its relationship to youth behavioral, affective, and cognitive outcomes, school connectedness still has yet to be consistently utilized and well-defined. In fact, even the term *school connectedness* has been both synonymously and interchangeably used in the literature with terms such as *student connectedness, school membership, school engagement, school climate, school attachment, school involvement, school commitment, school belonging,* and *school bonding* (Allen, 2017; Chapman, 2014; Chung-Do et al., 2015; Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Libbey, 2004; Loukas, 2016; Schochet et al., 2006; Wehlage et al., 1990). Nonetheless, the basic assumption is that a students’ sense of connectedness to school—regardless of the specific term used to describe this sense of connectedness—is a critical factor in their mental health outcomes (e.g., Oldfield, Humphrey, & Hebron, 2016 and Schochet et al., 2006). Adolescents who feel cared for, close to, and supported by the people in their school environment feel as if they are a part of their school and, thus, are less likely to engage in risky behaviors, such as substance use, violence, stealing, or early sexual activity (McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002). Consequently, a school’s social environment is vital to adolescents’ developmental needs. For example, in a study designed by McNeely, Nonnemaker, and Blum (2002) to explore ways in which middle and high schools can enhance school connectedness, a stage-environment fit perspective was adopted to test the association between connectedness and several features of schools that have been positively linked, through empirical and theoretical bodies of research, to adolescents’ developmental needs. Their findings revealed that several features of schools were important to
increasing students’ sense of school connectedness, including participation in extracurricular activities, tolerant disciplinary policies, smaller school sizes, and positive classroom management climates (McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002).

In the next section, school connectedness in the context of predominantly White schools will be discussed.

School Connectedness and Predominantly White Schools

African American and Hispanic students exhibit lower levels of connectedness when attending racially diverse, majority White schools (Chapman, 2014; Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001; McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002; Zirkel, 2004). These racial and ethnic minority students, in particular, are at a much greater risk than their Asian counterparts who are often stereotyped as “model minorities” (Chang, 1993) for suffering from low self-esteem as a direct consequence of their negative perceptions of their school climate, including the perception that their teachers, counselors, and school administrators have lower expectations of them. In her article on race and cultural flexibility among students in multiracial schools, Carter (2010) attempts to weigh the benefits of multiracial predominantly White contexts to racial and ethnic minority students:

Though previous studies show that mixed-race, predominantly White schools generally benefit racial and ethnic minority students, offering better academic resources…the question remains regarding whether they necessarily provide the cultural and social environments to enable all students—whether African American, Asian American, Latino/a, or White—to avail themselves fully of critical information gathering and academic resources and to cross social boundaries and form
relationships that would extend well into adulthood and influence their residential social network and friendship choices. (p. 1531-1532)

In predominantly White contexts, especially, African-American students are often subjected to structural features, such as discriminatory treatment, within the school that represent forms of institutional racism as a result of White privilege, power, wealth, and status (Noguera, 2001; Taylor & Clark, 2009). Systemic racism in the form of tracking, discriminatory disciplinary policies, lack of culturally diverse curriculum, lack of culturally relevant pedagogical practices, negative racial stereotypes held by White peers, and biased teacher, counselor, and school administrator attitudes and beliefs toward students of color make it rather apparent to the African American students that they have been rendered a position of subordination in relation to their White peers, teachers, and school administrators as a result of their race. Further, research continues to demonstrate that it is these existing structural elements that prevent these students from accessing resources and participating in activities that will not only enhance their learning and social growth, but will also make them more competitive for selective college admissions (Carter, 2008; Diamond, 2006).

While some researchers believe that the existing patterns of underperformance among African American students in the United States when compared to their White, Asian, and even Hispanic counterparts is merely a result of a cultural norm of African American student underachievement in response to racial discrimination in education and the workplace, it has been argued by other researchers that when experiencing racism and discrimination in school, African American students do not always respond negatively, such as by dropping out, becoming academically disengaged, or presenting oppositional identities (Anderson, 1988; Carter-Andrews, 2012; Orfield, Frankenberg, & Garces, 2008; Perry et al., 2003; Weinberg, 1977;
Wells et al., 2009). In fact, they note, African American students often respond in ways that promote educational attainment and school success by presenting a resilient attitude toward academic achievement and success. In this way, the existing racism and racist practices in education and society have inadvertently encouraged these African American students to succeed academically and present an even stronger achievement orientation reflected in their continual struggle for equitable opportunities in education (Carter-Andrews, 2012). Unfortunately, not all African American students respond to these institutionalized practices in a positive way.

For the African American students who attend predominantly White schools and do not respond well to the racism and racist practices that they have experienced in both education and society, their story is rather disheartening. Already feeling marginalized by their skin color as a result of their alienation and isolation from their same-race peers, African American students in predominantly White learning environments often feel as if they are forced to neglect aspects of their identity at school if they wish to be successful (Horvat & Antonio, 1999). A lack of positive social relationships can lead African American students to feel less connected to their school environment and can have a harmful impact on their psychological functioning.

**Social Experiences of Gifted African American Adolescents in Schools**

When Black adolescents and their gifted female counterparts enter the school environment, they must grapple with their own subjective perceptions of their environment based on the interactions they have with school personnel, support staff, and their peers. Hence, their self-concept is often influenced by their social understanding of their school environment and directly shaped by their personal experiences and reflected appraisals (Rayner, 2001). Not only can group memberships influence their evaluation of self, so can entering a more selective
academic setting where the average population has a higher ability level (Marsh & Parker, 1984). As this group of adolescents undergo major cognitive changes and changes in academic environments during the transition from childhood to adolescence and, later, emerging adulthood, so do specific aspects of their self-identity (Cross et. al., 2015; Eccles, Midgley, & Adler, 1984; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). Hence, their maturing self-concept during the adolescent period can severely fluctuate between the positive and negative ends of the spectrum as they cope with their own perceptions of their academic beliefs, social relationships, sense of belonging in schools, and perceptions of others’ beliefs about them (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Bracken & Howell, 1991; Cross et al., 2015). However, the positive or negative self-concept of gifted Black females, more specifically, can also be significantly influenced by the external factors that are sustained by their teachers, gifted peers, and same-race, non-gifted peers, among other school personnel and support staff, including racism, sexism, ostracization or bullying, discriminatory practices, and deficit thinking orientations. Because self-perceptions play a major role in influencing motivation (Ford & Grantham, 2003), the academic performance and overall schooling experiences of gifted Black females can be seriously affected. These internal and external dynamics play a poignant role in influencing, or hindering, the healthy identity development of gifted Black female adolescents in schools. Hence, African American students and their gifted female counterparts’ social experiences in the school environment are likely to be affected by their relationships with peers, teachers, counselors, and other school faculty and staff, as well as shaped by their involvement in school activities. In this section, the social experiences of gifted African American adolescents will be discussed within the context of their relationships with peers, and teachers and other school personnel, and their involvement in school activities.
**Peer Relationships**

Although Black students comprise of nearly one-fifth of the student population of school districts across America, they are significantly underrepresented nationally in gifted education (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Grissom & Redding, 2016). Coupled with the Black-White achievement gap that positions Black students as underperforming when compared to their White counterparts and lower teacher expectations of the academic performance of students of color, it is not difficult for gifted Black female adolescents to internalize these academic disparities in a negative way. Hence, when being identified for entry into gifted programs or referred to for Honors, Advanced Placement (AP), or International Baccalaureate (IB) program courses, gifted Black female adolescents are likely to feel as if they do not quite belong. Not only must they contend with being an “only” in a sea of White faces, as most gifted programs and advanced-level courses are attended by an overwhelming majority of White students as a result of tracking practices by teachers and standardized testing practices that determine course placement, but they must also consider whether or not their peers and teachers believe they actually belong. As a result, the development of low academic self-efficacy or imposter syndrome may ensue. In addition, for gifted Black female adolescents hailing from a lower socioeconomic background who have not been traditionally educated at racially mixed schools or who have never enrolled in advanced courses that comprise of mostly White students, they may struggle to negotiate the racial dynamics of their classroom, experiencing a sort of “culture shock” as they struggle with socializing with peers of an “other” racial or ethnic background and, ultimately, feel as if they are outsiders. For these girls, their first course of action may be to disengage in classroom discourse or drop out of the course altogether.
There is already a substantial gap in the empirical literature on gifted adolescent students and their social relationships with their gifted peers. However, there is no empirical evidence of the relationships between gifted Black adolescents and their gifted peers, whether Black or non-Black. Most literature discusses gifted Black adolescents’ relationships with their same-race peers and the stigmatization they sometimes receive for “acting White” by choosing to achieve (Ford, 2010; Grantham & Biddle, 2014; Whiting, 2009). However, there are some assumptions that can be made about the peer relationships gifted Black female adolescents may experience in their gifted or advanced classrooms.

Gifted Black female adolescents, plagued by both their race and gender identities, may be forced to counter negative stereotypes that come with their Blackness, their femaleness, and their Black femaleness. For example, negative stereotypes that depict Black people as lazy or unintelligent, Black women as loud, angry women who have insatiable sexual appetites (Oyserman, Gant, & Ager, 1995; Harris-Perry, 2011; Reyna, 2000), and females as less capable in STEM-related subjects (Meece et al., 1990), for example, may, in fact, cause gifted Black females to succumb to the implications of those stereotypes and adopt attitudes and behaviors that hinder learning and achievement in their gifted and advanced classrooms (Reyna, 2000). For instance, when a gifted Black female has internalized these stereotypes negatively, she may silence herself in the mathematics classroom when called upon by her peers or teacher or become less inclined to participate in groups with males who are often stereotyped as better math performers than females. And being that gifted Black females are likely to be one of only a few Black students in the classroom, they may also face problems with relating to the conversations of their gifted peers who are most likely to be White and from a middle- or upper-class upbringing. For instance, in the case study of Danisha Fulton, a Black female underachiever who
was identified as gifted in mathematics, she held many unfavorable perceptions of her relationships with peers (Grantham & Ford, 1998). For example, because she had limited experience socializing with White peers, she found it difficult to communicate with them in her gifted classrooms and mainly interacted with her same-race peers in her regular classrooms (Grantham & Ford, 1998). Gifted Black females, like Danisha, may feel as though they have to reject aspects of their Black cultural identity, such as their vernacular, in order to appease or fit in with their White peers. For instance, they may find that they subconsciously begin to speak more formally, using Standard American English around the White peers in their gifted and advanced classes rather than the slang they typically use when socializing with their Black peers.

During the period of adolescence when race becomes increasingly salient and their giftedness makes them predisposed to social difficulties (Lutfig & Nichols, 1991), gifted Black females may also feel alienated and rejected by their White peers (Whiting, 2009) who may have pre-formed cliques, or who feel as if gifted Black females do not belong in advanced courses as a result of White privilege, negative stereotypes of Black people or Black females in the media, and ignorance of culturally different groups (Whiting, 2009). They may also face alienation from the diverse groups of non-White students who harbor negative stereotypes of other racial/ethnic groups (Whiting, 2009), causing gifted Black females to potentially internalize deficit thinking as a result of a low self-concept. Many gifted Black females may choose to continue socializing with their “regular” friends outside of the advanced classroom context (e.g. Lee, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Peternel, 2010), while others who have been acclimated to the gifted classroom environment as a result of having been identified as gifted in their early years, may navigate this terrain with less difficulty and already have an established group of gifted, non-Black friends. However, making friends with other gifted and high-achieving Black peers in their classrooms
may serve as a source of academic and moral support for gifted and high-achieving Black females (Carter, 2007; Grantham & Ford, 1998) who usually find very few of their same-race counterparts in their gifted and advanced courses. These relationships may have a positive influence on gifted Black females’ adjustments in predominantly White classroom contexts, enhance their self-concept and academic performance, and create opportunities for them to affirm their racial identities (Carter, 2007).

Gifted Black female adolescents placed in gifted and advanced courses where they do not often have the opportunity to engage with many of their same-race peers may find that the perplexing nature of their racial, gifted, and academic identities jeopardizes their relationships with their same-race, non-gifted peers. To this end, gifted Black female adolescents may face ostracism by not only their gifted White peers who believe that they do not belong among the gifted as a result of their race and/or gender, but also their same-race peers who feel as if gifted Black females’ enrollment in predominantly White advanced-level courses and interest in attaining academic success is reflective of their rejection of their own Black culture. Same-race peers who adopt this view will often shun or ridicule their gifted and high-achieving counterparts for “acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Fordham, 1988; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). However, it is interesting to note that most same-race peers who adopt this mentality also attend predominantly White or racially mixed schools (Ogbu, 2003; Tyson, 2011).

The relationships gifted Black females share with their same-race peers can significantly influence their attitudes and behavior about their racial identity, achievement ethic, and perceptions of their schooling experiences (Carter, 2007; Ford, 2008; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Mickelson, 1990; Ogbu, 2003, 2008). Ford and Grantham (2008), for instance, examined the achievement-related attitudes, behaviors, and extent to which a group of gifted Black
adolescents’ perceptions of “acting White” and “acting Black” may have led to an ascription to oppositional culture and found that the majority of the students understood “acting White” as being related to “being smart”, “being stuck-up”, “getting good grades”, “being perfect”, and “speaking properly”, among others (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). On the other hand, “acting Black” was associated with “talking loud”, “acting mean”, “being thuggish or gangsta”, “being/acting ghetto”, and “speaking slang” (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). Most of the perceptions of “acting White” and “acting Black” reflected blatant stereotypes about both Black and White people, and were largely seen as negative traits (Ford et al., 2008). Hence, although gifted Black adolescents receive accusations of “acting White” by their same-race peers negatively, they do, nonetheless, equate acting White with intelligence, doing well in school, and speaking Standard English, and acting Black with low academic performance, and speaking and behaving poorly (Ford et al., 2008). Similar to the notion of stereotype threat proposed by Steele (1997), gifted Black female and male students internalize negative stereotypes associated with their race’s attitudes, behavior, and intelligence. In addition, when gifted Black females have a negative perception of the link between schooling and opportunity as a result of race-based discrimination, they are likely to underachieve (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Many of these girls find themselves in the immersion-emersion stage of their racial identity development, rejecting all things associated with the stereotypical characteristics of Whiteness (cultural inversion) (Ogbu, 1992), and intentionally underperform in an effort to demonstrate that they are not rejecting their Black culture or identity (Ford et al., 1993). Developing Ogbu’s (1978) original premise of cultural inversion further in an effort to explain the achievement gap between Black and White students, Fordham and Ogbo (1986) proposed the oppositional culture theory, an ecological theory of academic underperformance that argues African American students’ opposition to
achievement is influenced by the assimilation perceived as White culture (e.g., high academic achievement, speaking Standard American English, etc.) and, thus, leads them to embrace an anti-achievement ethic. However, more recent researchers have refuted this theory altogether, contending that many high-achieving Black students are able to maintain their academic performance without compromising aspects of their racial identity, despite their same-race peers’ beliefs that they have adopted White norms and behaviors by choosing to achieve, speak, or dress a certain way (e.g., Carter, 2005; Carter Andrews, 2012; Flores-González, 1999; Foley, 1991).

Gifted Black female adolescents who are accused of acting White may—instead of rejecting what they perceived to be associated with White culture and embracing everything that is perceived to be a sign of their Blackness—adopt a “raceless” persona, and, thus, reject Black culture in favor of White mainstream culture (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). However, recently, Durkee and Williams (2015) found that Black students have unique perceptions of the accusation of acting White, and it is important to note that gifted Black female adolescents are likely to vary significantly in both their perceptions and responses to accusations of acting White. These varying attitudes and behaviors may be, in part, due to internal and external factors alike, such as their current racial identity status, socialization practices in the home and other cultural influences, and their sense of connectedness in their school. Hence, while some gifted Black females and their high-achieving counterparts may adopt an oppositional culture identity when they are accused of acting White in an effort to avoid negative peer pressure and isolation, alienation, and rejection by their same-race peers, others gifted and high-achieving Black females do the opposite: they work harder to demonstrate academic success in school. These gifted Black females often have a much stronger sense of their racial identity and heightened
sensitivity to the negative stereotypes associated with their racial group’s intellect and take on a “prove-them-wrong” attitude in the classroom or school context where those stereotypes thrive (Carter, 2005). Many of these gifted Black females attend predominantly White or racially mixed schools where they receive little support from their White peers who are unable to understand their personal experiences with racism and racial discrimination in the school context due to their White privilege, and satisfy their desires for support by gravitating toward their same-race peers who can relate to their collective identity as Black people (Carter, 2007; Carter, 2008; Tatum, 1997). Through the formation of these identity-affirming counterspaces, gifted Black females and their same-race peers can form a Black fictive kinship within the school context where they unveil their true selves and enact their Blackness through a form of self-initiated racial spotlighting (Carter, 2007). It is in these spaces where gifted Black females and their same-race peers are able to “reclaim and perform an intrinsic form of Blackness that affirms their racial and ethnic identities” through certain clothing, speech, and behaviors (Carter, 2007, p. 549); a social space where “Black English is preferred, cursing is not shunned, voices at their loudest volume, gossip is revered, horseplay is a must, people-watching is calming, joking is consistent, and ‘profiling’ comes alive” (Carter, 2007, p. 549, citing Majors & Billson, 1992).

**Teacher Relationships**

According to Holliday (1985), teachers’ expectations, perceptions, behavioral styles, and both the type of interaction and the frequency of their interaction, impacts Black students’ academic outcomes. Several studies share similar findings (e.g., Douglas et al., 2008; Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Joseph, Viesca, & Bianco, 2016; McGrady & Reynolds, 2013; Oates, 2003; Parks & Kennedy, 2007; Reyna, 2000; Sirota & Bailey, 2009). As a result of this cultural mismatch
(Tettegah, 1996), many teachers, who are usually middle-class White females, view their White students more favorably and their Black students more negatively (Gutman & Midgley, 2000; McGrady & Reynolds, 2013; Spitz, 1999; Washington, 1982), often through a deficit lens. These perceptions, undoubtedly, become manifest through teaching practices, interactions, behaviors, and gestures toward students in the classroom and are, thus, often negatively internalized by Black students (Reyna, 2000).

In classrooms, regardless of their academic performance or gifted status, Black students are often ignored more than their White counterparts and receive more negative feedback and mixed messages from their teachers (Irvine, 1985; Reyna, 2000; Rubovits & Maehr, 1973). Additionally, in math and science courses, especially, females receive less communication, praise, and feedback than their male counterparts (Deaux & Emswiller, 1974; Irvine, 1985; Reyna, 2000). Most disheartening is the consequence these teachers’ low expectations have on Black students’ and female students’ academic self-efficacy and academic performance. Because the expectations many teachers have of their students stem from racially-charged and gender stereotypes, among others, they have genuine consequences for not only the beliefs and behaviors of the user (i.e., the teacher) but also for those being stereotyped (i.e., the students of color, female students, etc.) (Reyna, 2000).

When examining stereotypes as attributional agents in the classroom, Christine Reyna (2000) draws on Weiner’s (1986) theory of attribution and argues that stereotypes drives an individuals’ expectation that things will continue as they are due to the fact that stereotypes are perceived as internal and stable constructs. Hence, the internalization of negative stereotypes by racial and ethnic minorities may lead these individuals to engage in self-loathing behaviors or resignation about a negative outcome, thus, impeding their future achievement motivation.
(Reyna, 2000). On the other hand, if the stereotype is thought to have a controllable outcome (e.g., laziness), an individual’s attributions may lead to anger and blame. In the classroom, teachers can, and do, harbor attributions regarding their students’ achievement attitudes and behaviors based on both positive and negative stereotypes or assumptions about their group membership.

Because students have the ability to decipher teachers’ reactions along attributional lines by the time they are in elementary school, when teachers and other influential adults in the school context adopt stereotypic judgments about certain students that directly or subtly communicate their attributional beliefs to the student, it influences the students’ beliefs about the cause of his or her behavior and, consequently, impacts the motivation and academic performance of the student (Dweck & Bush, 1976; Reyna, 2000). These teacher behaviors may manifest in a variety of ways, including teachers who attribute failure to ability and, thus, spend more time in class with students whom they perceive to be of a higher ability (Brophy, 1983) or not calling on a female to answer difficult questions in math (Reyna, 2000), believing that certain students’ intelligence is fixed (Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

Teachers, especially, play a vital role in the academic outcomes of White and ethnic minority students alike. In fact, a student’s capacity to learn is often directly influenced by his or her teacher’s attitude towards them (Halvorsen, Lee, & Andrade, 2009). Unfortunately, harboring implicit biases and internalizing negative stereotypes about certain ethnic groups leads many teachers to subconsciously discriminate against certain students. Tenenbaum and Ruck (2007) found that teachers held lower expectations for their Black and Latino students than they did their White and Asian students. Additionally, these teachers provided White students with more positive referrals and words of encouragement than they did their Black and Latino
students (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). Not only are Black and Latino students held to lower expectations than their White and Asian peers (e.g., Andrews, Wisniewski, & Mulick, 1997; Bennett, 1976; Chang & Demyan, 2007; McFadden et al., 1992; Plewis, 1997; Ross & Jackson, 1991; Shaw & Braden, 1990; Vega, Moore, & Miranda, 2015), they are also given less teacher attention and ignored more often, regardless of their level of academic performance or label of exhibiting giftedness (Rubovits & Maehr, 1973), and they are also likely to be met with racial and ethnic stereotypes (Chang & Demyan, 2007) that oftentimes demean their intellectual prowess and portray them as threatening (Ross & Jackson, 1991; Poussaint, 1987). Not only that, embracing these stereotypes often has adverse effects on students’ performance on stereotype-relevant tasks, such as standardized tests for Black and Latino students and math and science tasks for female students of color, in particular (Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995), hence, influencing students of color to underperform. Even Asian students who are oftentimes favored by their teachers are at risk for underperformance. To this end, teachers who hold strong to the “model minority” stereotype of their Asian students as compliant and intellectually and academically superior, especially in math, may inadvertently impede their Asian students’ academic performance. For instance, Cheryan and Bodenhausen (2000) found that priming positive stereotypes about the mathematics skills of Asian students affected their ability to concentrate and, thus, impaired their performance on assessments that measured their quantitative skills.

Teachers of gifted Black female students who perceive Blacks as inherently lazy or intellectually inferior, or females as being prone to doing poorly in math subjects, might be less likely to refer gifted Black females for advanced courses in math or attribute a gifted Black females’ academic underperformance to her innate lack of intelligence or lack of effort. When
gifted Black females perceive their teachers as harboring stereotypes about their culture, gender, or personality, they are likely to experience additional emotional and cognitive burdens, according to Milner and Hoy (2003) and Steele (1997). Hence, teacher attitudes can seriously impede the academic self-concept of gifted Black females as well as their academic performance in both gifted and advanced courses and even their regular courses.

Research has also indicated that Black female students are likely to receive poor quality instruction from White teachers who do little to promote and develop their critical thinking skills, show a lack of empathy toward Black girls’ academic success, refuse to provide critical feedback, act as if they are afraid of Black females, and view Black females as argumentative and loud (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012). This cultural misunderstanding or indifference only further cultivates teachers’ negative attitudes toward Black students (Douglas et al., 2008), in general, and Black female students, more specifically, and is, as a result, negatively internalized by Black students, leading them to believe that their teacher does not care, does not believe in their ability to succeed, and is not interested in nurturing their potential.

Gifted Black female adolescents may also feel further discriminated against in classrooms where teachers fail to engage in culturally responsive teaching practices that promote cultural diversity and awareness and bring a multicultural perspective into the classroom curriculum (Ford, 2011). Further, when gifted Black females in predominantly White school contexts, in particular, are asked to act as the spokesperson for Black people by White teachers who are constantly calling upon them to share their opinions about certain issues in an effort to “get a Black person’s point-of-view” (Douglas et al., 2008, p. 55), it becomes a form of racial microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007) referred to as racial spotlighting (Carter-Andrews, 2012). Equally detrimental to gifted Black females and their African American counterparts is when
their teachers engage in racial ignoring, or fail to acknowledge or recognize them in the classroom (Carter-Andrews, 2012).

Hence, as a result of the deeply embedded racism in an American society where middle-class White female teachers comprise of the teaching staff in an increasingly racially and ethnically diverse public school environment, the quality of teacher-student relationships is significantly compromised (Carter, 1992) which may only further exacerbate the Black-White achievement gap. When the teachers of gifted Black female students fail to consider the cultural differences of Black learners and their uniquely different needs, community contexts, ways to engage them academically, and other identifying characteristics, they become a direct impediment to the academic achievement of their gifted Black female students.

**Relationships with School Counselors and Other School Personnel**

School counselors play a vital role in providing students with the services they need to ensure better K-12 academic outcomes and postsecondary successes (e.g., Carrell & Carrel, 2006; College Board National Office for School Counselor Advocacy, 2011; Dimmit, Carey, & Harrington, 2011; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Lapan & Harrington, 2009; Lapan, Wells, Peterson, & McCann, 2014; Whiston & Quinby, 2009). In fact, school counselors are key agents in helping to strengthen students’ connectedness to school (Lapan et al., 2014). Unfortunately, quality school counseling services are not found in every public school due to the fact that time constraints often limit many school counselors’ ability to provide the services they need to ensure every students’ stronger connection to school (Lapan et al., 2014; Public Agenda, 2010). While this violates the Center for Disease Control’s (CDC) (2009) outlined fundamental condition of school connectedness, research continues to be disseminated that demonstrates
discrepancies in the type and quality of counseling services that schools provide their students, especially when schools are located in high poverty areas with a larger number of minority students (College Board, 2009; Lapan, Gysbers, & Kayson, 2006; Lapan & Harrington, 2009; Lapan et al., 2014). For example, in many high poverty schools, school counselors find themselves overwhelmed with clerical, disciplinary, and “fill-in” school management assignments that often include copying student transcripts and serving as bathroom monitor, among other things (College Board, 2009; Lapan, Gysbers, & Kayson, 2006; Lapan & Harrington, 2009; Lapan et al., 2014). These tasks, unfortunately, hinder school counselors’ abilities to build and maintain emotionally and interpersonally responsive relationships with their students that could solidify their students’ school connectedness, thus leading to better academic and life outcomes for their students (American School Counseling Association [ASCA], 2003; Gysbers & Henderson, 2012; Lapan et al., 2014).

Both teachers and school counselors also serve as the gatekeepers to certain academic courses, especially at the secondary level of schooling. School counselors, along with teachers, who harbor negative beliefs about students’ abilities to perform well academically due their race, gender, or socioeconomic background may, in fact, set students up for academic failure rather than success by limiting their post-secondary education and career options. For instance, because Algebra I is seen as the “gateway” to higher mathematics attainment (National Mathematics Advisory Panel, 2008), students who are not placed in Algebra I in 8th grade will not have the opportunity to take Calculus in high school, a course that is highly recommended by many competitive four-year colleges and universities (Tyson & Roksa, 2015). And if students take Algebra I in 9th grade, they are facing their “last chance” at being “college-bound” as they will only have the opportunity to take Pre-Calculus prior to graduation based on the required
sequence of math courses necessary for a competitive profile that ensures readiness for the rigor of college-level math and STEM courses (Tyson & Roksa, 2015). Although extensive research has found that placement in higher ability groups, tracks, and advanced-level courses offers students with superior academic opportunities than their lower tracked counterparts and leads to high gains in achievement over time, school guidance counselors and teachers still exhibit bias in their choice to refer students to certain tracks and courses (Chapman, 2013; Chapman, 2014; Oakes, 1985a, 1985b). Sadly, the students who are most often placed by their teachers and school guidance counselors on lower-level tracks (e.g., remedial, special education) that subject them to less academic rigor and college-readiness, ultimately leading them down the path to vocational careers rather than college, are overwhelmingly Black and Latino (Yosso, 2002).

School guidance counselors, who are institutional change agents responsible for helping students achieve success in the school and post-secondary context, have been criticized by Black and Latino students for their lack of individual counseling and attention, low expectations of students of color, differential treatment, lack of availability, and inadequate advisement (Chapman, 2013; Vela-Gude et al., 2009). However, while the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model calls for school counseling programs to ensure that all students experience academic success, especially marginalized students (e.g., low-income students) (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012), many school counselors who are employed in predominantly poor schools with large numbers of ethnic minority students than their affluent counterparts (McDonough, 1997) are unable to provide adequate guidance counseling services to students due to their school’s organizational structure (Farmer-Hinton, & Adams, 2006). Hence, large counselor-to-student ratios result in counselor’s having to limit their time with individual students and, instead, focus the majority of their attention on upper-grade
students (Farmer-Hinton, & Adams, 2006). Additionally, a general lack of resources in these schools (Farmer-Hinton, & Adams, 2006) fails to provide many minority students with the school-based social capital (i.e., institutional agents, such as guidance counselors, who have the ability to share resources, norms, and information with students and their families that are necessary to increase school success and social mobility) they need to be successful in their educational endeavors.

**Involvement in School Activities**

While various contexts of adolescent development have been a central focus of literature on adolescents, relatively little attention has been paid to investigating the role that school-based extracurricular activities play in the developmental settings of adolescents (Feldman & Matjasko, 2005). However, studies have found a link between adolescents’ school-based extracurricular involvement and academic achievement, school engagement, self-esteem, and resilience, among others (e.g., Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; Finn, 1989; Fredricks & Eccles, 2008; Irvin, 2012; Mahoney, 2000; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; McNeal, 1998). This is not to say, however, that extracurricular activity involvement outside of the school context (e.g., youth sports, community activities, church activities) does not lead to positive outcomes in adolescent youth, because they do. In fact, despite the fact that studies have shown—in addition to positive experiences—some negative experiences associated with adolescents’ participation in sports activities (e.g., frequent stress, association with peers who use alcohol, etc.) (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Larson et al., 2006), involvement in school activities, in general, has yielded far more positive outcomes than negative ones (Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; Finn, 1989; Fredricks & Eccles, 2008; Irvin, 2012; Mahoney, 2000; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; McNeal, 1998).
Adolescents are subject to a highly structured leisure environment when they participate in school-based extracurricular activities (Darling, 2005). Involvement in these activities can directly influence the adolescents’ developmental processes, provide them with opportunities to exert control and express their identity through choice of activity and actions within the setting, although they do not necessarily engage in role experimentation and activities not sanctioned by adults (Darling, 2005). These highly structured activities include “regular participation schedules, rule-guided engagement, direction by one or more adult activity leaders, an emphasis on skill development that is continually increasing in complexity and challenge, activity performance that requires sustained active attention, and clear performance feedback” (Mahoney & Stattin, 2000, p. 114-115). Equally important, participation in school-based extracurricular activities, in particular, can also change the nature of adolescents’ social relationships (Darling, 2005) and facilitate parental monitoring (Osgood et al., 1996). Moreover, when adolescents engage in selective participation of school-based activities, it may help shape the prevalence of deviance within their peer network (Darling, 2005; Caldwell & Darling, 1999; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Mahoney, 2000). School-based extracurricular activity participation also allows adolescents the opportunity to work closely with unrelated adults outside of the classroom context (Darling et al., 2003).

Consistent with Holland and Andre’s (1987) review of 30 studies examining the association between extracurricular activity participation and adolescent outcomes, youth participation in school-based extracurricular activities have also been associated with higher levels of academic commitment and performance (Cooper et al., 1999; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Jordan & Nettles, 1999), lower high school dropout rates (Davalos et al., 1999; Mahoney, 2000; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; McNeal, 1995), and lower levels of juvenile delinquency and arrests
(Cooley et al., 1995; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Larson, 1994; Mahoney, 2000; Mahoney & Stattin, 2000). More studies, however, should examine possible variations in participation in school-based extracurricular activities and adolescent outcomes across demographics (e.g., race, gender, SES), school contexts (e.g., predominantly White schools), and level of school connectedness.

**Parental Socialization and African American Adolescents’ Identity Development**

Drawing on the socialization literature of Ladd and Pettit (2002) and Parke and Buriel (1998), Spera (2005) most eloquently defines the socialization process as “the manner by which a child, through education, training, observation, and experience, acquires skills, motives, attitudes, and behaviors that are required for successful adaptation to a family and a culture” (p. 126). As the socialization literature continues to grow, researchers, such as Ryan and Adams (1995), have begun to consider the influence of adolescents’ interacting home and school contexts, including the critical socialization agents (e.g., parents, teachers, peers) situated in these contexts (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Parke & Buriel, 1998; Wentzel, 1999)—on adolescents’ development. In this section, I will articulate how the socialization process of African American adolescents, in general, and gifted Black female adolescents, in particular, is the most influential factor in their identity formation in the home and school contexts.

Ecological theories propose that an individuals’ development is influenced by the intersecting nature of the environments in which they live (e.g., home, neighborhood, church, peer network, school, etc.) (Brofenbrenner, 1979; Weisner, 2002). One of the most important popular social contexts to play a formative role in the lives of African American adolescents’ sense-making about the significance and meaning of their race and gender is the African American family (Neblett et al., 2009). Because the initial microsystem in which the African
American child develops is the home, the messages received by the child from his or her parents play a vital role in his or her racial and gender identity development. As the gifted Black female adolescent develops in her home context, the messages she receives from her parents are critical in developing her racial, gender, and gifted identities. Hence, it is in this immediate environment that the African American family has the opportunity to encourage their children to adopt values, goals, skills, and attitudes that will increase their chances of success in life. Parents given the task of raising African American adolescents must not only contend with their own biculturality, associated with being African American and, thus, having to routinely transition between predominantly Black and White worlds, they must also work to effectively socialize their children to develop fluency in two unique cultural scripts (Gonzales et al., 1996; McCombs, 1986), communicating not only universal messages but culturally distinctive messages as well (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Thornton et al., 1990; Hughes et al., 2006). Parents who give birth to a Black female are key agents in nurturing their daughter’s healthy responses to the racial and gender discrimination she is likely to encounter outside of the home, and for the rest of her life. While this process of socialization is bidirectional and parents’ conveyed messages to their gifted Black daughters may be met with various levels of acceptance, receptivity, and internalization (Spera, 2005), it is important that these messages are at least communicated in an effort to increase African American adolescents’ and their gifted Black female counterparts’ likelihood of achieving life success. Moreover, parents of Black female adolescents, in general, and their gifted counterparts, more specifically, must work even harder if they expect to socialize their daughter so that she values her unique identity in a world where she is dually plagued by her race and gender and, therefore, must be prepared to confront not only the ills of racism but sexism as well.
According to the literature, African American adolescents who are able to maintain a healthy racial/ethnic identity may experience marked improvements in their psychological and physiological well-being and academic outcomes (Chavous et al., 2003; Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006). African American adolescents who achieve healthy racial/ethnic identities exhibit higher levels of school engagement, academic efficacy (Altschul, Oyserman, & Bybee, 2006; Chavous et al., 2003; Kerpelman, Eryigit, & Stephens, 2008; Oyserman, Brickman, & Rhodes, 2007; Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2003; Oyserman, Harrison, & Bybee, 2001), and self-esteem (Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997; Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, Smith; 1998; Smith, Walker, Fields, Brookins, & Seay, 1999; Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, & Harpalani, 2001). African American parents can aid in their children’s racial identity achievement by simultaneously engaging in racial and academic socialization practices in the home. It is imperative that African American adolescents are prepared to endure the harshest race-related experiences in the school context and in society-at-large as they emerge into adulthood. In addition, African American females and their gifted counterparts must be prepared to deal with both the race-related and gender-related experiences they are likely to encounter in their lives. I believe that African American parents play a leading role in cultivating this endurance through socialization practices that positively impact their child’s racial/ethnic and gender identities, in addition to their emotional and physical well-being in an oppressive society.

This section will be divided into four sub-sections. The first sub-section will highlight the socialization practices of Black mothers, specifically, while the second sub-section discusses the racial and cultural socialization practices of African American parents, in general. The third and fourth sub-sections introduces literature on academic socialization practices and gender socialization practices respectively.
Black Mothers’ Socialization of their Adolescent Daughters

Interestingly, despite the intersecting oppressions Black girls experience as a result of their race and gender, Black girls are consistently shown to maintain stronger self-esteem and sense of control than their White peers during adolescence (Biro et al., 2006; Lewis et al., 1999; Molloy & Herzberger, 1998; Simmons et al., 1978; Twenge & Crocker, 2002), a time when adolescent girls typically experience a decline in self-esteem (Block & Robins, 1993; Simmons & Blyth, 1987). It has even been suggested that Black girls’ self-esteem and sense of control may be best explained by both the relationships they share with their Black mothers and their mothers’ socialization practices (Ridolfo, Chepp, & Milkie, 2013). It is believed that Black mothers socialize their daughters to be strong and resourceful in order to prepare her for the racial, gendered, and gendered racial oppression she will likely face in adulthood due to her intersecting race and gender and, thus, positively affect their daughters’ self-evaluations (Lovejoy, 2011). This form of gendered racial socialization is referred to as “armoring” (Edmonson Bell, & Nkomo, 1998; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). Armoring is a racial socialization practice used by Black mothers who are aware of the patterns of racial disparities that persist between Black and White women in college attendance and graduation rates (Perna, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 2011), unemployment rates (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011a), health outcomes (Adler & Rehkopf, 2008; Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, 2010; Ogden, 2009), incarceration rates (Alexander, 2011; Lawston, 2012,), and income (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1994; Bureau of Labor Statistics 2011b). Consequently, empirical evidence suggests that Black mothers raise their daughters to be independent, self-reliant, goal-oriented, and strong, a socialization practice that differs from the way White mothers raise their young
daughters (Ladner, 1971; Richardson, 1981; Suizzo et al., 2007; Thomas & King, 2007). Hence, self-concept development in girls is likely to be influenced by mothering (Ridolfo et al., 2013).

Racial and Cultural Socialization

Adopting child-rearing strategies that protect their young children from the social and psychological consequences of racism (Pezzella, Thornberry, & Smith, 2016) starting as early as their child’s second birthday (Billingsley, 1968), African American parents engage in the process of racial socialization, transmitting both implicit and explicit messages about the meaning of their Blackness in a broad societal context (Coard & Sellers, 2005). In fact, through this socialization process, African American parents must prepare their children for adult roles and responsibilities by transmitting values, beliefs, and ideas around lifestyles that are a necessity to their healthy functioning in society (Harrison, Wilson, Pine, Chon, & Buriel, 1990; Thomas & Speight, 1999). Furthermore, the explicit (e.g., verbal directives) and implicit (e.g., modeled behaviors, exposure to opportunities, and interactive experiences) teachings that are transmitted from parent to child through parent-child communication are essential in the Black child developing a positive racial identity (Brown & Krishnakumar, 2007; Thomas & Speight, 1999).

Cultural socialization is a form of racial socialization that includes the transmission of messages by African American parents that communicate racial pride, instilling cultural knowledge in African American children, and preparing African American children for racial bias (Hughes et al., 2006). Racial socialization that includes cultural socialization messages not only influences a positive racial identity, it also encourages African American children to question allegiance to the dominant culture’s negative views of African Americans (Marshall, 1995).
Contributing to the literature on the significance of cultural socialization messages on the positive academic outcomes of African American students, Trask-Tate and associates (2014) found a relationship between high levels of cultural socialization techniques and African American students’ expectations of achieving higher levels of education in the future. Further, in the school context where racial discrimination is prevalent with both teachers and peers serving as enactors of discrimination, they found that African American students who receive low levels of cultural socialization messages are directly impacted by teacher-based and peer-based discrimination and, in turn, hold lower future academic expectations for themselves (Trask-Tate et al., 2014). Although teacher and peer expectations are important to many adolescents during a period when self-perceptions become a critical part of their evolving identities, when these students received higher levels of cultural socialization messages from their parents—even when they reported higher amounts of teacher- and peer-based discrimination—their academic expectations for their future self still increased (Trask-Tate et al., 2014). Significantly, these results have implications for gifted Black females and their same-race peers as it demonstrates the major impact parents’ cultural socialization messages have on the possible self in African American adolescents. Further, it acknowledges the resilient nature of this marginalized group, who continues to expect themselves to achieve despite others’ discriminating perceptions of them or attitudes toward them.

*Academic Socialization*

According to Taylor, Clayton, and Rowley (2004), academic socialization is comprised of the various beliefs and behaviors that parents adopt that influence their child’s school-related
development. Parental attitudes and socialization practices regarding academic achievement provide children with the foundation necessary to develop schemas about school experience.

Existing literature suggests that parents’ academic socialization is crucial during the adolescent period (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Falbo et al., 2001). A study conducted by Cooper and Smalls (2010) found a relationship between cultural socialization and academic socialization and potential academic-related outcomes among African American adolescents. Reports of parents’ academic socialization practices were associated with positive academic self-views (e.g., Garg et al., 2007), greater academic competence, and school engagement (Cooper & Smalls, 2010; De Bruyn et al., 2003). Moreover, they found that African American adolescents’ classroom engagement and academic self-esteem was more directly influenced by their parents’ academic encouragement than their academic involvement in schools (Cooper & Smalls, 2010). African American parents may also engage in academic socialization in an effort to help their children transcend racism, discrimination, and other societal barriers (Franklin, 2002). For instance, in a study investigating the interplay between the ethnic and academic identity of three academically gifted Black males, Graham and Anderson (2008) found that these gifted Black males’ academic identities were significantly shaped by their parents and entrusted community members (“significant others”) who instilled in them the importance of school and its connection to their ethnicity, which led them to develop work ethics and attitudes that supported and strengthened their academic identities.

Literature focused on parental involvement in schools mostly focuses on school-based activities, including attending school events and participating in parent-teacher conferences (Carranza, You, Chhuon, & Hudley, 2009); however, many lower-income and working-class parents are unable to engage in these practices due to their limited English proficiency, low
education, inflexible work schedules, lack of time, feeling unwelcome or feeling as if they have been discriminated against (Williams & Sanchez, 2013). These parents are likely to be perceived as uninvolved or uninterested in their child’s education by teachers and other school personnel (Hill & Torres, 2010). However, research that has expanded parental involvement in poor and low-income families has found that these families, though unable to be actively involved in their child’s school, may still have a significant impact on their child’s achievement through their home-based involvement (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Lower class and working-class African American parents, for instance, may still remain involved in influencing their child’s academic achievement by instilling behaviors that promote optimal academic outcomes, such as conveying messages about the importance of engaging in academic behaviors that lead to academic achievement in addition to what it means to be a racial/ethnic minority (Cooper & Smalls, 2010; Hill et al., 2004) even if they are unable to physically visit their child’s school on a regular basis. In fact, after conducting a study that found parental academic involvement to be positively associated with African American adolescent achievement, but not for their White counterparts, Hill and colleagues (2004) concluded that parents’ academic involvement might be interpreted differently across racial/ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. However, ethnic minority development theorists believe that African American parents may engage in a variety of socialization practices that include not only culturally distinctive forms of socialization but they may also engage in a variety of behaviors consistent with universal forms of academic socialization (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Garcia et al, 1996). For instance, Yan (1999) examined four constructs of social capital (e.g., parent-teen interaction, parent-school interactions, interactions with other parents, and family norms) to investigate the levels of involvement of African American parents in comparison to White parents and found that, when compared to
White parents, African American parents demonstrated equivalent or higher levels of parental involvement. These academic socialization practices are especially critical for African American youth whose self-perception in the academic domain is greatly influenced by their fellow peers (Cooper & Smalls, 2010). Fordham and Ogbu (1986), for example, suggest that African American youth may develop an academic cultural identity that causes them to downplay their academic success in order to maintain ties with their same-race peers and avoid the “acting White” label. This behavior may be most pronounced, however, in African American youth attending predominantly White schools (Tyson, 2011). Gifted Black female adolescents and their male counterparts who are enrolled in gifted and advanced courses that have very few minority students may especially be at-risk for adopting an oppositional culture that leads to underachievement (Ford, 2010), academic disidentification (Cokley et al., 2012; Majors & Billson, 1992; Osborne, 1997), and lack of academic motivation because their academic self-views are shaped by their same-race peers’ perceptions of them. By committing to an achievement ideology, many gifted and high-achieving Black students face opposition from the same community they are likely to self-identity with most: the Black community (Fordham, 1996). Although wanting to succeed is not necessarily related to one’s wish to reject other parts of their identity, it is often seen this way by other members of the group.

Often, African American parents promote autonomy and self-efficacy (Hayes, 2011) and communicate to their young sons and daughters the importance of family responsibility through Afrocentric values passed down through extended kin networks that include showing respect for elders and mutual cooperation (Pallock & Lamborn, 2006). Further, they often share with their children stories about their own struggles as well as the struggles of their ancestors, instill a sense of cultural pride in their children, and endorse education attainment as a pathway to social
mobility and autonomy (Cooper & Smalls, 2010). This may inspire gifted Black female adolescents and their African American counterparts to become even more motivated to achieve due to the racial and academic socialization messages they have internalized regarding the sacrifices made by their parents and the relationship between higher education and elevated social status (Suizzo et al., 2016).

**Gender Socialization**

Parents of gifted Black females must not only prepare their daughters for the racial discrimination they are likely to experience in life, they must also consider ways to allow them to satisfy healthy gendered identities in a society where their femaleness is also seen as somewhat of an impediment. Gifted Black female adolescents experience a relational crisis in both their racial and gender development, according to Stevens (1997). Through gender socialization practices, parents may successfully prepare their daughters for roles and attitudes needed to maintain a healthy identity.

Research on parental socialization often supports the idea that daughters and sons are raised differently (Block, 1983; Bornstein et al., 2008; Cowan, Cowan, & Kerig, 1993). According to Block (1983), parents tend to emphasize notions of “achievement, competition, independence, and education” in their sons while emphasizing traits of kindness, affection, and politeness in their daughters (p. 480). Bambara (1970), for instance, draws on the distinct nature of men and women in White culture, arguing that men are expected to be “aggressive, uncompromising, factual, lusty, intelligent provider(s) of goods” while women are perceived as “retiring, gracious, intuitive, attractive consumer(s) of goods” (Bambara, 1970, p. 124). In other words, according to the White worldview, men are strong and rational beings while women are
weak and emotional creatures (Wallace, 2007), and the ways in which they are often socialized in the home only further perpetuates the adoption of stereotypical traditional gender roles by males and females.

However, these parenting behaviors may not be as pronounced in African American families who must contend with the impact of racial stratification in American society and economic “depravation” on the family structure and roles in the African American community (Brown et al., 2010; Buckley & Carter, 2005; Hill, 2001). For example, some scholars believe that slavery played a vital role in the gendered categories of domestic and economic labor in the African American community and, thus, the notions of “manhood” and “womanhood” are significantly different than the notions upheld in the White community (Brown et al., 2010; Buckley & Carter, 2005; Hill, 2001).

While theorists propose that gender role differentiation increases as children reach the adolescent period (Hill & Lynch, 1983), African American parents may adopt gender neutral socialization practices in the home, basing role expectations and parenting on factors other than gender, such as age, while aiming to instill similar traits in their children, whether male or female (Hill, 2001). Additionally, they may hold different expectations for their sons and their daughters due to their perceptions of the different experiences their children are likely to encounter in larger society as a result of both their race and gender. For instance, African American parents may fear the safety of their sons because they understand that their Blackness and maleness leads society to perceive them as dangerous (Hill, 2001). On the other hand, they may instill skills of competence and self-reliance in their daughters (McAdoo, 1988; Staples & Johnson, 1993) who may have to act as sole provider and caretaker in her household in the future.
Interestingly, Bem (1983) proposed that gender-typed (masculine male and feminine female) individuals often evaluate themselves in relation to traditional gender role stereotypes that define the attitudes and behaviors that are gender “appropriate”. However, nongendered-type, or androgynous, individuals, select attitudes and behaviors that are consistent with their self-perception rather than whether or not they are deemed “appropriate” (Buckley & Carter, 2005). The gender roles of African Americans are often more flexible and less restrictive than they are among Whites (McCollum, 1997), leading many African Americans to assume androgynous gender roles (Harris, 1997). For this reason, it is equally likely that African American men and women will describe themselves in terms of traditional masculine characteristics, such as independent and assertive (Harris, 1996). This differs significantly from White men and women who are more likely to describe themselves in terms of possessing traditional gender traits and assuming traditional gender roles (Buckley & Carter, 2005). While the literature on the relationship between Black girls’ gender roles and psychological well-being is still limited, some studies do suggest that Black girls who possess masculine and androgynous traits and those who display strength and perseverance in their roles as worker and mother have higher self-esteem (Molloy & Herzberger, 1998; Ward, 1996). This is likely a result of the consistency between their gender role characteristics and their cultural teachings (Buckley & Carter, 2005). Not only may androgynous Black girls be more effective due to their ability to perform stereotypical masculine “instrumental”, or contributory, functions, as well as stereotypical feminine “communal” functions (Powell & Butterfield, 1989), they may also be more content with their body image, sexuality, and adopt their own definitions of beauty standards, unlike their stereotypically feminine counterparts (Bem, 1983; Kilmicka, Cross, & Tarnai, 1983; Molloy & Herzberger, 1998).
The literature on gender socialization, which primarily reflects the experiences of White females, found that the powerful messages adolescent females receive from adults and from culture “undermine their self-confidence, suppress their self-identity, and compel them to conform to limiting gender roles” (Buckley & Carter, 2005). However, African American females’ self-esteem during the period of adolescence primarily remains consistent and the messages they receive from adults and from culture are less limiting and restrictive (American Association of University Women [AAUW], 1991; Buckley & Carter, 2005; Collins, 1991; Ward, 1996). African American parents who engage in both racial, academic, and gender socialization practices are one of the most influential factors in the healthy identity development of gifted Black female adolescents. Despite the bidirectional influence of the social and environmental contexts that consistently interact with one another to assist in the identity development of the gifted Black female adolescent, I believe it is within the most intimate environment—the home—that these girls’ healthy identity development is initially nurtured and is most strongly impacted. Further, I believe that African American parents who routinely engage in effective racial, academic, and gender socialization practices inadvertently promote in their gifted daughters the opportunity to develop a healthy racial/ethnic identity that allows them to maintain a positive sense of self, which, in turn, influences their healthy psychological functioning, promotes positive peer relationships, and increases their opportunities to experience optimal academic outcomes. Existing research even suggests that racial/ethnic identity may, in fact, be one of the strongest influences in the academic success and school engagement of African American adolescents and their gifted counterparts (Chavous et al., 2003; Chavous et al., 2008; Grantham & Ford, 2003; Phinney, 1989). As more literature emerges that explores the risk factors that contribute to the psychological functioning of African American youth,
maintaining healthy racial/ethnic identities and embracing the racial, academic, and gender socialization messages they receive from their parents continues to be linked to healthy psychological, emotional, and academic outcomes in African American adolescents (Chavous et al., 2003).

It is, thus, necessary for parents of gifted Black female adolescents to constantly provide their gifted Black daughters with daily messages of self-affirmation and engage in the practice of racial, academic, and gender socialization in an effort to allow her to both gain a sense of pride in her femaleness as well as to help her make healthy choices about how she chooses to cope with race-related and/or gender-related messages about her intellect, beauty, or opportunities, among other things. By engaging in rigorous socialization practices and constantly communicating affirming messages that she can successfully internalize over time, African American parents can provide their gifted daughters with the tools she needs to not only embrace affirming racial, gender, and academic identities in the school and society-at-large, but also to successfully face, critique, and confront, if necessary, society’s negative perceptions of her race, gender, or gifted identities.

**Conclusion**

Little research exists on the academic experiences of gifted Black female adolescents. Literature on the academic experiences of gifted Black females attending predominantly White schools is completely void as researchers concerned with gifted Black students have not explored their experiences in predominantly White school contexts, specifically. While the intersecting nature of gifted Black females’ multiple identities can allow us to make some assumptions about the ways in which they may experience the world through a developmental perspective (see e.g.,
Figure 1), there is not enough research available regarding the specific phenomenon of gifted Black females and their experiences in predominantly White schools. However, information on the developmental processes that these girls undergo during adolescence as well as the literature on giftedness, school connectedness, educator and peer relationships, and parental socialization for African American adolescents allows us to consider some of the factors that may (or may not) impact the academic experiences of this group. The literature compiled in this review can be used to help us understand some of the experiences of gifted Black females who attend predominantly White schools.

Figure 1. *Intersection of gifted Black female adolescents’ identities.*
CHAPTER III: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Overview of the Qualitative Inquiry

The purpose of this study was to use a narrative inquiry approach to examine the academic experiences of gifted Black female adolescents attending predominantly White schools. Examining these girls’ narratives allowed me to consider the roles that racial identity, parental socialization, and school connectedness play in shaping how they experience the predominantly White school context.

Qualitative research was essential in order to garner the type of data necessary to describe the complexity of gifted Black female adolescents’ academic experiences attending predominantly White schools. By examining individual perspectives in context, qualitative research can help us to better understand the complexity of people’s lives (Heppner et al., 2008).

In addition, by drawing on Friend and Caruthers’s (2016) approach to using documentary film as qualitative research, I made an effort to share the knowledge and experiences of students and their parents to a wider audience than traditional research methods allow (e.g., through publication journals). Hence, a documentary film was created to supplement my written dissertation so that (1) the authentic voices of this marginalized population will be centered, and (2) viewers of the film could be provided with the opportunity to engage in their own meaning-making around this topic. I believe that the documentary aspect of this research study was imperative in helping to share the stories of gifted Black females—an important population that has been shunned in the scholarship on gifted and talented students—to educators, psychologists, counselors, and staff who work with gifted Black female students in schools.

In this chapter, I will provide my rationale for selecting narrative inquiry as the research design for this study, present a description of specific research methods (including interview, and
artistic reflections artifacts, and field texts), interview/data collection protocols, participant information, establishing trustworthiness, credibility, and reflexivity.

**Qualitative Research Approach**

This study used qualitative research approaches to closely examine the academic experiences of gifted Black female adolescents attending predominantly White schools. This type of methodology was used to gather intricate details about feelings, emotions, thought processes, and other phenomena that cannot be extracted or learned about as easily through more conventional quantitative approaches (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Hence, a qualitative research design was used to provide insight relative to the experiences of gifted Black female adolescents in this study and possibly provide further information about the experiences of other ethnic minority gifted female adolescents who attend similar school contexts.

Emerging in the early 1900s as an inquiry method employed in various academic disciplines, qualitative research was designed to not only understand a process, but also to describe phenomena that is poorly understood, discover unspecified contextual variables, and understand differences between stated and implemented theories or policies (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2002). In this way, qualitative research is a valuable methodological tool for exploring a central construct or phenomenon. Eliciting a qualitative research design allows researchers to study a small number of people or sites in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2005). By taking an in-depth look at multiple realities, qualitative research studies can be utilized to determine the “truth” about a central construct or phenomenon. The inductive nature of the process of qualitative inquiry allowed me to specifically focus on a participant’s experiences by asking a variety of questions and asking them
to describe their experiences in detail. Conducting a qualitative research study allowed me to explore and gain a better understanding of gifted Black females—a group that has been greatly marginalized by the literature—and the variables that have shaped their academic experiences at predominantly White schools.

**Narrative Inquiry Approach**

“Experience happens narratively. *Narrative inquiry is a form of narrative experience. Therefore, educational experiences should be studied narratively.*”

- D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly (2000, p. 19)

Introduced to the field of education by Connelly and Clandinin in 1990, narrative inquiry was originally defined as “the study of the ways humans experience the world” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). However, elaborating on the experiential nature of the methodology, the methodologists later applied a more intricate definition to narrative inquiry, centering story as the context through which these experiences are shaped:

Viewed by this way, narrative is a phenomenon studied in inquiry. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular narrative view of experience as phenomenon under study. (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375)

A number of researchers note the significance of narrative inquiry in education research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Goodson & Gill, 2011), accrediting it with being able to capture the lived experiences of teachers and students (Kim, 2016). Hence, a narrative inquiry is the most appropriate research methodology for understanding and sharing the experiences of gifted Black
female adolescents and, thus, the reason I chose to strategically employ it to examine the varied educational experiences of gifted Black female adolescents who attend predominantly White secondary schools. With this study, I hoped to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of gifted Black female adolescents attending predominantly White schools, both individually and collectivity. By focusing on capturing the lived detailed experiences (Wertz, 2005) of this group, I hoped to produce qualitative data that explored the subjective meanings these girls produce and sustain through their lived experiences as gifted Black females who attend predominantly White secondary schools. Moreover, I utilized counter-storytelling as a methodology to tell the stories of the gifted Black female adolescents and their parents through both a textual and visual approach. Textually, the counter-stories, or counter-narratives, of this group offered participants the opportunity to share their lived experiences as People of Color and as a group that has been continually marginalized and silenced, thus, adding to the literature on a population that has been vastly understudied. Additionally, using their counter-narratives also allowed me (the researcher) to communicate the realities of the oppressed in both written (dissertation) and visual (documentary film) form. Finally, eliciting the counter-narratives of this population and sharing these stories in both a written and visual format provided me with the opportunity to challenge dominant ideologies, validate and legitimize the experiential knowledge of gifted females of color, and use a social justice approach through documentary filmmaking to clearly take an active stance in centering the counter-stories of gifted Black females and their parents through a more accessible and digestible format than textual analyses would have allowed.
Research Questions

This narrative inquiry study contributes to the literature by closely investigating the shared academic experiences of gifted Black females who attend predominantly White schools in a large, racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse metropolitan area located in the Southeastern region of the United States. The following research questions shaped this narrative inquiry:

1) How are the academic experiences of gifted Black female adolescents attending predominantly White schools shaped by their racial identity?
2) How are the academic experiences of gifted Black female adolescents attending predominantly White schools influenced by parental socialization messages (i.e., racial/cultural socialization, academic socialization, and gender socialization)?
3) How are the academic experiences of gifted Black female adolescents attending predominantly White schools impacted by their school connectedness (i.e., relationships with classroom teachers, gifted peers, same-race, non-gifted peers, and other school personnel, including school administrators, school counselors, and coaches; school curriculum; and involvement in school activities)?

Participant Selection

According to Patton (2002), no rule exists in qualitative research for sample size selection. Rather, “the validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size” (p. 245). Moreover, as Lutz and Samir (2011) argue, a study’s population consists of an individual or group of
participants from a particular class or group. Hence, the target population for this narrative inquiry study were Black females who ranged in age from 12 to 17, were enrolled in grades 7 through 12, and attended a predominantly White school (i.e., a school that has a majority White student population in relation to minority students). In addition, they were expected to meet one or more of the following criteria: (1) they must have been formerly or currently identified as gifted based on federal or district eligibility criteria recognized by the school they attend (e.g., standardized test scores, teacher referral into gifted programming in Math and/or English Language Arts); (2) they must have been referred to advanced-level courses (e.g., Honors, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate) by teachers and/or school counselors; and/or (3) they must have been enrolled in advanced-level courses at the time of the study.

In order to recruit participants for this narrative inquiry, email blasts were sent to local middle and high school English and Math teachers, AIG teachers, and school administrators guidance counselors at predominantly White schools (within the recruiting region) detailing the study, including information about its importance to gifted education research, eligibility criteria for interested participants, and two interest flyers (one for students and one for parents) that included the researcher’s (my) contact information (See Appendix A and Appendix B). In addition, the study was advertised on my personal social media site, Facebook, in an effort to obtain a larger, more diverse number of recruits. Finally, one participant selected for this study was recommended by another gifted Black female participant and her parents through a snowball sampling strategy.

In total, seventeen gifted Black female adolescents expressed initial interest in participating in this study; however, four of them did not attend predominantly White schools and the other three declined to participate after learning of the time commitment and
expectations required of the study (e.g., 3-hour time commitment for interviews and expectations to produce artwork). Therefore, ten gifted Black females, ranging in age from 12 to 17, who resided in a large metropolitan area in the Southeastern region of the United States and attended predominantly White schools were selected to participate in this study (see Table 1). Additionally, each of the gifted Black female adolescents’ parents (n=16) were selected to participate in this narrative inquiry (see Table 2).

Table 1. Gifted Black Female Participants’ School Demographics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Current School</th>
<th>School Locale</th>
<th>Type of School</th>
<th>Racial Composition: % White</th>
<th>Racial Composition: % Black</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alani Tyler</td>
<td>Marymount Park Middle School</td>
<td>Suburb: Large</td>
<td>Public, Middle, 6-8</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber Olds</td>
<td>Ramsville Community Charter School</td>
<td>Rural: Fringe</td>
<td>Public, Charter, 6-12</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn Mack</td>
<td>Willows Forest Middle School</td>
<td>Suburb: Large</td>
<td>Public, Middle, 6-8</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jayda Davenport</td>
<td>Leeford Middle School</td>
<td>City: Large</td>
<td>Public, Middle, 6-8</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jurnee Carver-Hicks</td>
<td>Harrison Middle School</td>
<td>Suburb: Large</td>
<td>Public, Middle, 6-8</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalyn McIntosh</td>
<td>Leeford Middle School</td>
<td>City: Large</td>
<td>Public, Middle, 6-8</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kara Davis</td>
<td>Radford Charter High School</td>
<td>City: Large</td>
<td>Public, Charter, 9-12</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laila Troy</td>
<td>Triangle Research Academy</td>
<td>Suburb: Large</td>
<td>Public, Charter, 9-12</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larissa Nixon</td>
<td>Marymount Park Middle School</td>
<td>Suburb: Large</td>
<td>Public, Middle, 6-8</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKenzie Bond</td>
<td>Maylock High School</td>
<td>City: Large</td>
<td>Public, High, 9-12</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Parent Participant List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name(s)</th>
<th>Parent(s) of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Naimah &amp; Roger Tyler</td>
<td>Alani Tyler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina Olds</td>
<td>Amber Olds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malik &amp; Cyndi Mack</td>
<td>Autumn Mack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara Sherlock &amp; Tony Davenport</td>
<td>Jayda Davenport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia Brogden</td>
<td>Jurnee Carver-Hicks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly McIntosh</td>
<td>Kalyn McIntosh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ronald &amp; Valerie “Val” Davis</td>
<td>Kara Davis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramón &amp; Evelyn Troy</td>
<td>Laila Troy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carl &amp; Syndney Nixon</td>
<td>Larissa Nixon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamara Brockington</td>
<td>McKenzie Bond</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

Data was collected over a fifteen-week time period between mid-July and late-October. Participants, ranging in age from 12 to 17, and their parents, were residents of a large metropolitan area in the Southeastern region of the United States. They had either already been formally identified as gifted according to state and federal definitions and guidelines or were enrolled in advanced-level courses in the areas of English Language Arts and/or Mathematics.
and, thus, showed potential for giftedness. Parental consent and child assent forms were obtained prior to the participation of the recruits in this study (see Appendix D, Appendix E, and Appendix F). Participants who elected to participate in the study were provided with either an informed consent or assent form with the purpose of the study, research methods, time commitments, and other important details (see Appendices D, E, and F), and an electronic demographic questionnaire form that requested information about race/ethnicity, gender, age, year in school, and cumulative grade point average (GPA), advanced courses taken, and school and community activities (see Appendix C).

_Semi-Structured Interviews_

In-depth, audio and video recorded semi-structured interviews (see Appendix G, Appendix H, and Appendix I) were used to investigate “little-understood phenomena; to identify/discover important variables; [and] to generate hypotheses for further research (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Described as “one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative armory”, by McCracken (1988, p. 9), semi-structured interviews enabled me, the researcher, to “step into the mind” of my participants so that I might be given the opportunity to “see and experience the world” as they, themselves, do (p. 9). Semi-structured interviews were open-ended in nature so as to elicit stories of lived experience from the participants (Clandinin & Huber, 2010; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Individual interviews were conducted with both the gifted Black female adolescent participants as well as with their parents. Interviews with the gifted Black female adolescent participants lasted approximately 1 ½ to 2 ½ hours and interviews with the parents of the gifted Black female participants lasted approximately 30 minutes to 1 ½ hours. Each interview was audio recorded for the development of verbatim transcripts. In addition, eight
gifted Black female participants assented to have their interviews video recorded and five parents consented to have their interviews video recorded in order to add to the data collected for the documentary film that will complement this dissertation study. Broad topics covered in the interview with gifted Black female adolescent participants included key academic, financial, and social/emotional supports, peer relationships, self-identity, academic self-concept, perceptions of teachers, curriculum, experiences of racism and racial microaggressions in school, racial identity development, parental socialization (i.e., racial/cultural, academic, gender), and the experience of being gifted. Broad topics covered in the parent interviews included family values, experiences raising a gifted Black daughter, parental socialization practices (i.e., racial/cultural, academic, gender), and challenges their daughter has faced at school with racism, sexism, and/or academically.

Follow-up interviews (see Appendix H) were individually conducted with each gifted Black female participant following the initial interviews. Follow-up interviews with the gifted Black female participants lasted approximately 15 to 30 minutes. Follow-up interviews, though still semi-structured in nature, were designed to encourage the expansion of ideas beyond what was discussed in the initial interviews as a way to enrich each participant’s story. Follow-up interviews were brief and created after preliminary analysis of the initial interviews was conducted. This was done to ensure that I had not only properly captured each participant’s storied experiences accurately but to also have participants elaborate in certain areas of the story that may have been less detailed, yet may have yielded important data for the study, as well as to find new ways to tell the stories. Hence, follow-up interviews were conversational in nature, but also designed in such a way that they served as a form of member checking. Finally, during the follow-up interviews, participants were asked to bring in their artistic reflection artifacts and
discuss how their artwork reflected their lived experience as gifted Black females who attend predominantly White schools. Pseudonyms were created for each participant in order to maintain anonymity (see Table 1 and Table 2).

**Artistic Reflection Artifacts**

In an effort to actively involve participants in the research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), participants were given the opportunity to express their experience being gifted Black female adolescents attending predominantly White schools by creating a work of art in literary-based form (e.g., play, poem, short story, spoken word, etc.) or visual-based form (e.g., digital storytelling, drawing, sculpture, dance, archival photographs, etc.). By drawing on the notion that knowledge and experience can be communicated through multiple modes (e.g., spoken word, written language, body language, and visual images) (Alerby & Bergmark, 2012), I used an arts-based narrative approach (Kim, 2016) to allow the participants to tell their stories using an artistic domain outside of the more restrictive nature of the interview setting that relies solely on spoken word expression. To ensure that I was able to capture, and successfully interpret, all of the elements of the participants’ artistic creations, I took a picture of the artwork (or audio or video-recorded the artwork, if necessary) and had the gifted Black female participants provide me with an accompanying verbal explanation, that was audio recorded, detailing the reason they chose to create the particular artwork they did and how they feel it represents their experience as gifted Black females at a predominantly White school, creating meaning behind their artwork. Finally, I used their transcribed audio recorded explanations of their artwork to create field texts.
Field Texts

Field texts included transcribed interviews that were captured during both the initial and follow-up interviews with gifted Black female participants and their parents. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) maintain, “Field texts have a recording quality to them. Research texts are at a distance from field texts and grow out of the repeated asking of questions concerning meaning and significance” (p. 132). Hence, field texts were used as a medium to create research texts using the data collected for this narrative inquiry. In this narrative inquiry, field texts not only included the actual written interview data (transcribed verbatim), but also the audio- and video-recorded transcribed artistic reflection artifact explanations provided by the gifted Black female participants during their follow-up interviews in order to elicit the “archaeology of memory and meaning” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 114). By viewing the artwork and the narratives behind them—as told by the participants in the study—as items that can provide a rich source of memories of important times, people, and events, field texts served as an important document in the context of this narrative inquiry by capturing the memories and meaning of options that are either not tangible or serve as “little fragments that have no beginning and no end” (O’Brien, 1991, p. 39).

Data Analysis

In narrative inquiry, data analysis is described as a transition from field text to research texts. In this study, field texts included the transcribed interviews of each participant (i.e., gifted Black female participants and parent participants), and the transcribed data gathered from the verbal artistic reflection explanations that accompanied gifted Black female participants’ presentations of their artistic reflection artifacts. After first listening to each of the audio
recordings directly following each interview, I sent the audio-recorded narrative field texts of the participants’ telling of their storied experiences to a professional transcription service, Rev.com, to be transcribed verbatim, a “crucial” step in the research text composition process of narrative inquiry (Wells, 2011, p. 37). Upon return, each transcript was read and reviewed thoroughly at least one time prior to beginning the analysis process for consistency and preparation for analyzing the data using Dedoose 7.6, which facilitated the coding and code management processes (Creswell, 2009).

In an effort to move from field texts (data sources) to research text (interpretation of experience) (see Clandinin, 2013), I spent a significant amount of time listening to each recorded interview while simultaneously reading the corresponding field text to correct any errors I may find. Next, I read and re-read each field text looking for patterns, narrative threads, tensions, and themes that may have developed into stories by putting this storied data into context around the academic experiences of gifted Black females (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Careful coding of these data allowed me to identify emerging themes. I used my initial analysis of the interview data to inform how I would continue to ask questions in the follow-up interviews.

Following the subsequent interviews, I reviewed each artistic reflection artifact again along with its accompanying transcribed reflection explanations. I simultaneously read and re-read each transcribed interview along with the audio recording for both error and meaning, highlighting any themes that had already been established in previous coding of the initial interview data prior to beginning the coding process of the follow-up interviews and artistic reflection artifacts. Afterward, I began coding the transcribed follow-up interviews and transcribed verbal explanations about the artistic reflections and compared the data with the initial interview data. In order to organize and analyze common threads between participants and
across interview field texts and artifacts, I used a categorical aggregation, suggested by Stake (1995), to look for patterns and draw connections between emerging themes of each field text separately, as well as between and across field texts. This helped me to find and make meaning of both individual and shared storied data in an effort to find storylines that were both unique to participants as well as common to participants, and, finally, create an overarching story from each participant’s personal narrative as well as a shared narrative (Wells, 2011). Finally, I engaged in narrative smoothing, a method proposed by Spence (1986) and described by Kim (2016) as a process which narrative researchers use to “make [their] participant’s story coherent, engaging, and interesting to the reader. It is like brushing off the rough edges of disconnected raw data” (p. 192).

Following the written analysis of the data collected, I uploaded, organized, and logged all of the video footage (i.e., make a recording of what is on the recording medium as it comes from the camera, including recording the time code at the start of each shot, a brief description of what happens in the shot, and any other comments I may have about the shot). Next, I began to edit the video recordings of the participant interviews as well as the collected photographs and/or video recordings of the gifted Black female participants artistic reflection artifacts using Adobe Premiere Pro CC video editing software in an effort to create a documentary film that shared the lived experiences of gifted Black female adolescents attending predominantly White schools (see Appendix K).

During the editing process, special attention was given not only to stories that truly captured the essence of the phenomenon at hand, but also to the body gestures, facial expressions, awkward silences, changes in tone of voice, and other verbal and nonverbal, yet telling, compelling visual evidence. Using interview transcripts, field texts, and the final written
analysis to retrieve visual images that directly aligned with the narrative being told, I intentionally documented specific participants and their stories at different phases of the documentary film’s storyline. Throughout the reflective process of composing my documentary film, I engaged in simultaneous meaning making as I explored the images at hand while deciding how I might best position them within the linear moving image of the film. While this has the potential to create a power imbalance as the voices, stories, images, and music to include were based upon my sole discretion, it also restored some of the power back to the participants who shared their stories and artwork through a visual medium by privileging their personal stories and knowledge throughout the film. Moreover, this reflexive process of composing images and deciding where to position the storied data within the linear context of the moving image, as well as accounting for the particular approaches I had chosen to take in the production of the film, was essential in allowing me (the researcher) to engage in both self-reflection and sense-making as I considered the best way to tell a comprehensive story that accurately detailed the experiences of this marginalized group.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness, in qualitative inquiry, is used to ensure a study’s findings are “worth paying attention to”, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 290). In addition, checking for accuracy and credibility of the findings is equally important (Creswell, 2009). This study was designed in a way that was meant to minimize errors or research biases and use trustworthiness criteria to affirm the inquiry approaches (Gall et al., 2010). To address issues of trustworthiness, I engaged in the process of member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994) by conducting follow-up interviews. In these interviews, I followed up with
each of the gifted Black female participants to ensure that what was captured in the data was reflective of what they originally intended to convey as well as ask them to elaborate on experiences they shared in order to elicit richer storied data. Finally, I strived to accurately capture the lived experience of the participants using thick, rich description in the narrative to support, or validate, the key findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988). This narrative inquiry addressed credibility, authenticity, and reflexivity to ensure trustworthiness of this study’s findings.

_Credibility_

In order to establish credibility, I first created a codebook (see Appendix J) with theory-driven and data-driven codes (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011) to ensure a systematic coding process. Engaging in a second round of coding of the interview transcript data and artifact field texts, ensured me that no important findings had been overlooked prior to organizing the codes into broader themes. Additionally, I worked to remove researcher bias by engaging in peer debriefing and discussing my thoughts about the narratives that emerged from the interviews and artistic reflections with a colleague who is familiar with qualitative research and the topic of investigation at hand (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Onwuegbuzie, Leach, & Collins, 2008). In addition, by eliciting interviews from both gifted Black female participants and their parent as well as tasking gifted Black female participants with creating artistic reflection artifacts and reflecting on their artwork, this study also utilized triangulation to strengthen credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), compare responses among participants, and seek corroboration of the stories told to interpret the events, similar characteristics, and piece together themes from the experience (Eisner, 1998). Moreover, the documentary filmmaking approach added an additional
element of data integrity by facilitating further validation of the storied and artistic that emerged from participant interviews and artistic reflections. Using triangulation built justification for the themes that emerged from the perspectives of the participants in this study (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Finally, engaging in member checking during the follow-up interview conversations with the gifted Black female participants allowed me to check the reconstruction of my participants’ perspectives (Gall et al., 2010) as well as to determine the accuracy by gaining their approval of the transcribed field texts, themes, and descriptions. Additionally, member checking—the most crucial technique for establishing credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)—allowed me to maintain an open and honest dialogue with my participants throughout the study.

**Authenticity**

When researchers engage in authenticity, they fairly and faithfully show a range of realities that realistically convey the lives of their participants (Connelly, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Polit & Beck, 2014). Researchers often address this criterion by ensuring their participant sample meets their study’s criteria and providing rich, detailed description to increase their study’s trustworthiness. Authenticity represents an advantage of qualitative research over quantitative research in the sense that no analogy to authenticity exists in quantitative methodology (Connelly, 2016). Authenticity criteria, which often overlap with critical paradigms, includes ontological authenticity (the individual constructions of participants are improved, matured, expanded, and elaborated), fairness (different constructions are solicited and honored), educative authenticity (the understandings of and appreciation for the constructions of others is expanded by participants), catalytic authenticity (the extent to which the research
process promotes action), and tactical authenticity (concerned with whether researchers empower stakeholders to take action) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Means Coleman, 2001; Morrow, 2005).

In this study, documentary filmmaking was used to ensure authenticity of the audio-recorded data by adding an additional visual layer to the data captured (see Appendix K). Further, fairness was ensured by my attempt to represent every participants’ stories in both the written (dissertation) data and the visual (documentary film) data. By capturing the stories of participants on camera, educative authenticity aided knowledge generation of inequities in gifted education and education policy for students of color, in general, and gifted Black girls, in particular. The expansion an elaboration of participants’ individual knowledge and experiences increased the ontological authenticity of the study. Finally, the dissemination of the documentary film to a wider audience than traditional research methods allow, helps ensure the catalytic and tactical authenticity of the study and documentary film by encouraging key stakeholders in the lives of gifted Black girls to take action and promote effective change in gifted education and education policy for gifted Black females and their culturally different counterparts.

**Reflexivity**

The final technique used to establish trustworthiness was reflexivity. Defined as “[a] process that researchers used [sic] to identify their biases, attempt to take these biases into account in their interpretations, and seek to minimize their effects on data collection and interpretation” (Gall et al., 2010, p. 350), reflexivity draws on the idea that researchers’ multiple influences can potentially affect the research process unless they acknowledge them (Gilgun, 2010). Similarly, according to Schram (2006), reflexivity is a heightened sensitivity to and awareness of the “self and other and of the interplay between the two” (p. 9). As such, several
methodologists argue the importance of engaging in continuous reflection and self-criticism when engaging in any qualitative analysis (see Pyett, 2003; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011).

In this narrative inquiry study, I documented and reviewed my own understanding throughout the research process in the form of a reflexivity journal, which I used to record my own personal stories. I believe this reflexive writing approach was necessary in, first, centering my personal experiences as a gifted Black female who attended predominantly White schools during the majority of my K-12 schooling as well as my experiences as a K-12 classroom teacher who taught gifted students of all racial, ethnic, and gendered backgrounds, and, next, understanding how these experiences have informed how I understand this research. Further, it was important that I attempt to understand how this narrative inquiry guided my re-thinking about my own personal experiences as a gifted Black female and classroom teacher of some gifted or potentially gifted Black female students. By remaining cognizant of the ways in which my personal biases may have potentially unintentionally influence my analysis, I utilized my reflexivity journal during the entire research process as a way to remove myself (my narrative) from the stories of my participants by bringing my biases to conscious level in order to make them clear to the readers of my research.
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Re-Presentation of the Narratives of Ten Gifted Black Female Adolescents

The findings presented in the following chapter are discussed based on collective participant characteristics, demographic background, K-12 experiences, parental socialization messages that center on race, culture, education, and gender, and their collective contribution to the identity of each participants’ development. In this study, gifted Black female participants ranged in age from 12 to 17 years old, which is the standard age of middle and high school girls in 7th through 12th grades. Each gifted Black female participant attended a predominantly White school within close proximity to a large metropolitan area located in the Southeastern region of the United States.

This first part of this chapter is organized to provide an individual narrative profile of each gifted Black female participant, breaking down each participants’ individual experience at their predominantly White school. Using a counter-storytelling approach, these personal narratives of each girl are presented as evidence to the understanding of their academic experiences at predominantly White schools. In addition, descriptive characteristics, interests, family and educational backgrounds, and school involvement are detailed (see Tables 3, 4, and 5). The second part of this chapter focuses on the collective and emergent experiences of each gifted Black female participant through a shared narrative that encompasses several collective themes (see Table 6).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Racial Identification</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Gifted Identification</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>Current Advanced Courses</th>
<th>School Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alani Tyler</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Testing</td>
<td>4.0 (A)</td>
<td>Math I (HS Math), Advanced English</td>
<td>Track, National Junior Honor Society Student Council, Run Club, Battle of the Books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Amber Olds</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>10&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Testing</td>
<td>4.0 (A)</td>
<td>AP Psychology, Math III</td>
<td>Soccer, Theater, Beta Club, Jazz Band, Interact Club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn Mack</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Testing</td>
<td>3.7 (A-)</td>
<td>Math 7 Plus; AIG English</td>
<td>Junior Beta Club, Art Club, Science Club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jayda Davenport</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Teacher Referral</td>
<td>3.3 (B+)</td>
<td>Math I (HS Math)</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jurnee Carver-Hicks</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Testing</td>
<td>4.0 (A)</td>
<td>Math I (HS Math)</td>
<td>Girls Empowerment Mentoring Society (GEMS), Band</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalyn McIntosh</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Testing</td>
<td>4.0 (A)</td>
<td>Math I (HS Math), Advanced English</td>
<td>Girls Empowerment Mentoring Society (GEMS), National Junior Honor Society, Volleyball, Basketball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kara Davis</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Testing</td>
<td>4.5 (A+)</td>
<td>AP Calculus AB, AP European History, AP English IV</td>
<td>Drama, Improvisation, Mock Trial, Voices for Minorities, National Honor Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laila Troy</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Black Latina</td>
<td>12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Testing</td>
<td>4.5 (A+)</td>
<td>AP European History, AP Physics, AP Statistics, AP Literature &amp; Composition</td>
<td>Volleyball, Speech and Debate, National Honor Society, Spanish Honor Society, Student Ambassadors, Cheerleading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larissa Nixon</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Testing</td>
<td>3.7 (A-)</td>
<td>Math I (HS Math), Advanced English</td>
<td>Minecraft Club, National Junior Honor Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKenzie Bond</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>11&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Teacher Referral</td>
<td>2.7 (B-)</td>
<td>AP Human Geography, IB Theory of Knowledge, IB Biology SL, IB History of the Americas HL</td>
<td>None; Has Job After School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. Gifted Black Female Participants’ Home Life, Racial Centrality, and Internalized Socialization Messages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Lives With</th>
<th>SES</th>
<th>Racial Centrality</th>
<th>Socialization Messages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alani Tyler</td>
<td>Both Parents; 1 Younger Sibling</td>
<td>Upper</td>
<td>Very Important</td>
<td>• Work hard&lt;br&gt;• Knowledge and education are essential&lt;br&gt;• Everyone is equal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber Olds</td>
<td>Both Parents; 4 Older Siblings</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Very Important</td>
<td>• Turn to religion&lt;br&gt;• Work hard&lt;br&gt;• Value family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn Mack</td>
<td>Both Parents; 1 Younger Sibling</td>
<td>Upper-Middle</td>
<td>Very Important</td>
<td>• Preparing for racial bias&lt;br&gt;• Value of family&lt;br&gt;• Combating stereotypes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jayda Davenport</td>
<td>Joint Custody (Father during Week; Mother during Weekend); 1 Older Sibling</td>
<td>Upper-Middle</td>
<td>Very Important</td>
<td>• Prove them wrong&lt;br&gt;• Love yourself&lt;br&gt;• Knowledge and education are essential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jurnee Carver-Hicks</td>
<td>Mother and Step-Father; 2 Younger Siblings</td>
<td>Upper-Middle</td>
<td>Very Important</td>
<td>• Prove twice as hard&lt;br&gt;• Prove them wrong&lt;br&gt;• Instilling racial pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalyn McIntosh</td>
<td>Both Parents; Only Child</td>
<td>Upper-Middle</td>
<td>Important</td>
<td>• Promoting independence&lt;br&gt;• Knowledge and education are essential&lt;br&gt;• Turn to religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kara Davis</td>
<td>Both Parents; 1 Older Sibling, 1 Younger Sibling</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Very Important</td>
<td>• Strive for personal excellence&lt;br&gt;• Failure is not an option&lt;br&gt;• Work hard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laila Troy</td>
<td>Both Parents; 2 Older Siblings</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Important</td>
<td>• Prove them wrong&lt;br&gt;• Strive for personal excellence&lt;br&gt;• Promoting independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larissa Nixon</td>
<td>Both Parents; 1 Younger Sibling</td>
<td>Upper</td>
<td>Not Important</td>
<td>• Kindness and respect&lt;br&gt;• Ignoring racism&lt;br&gt;• Knowledge and education are essential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKenzie Bond</td>
<td>Mother; 1 Older Sibling, 1 Younger Sibling</td>
<td>Lower-Middle</td>
<td>Very Important</td>
<td>• Prove them wrong&lt;br&gt;• Promoting independence&lt;br&gt;• Knowledge and education are essential</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5. Parent Participants’ Demographic Background and Socialization Messages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Parent(s) of</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Profession Type</th>
<th>Key Parental Socialization Messages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Naimah &amp; Roger Tyler</td>
<td>Alani Tyler</td>
<td>Post-Graduate (both PharmD)</td>
<td>Pharmacist &amp; Director of Medical Sciences</td>
<td>• Instilling cultural knowledge&lt;br&gt;• Preparing for racial bias&lt;br&gt;• Endorsing education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina Olds</td>
<td>Amber Olds</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Stay at Home Mom</td>
<td>• Religion and spirituality&lt;br&gt;• Preparing for racial bias&lt;br&gt;• Promoting independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyndi &amp; Malik Mack</td>
<td>Autumn Mack</td>
<td>Graduate (MS, MSc/PMP)</td>
<td>Software Engineer &amp; Project Manager</td>
<td>• Preparing for gender bias&lt;br&gt;• Endorsing education&lt;br&gt;• Preparing for racial bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara Sherlock &amp; Tony Davenport</td>
<td>Jayda Davenport</td>
<td>Graduate (MSc, MBA)</td>
<td>Speech-Language Pathologist &amp; Financial Auditor</td>
<td>• Instilling racial pride&lt;br&gt;• Preparation for future&lt;br&gt;• Promoting independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia Brogden</td>
<td>Jurnee Carver-Hicks</td>
<td>College (BSc)</td>
<td>Project Manager</td>
<td>• Instilling racial pride&lt;br&gt;• Preparing for racial bias&lt;br&gt;• Importance of family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly McIntosh</td>
<td>Kalyn McIntosh</td>
<td>Post-Graduate (PhD in-progress)</td>
<td>Director of Online Learning</td>
<td>• Instilling racial pride&lt;br&gt;• Instilling cultural knowledge&lt;br&gt;• Promoting independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ronald &amp; Valerie “Val” Davis</td>
<td>Kara Davis</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>VP of Sales &amp; Manager</td>
<td>• Instilling racial pride&lt;br&gt;• Striving for excellence&lt;br&gt;• Preparing for racial bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramon &amp; Evelyn Troy</td>
<td>Laila Troy</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Teacher &amp; Army Lieutenant</td>
<td>• Preparing for racial bias&lt;br&gt;• Religion and spirituality&lt;br&gt;• Endorsing education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carl &amp; Sydney Nixon</td>
<td>Larissa Nixon</td>
<td>Post-Graduate (MD, PhD)</td>
<td>Engineer &amp; Medical Doctor</td>
<td>• Instilling racial pride&lt;br&gt;• Instilling cultural knowledge&lt;br&gt;• Endorsing education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamara Brockington</td>
<td>McKenzie Bond</td>
<td>2-Year Degree</td>
<td>Medical Billing Specialist</td>
<td>• Endorsing education&lt;br&gt;• Promoting independence&lt;br&gt;• Preparing for racial bias</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Narrative 1: Alani Tyler

“I, personally, do enjoy winning a lot and being the best at stuff...”

As I rang the doorbell to Alani’s grand home, I could see a brown girl with a bright smile peeping at me through the glass pane on the left side of the front door. She wore her natural hair in long braids and opened the door with an energetic greeting: “Hi! I’m Alani! Nice to meet you!” She immediately showed me to the family room and helped me set up my camera equipment. Her mother, Naimah, walked over to me from the kitchen to introduce herself and ask if I wanted anything to drink while her father, Roger, came out of his office to shake my hand and make sure I did not have any trouble finding the place.

As she sat on one end of the couch with near-perfect posture and her shoulders pressed back, I could tell Alani was a confident girl with a strong sense of self. She was, by no means, shy, and began her interview by describing herself as a creative person who dislikes using traditional methods to accomplish things, independent, and outgoing.

Alani’s family moved to North Carolina from Maryland when she was in 5th grade and settled in Carrington, an affluent suburb in the large Radford-Dunbar metropolitan area. Every school that Alani attended through middle school had a predominantly White student body. At the two elementary schools she attended in Maryland, she was usually one of only two or three other Black students in her entire grade level. It wasn’t until 5th grade that Alani began to have friends of various races and ethnicities, when she began to attend more racially/ethnically diverse schools, albeit predominantly White schools, in the Carrington area. Thirteen-year-old Alani shared with me that she had a 10-year-old sister and that her parents both boasted professional doctorates in Pharmacy but had chosen to pursue different career paths with their post-graduate degrees.
Alani was formerly identified as gifted via standardized testing in the 3rd grade, although both of her parents agreed that they noticed signs of giftedness as early as two years old in their firstborn daughter. For example, her father, Roger, chuckled as he noted how precocious Alani was as a young tot:

When you have a kid that asks a ton of questions, you got a good chance of knowing that…she’s really curious, obviously, ‘cause she asks a question about anything you ask her to do. She wants more information. So that’s usually a sign. Either you’ve got a talented kid or it’s gonna be a tough kid. One or the other.

Roger and Naimah recognized the importance of reading early. In fact, when pregnant with Alani, Naimah’s family, friends, and neighbors held a book-themed baby shower where everyone gave their favorite book as a baby shower gift. In their household, both the parents and grandparents regularly read to Alani and her sister as both reading and family time are highly valued by Roger and Naimah. As a family, the Tyler’s spend Thanksgiving with Roger’s family and Christmas with Naimah’s family in Philadelphia. The Tyler family also travels a lot, according to Naimah, and, during the summers, they take their RV out at least once a month, leaving the family confined to a small space with nothing to do but communicate and spend time with one another. They are also a big football family and reserve Sunday afternoons for sitting around the television together as a family watching football. Further, Naimah really finds it important to have her family come together and sit down at the dinner table to eat dinner each night. Naimah contends,

I think you can get so busy and so caught up in life that you sometimes just forget and overlook things…Us being as a family together, whether it’s traveling, whether it’s for a holiday, whether it’s in our RV in a small space, just reminds you of who you are, and
with family gatherings, it reminds you where you came from, and just the importance of
that unit, that family unit, and that family unit is always there for you. Things can go
wrong outside of family, something could go wrong at work, something could go wrong
at school, but we always have our core unit to come back to regroup, figure it out, and
move on.

Overall, Roger and Naimah Tyler want to prepare their daughter to be successful and able
to support herself. In fact, Roger envisions his daughters finding “that thing” that makes them
most happy and being the “best you” they can be at whatever goal, career, or activity they decide
to pursue. For Roger, saying “I can’t” is not acceptable for the girls in the Tyler household and
he pushed this message very early in their lives and quite often:

I’m just not a believer in the whole, ‘I can’t do this’ type of phenomenon ‘cause half of
it’s just a mental block, that you’re blocking yourself mentally. So, I really pushed this,
‘You can pretty much do whatever you put your mind to doing’…. It’s gonna either take
more work, more practice, if you’re playing an instrument or a flute, or even sports…So,
I’m a firm believer that you can do almost anything that you put your mind to with a bit
of focus, and probably a lot of effort depending on what you’re trying to do…it may be a
lot of effort.

Naimah, on the other hand, has tried to instill in Alani qualities that center on
independence, kindness, and family support:

And I guess it’s a male-female perspective, is of course being independent. And then
some of the nurturing qualities, as far as just being a caring person. It’s a rough world out
here, and especially as she’s gone on to middle school—and I saw this even in in
elementary school—there’s some mean children out there…And just kind of recognizing
that, number one, someone that’s a very good friend of yours could just have a bad day and that could cause them to be mean. Kind of be open to, you never know what’s going on in someone else’s household…And sometimes if you happen to walk into the cafeteria and there’s a child sitting there by themselves, maybe go and embrace that child, invite that child over…So, just being a kind, good person. Being independent, making your way through this world on your own, but more importantly knowing that your mom and dad and your sister and your family are always here for you.

While Alani hasn’t yet decided what she wants to do with her life in the future, she is a self-motivated girl who has certainly internalized these messages. For example, she states that her parents’ dreams and visions for her future are to be successful in whatever she chooses:

If I choose to be an artist, to be the greatest artist I can be, to just be the greatest person I can be, I think, for a career-wise, that’s what it is. For like person, just be the best person I can be. If I get married, the best wife I’ll eventually be. If I have kids, the best parent I can be. Just to be the best at whatever I can be.

While Alani’s experiences in middle school have been relatively positive, she does use the word underestimated to describe her experience being a Black female at a predominantly White school. She feels that she is underestimated for being a girl and having to deal with stereotypes of being both Black and female. She shares,

You’re underestimated. I mean, even all girls—no matter color or background—I think they all deal with a different struggle than maybe males do, not to say males don’t deal with different things, but they’re not always looked at as smart or not as strong or not as athletic. The stereotypes they’re given, they tend to benefit them more than for females. It doesn’t tend to benefit us.
Alani recalls being separated from boys for sports and during Physical Education (P.E.) class and hearing P.E. teachers declare, “Well, the boys are stronger, they’re taller, they weigh more, they can run faster. They’re just genetically built to be better at stuff.” Alani believes, however, that “there are plenty of girls who can beat guys at stuff…. It can’t always be against girls versus boys, Black versus White, this versus that. We have to come together if we want to succeed at anything.” Similarly, adding the gifted label to her Black femaleness has been quite difficult for Alani:

I mean, people are already underestimating you and what you can do, so now you’re going above their expectations and proving them wrong. And I don’t like to be wrong…. It’s very hard when you’re not getting the appreciation or the respect you feel you deserve when you’re doing the same thing as other people, but other people are being congratulated or clapped on the back, where you’re kind of brushed aside or people assume you didn’t do it the fair way or that you cheated or have somehow found a way to make the same level of success, but it’s not equal.

Roger believes that even some teachers fall prey to the stereotypes placed on Blacks and Black females and, thus, often overlook the talent in many African American students like his daughter. He argues,

I think it’s an interesting process for talented students going through traditional schools that may be mostly White. But I think now it’s getting a little bit better ‘cause you have a mix of Asians, Indians…So you may get some diversity in what teachers recognize as talented over time due to other influences of other cultures coming in. But, still, I think it’s still tougher for the African-American girl or, certainly, a male, because it’s just, ‘Oh, man, we’ve never seen this before.’ So, it certainly surprises, I think, even some teachers,
at some point in time. It certainly surprises students at certain points in time if you’re like in the…National Honor Society and Duke TIP thing, and all these different things. So, people will be pleasantly surprised to see you there, at all these different events with your child over time.

However, over time, Roger notes, the teachers and students who were once surprised by Alani’s regular occurrence on the “A” Honor Roll “figured it out after a couple years” that “Alani’s gonna be here.”

Alani, a talented flutist who made first chair in the Marymount Park band and is the sole African American flute player in her grade, recalls qualifying for the all-county band and having a White student question whether she was sitting in the correct chair and in the correct band:

‘Are you sure this is your chair? This is for the band. This is the all-county band. Are you sure this is where you are?’ And I was like, ‘No, this is my chair,’ because I’m the only Black student who plays flute in my grade. I haven’t seen a Black flute student at this school, at Marymount Park. I’ve looked a little bit, like I’ve looked in the band pictures, and I haven’t seen any. So, it’s like sometimes people doubt my ability to play my instrument. So, it’s very interesting. It’s usually not teachers, it’s usually students who doubt or they assume that, since I have a good relationship with a teacher, they’re always boosting up my grade or I get that special solo in this.

In her gifted class, Alani is also used to being one of the only African American students in the class. In fact, her gifted classes usually comprise of White and Asian students, with Black and Latino students vastly underrepresented. Alani recalls seeing the same Black students from year-to-year in her gifted classes and merit-based school activities, many of the same Black students who were in gifted classes with her in elementary school:
There’s a couple others, but it’s always those same couple people. When we do the thing for the National Honor Society, it’s always us three. When we do the thing for AIG, it’s always us. Like, it never changes. There’s never anyone else. There’s never another Black student stepping up their game and joining us. Now, there’s a lot of other people who come in who aren’t Black, and they’re stepping up their game, but there’s never the African American kids stepping up their game.

Alani does believe, however, that her gifted peers share similar upbringings which, possibly, contribute to their ability to do well in school. She ranks her academic ability as similar or even to that of her gifted peers for the following reason:

Our parents have similar thoughts about education and have advocated for us to be in those classes. So, it’s usually strictly from our parents’ academic beliefs. They’re all very similar. And we’re usually growing up in better households than people who maybe aren’t in the top academic classes. So, it’s very even within the gifted group. But once you step outside the gifted group, it’s where you see the people whose parents aren’t always home, whose parents are divorced, who maybe they’re just not given an equal opportunity.

Interestingly, the predominantly White middle school environment has also exposed Alani to a new reality: racism and comments about race not only come from those outside of your race, but also people within your race:

There’s more Black kids in middle school, because it’s bigger, and I’ve realized that racism not only comes from other people, but it’s also from inside your culture, which is very weird, because you’d think the few people who are of your culture in a school join together instead of trying to split off into separate groups…It’s like, if people see that
we’re hating on each other, what’s going to stop them from hating on us? So, it’s like we’re almost kind of responsible, a little, because we’re letting it be okay, because we’re doing it to ourselves.

While Alani does share close friendships with a select group of African American girls, she recalls being mistreated by the majority of her same-race peers in her predominantly White school environment on multiple occasions, often as a result of her unique style of dress or academic prowess. In fact, she notices, many of the Black girls who never give her the opportunity to befriend them and say negative things about her don’t even know her first or last name and merely make assumptions about her without knowing he she is. She shares,

When I went and got my Honor Roll certificate from a teacher, an African-American girl was like—and I went and carried it back to my locker, just to put it there—and she was like, ‘Why are you always acting White and being smart and stuff?’ I told her, ‘Well, I don’t associate being White and being intelligent together. Intelligence is a thing for everyone.’ She’s like, ‘That’s not really how I see it.’ I’m like, ‘I know, but you’re wrong.’ And she’s like, ‘How am I wrong?’ I’m like, ‘Well, you’re kind of just sitting in class not doing anything and kind of wasting opportunities.’ She’s like, ‘Well, I don’t just hang out with White people like you do.’ I’m like, ‘That’s not really true. I have a lot of friends with different cultures.’ She’s like, ‘Well, you’re not friends with a lot of Black girls.’ I’m like, ‘Well, I may not want to be because I don’t need to hang around people who are so negative and have opinions like that.’ And she just walked away saying something…I was very disappointed because I feel like a lot of African Americans love to say that White people are the only people that are racist to us, when, even within the culture, it’s racism towards each other. You’d think that wouldn’t happen because you
don’t always see White people hating on each other and stuff. Maybe that’s why they had so much power over us and, to this day, some people of that culture still think rude things, because we’re making it okay.

The ‘Acting White’ label is all too familiar to Naimah who also attended predominantly White schools similar to the ones attended by Alani growing up and was able to relate directly:

…African Americans at different levels, parents at different levels, and those of the lower socioeconomic class, yes. ‘You act White.’ ‘No, I speak English properly, I dress the way I want to dress, no…’ It is what it is, but that’s been around for so long that, to me, it’s almost second nature and I have to take a step back and realize that this is new to her, and have conversations with her, again, about people just not understanding, and there being jealousy sometimes. It’s tough.

Hence, while Alani has been met with many racist undertones by students who are usually White, Roger and Naimah believe that the comments made by Alani’s same-race peers, such as “Oh, she thinks she’s better than us”, have been the most hurtful to their daughter than those comments made by her White peers. These incidents have led Naimah to not only expose Alani to more programs and activities around the county that are African American-focused to give her a balance outside of her predominantly White neighborhood and school, but also to provide her with more conversations on a mother-daughter level that will help her deal with racial undertones, in general. For instance, she states:

We’ve had conversations that sometimes comments people make to you with racial undertones may simply be from their lack of exposure. They just haven’t been around African-American people, they haven’t been around Asian people, Indian people. So, it may not necessarily be that their thoughts are hurtful, although they certainly come across
as hurtful; it may be that they’re just not exposed and that they don’t know any better and
ey don’t know comments that they say…We’ve had conversation ad nauseam…about
the hair, and how our hair is different, and no matter what we do to our hair, it won’t be
like a White person’s hair. We can flat iron our hair but…the next day after we’re done
running, it’s going to revert back to our hair. And at some point in time, we have to
accept our hair for what it is and not trying to make it like someone else’s hair…And
conversation around, again, people making comments about your hair… But it’s difficult
to instill in a child, as well as have her accept that if someone says something about your
hair, just keep moving. I think that’s a huge piece, the whole hair thing in an
environment, particularly with a child that’s active and wants to run track. We have to
make decisions, we have to figure out and understand that we’re different, but still the
same.

The topic of hair has definitely presented Alani with challenges when engaged with some
of her non-Black peers. She describes getting invited to the pool but not being able to go if her
hair is not in braids due to the cumbersome hair care process that many African American
females who wear their hair in its natural state must undergo:

Sometimes, even the simple stuff for them, is hard for me. Like going to the pool. I
always get invited to go to the pool, but if my hair’s not in braids, I’m not interested in
getting my hair washed…So, even sometimes, I get excluded in that kind of stuff because
I just don’t have the time to go to the pool on Sunday afternoon, come back and wash my
hair, and be ready to go and look presentable for school. Sometimes, from certain
activities, I’m excluded from. It’s just certain stuff that I just can’t always give up and
say, ‘Yeah, I can do that.’ Or people don’t understand that this hair is an all-day affair thing…

These feelings of isolation from her non-same-race peers are also felt sometimes in the lunchroom:

Sometimes, when I would be in the lunchroom and sitting with groups of people who maybe aren’t African-American, they will be talking about stuff that I can’t relate to. They’re like, ‘Oh, my hair, it won’t do this,’ or ‘I can’t do this, or I can’t wear this because it doesn’t…’ If I can’t relate to stuff they’re talking about I don’t always feel included as much. Or, even sometimes, they’ll be just talking about stuff that I don’t understand at all. And, of course, I bet they feel the same way if they’re with a group of people who maybe a different race than them, and we’re talking about stuff that maybe they don’t understand as much.

Alani feels further marginalized from the school curriculum at times due to the lack of culturally relevant or multicultural course content, which often leads her to feel disconnected from the curriculum. In all of her years of schooling, she has only found one teacher—her White 7th grade English Language Arts teacher—who regularly implemented culturally relevant books that featured African American protagonists, multicultural projects and activities into her curricula and sought perspectives from students of all races, ethnicities, and genders during classroom discussions. Unfortunately, the majority of the course content presented by the majority of her middle school teachers have left her feeling “bored”. She feels, for instance, that the Social Studies curriculum is too repetitive and centers on the usual White males, such as Christopher Columbus, but rarely includes People of Color or females:
The curriculum—it’s all usually about White males, and I’m neither of those things. I think that’s a challenge a lot of girls face. We’re learning about the past in Social Studies and, in the past, girls, African Americans, they weren’t really recognized as important figures. So, we’re not learning about them because when we’re learning about the Civil War and World War, females weren’t in power…I think we need to sometimes learn about recent history, like Michelle Obama. We never learn about her in class, but we learn about George Washington every year. So, sometimes, I think the curriculum needs to be more open or teachers need to take it into their own hands…I mean, it’s definitely more fun to learn about people who are like you. I mean, I don’t have anything in common with George Washington. Complete different gender, different race, different time period. It would just be nice to learn about people who are like me, and not even at a racial level, but just even a gendered level.

Fortunately, her relationships with her peers and involvement in school activities have helped her to become more connected to her predominantly White school environment. One of her closest friends is a Black girl whom she met while involved in track last year. Alani describes her as one of the few Black girls at her school who weren’t mean to her or judge her before getting to know her. In fact, it was her comedic persona, acceptance of other people, and ability to give great advice that first drew Alani to her. In fact, she also stands up for Alani when other Black students say negative things about her. Alani shares,

…There’s been a lot of comments from some of the African-American girls at school and their opinion of me. Whenever they say something in front of her, she’ll often say good things about me, not to try and change their opinion, but just show them that that’s not really the true me, whatever they see. Because, to them, I think I’m better them because
I’m making good grades and stuff. But that’s not really the case…When they say something negative about me, she’ll say, ‘Well, that’s just not true. I know her. That’s not how she is.’

Alani’s involvement in school activities have also led to her increased school connectedness. Alani is involved in Marymount Park’s school band, track team, Battle of the Books Club, and was recently inducted into the National Junior Honor Society as a result of her stellar academic performance. She shares why she believes that her involvement in school activities has helped her to feel more connected to her school:

I meet a lot more people, so I know more people. Because there’s like 700, 800 kids in my grade, and they used to divide us into teams in 6th and 7th grade of 100 to 125 kids, so I only knew 125 kids each year. So, in 8th grade, they just throw us all together. So, now, going into 8th grade, a lot of people only know about 200-some people, the people who were on their teams those two years. But I know more since I did all the extra activities in school…You meet people of different cultures and different backgrounds. It’s just an educational experience… When I try new things, I learn stuff. So, when I’m taking a test in science, I’m like, ‘Oh, I remember that from the book I read, because I was on the [Battle of the Books] team and we read 30 books [last] year. So, I remember from there.’ It makes you more well-rounded when you try more stuff.

After meeting with Alani a couple of weeks and having her present her artistic reflection to me, she shared with me a collage that she created (see Figure 2) that represented the thoughts of African American girls in an all-white space. She shared,

I did the background in all white kind of, representing how a lot of times, we’re always in an all-White environment. Or, it’s usually just us who, kind of, stands out. Which is why
I used darker magazine color, to make the person…It’s kind of like, the background, there’s just a lot of stuff on it—there’s a lot of words and everything on it…just a lot of noise in the background a lot of times…Then, I also did the little thought [bubbles], into a bunch of stuff that African American girls sometimes think about…Like dreaming, being bold, a lot of times bullying, loving your life, Black power, speaking up, belonging, being brown, doing something about stuff, proving people wrong. So that’s basically…sums up what it was. There’s just a lot of stuff in the background and this is what the girl is mainly thinking of.
Narrative 2: Amber Olds

“The standards are so much different; I have to work. Like my best friend, she’s White, and we’re on different academic levels, but we’re in the same grade. But the standards for her are so much lower than they are for me. So, my teachers are expecting me to do everything within the standards and be above average, but she can slack off and get the exact same recognition as I can.”

It took me roughly an hour to reach the small town of Ramsville from Radford. It didn’t help that the main two-lane road through town limited me to drive only 25 miles per hour. I found Amber’s house down a sharp bend in a windy rural road, surrounded by grassy pastures, ranch style homes, and farmland. Before I arrived, I received a text from Amber asking that I park my car on the side of the house so that I would not get stuck in the mud as there was no paved driveway to the Olds’ modest Ramsville home.

Amber’s mom, Tina, greeted me at the back door before I had the opportunity to knock. Amber trailed her mother’s footsteps, pacing shyly while smiling down at me with large hazel eyes. We walked from the backroom of the house, past the small kitchen, and down a short narrow hallway to the front of the home where I was seated on an oversized, plush loveseat with what seemed to be a gazillion pillows. I started trying to warm up Amber with a few questions about how her summer was going and she informed me that she was busy with a summer online math course, but had slept in this particular morning and had just woken up not too long ago.

I finally broke the ice by asking Amber to describe herself using three words and she obliged, using the words intelligent, independent, and creative. She asserted, “I’m smart, and then independent because I can’t depend on anybody else to do stuff for me; I have to do it
myself or I don’t feel right. And creative—I play a number of instruments, so I’m really into music and that kind of stuff.”

The youngest of five siblings who are all in their early- to-mid-thirties, Amber was formally identified as gifted in third grade. She believes her biggest supports during that time were her principal and second grade teacher, both Black of whom were Black. However, her mother Tina declares she knew Amber was gifted when she was only 12 hours old. She contends, Because unlike most babies whose eyes are completely closed for days, from the moment they cleaned her, her eyes were wide open…Her eyes literally followed everything you did, and she probably was 48 hours old and I realized then, ‘Okay, there’s something special about this baby’. When I had my amniocentesis done, the child literally crossed her leg and waved to her father and I. The poor nurse almost passed out…she literally waved! Then my mother and father-in-law are both pastors and my mother-in-law who is 96—she just passed away earlier this year—she said to me the first time she saw Amber—Amber was two days old—she said, ‘Tina, you should read II Samuel so that you know the type of child that you are raising’.

Amber’s giftedness began to surface very early. For example, after Tina’s mom, a retired teacher of thirty-eight years, left 6-year-old Amber several books before she moved out to California, Amber picked up one of the books she left on gifted children, read, and highlighted the sections that she felt applied to her and handed her mother the book and said, ‘Mommy, you should read this because they are talking about me.’ Moreover, around the age of three after Amber developed a stutter and her parents took her to a speech pathologist to be evaluated, therapists suggested Tina stop teaching Amber because they realized her stutter came because
she had so much information stored in her brain, she was unable to process it through a verbal medium in a timely manner.

With dreams of becoming a forensic pathologist, Amber describes being Black at a predominantly White school as tough, listing the double standards her teachers often have in place for above average Black students in relation to their average White counterparts. Oftentimes, Amber attests, Black students must achieve at much higher levels than their White peers in order to receive the same level of recognition:

…the standards are so much different. I have to work. Like my best friend, she’s White, and we’re on different academic levels, but we’re in the same grade. But the standards for her are much lower than they are for me. So, my teachers are expecting me to do everything within the standards and be above average, but she can slack off and get the exact same recognition as I can.

For Amber, it is even more difficult being a Black female at a predominantly White school because, she believes, “[people] take you even less seriously because you’re a double minority, and it is not fun.” Fortunately, she finds some comfort in being a gifted Black female in a predominantly White school setting. She shares,

Well, it’s a pretty good feeling because I know that I’m above average. So, it makes me feel better about myself that I’m above average, and I’m above the standard, and I can do more than…I don’t know. It’s just a lot of times the White people in my school, they feel threatened by it, but I’m just like, I feel really good about myself because I know that I can do this. And I feel cocky, but {chuckle} you know what I mean.

Growing up in a rural Southern town has definitely presented many obstacles for Amber in the predominantly White schools she has attended throughout her life. When asked to recall
experiences where she felt mistreated by anyone because of her race, the smile on her face immediately turned to stone as she shared:

   After Trump got elected in office, it was bad. Because, I think it was the day after, I was called the “N” word [by students] multiple times, and it was pretty tough…then teachers were acting funny. And I was so done…

During this traumatic experience, Amber sought out her band teacher and sat in his class for the rest of the day, unable to deal with the racist taunts from her White peers. Her band teacher immediately went to the administration team at Ramsville Community Charter and reported the incident while Amber contacted her mom sharing what was happening at school. Tina recalls the day her daughter contacted her from school:

   Yes, last year, right after the day, was it the day after the election? I was a little upset when Amber called me about what was going on at school, only because when Mr. Obama won, who was our very first Black president, my husband and I made it a point to say it to her, ‘There are going to be children at school who are going to be upset. Please don’t go rub it in their faces’, and things like that. I guess other parents forgot to teach their children that, and sent them to school and they thought that because they’re ‘making America great again’ and they’re suddenly empowered that you can be a little slave girl now…I told Amber, I’m going to send you to school with this T-shirt that I saw. It says simply this, ‘I am not my ancestors’, that’s all it says.

Although Amber acknowledges that she does not hang out with her same-race peers at school, she recalls they were all targeted after Trump won the U.S. presidency in 2016. In fact, after being called the “N” word to her face, Amber decided to confront some of her tormentors who readily denied their blatant racism:
‘Cause I was kind of like…Some of the stuff they were saying made no sense and I was like, ‘That’s really not…Everything you guys were saying, it’s very unintelligent and racist.’ And they’re like, ‘It’s not racist,’ and all this other stuff, and trying to use the ‘N’ word and I’m like, ‘That doesn’t make sense.’

Not only were students behaving differently, so were her teachers. Amber, who is in the AP Academy at Ramsville Community Charter, talked to the cohort leader of the AP Academy, who also happens to be a 9th grade teacher at Ramsville, as they usually meet and have lunch every day. However, on this particular day, as Amber vented to her about the mistreatment she experienced throughout the day because of her race, her White cohort leader brushed it off as if it were not a big deal. Luckily, having two African-American administrators, one African American teacher at the school, and a social justice-oriented White superintendent, helped the issue to become resolved in a timely fashion, with administrators sending out emails to students and their parents and mandating class discussions around the topic.

At Ramsville Community Charter, Amber has experienced a great deal of racial overtones and undertones, mostly from her White peers. Even her mother, Tina, recalls an incident that took place shortly after the election when several males wearing confederate shirts and belt buckles drove onto Ramsville Community Charter’s campus flying their confederate flags from the backs of their pickup trucks, blowing their horns, and yelling, ‘We’re taking our country back!’ Additionally, stereotypes about Black people have run rampant at Amber’s school. For instance, Amber recalls an entire list of things that she’s heard her peers at school say about Black people, including the stereotypes that “Black people are lazy, and they don’t work, half of them are on welfare, and they’re all liberals…Pretty much every Black stereotype or every rude Black stereotype, I’ve heard from people at school.”
When becoming involved as head assistant for the Cotillion, a popular etiquette program in the Ramsville community traditionally reserved mostly for the community’s White elite, Amber experienced covert racism in the form of racial microaggressions, ultimately communicating to Amber that, as a Black girl, she did not belong in Cotillion:

I’m involved in Cotillion, and…I’m the head assistant now, so I do a lot of talking and advertising for Cotillion. And the parents act like they don’t wanna talk to me, because they don’t think I should be there…Cotillion—it’s an etiquette class and you learn ballroom dance and manner training, and they do a five-course meal. And then we started pre-Cotillion with kindergarten or like third grade students…Yeah, it’s that kind of stuff, so fancy.

While Amber has experienced a great deal of racism both in her school and community, she does share a close relationship with one of her White friends at school—Braelynn—whom she met during her involvement in theater. Braelynn’s family originally hails from Mississippi, and her mother is a doctor and father, a former rocket scientist and state-level politician. Amber attests her best friend Braelynn’s empathy and supportiveness as qualities that make her a great friend. It was Braelynn who became genuinely worried when Amber shared with her the details of the post-election incidents taking place and immediately texted her mother, who is Board Member at Ramsville Community Charter, and presented the issue to the Board at their next meeting.

Dealing with these incidents have certainly caused Amber to feel marginalized at her school. However, she discusses feeling even more marginalized from her Black peers at school, many of whom don’t share the same advanced classes as she does:
When I was trying to become friends with the other African-American students, I felt isolated because I was trying to befriend…I’m friends with one of the girls, kinda, and none of the other Black children at school like me, and I don’t know why they don’t like me, ‘cause I don’t talk to them and I don’t say anything to them. And I try to be nice because I’ve known a lot of them for a while, but it’s just kinda like, I go and try and talk to my [Black] friend and they stare at me like, ‘Why are you here?’

Amber tries not to take their lack of acceptance of her to heart as she believes most of her same-race peers were focused on drama, which she is not interested in, but does believe that both her choice to hang out with her White peers as well as her lighter skin color may potentially play a role in their willingness to exclude her from their circle, alluding to issues of colorism among her Black peers:

I feel like it was because they’re all darker than me, and they don’t hang out with anybody lighter than them. So, I feel like it was the in-race bias, because light skin versus dark skin thing. And I don’t care about that, but I think they just don’t like me because I have finer hair and I have lighter skin…and because I hang out with White people.

In fact, Amber does not find it important to have Black friends: “I’ve had the experience where…I’ve always had a lot of White friends, but then when I did try to have Black friends, my Black friends ended up turning on me or doing petty stuff and making me look like a terrible person when I didn’t do anything. I’ve just had a very bad experience with trying to have Black friends.”

Despite her failed attempts at forming relationships with her same-race peers at school, Amber does acknowledge the importance of her Blackness. She shares: “I mean, I can’t change
this, so I have to make myself, or I have to make my parents look good and what they worked for.” In her own experiences, being Black means working harder:

To be Black, it means to me I need to work harder. Yeah, to work harder and try to be better, and be your own person because nobody else is gonna do it for you.

Moreover, being a gifted student has not always presented a positive experience for Amber, who recalls an experience when class notes were stolen and her teachers failed to take the matter seriously or accommodate her:

Back when I started in sixth grade, everybody knows each other, so they all know that I made good grades, and I take really good notes in class because I know I can just go back and read them, because I wrote down everything the teacher said. So, it was right before we were taking [End-of-Grade Exams], and someone went in my locker and they stole all of my notebooks. And then after EOGs, all my notebooks showed up in places around the school…So, I stopped getting a locker after that year, ‘cause I’m like, ‘I can’t deal with this.’ But it was just the fact of like my teachers did notebooks checks, so them stealing my notebooks brought grades down because I didn’t have a notebook for my teachers to check because somebody stole it, and then it was kind of hard having to go back and re-take all of the notes from somebody else.

In addition, to being mistreated because of her giftedness, Amber has also experienced being taken advantage of. She recalls, for instance, a time when a peer texted her asking her to provide them with her citations for a paper and having to tell them she was not going to assist them.

Moreover, Amber has experienced sexism at school from one of her White male peers as a result of her gender. She recalls,
I’ve had issues with the same guy last year. I have Spanish class with him, and he comes in, and sits in my seat every single day, because we have assigned seats, okay? I would ask him nicely, but then I got kind of sick of it so I just kind of stood there. I’m just going to stand up until you get up. He’d be talking to his friend, and then he’d look at me and say, ‘Men are speaking.’ I was like, ‘Well, you can go speak to a man if you want to if you don’t get up out of my seat.’ I usually don’t get to school super early, but I came in five minutes early one day and I walked past him, and he wanted to talk to my friend group, which is standing right beside his friend group. And I said something to one of his friends that I’m friends with also, and he goes, ‘Um, men are speaking, why are you talking?’ I’m like, ‘Because I can.’ He says stuff like that all the time.

In order to feel more connected to her school environment, Amber has made an effort to become involved in several school activities, such as the Science Club, Jazz Band, Beta Club, theater, tennis team, and soccer team, because she believes these activities not only gives her something to do outside of school, but also offer her greater opportunities for scholarships due to the fact that school involvement is highly favorable on college applications. Further, she believes that her involvement in school activities makes her feel as if she’s doing something for her community and allows her to build relationships with people she likely would not have tried to build relationships with outside of her school activities.

While school activities generally help Amber feel more connected to her school environment, oftentimes the curriculum makes her feel further marginalized. In fact, she describes a learning environment at Ramsville Community Charter that is largely test-driven and lecture-based, especially in math and science, and rarely integrates culturally relevant or multicultural curricula. While she does feel that her course load is quite rigorous, as she is
entering 10th grade enrolled in AP U.S. History, Pre-Calculus, Honors Chemistry, Spanish II, Honors English, Band II, and Jazz Band, she often feels left out of the curriculum because teachers fail to implement curriculum that integrates the experiences of People of Color or women:

It feels kinda like they don’t really care. Because there are books out there that would fit in the curriculum that have even Hispanic or Asian characters, but they just don’t…We learned about [inventors of color] in 6th grade from our English teacher and that’s ‘cause she was Black and it was Black History Month, so she made us do a project and she gave us a Black inventor. We had to make a little mini model and do a little biography and that was it…I don’t even think they know [Women’s History Month] exists.

Overall, the messages Amber has received at home from both her mother, who did not go to college, and her father, a music major in college, has allowed her to walk confidently in her school environment, and provided her with a unique strength and determination to be resilient in the face of adversity. Understanding the value of education because of these constant discussions with her parents early in life and knowing that she wants to be successful and able to travel as an adult, rather than having to depend on someone else or struggling because she has no money, Amber believes that her parents’ messages about the importance of education and, at minimum, obtaining a college education, have greatly prepared her for her school environment:

It’s made me not give up on doing my work and trying because of outside influences, like people being racist or bigoted… I think it’ll help me do very well in college and actually be able to go out and get a career and do what I want.

During my meeting with Amber a month later and having her present her artistic reflection to me, she read to me a poem that she created (see Figure 3) that represented how she
felt as a gifted Black girl at a predominantly White school. She shared various aspects of her poem and how these experiences equate to her feeling singled out, including the topics presented in the curriculum that center on racism and Black history that leave her feeling as if she is the spokesperson for her race:

Ever since elementary school, you know, they talk about Black History Month or racism, the kids always turn around and look at you like you should know everything, but I’m just like, ‘I’m learning just like you are.’

In addition, being an “only” in a predominantly White school environment also comes with some feelings of discomfort. She explains,

Because sometimes it’s just like being around mostly White people all the time, you get comfortable with it, but sometimes it’s just like, ‘Where are the other minorities or people that look like me?’ Mostly, the uncomfortable thing came from elementary school and preschool... Feeling isolated, or when they have conversations about... When people talk about Trump’s presidency or something that has to do with racism, and I say something because I have to deal with that kind of stuff, and they just don’t get it, and don’t understand. They don’t attack me for it, but it’s still... I don’t really know how to explain it, but it’s just not comfortable at all.

Further, Amber shares that she feels her ideas and knowledge are dismissed in favor of accrediting her White peers when she voices her ideas or opinions about something. In addition, her schoolwork is often stolen by her peers causing her to stop using her locker and carrying her books and notes with her throughout the school day.

When I’m in class and I say something, I don’t get credit for it as when the White girl sitting beside me raises her hand and says the exact same thing, and they think it’s the
greatest thing in the world. Actually, I stopped getting lockers, because when people would rob my locker and take all of my books, and my notes and stuff, and use my work as their own even though when it’s obviously my work. I actually had this last week in class because I have an online period. I was working on my math homework for my next period and I had to go to assembly, and I put my math homework and my calculator and stuff in my bag. I get back and my stuff is still in my bag, but when I get to my next class period, the guy that sits beside me in my online class period took my pre-calculus homework and used my calculator and claimed it all as his own work. But it was wrong because he didn’t know how to read my calculator. But then he threw me under the bus saying, ‘Oh, I didn’t use my own calculator and blah, blah, blah.’ I’m just like, ‘Okay.’ I didn’t get in trouble for it. It’s just, I just didn’t like how my teacher explained to him how to properly do the work when I actually asked the question, because my calculator was weird and it had a line in it that wasn’t supposed to be there, but there was nothing I could do about it, and when I asked my teacher, he was like, ‘I’m not explaining it to you. Why don’t you ask the guy over there?’ I’m just like, ‘But that was my calculator and my work, and you’re explaining it to him, and he doesn’t even own a calculator.’ That frustrated me.

*Singled Out—*
When children ask their parents why I don’t look like them.
When the class talks about slavery.
When they’re complaining about being too pale.

*Called out—*
When I did the same amount of work as my partner, but somehow it’s not good enough.
When my hair changes magically overnight.
When I make a simple mistake.

*Underestimated—*
When I’m smart and pretty “for a Black girl”.
When, “Oh, Black people can do that?”
When I get looks for being in a formal surrounding or volunteer setting carrying myself better than my White counterparts.

Uncomfortable—
When I see nobody that looks like me.
When people I know talk about supporting racism.
When they think they can use the “N” word and it’s all fine.
When they think they can touch my hair.

Taken advantage of—
When they steal my work without giving me credit.
When they ask for my help just to use it against me.
When I’m thrown under the bus for someone else of their same race.

Proud—
That I can do the work and deal with working 10 times harder.
That I can get so many great opportunities.
That I can surprise so many people with my abilities.

Content—
With my hard work.
With me doing my best.
With knowing that I’ll have a bright future.

Figure 3. Amber’s Poem, “Singled Out”
Narrative 3: Autumn Mack

“I don’t want people to see myself as, ‘Oh, you’re Black, you’re female, you don’t know how to do this’, and stuff like that...I want to try to prove them wrong...”

When I first arrived atop the large, brick front steps to the Mack’s large new construction home that took up a vast majority of the corner lot on which it was situated, Autumn’s mom, Cyndi Mack, was the first one to greet me with a bright smile. Petite Autumn quietly sauntered into view and gave a bashful wave as Cyndi led me to the formal dining room where I sat at the large head chair on the far end of the table. When Autumn sat down and began to introduce herself to me, I knew I would have to ask her to speak a little louder in order to make sure that my audio recorder and microphone on my video camera were able to capture her voice clearly. She had brown skin, light brown cat eyes that hid behind rectangle-shaped glasses and nervously awaited whatever questions she knew I would have for her.

She first described herself as creative, shy, and beautiful, explaining, “Creative, because I like to draw and do animations and stuff like that. I don’t like to talk in big groups...because I’m a bit...I’m an introvert. Beautiful. I like to look at myself and point out all the good things about me instead of thinking about all the stuff I wish I could change.”

Autumn’s family moved to North Carolina from Louisiana when she was five years old and her younger sister was three. Prior to their move to North Carolina, Autumn had attended an elementary school in Louisiana where she was the only Black girl in her entire Kindergarten class. It was during this time that Autumn noticed she was the “only” Black girl. While she initially used the term “brown” to describe herself and declared to her parents that Black people
are not truly “black” but “brown”, her father, Malik Mack, made it very clear to her and her sister early that the world classifies them as “Black”.

Autumn’s favorite subjects are science and English Language Arts, although she admits to doing best in science and social studies, and she has dreams of one day becoming an animator working at an animation studio, or a digital artist. Hence, in her spare time, she enjoys working on her animations on her tablet but confesses she has not yet found the right animation tool to work with. This passion of Autumn’s is fully supported by her parents, although her father was initially hesitant to co-sign her dream to be an artist. Malik shares,

I know Autumn wants to be an artist and it took me a while to get on board with that. I think, ‘cause is being an artist really practical? You know, because you have so many friends that are starving artists, per se, and right now I’m being supportive of that goal because, like I said, she’s making straight A’s and now she’s streamlining to graphic arts and animation. We’ve already set some things in course right now. We want her to be able to go to Disney or Pixar animation camp when she can. She wants to go to Japan when she’s 16.

Wanting the absolute best for her daughter, Cyndi believes that Autumn should pursue a career that stirs her passion and also meet a man that is going to treat her the way that she should be treated.

Cyndi and Malik first realized their daughter was gifted around the age of two after she was removed from the infant room to the toddler room at her nursery school early because she was excelling at such a fast pace. In addition, Cyndi, who stayed home with Autumn while working on her Master’s degree, notes how inquisitive her daughter was:
She was always really inquisitive. She’s all into the details. Like if we had crayons somewhere, she would try to line them up. And so, we noticed she took a liking to the details, looking for more information.

Malik recalls really realizing young Autumn’s gifts and talents when she started Kindergarten and constantly earned straight A’s:

Starting in Kindergarten. She brought home straight A’s every time. Every time. I was like, ‘Okay, maybe we need to challenge her more. Maybe we need to have her do more things.’ And that’s when I started noticing…And I think it magnified when she started taking standardized tests when we got back [to North Carolina]—and I think in Language Arts she was scoring in the ninety-something percentile—97th percentile; math she’s probably eighty-something percentile. I like Math, but she’s not really a Math fan.

Even as a 7th grader, Autumn continues to make straight A’s at Willows Forest and excels with very little effort. Aside from Math class, her parents note that she doesn’t spend a great deal of time studying. Cyndi even worries it may one day catch up with her daughter:

[Math] is probably the only subject that she will ask us questions or [say], ‘Check this for me.’ But, like, the testing, it’s like flawless. It’s like she doesn’t study. She doesn’t like to study for anything. We take that even to her extracurricular activities. She used to do Track and Field. She hated practice because she just wants to get out there and run, and she ran very well, but no practice. She just wants to go and do it. So, it’s like everything she does…she’s a natural. She’s a natural, accelerated person.

In order to help shape and mold her giftedness early in life, Cyndi and Malik read to young Autumn—Cyndi even read to her in the womb—and played instrumental and gospel music, as they are a family deeply grounded in their Christian faith. They also watched National
Geographic documentaries and Baby Einstein with her, provided her with art tools after realizing she liked to draw, and paid for her to participate in a local art club after learning of her interest in animation. Their only rule, Cyndi declares, is: “You must complete it, you can’t quit. We find the resources. Let them have it and if they choose not to go through it after they completed it, that’s cool.”

When describing her experience being Black in a predominantly White school, Autumn coins it as different: “Maybe one word I’d use is…maybe a bit different. Because when I’m in AIG and stuff like that, you don’t see many minorities there; you see mostly White people.” Similarly, she describes being a Black female at a predominantly White school as different:

It’s a bit different, because in my AIG [classes] you usually see White boys, and…most of them are White boys and we have a few White girls, but it’s mainly me and maybe two other Black girls in the AIG group…So to have, maybe, five other females with me that aren’t the same color as me, is a bit different.

On the other hand, Autumn describes her experience as a gifted Black female as exciting: “I would use, excited and exciting, because I feel like as a Black female that you don’t see many of us in AIG, in special classes, so I feel really excited to be in one of those.”

While the majority of her friends are gifted girls who are White, with the exception of a close Vietnamese peer, Autumn also finds that her Blackness is a very important part of who she is:

It’s really important to me, because I know all of the racial stuff that’s happening in this world now, and to be like, ‘Oh, you’re female and you’re Black, and you’re…want to stand for something, and you’re gifted.’ So, you can push that more…to be showing
everyone that, just because you’re Black and you’re female, doesn’t mean you can’t do this or that.

In fact, for Autumn, being Black means “[t]o be proud of who you are, and to not think what everyone else thinks about you…” In addition, she shares the importance the racial/cultural, academic, and gender socialization messages she’s received from her parents that have helped her to deal with various kinds of discrimination both in and out of school. She shares,

[My parents] have talked to me about if someone says something negative about your race, then you tell someone or ignore it…Don’t think too much on it, because their ignorance is not anything that should bother you like that…Like I was talking about with my mom…that, just because you’re female and you’re Black, you shouldn’t think about yourself as anything different from other people, and you should always try to be your best to beat that stereotype…Black women, Black people, in general…If you’re in a class and you’re in a test, make sure you don’t just…‘Oh, I’m good at this anyways, so I don’t need to study for this.’ You should always try your best and study and do your best…don’t just underestimate… ‘Oh this is so easy, I don’t have to do anything about this.’ You always have to try your best at it and study.

These beliefs, Autumn internalized from her parents, Malik and Cyndi, whose messages about racial pride, combatting stereotypes, and striving for excellence were communicated to Autumn early in life. Her father, Malik, for example, witnessed overt racism firsthand in rural Louisiana where he didn’t attend school with Whites until third grade and was immediately called the “N” word by a White male peer, which led him to punch his peer in the face out of anger. However, he constantly communicates to Autumn to handle herself in a more mature fashion and work to combat the stereotypes about Black people as opposed to feeding into them.
In a recent incident at Willows Forest Middle School, 7th grade Autumn was working on a group project with a group of classmates who were slacking on their work, and when Autumn tried to assert herself and get her group back on task, a White male student told her, “You are working so hard, you’re acting like a slave.” While Malik went to the school the very next day and Cyndi made a phone call to the school to make certain the incident was handled, both parents were surprised to learn that Autumn had been proactive in involving the teacher and the action group at Willows Forest. Cyndi recalls,

[The teacher] called me. She was like, ‘Let me just say, if she had to speak for herself, you don’t have to worry about her. ‘Cause she told me from here to there.’ And even there were times when she had both [Autumn and the student] in the same room and there were times when the boy was like, ‘I don’t even know what that means.’ Like [Autumn] used words to describe the situation…”

Malik chimes in adding,

‘Cause he was saying, ‘I was saying you were a slave because you were just working hard and crazy,’ and Autumn said, ‘Do you know my people were slaves? When you say that, that’s how I perceive it.’

Following the incident, additional conversations ensued about the recent election and Charlottesville riots. Cyndi also found it important to discuss matters of race with her daughter who often found herself being the only Black girl in her multicultural group of friends:

…A lot of times [Autumn] is the only Black and we have to tell her, if people see a group of kids doing their thing and someone’s misbehaving they’re going to assume it was the Black girl. It’s like now I’m telling her things and I don’t want to tell her that. I don’t want her to be conscious of like, ‘They’re going to see me as this thing because of the
stereotype’, ‘cause that’s not her, but we have gotten this far by not restricting with barriers on…if you put your mind to it, you can do it. It doesn’t have to do with your skin or your gender. And I think that’s how they’ve gotten to where they are now.

Autumn recalls another incident where she was underestimated by a White male student because of her Blackness and femaleness. However, she took it as an opportunity to prove him wrong:

I have been in a class where a guy has underestimated me because I was Black and I was female, but I soon showed him that… ‘He did that, I need to show him’, but I just did my work, and I just ignored him and then he realized, ‘Wow, she’s actually really good at this’…It was in Math class, and he was like, ‘Oh, this is probably really hard for you, Autumn.’ I was like, ‘No, this is actually pretty easy.’ It was dividing and stuff like that. Then, it was a test that we did and I got an A—a 100, and he got a B, so he was like, ‘Wow, you’re actually really good at this.’ I was like, ‘Yeah.’

Autumn is very aware of the stereotypes about Black people, mostly from the media, especially as it relates to being racially profiled, what Black people eat (e.g., watermelon and fried chicken), and how Black people love to “dance crazy”. She responds to these stereotypes by embracing the uniqueness of Black people and applauding their ability to “be themselves”. Moreover, Autumn also has received messages from her mother that Black females often have a difficult time in the workplace and their abilities are often underestimated, especially when working among White males, which her mother Cyndi has experienced personally. In addition, she mentions assumptions made about Black females: “There’s an assumption that Black females are crazy and ratchet and stuff like that. I’m like, ‘Oh, no. We’re not like that. We’re not like that, so you shouldn’t just put a stereotype on all Black females because of what you think about them’.
Dealing with these types of stereotypes and understanding the need to engage in dialogue around topics of racism and race relations, Autumn finds it important to maintain close relationships with other Black and minority people. She explains,

I think I should have lots of Black…minority friends, because you can vent with them and relate to them about certain subjects that have been happening. Because if you have White friends, they don’t really understand what’s going on and stuff like that. It’s good to have close people who are the same race as you…I have my friend…one of my good friends…She goes to the Boys & Girls Club with me. I can always talk to her about stuff that’s going on and how we feel about it. We just go vent back and forth. I can really trust her.

Autumn has several Black friends at church and some at the Boys & Girls Club where her parents enrolled her in afterschool so that she could have more interaction with other Black girls, since her involvement in her school’s majority White gifted program has not provided her sufficient opportunities to meet and befriend other Black females, who are largely absent from the gifted program, especially since students at Willows Forest are expected to sit with their class and Autumn must sit with her gifted cohort. Unfortunately, not all of the Black kids that Autumn has come across at the Boys & Girls Club have been particularly nice. Autumn recalls,

At the Boys & Girls Club, I think they say that [I’m acting White] because of my properness…the way I talk, the way I dress. They’re like, ‘Oh my God, Autumn. You sound White! You look White. You’re acting White.’ I’m like, ‘Well, what is acting White?’ Is there really…What is that? You can’t really say that. That’s incorrect…I just laughed at it like, ‘Wait. What is acting White? Just because I talk like this, wear stuff like this. How much I am valued, doesn’t mean, ‘Oh, I’m White.’ No.
While she admits that she does not really share any close relationships with her majority White teachers, school counselors, or other school personnel—although she does enjoy her math teacher, Ms. Spires’ enthusiastic approach to teaching math—she does feel that she and her friends are treated better by their teachers because of their giftedness. However, Autumn feels that the academic content she is being taught—even in her gifted classes—is not quite rigorous nor is it particularly meaningful. In fact, she admits that her teachers seem to be more concerned with teaching students the curriculum at-hand so that they will be sufficiently prepared to take the End-of-Grade high-stakes tests than integrating culturally relevant or multicultural curricula in their classrooms.

Aside from her close relationships at school with a group of gifted girls she gravitates toward due to their extroverted nature, humor, and weirdness, Autumn also finds her involvement in school activities also helps keep her connected to her school environment. In school, Autumn participates in the Junior Beta Club, a merit-based club for gifted students, Science Club, and Art Club. The previous school year, she also participated in Track and Field where she quickly became a star athlete at her school and went on to place second in the state her very first year running. Autumn believes that her involvement in school activities enhances her connectedness to teachers and peers:

I get more connected with the teachers, step-by-step, because the AIG teacher, he doesn’t really talk with me or anyone else that much. Since he’s a Junior Beta Club [leader] and my AIG teacher, I feel like I should talk to him more and get to know him better…

[Being involved in extracurricular activities at school has] gotten me to have more friends. In Art Club and Junior Beta Club, I’m meeting more people, and I’m talking to
more people, since they need help, or they just want to talk because they just want to make more friends.

Autumn also believes that her involvement in the Junior Beta Club has enhanced her academic experiences at school because it helps motivate her to continue making good grades. Further, the community service aspect of the club allows her to help out around the school and community:

“It’s helping me get out there and do more stuff.”

When I returned to Autumn’s house two weeks later, she presented a sketch (see Figure 4) that she drew and explained her artistic angle:

I was just thinking about how I can achieve as a person, what I want to be in life, and what I can do to do this. That’s what I was thinking about when making this, and thinking about me along with other Black females, and how this could help them as well… So for me, personally, this means as long as I have the right resources, I can achieve what I want to be when…I grow up. For all Black females, as long as you have the right resources, you can achieve what you want to be as well.

When asked to clarify what specific resources Black girls need to achieve, she shared,

The right knowledge, basically the right knowledge, what you already know, and getting what you need to become what you want to be…For the pencil, it’s more like learning, ELA, academics, and stuff life that...The ruler is math, just basic things that you need when you’re older. Painting, art is for me, because that’s what I want to be when I’m older. Books, also for knowledge, and phone as well, because you can get your information on line and many different places. That’s why I had the book and the phone… I’ve always been able to have the right materials I need to achieve in life.

Thinking about being gifted, academically gifted, and everything, that I know what I need
to become greater than I already am. Thinking back at that, I'm using my knowledge from that to create this drawing.

Figure 4. Autumn’s Sketch
Narrative 4: Jayda Davenport

“I try to go against stereotypes so they won’t be assumed about me…I try to do the opposite of the stereotype so they’re not slapped on my back, so I’m not labeled as a usual Black girl.”

I could tell that Jayda was a girl with a great sense of style from the day she and her parents arrived at my house. Jayda, who wore black-rimmed glasses and had her hair up in long Senagalese twists, had on a pair of faded black denim skinny jeans with a red and-white flannel shirt and red Chuck Taylor sneakers. She had a golden glow to her brown skin and had bold black eyeliner around her slanted eyes. Her mother, Barbara Sherlock, let me know that she and Jayda had just spent nearly two hours in the mall at Sephora playing in makeup. Her dreams of becoming a successful tattoo artist, digital artist, and painter in the future were not surprising. Her eyes became bright with excitement as she began to share her dreams and aspirations with me:

Personally, I want to be a [sic] artist. My dad says I should be in a magnet school for math and science since my EOG scores are so high, but…I love art…I want to be a tattoo artist and I want to take something I can draw, turn that into something someone can put in a poster, something I can turn into a tattoo. And so I want to hit all those three areas of digital art to physical art that somebody can put on their body…I feel like in the art world, it’s so fixed on, okay, you have to put it on this thing, it has to be set in this certain area, it can’t be displayed across…Tattoo artists, they’re stuck on, ‘Oh, I can only put this on somebody’s body’ if you ask them, ‘Can you draw this for me and then I can it up in my house?’ If a painter, you ask them, ‘Can you put this on my body, they’ll be like, ‘You can take it to a tattoo artist, but I can’t put it on your body.’ But I want to have all
three of those aspects, so if somebody wanted me to paint them something, I can do that. If somebody wanted me to tattoo something, I can do that. If somebody wanted me to do something for an event, I could do that…and they wouldn’t have to go to 15 different people for one thing.

Jayda’s parents are divorced couple with joint custody of Jayda, who spends the school week with her father, Tony Davenport, a financial auditor, and the weekends with her mother, Barbara, a speech therapist who lives in another city and runs her own business. Barbara and Tony both understand the importance of working together to try to create the optimal living environment for 13-year-old Jayda, who had a very tough time dealing with their divorce when she was in elementary school.

Jayda was referred to advanced math by her 5th grade and, thus, has been enrolled in advanced mathematics courses throughout her middle school career. In 8th grade, she is currently taking high school math. She recalls the experience of being identified by her teacher but feeling that she was just a “normal kid” prior to her teacher’s referral:

I don’t really think anybody realized [my giftedness]. I had one teacher that did, and she supported me with it. But, other than that, I don’t really think anybody realized it, and I didn’t even realize it…I just thought I was a normal kid, like a regular kid. I didn’t really think I was higher in those levels, but thinking back to it…I can catch on to stuff very easily and expand on it very easily.

However, her mother and father both share a different story. Barbara, for example, believes that Jayda has always been gifted:

I’m just going to give you a mother answer. I’ve always thought she was very bright, and I’ve always groomed her from the standpoint of making learning fun…
Similarly, Tony saw something special in his daughter before she was first born:

I knew [she was gifted] when she was in the womb…When she was born, she knew my voice…It was always just this weird connection with her. So, the whole thing from her crawling to walking, I swear, it absolutely amazes me, because I’ve always said, this child wants to walk. When she was two or three months. The reason why I knew is because I could see her eagerness. She was three months, rolled off the bed. We walked out the room and when we walked out the room she tried to follow and rolled off the bed and couldn’t figure it out…Then [Barbara] knew she was trying to be mobile.

In order to shape and mold these gifts and talents early, Tony and Barbara engaged in a lot of modeling exercises with Jayda. After finding out that Jayda possessed a strong passion for drawing, Barbara drew with her and let her scribble on little brown paper plates, allow her to be creative and make a mess using flour, water, and rice to enhance her work, and later, put her artwork up around the house. In attempt to also bond with her young daughter, Barbara and Jayda also engaged in a lot of role-play activities together. She recalls,

She had fake little kitchen toys, so she would role-play kitchen play with me while I was really cooking. She would be play cooking, and then I’d have a taste of her food…Then we did a lot of dress up…She’d cook for mama, be like, ‘Taste this, Mama.’ I’d be like, ‘Mm-hmmm. Okay.’ But we did a lot of that kind of stuff.

Moreover, Barbara admits that most of her walls are now covered with Jayda’s artwork. She shares,

Most people don’t get to paint on their walls, and I’m more creative than I realized once we had her. So, a lot of stuff just started coming out and she just really expanded on it.
She does a lot of canvas artwork painting. Most of my artwork on my walls now is hers...I don’t buy much art anymore. It’s mostly hers.

Tony also found it important to let Jayda be creative with her mind. He went bought goo and starch for her play in when she was younger. He also went out bought Jayda a chemistry so that she could conduct experiments and learn how to mix things. He reveals,

I would just allow her to be her own, do the same thing. Give her own space, let her mind wander. She can do what she wants to. She used to create a lot of stuff. Different colors and different forms, and if I put more of this, it makes it this way. Put less of that and it does this. Just learning. I’m like, really? Okay. Just…it’s a big mess when she’s done, though.

While Barbara and Tony may not have realized the impact their decision to pursue graduate degrees in their respective fields had on their young daughter, their implicit and explicit messages endorsing higher education have greatly influenced Jayda’s motivation to perform well academically so that she might obtain a degree comparable to both her parents and brother:

My mom said that grades are money, so that’s mainly been my thing to push me. And also, when I heard my mom had a Master’s and my dad had a Master’s, and then my brother, he wanted to get his Master’s…And when I was little, I didn’t know what a Master’s was, but I was thinking, I want to get a Master’s. So, once I found out what that was I realized how beneficial that would be. And so, I want to do it even more now…It helped me do better and put forth more effort, so I’m prepared for whatever is to come.

In fact, Jayda believes these messages will prepare her for life success in the future: “I feel like it will help me a lot, ‘cause I’ll always have that mindset of I can do better. I can do better than yesterday, or I can do better than today.”
While Jayda admits that she hasn’t experienced a lot of discrimination due to her race, gender, or giftedness in her current school environment, she does describe being Black at a predominantly White school as “awkward”. She shares,

Awkward. Because I feel like…I would stand out a lot more, which I do, and people kinda look at me differently. And so, as an example, in elementary school I had a lot of friends on and off. A lot of people I thought were my friends, weren’t actually my friends…And so they looked at me differently, and I was treated differently by the teachers. Some teachers were extremely nice to me and they loved me, but some teachers had an attitude, or wanted to be difficult. And so, it just depends on the main person’s mindset, but it’s very awkward ‘cause I feel like I stand out a lot more and that I don’t really fit it. And so, I’ve always—ever since I was little—I’ve always wanted to fit in with the crowd and, you know, just be popular and…be that person can be friends with everybody ‘cause…I want to make people happy. But it’s kinda hard to do that when you don’t have the same skin color as everybody else, you don’t have the same hair as everybody else, you don’t think the same as everybody else.

Now that she attends Leeford Middle School, she believes there is a lot more diversity among the still-majority White school student and staff population. However, because she now has a mix of friends that are Black, White, Latino, and Asian and they all “stick together” she feels that she fits in a lot better.

However, Jayda does recall feeling devalued by her teacher who underestimated her ability to perform well academically in 5th grade—a time period when she suffered a great deal of emotional problems as she learned to cope with her parents’ separation and impending divorce. Unfortunately, her teacher felt that Jayda, an ordinarily strong reader, should have been
demoted to a remedial reading class rather than consider the personal changes that were taking place in Jayda’s life. Jayda believes that her race may have influenced her teachers’ judgment as she was one of only two Black students in the class:

Most likely it would’ve been [my race] because I didn’t need to be in that class, because I’m a very strong reader and I’ve always been good at ELA. So, in all my other years of school, I’ve never needed to be in remedial reading, so I’m like, ‘Why now do I need to be put in this class?’

Jayda seems to have a more positive outlook on her experience as a gifted Black female at a predominantly White school, which she describes as empowering:

…[A]s a kid…people underestimated me. And so, I wanted to show people that I’m better than what they think I am. So, with my grades, they’re always, you know, A’s or B’s, never lower than that…And so, I always walked around the school confidently, because I wanted people to look at me as, I’m not what you think I am. I’m like, when people look at me, they will think, ‘Oh, since she’s Black, she’s not smart. Oh, she’s not…she can’t do this, she can’t do that’…I tried to make myself look as what I actually am…I wanted to show what I am. I didn’t want to cover myself up and kinda hide myself away…

Anytime she has an opportunity, Barbara strives to instill in Jayda the importance, as a Black female, in having a strong sense of self-love and racial pride, which will allow her to cope with the obstacles she will, undoubtedly, face in the world as a result of her race, gender, and giftedness. Her goal, she shares, is for Jayda to be herself, be confident in who she is, protect herself and her boundaries. Since Jayda has been subjected to bullying in the past, she works to communicate the importance of choosing people who are like her. She contends,
She’s beautiful—she’s never been not told that, at least by me. That’s pretty much what I tell [Jayda], and she’s smart, and that I want her to be positive about life and about learning, and for her to enjoy learning. We went through a phase where I was concerned she was going to lose her joy for learning… And my goal in looking for her to have good academic environments. Most of the time there’s not a lot of brown people in those environments… I still want her to know that she wasn’t exactly like them. She could easily get lost in the fact that she’s in that environment, and then when her differences are gonna start to show up, that would be compromising to her, and I didn’t want her to feel that way. So, we embraced the hair. We embraced the fact that she’s smart, that she was beautiful. We embraced everything that was special about Jayda. And that her difference was just her difference. And so that was probably one of the reasons why I went from straightening my hair to leaving my hair natural, so that she would be proud of her bush… So I wanted her to feel good about that. But this is how you are, this is what you look like, this is who you are. And even though you physically look different than these people, you’re not any different than they are, or any less than they are. You’re just the pretty brown girl.

For her father, Tony, it has been important that his daughter value herself:

Mine has been for her to value herself, which is a lifelong lesson. So, I started with things like, ‘If you’re gonna value yourself, then you’re gonna stand up for yourself. You’re not gonna let people push you around or take advantage of you… You gonna get respect only if you get respect from the other person. And I teach her that. And that’s a part of valuing yourself. Knowing when you feel like you’re being taken advantage of, or remove yourself from the situation. Don’t allow someone’s words to impact your self-esteem… If
you set out to have a good day today because someone says something mean and looks at you a certain way, don’t change because of what they said; value who you are. And it’s an everyday thing.

Although Barbara and Tony admit to not being a very religious family and practicing few cultural traditions aside from visiting family and cooking together, they have constantly articulated messages to Jayda, who proudly embraces her Blackness, about self-love and racial pride. In fact, Jayda is well aware of the many stereotypes that have been perpetuated about Black males and females through the media and at her school, and works hard to combat those stereotypes by striving to promote an image opposite of the stereotype. She shares,

So, you know on TV shows, you see on reality shows and stuff [Black people] are easy to get mad about something, easy to fight somebody or you see them at a strip club or whatever…You don’t see a White girl, you see a Black girl. You go on a reality show and you see a girl fighting. It’s not a White girl, it’s a Black girl. You see women get mad about something and usually lash out about it, it’s not a White girl, it’s a Black girl. And so, the angry and the fighting part I’ve seen in real life. The sexual part of it, it’s usually just on TV and hearing about it in songs and stuff like that. But it’s just those are the main three stereotypes that we have hovering over us. Also, education-wise? Stupid…We supposedly don’t know as much as White people. But they took the racehorses away from us so we’re tryna regain those back and when we do, we’re fine. We are on the same level or higher. But we’re usually labeled as dumb ‘cause we don’t try. We’re labeled as bad kids, usually, you know in school. You usually see a Black boy, the teacher will think, ‘Oh, he’s gonna get in trouble this year.’ See a Black girl, you think, ‘Oh, she’s gonna get in a fight this year.’ But that’s not always the case. But it’s usually
the first thing people think when they see you…I don’t say anything about it to anybody. I just act differently. So, if I’m next to a girl that will get mad about something? I will act the entirely different way. If she lashes out at something, I will do the entire opposite…I try to go against those stereotypes so they won’t be assumed about me…I try to do the opposite of those stereotypes so they’re not slapped on my back, so I’m not labeled as a usual Black girl.

Further she embraces her Black beauty, admitting that she doesn’t want to be any other face or ethnicity:

I don’t want to be known as Latino, I don’t want to be known as Asian. I don’t want to be known as White. When people ask me, what am I, I’m Black, just like you. I’m proud to be Black. There’s nothing wrong with it. For one, I stand out in the sun and I glow. That’s a plus. I look great in a lot of things, so that’s also a plus…you can put coconut oil on, step out in the sun, you glowin’ to the gods. So, I’m like, why not?

Both Tony and Barbara agree that it is important for Jayda to be independent. Barbara admits, for example:

I tell her all the time that I want her to be able to survive without me. And a lot of people don’t understand that…But she has to be able to survive without me, not when she’s up under me. I got you when you with me, but if you’re not with me, there’s certain things you need to know, there’s certain things you need to be doing. And I’m not gonna be there. And so, you got to have the judgment and you got to have the self-regard to make sure that you do what’s in your best interest.

Similarly, Tony provides messages to Jayda that center on self-sufficiency, which he believes directly relates to self-esteem and value. Further, although she is their youngest daughter and has
an older sibling who is ten years her senior who is now working on a Master’s degree, Tony admits that he has always held the same expectations for Jayda that he has their older son. He shares,

I push the same things off of him… He washed the dishes, he didn’t like it, but he did it. And he swept the floor, cleaned off the stove. Jayda is doing the same thing right now. I’m like it’s easy for me, because whatever I taught him, I teach you. I don’t want to reinvent the wheel… I want you to be independent, that’s with everything: cooking, cleaning, to how you treat people, how you teach yourself. Be yourself. Very same thing. He did trash, she’ll do the trash. It’s all around. Tools, same thing. You can be independent. Her tub was squealing and it was making noise. She was trying to go from the tub to the shower, so she pulled the stopper up and I said, ‘Let me show you something.’ And I said because when these things happen, I want you to be able to figure it out yourself. Water comes through here, and I was explaining to her how the water comes in when she turned the shower on, what it does. We screwed it off and she looked in there and saw how it worked. She didn’t want to learn it… I’m not going to differentiate what I taught my son; she may not want to learn it, but I’m going to offer it to her.

Although Jayda believes that she has not internalized messages from her parents that have helped her to deal with sexism, and has, instead, obtained the ability to deal with sexism on her own, she is very aware of the contrasting differences in how girls and boys are treated, especially as it relates to dress code in school:

…I’ve always thought that it’s not fair that guys are treated compared to the way that women are treated… Example, dress codes. Guys only have two things: You can’t wear
muscle tees and…like some type of pants. And you can’t have your butt hanging out, that’s it. That’s all they have for guys. Girls, it’s like, you can’t have your bra showing, you can’t show your back, your arms, your shoulders, everything. I’m like, so I have to be in a full bodysuit, basically. So, they have it like, I was like, they have 15 different things for the girls, but two things for the boys. That’s unfair. ‘Cause I’m like, they can do all this stuff just ‘cause they’re a guy? That’s not fair! I can’t have my shoulders out, I can’t show anything basically but the neck up and my arms, that’s it. They’re so particular on what the girl has to cover up, but they’re very vague on what the guy has to cover up… I don’t control guys looking at me. You should have a class for guys to keep them from looking at me; I don’t control that. They’re the one with the eyes, okay. Not me… That’s because guys are not taught… I did not ask to have this body.

While Jayda has had some success with building relationships with her teachers, she admits that many of her elementary and middle school teachers haven’t been interested in supporting her academically or emotionally. However, there was one particular teacher fourth grade teacher—Mrs. Matthews—whom Jayda found to be different. In fact, Mrs. Matthews, held high expectations for Jayda because she was aware of Jayda’s giftedness. Jayda shares,

So, my teacher, Mrs. Matthews, if I had a problem, I could always go and talk to her about it… And so, if I was struggling with some of my classwork, or if I was struggling with my homework or something and I needed help with it because I was having a hard time emotionally, she would help with it…She would step me through it if I needed to, she would give me more time if I needed to, because she knew I was struggling at the time, so she was like, ‘I know you’re gifted and I know you can get to that point, so I’m gonna push you a little bit, but I’m gonna still support you.’
Other teachers, Jayda believes were much less supportive emotionally and urged Jayda to visit one of the school counselors if she had a personal problem, making it difficult for her to form close relationships with them during a time when Jayda was forced to deal with a divorce in addition to her mother’s health ailments. Some teachers like Jayda’s seventh-grade and fifth-grade teachers were dismissive of Jayda’s turbulent emotions, which often made Jayda feel as if she were being treated unfairly by them. She recalls a time when she came to school upset about a situation that was taking place in her personal life that left her feeling as if her teacher didn’t care about her emotional needs and refused to give her an opportunity to work through her emotions as she needed:

My fifth-grade teacher, she was extremely ignorant, and she was not supportive at all, like you can’t go to her for anything… So, there was one time I was at my dad’s [house] and I wasn’t having a good day at all. I was crying a lot; I was really emotionally thrown off and so I went into school, my dad made me go into school and I wanted to go back home so I could rest and kinda get my head together, and he still made me come to school. So, I come to school and I go to the counselor, two of the counselors are there and they’re trying to get me to go to class and I eventually go to class, and then I go to the class and I’m in the hallway, and the teacher says, ‘I’ll give you 10 seconds to get yourself together and then come in the class’… She knew I was coming from the counselor, she saw me that I was upset, she knew that I was crying, but she told me, ‘I’ll give you 10 seconds to pull yourself together.

In Jayda’s opinion, teachers like her fifth-grade teachers are missing the key qualities that she believes make them good teachers who will provide a classroom environment that is conducive
to both learning and building strong relationships with students. In fact, Jayda declares, there are several qualities that a truly “good” teacher must possess:

…[B]eing supportive, not stereotyping her students, not thinking each student is…like her students are lower than her or something. Not using the ‘I’m the adult’ thing. I hate that. A teacher that expects a lot from her students and tries to push their students, but is also very supportive of their students and doesn’t think lower of their students at all and thinks of them equally, all around. And wants to have a good time with their students, so doesn’t want to be mean to them. Doesn’t want to have any problems with them. Just wants to teach and have them learn and have fun, and enjoy themselves, but also, you know, learn.

In Jayda’s experience, school counselors have also been highly unsupportive during her schooling experiences. Given the fact that Jayda experienced a traumatic event in her personal life during her elementary school years that she still continues to deal with in middle school, it is essential that she receive not only academic support from her teachers at school, but also emotional support from both her teachers and school counselors. Unfortunately, she has been met with several school counselors who express to Jayda their belief that she is persevering rather than helping her in a way that she finds beneficial or truly supportive.

Jayda’s transition to middle school, however, has still been quite a positive one. She has made several close friends since leaving elementary school and has developed a strong interest in pursuing a career in the arts, despite her father’s wish for her to pursue something STEM-related in the future based on her strong academic performance in the areas of science and math. While she finds that she continues to be one of only three African American girls in her advanced math class of roughly 30 students who are mostly White, Leeford’s diverse school environment—
albeit predominantly White—has allowed her to make friends with Black, White, Latino, and Asian students. She notes the drastic difference between Seemore Creek, her elementary school where she was one of the only Black students in a school environment that had mostly White students and a predominantly White teaching staff, with the exception of one Black fifth-grade teacher, and believes the diversity at Leeford has allowed her to feel more connected to her school environment because she is able to fit in better:

…[A]t Leeford, it’s a lot better. Since there’s a more diverse group of kids and group of teachers, I fit in a lot better. I have a mix between Black, White, Latino friends, Asian friends. And so we all kinda stick together, and so all of us knows how that feels of not fitting in or not, you know, feeling a part of the crowd. So we all stick up for each other, and so it’s a lot better now.

One friend, Maria, for example, Jayda met in sixth-grade when they both realized they had a shared interest in doing nails. Jayda beams with excitement as she shares how she and Maria became friends:

We met in sixth-grade, we became friends over nails because both of us really love doing nails because before I started getting acrylic nails, I’d paint my own nails and I’d do designs and stuff, and she did the same thing. So, we became friends over nails and stuff and so we just got closer.

At other times, Jayda admits that she feels isolated from some of her peers at school because some of her friends also have friends who do not get along with Jayda. In order to feel less isolated, Jayda began to find other peer groups to join in order to not feel left out. She states, “‘Cause when I feel left out, it’s not really fun. I get really emotional.”
While Jayda cannot recall a time when she has been accused of acting White by her same-race peers, she has been mistreated by both her same-race and nonsame-race peers alike. For example, one of her Black female peers, Cassie, who had been a close friend of Jayda’s since elementary school, teamed up with one of Jayda’s White female peers, Piper, to bully Jayda starting in elementary school and continuing into middle school. Both of these girls would act as if they were friends with Jayda one day, then tease or deceive her the next, both in and out of school. She recalls,

…They would act like they were my friend and then be mean to me. And then, one time I went over Cassie’s house to swim, she stole my towel. I know that’s really petty, but like, okay, I’m like, you don’t do that. And then so, she’s always been rude to me, she’s even been rude to me in middle school ‘cause she goes to my school. So she’s been mean to me ever since elementary school. And so, I’ve tried to be friends with her, but I can’t. I’m just too nice of a person. ‘Cause I’m like you have to have a cold heart to be friends with her. You have to have the same mean mindset as she does to be friends with her. And I can’t do that, ‘cause I care too much about people and I’m too nice to people to be friends with her. ‘Cause she says something with a [sic] attitude for no reason. She’ll get mad at somebody for no reason. She’ll direct something toward somebody for no reason. They did nothing. They did nothing to her, and she’ll be mean to them.

Jayda’s unique learning style has not always been a fit for the traditional pedagogical approaches many of her teachers have implemented in their classrooms. For Jayda, who happens to be highly artistic, project-based learning activities that allow her to utilize her creativity help her combat academic disengagement. She asserts,
Me, personally, since I’m the artistic person, I want everything to be—the way that I think, if it’s correlated around some type of art, I understand it a lot better. The teachers don’t teach that way, that’s not the way that the curriculum is set up. So I take longer. But like when it comes to writing stuff down and doing projects and stuff it was more correlated around art and incorporating color and certain shapes or certain words or certain numbers or something like that, in artistic manner, I would understand a lot better.

On the other hand, Jayda has found that, although she has rarely been exposed to culturally relevant or multicultural curriculum in her classes, the curriculum in most of her classes, albeit tradition, are still relevant to her because she can draw on many of the topics learned in her classes later in life. In her English Language Arts class, Jayda describes how she has been recently exposed to reading material that allows her teacher to introduce her students to a multicultural perspective, although she is not quite sure later curricula items presented will provide students with a similar curricular experience. She shares,

In ELA we’re reading a book that took place in Sudan right now…’Cause we’re doing a project right now where we had to do research on certain parts of…the culture of people of Sudan… Everybody had a different topic; some people had food, some people might actually cook the food and bring it in. We had music, so people had to find the music, so we might play it in in class when the project is due. I did ethnic groups and languages, so I had to have charts on the percentages of the types of ethnic groups in there, the percentages on the types of languages, and then what the languages are and what the ethnic groups are and they vary and stuff like that. And so that’s what we’re doing for this book right now, but it might not be the same for the rest of the year.
Jayda has never been involved in school activities at Leeford Middle School because she has not found any clubs offered that have sparked her interest. For example, as an artist, Jayda admits that the Art Club and Dance Club would have been ideal, however, the Art Club does not provide her a challenge or help her learn anything more than she could merely logging in to YouTube for a quick drawing tutorial, and the Dance Club does not offer hip-hop, which is the dance style she prefers. Hence, she believes it is not that important to be involved in school activities:

If I’m interested in something and you have the option, then I’ma do it. But if you don’t have the option that I’m interested in, then I’m not gonna do it. So, it might be important for some people, might not be important for other people, and, personally, it’s not that important for me.

Unfortunately, that evening was the last time I met with Jayda and her parents. I received a call from Barbara saying that Jayda had been having challenges at school and she and Tony had not been able to get Jayda motivated about much of anything dealing with her schoolwork. Additionally, she shared, Jayda felt overwhelmed and no longer wanted to complete her artistic reflection.
Narrative 5: Jurnee Carver-Hicks

“I was so good at math, at every grade I was the next grade up in my learning...Now, in 8th grade, I’m learning high school things. I think that’s an accomplishment for me because, I guess, there’s a lot of White kids that are very smart but wouldn’t expect me to be in that range.”

It came as no surprise to learn that Jurnee wanted to one day be in the spotlight. When I first arrived at the Brogden’s brand new Willows Forest residence and she came bursting through the front door to greet me in a beautiful red off-the-shoulder dress that really added a glow to her strikingly gorgeous chocolate skin tone, I knew that she was ready for the camera. Eager to participate in both my documentary and share her story with me, she waltzed past her mother, Mia, who tried greeting me at the door as I walked in the house, in order to show me to the family room where her small furry dog lay comfortably in her dog bed. Jurnee, who wore her straight hair in a chin-length style, grinned at me from her end of the couch with a mouth full of braces as she prepared to be interrogated by me for the next couple of hours.

One of the most important things to Jurnee is her family, which consists of her mother, Mia Brogden, who works as a project manager at a large pharmaceutical company, her step-father, Riley, who is a manager at a local optometry chain, her biological father who coaches football at a local university, her 1 ½ year-old baby sister who resides with her mom and step-dad, and her younger brother who resides with her biological father. Jurnee, who describes herself as smart, energetic, and optimistic, shared with me that she hopes to one day utilize her talents to grace the stages of Broadway as a famous actress:

I would love to be on Broadway someday or just be a famous actor. I love acting, and the reason why is it all started in 5th grade when I got the lead role in the play Annie. It was
pretty surprising to me because all the Annie movies, all girls are White, and you have a Black lead. It’s inspirational for me to continue doing acting because it’s a different form… I wouldn’t say like literature, but you get to play all these different characters and experience their problem-solving. I just love acting. I know my mom has told me a bunch of times that I have to try even harder because even though I’m Black, you don’t really see a lot of Black leads on TV and stuff. So, it’s definitely something that I’m going to have to work on. I have to prove that I’m more than what they see.

Jurnee’s mother, Mia, fully supports her daughter’s dreams of becoming an actress, urging her to “be the best her” by following her heart’s desire and not allowing anyone to intimidate her or hold her back from accomplishing her goals. She beams widely as she recalls one of the many moments that Jurnee made her proud:

I would say maybe the first award that she got. Going into middle school, it’s many challenges, many changes for students, and she was a straight A student and she was recognized by her teachers and the principal. We were very proud to go to the breakfast that they had in recognition of her and just seeing her stand up there and get her award. We were very proud because she was so presentable. She had on a blazer, you know, she dressed the part, you know, 6th grade… So it really stood out for us. After the ceremony was over, someone came up to us and said, ‘Man, it’s great to see her. She seems so professional and so mature. You guys are doing an awesome job with her. She’s the kind of person that I think in a few years I’d be willing to hire her.’ You know, that someone else could see in her how mature and serious… She was taking this very serious. Although it was just a breakfast to some students, to her it was a big deal. I think that
really makes us proud that she’s very serious and committed to her work and she listens to some of the things that we try to teach her.

Mia communicates to Jurnee often that she wants her to give her best effort, even if she doesn’t earn straight A’s in her classes. Unfortunately, she notes, Jurnee has had trouble in the past with being too hard on herself and feeling defeated whenever she didn’t earn a perfect score on an assignment or assessment. She shares,

I’m always proud of Jurnee if Jurnee has given her best effort. But for me, failure was the fact that I didn’t feel like she tried hard enough. She didn’t really fail to meet my expectations, but really just not being confident enough in herself, just really kind of failing herself. Not me, but just herself, and that’s something that we discussed. And if she needs help, it’s okay to need help, but don’t let it get to the point where you are failing that class because we know what you’re capable of… Because she felt so defeated, and I didn’t want her to take that kind of attitude to the next quarter. We want her to be able to bounce back from that and know that this is just a setback. A setback only, you can bounce back from this and next semester, you can go back to your straight A’s, but make sure that you’re giving it your all and you’re not being discouraged and that being the reason why you’re continuing to have issues in this class… [Jurnee was] afraid to ask the teacher and then just really kind of giving up, and that was the issue. I didn’t want her to just feel so defeated. It’s like, no, this is temporary and see what we need to do to get back on track… We have the option to just give up now, or we can continue to try something different. That was kind of why it resonated with us.

Eighth-grade Jurnee, who is currently enrolled in a high school math course, is admits that she often struggles with reading, but took an acceleration class in 6th grade that helped her a
lot. One of her favorite subjects, however, is science because she feels as if she has been given the opportunity to explore the world and learn about how the world came into existence. She also really enjoys social studies and finds that it is a subject that is especially important to her: “For social studies, history is a big part, especially for me, like women’s rights and stuff, like how did I become who I am today because of people before me?”

Behavior issues that emerged between Kindergarten and first-grade eventually led Mia to realize her daughter was quite special as she began to examine the work that her daughter was doing. She noted,

She was well advanced in her class and the behavior issues started to pop up because she was done with the work. She was finished very early with the work, with nothing else for her to do, so we started to ask for extra work, some activities when she’s done, and still it just wasn’t enough. We knew we needed to find some other avenues for Jurnee and those worked out when we ended up transferring schools. I think maybe about 5 or 6 years old when we started to see some things pop up that triggered us to look a little bit further.

During this time, Mia and her husband began to invest in Jurnee’s library at home, buying her lots of books in order to start her reading early, and they enrolled her in the local Mathnasium center for additional math classes after school and during the summer:

She was really into math and to just supplement what was going on at school because we felt like it just wasn’t enough. She did Mathnasium a little while as well…They do brain boosters math camps, and those things… It’s really just working on shaping your math skills and boosting those skills and making math a little fun for kids. So, instead of your regular camp, they do math camp and things like that. So that was really good for her.
When asked to share her experience being a Black female at a predominantly White school, Jurnee sums it up using one word: rollercoaster. She finds it important to socialize with a diverse group of people and has formed friendship with peers who are many different races, including White and Black. Yet, she has also experienced racism and admits to having racist things said to her or directly or acted towards her indirectly in the form of racial microaggressions by both peers and teacher. For instance, Jurnee shares that she has observed some of her teachers treating her White female peers better than Black females in class.

On the other hand, when describing her experience as a gifted Black female at a predominantly White school, she shares,

I would say very fortunate, because I could be very not smart at a predominantly White school and then I would be treated a lot differently, because people automatically think that they’re better. I feel like my academic things and the way that I think and learn can actually change that, being different in the way that people don’t really realize that Black people have those type of things and that White people are the only people in the world who are smart and different. I’m very fortunate that I’m this way.

Although attending a diverse school in a relatively liberal area of the city in which she and her family reside, Jurnee has still experienced both racism and sexism. One incident in which Jurnee encountered racism that still resonates with her most is when she was called a slave by one of her White female counterparts in Social Studies class during a group project. She reveals,

There [was] this one time where I was doing a Social Studies project and we had this giant construction paper on the wall and we were going down writing stuff in history that we had learned. We were really small; we had to stand on chairs and write on it. I was
standing on this chair and then there was another girl beside me standing on a chair. She was White. There were two other White girls that were on the floor working on something for us to put up on the wall. They’re using a ruler. Then, I guess, one girl, she thought it was a joke. She kind of walked up to me and said… She pointed her ruler and she was just like, ‘You better get down before I beat you’ and stuff… I don’t know what she was thinking, but she was kind of pretending like she was a slave owner and I was like, ‘That’s not okay.’ I was in a little bit of shock because I kind of thought we were friends and I guess people don’t know where to stop. There’s boundaries with things you shouldn’t say to somebody because you don’t know how that might make them feel. That made me feel really hurt to say that even if she did think it wasn’t just…it wasn’t because for my ancestors in history, things like that actually happened, and for a Black girl, that’s pretty offensive.

Jurnee also notes the presumption that boys are more athletic than girls when she attends Physical Education (P.E.) class. However, she and her female friends challenged this sexist stereotype after becoming agitated with the P.E. instructor constantly separating boys and girls during games. She recalls,

I had like a group of friends. It was me, two other Black girls and one White girl. We were really tight together. Whenever the P.E. coach would split us up, we would play games. They would separate the boys from the girls. They would say…when we played against each other, ‘Well, the boys…the boys are more aggressive and they actually play.’ Well, we can play, too. One time, me and my friends were like, ‘Well, tomorrow, we want to play against the boys.’ They’re like, ‘Okay.’ Then we ended up winning. So, I guess, in P.E., boys don’t think that girls are very athletic and can do what they do, but
they’re wrong, and we can. Just because we’re girls doesn’t mean that we won’t be able to play.

Jurnee has not always been able to maintain close relationships with her same-race peers. In fact, one of her best friends since third-grade was Black and their friendship began to fall apart by 7th grade after Jurnee began to notice her friend keeping secrets from her, telling her lies, ignoring her when she called or texted, and talking about her behind my back. In addition, it has been her same-race peers who have mistreated her because of her style of dress and the way she “acts” by accusing her of acting White. She shares,

The way I dress, they’ll be like, ‘Oh, you dress like a White girl.’ I’m like, ‘What is that supposed to mean?’ I don’t know. At that time, I really didn’t know what they were trying to say, that I dress like a White girl, or I acted so I was always so happy and I acted White and stuff. I dressed White… It kind of made me feel bad and confused… I talked to my mom about it and I was super confused because they’re trying to define the race as what they dress like, or what they’re supposed to act like, but there is no, ‘You act like a White girl’, ‘You act like a Black girl’, it’s just you…it kind of made me wonder, Does everybody think like that? Does everybody think that I act like a White girl, or there’s a certain way that Black girls act that you have to act?

Jurnee’s parents have worked exceptionally hard to socialize her to be prepared for life’s challenges, especially racism, so that she can ultimately experience life success. For example, when describing the important values that she and her husband instill in Jurnee, Mia notes,

I think the biggest thing for us is making sure Jurnee knows that she’s enough. That she deserves any and all opportunities that anyone else of any other race would deserve as well. So, just making sure that she knows that she’s awesome. She deserves to be here,
and whether that be President, you know, first Black female President or first actress in
our family, it doesn’t matter. The sky is the limit and there’s no limitation based on race
or the fact that she’s a girl… I think it’s important for her to be confident in those things
that we’ve tried to instill in her because the world is not always a nice place, so I think
being able to instill those things in her will certainly help her when she’s out on her own
and she’s faced with some of those adversities and difficulties because of her race and her
gender. Hopefully, something that we have said or tried to teach her will help her through
some of those challenges.

Moreover, Mia and her husband constantly instill racial pride in Jurnee in an effort to
help her prepare for racial bias. She asserts,

That she’s beautiful and that beauty comes in different forms—many different forms.
There’s no one ideal image of what beauty is and that she is beautiful. Her black is
beautiful and that, again, she just deserves every opportunity that anybody else does and
don’t let anyone else tell her otherwise.

These messages, Mia believes, were influential in helping Jurnee to deal with a recent incident in
class when Jurnee was forced to confront racism and racial discrimination in school. Mia shares,

I think the incident we had with the ruler, her class had just learned about the Middle
Passage and there was a student that pointed a ruler at her and was like, ‘Get down, I’m a
slave holder,’ and I think that those discussions that we’ve had with her prompted her to
discussion with her teacher.

Other messages that Mia and her husband have continued to instill in Jurnee center on
working hard, striving for excellence, and valuing family. She imparts,
I think one of the things that we talk to Jurnee all the time about is giving it your all, being committed to things that are important to you. That’s just something that we teach her all the time. I know around the holidays, we discuss the reason for the season. We’re not big on materialistic things, but it’s important to give back. It’s important to love and show those around you that you love and care about them, and just appreciating who you have. For us, that’s a time that we may reflect on the year, how things have gone and what we want to do together as a family, but not necessarily giving gifts…but spending quality time with one another and how that’s important as well.

Jurnee has a strong sense of self and has a strong racial identity that centers on racial pride and valuing the uniqueness of being Black. When asked to describe what it means to be Black, for example, she discloses her belief that “Black is always beautiful” and she is “not ashamed at all” of her dark-skinned complexion. In addition, when describing the importance of Blackness she contends,

To me, I think it’s very important, because I’m different, and not everybody has to be the same. I love being Black because…I guess that I get kind of introduced to different things. I know that White people are going to be racist. I know there is that in the world. But I feel like if I was born a different color, then I wouldn’t see the world’s true colors and I wouldn’t be able to see how some people could be. I could just learn from my own as being White. So being Black kind of helped me to see what our country, in general, or just the world, has going on.

It is painfully obvious that Jurnee really values and has deeply internalized the messages her mother, Mia, and step-father have communicated to her about being kind and having respect, working hard, being proud of her race, and striving for personal excellence. For example, she
shares that her mother’s messages about the beauty of her Blackness and persevering throughout life despite the many obstacles she will face in order to maintain excellence have truly resonated with her:

My mom always says that Black is beautiful, and I need to be very proud of that, because being Black is something special. And she always says that I have something special inside of me. They always tell me to block out the haters, the people that are racist, and just think I need to strive for excellence no matter what comes my way.

In addition, she discusses how the messages promoted by her parents about developing a strong work ethic and striving for academic excellence have played a major role in her ability to maintain good grades in class. She describes an incident in math class when she earned an A on an assessment and felt proud of her accomplishment:

I think my work ability, if I know that I can do better on my work, then I would definitely try. Sometimes in math, you have those kids that are literally like calculators and know the answer right away while I want to figure it out on my own and I want to take my time and see how I got [the answer]… Well, I remember last year, when I got my tests back and my grades, I would always get A’s and then people who would be like, ‘What? How’d you do that?’ And I’m like, ‘I studied.’ I would finish my tests super early and people would be like, ‘Oh no. She failed or something,’ just because I finished early, but then I ended up getting an A on it, and then they were like, ‘What?’ I was like, ‘Yeah, I know my stuff.’ When I see a good grade, to me, that’s an accomplishment.

Even her fellow peers often notice Jurnee’s strong work ethic and academic motivation in class. For instance, she believes that her peers would likely describe her academically as one who not
strives for the highest grade in class and her grade often has a direct effect on her mood. She asserts,

   Academically, [my peers] might say that I always strive for the highest grade. If we’re doing a test and the highest grade you can get were like a B or something, I’m going to get that B. They would probably also say that how my grades come out determines my mood, so if I don’t get a good grade, I’m not going to be a happy camper for a while, so you’re going to have to let me cool off about that and let me fix it.

   In addition to instilling in Jurnee that she’s going to need to have “amazing manners” in order to experience success in life, they also acknowledge the importance of hard work. Jurnee shares, “[My parents] are teaching me things now so I can have it later, because I know that I want to achieve these things, I’m going to work hard to get them.”

   Jurnee has experienced being an “only” in her advanced classroom of mostly White peers for years; however, she has not allowed her minority status in her predominantly White school or advanced math class negatively affect her. In fact, she has embraced the opportunity to stand out among her mostly White peers:

   Well, in [my advanced math class], there was a lot of White kids, and there would be a couple of Black people, but not a lot of Black girls. This year, I’m the only Black girl in my class. There’s a couple of Black boys, but I’m the only Black girl. I try to really not pay attention to that. I know I still have to stand out in my own way… I haven’t felt any hatred or anything towards me in my classes, even though there’s all those White kids.

   At times, Jurnee has found that some of her middle school friends do not get along with one another since everyone in her school seems to have their own peer group, making it difficult for her to engage with both groups of friends at the same time and maintain a sense of neutrality
without one of her groups of friends becoming upset with her. She continues to respond with her desire for all of her friends to at least show respect toward one another and reminds her friends that she doesn’t have to reject one group of friends in order to maintain her friendship with the other group.

However, Jurnee has still managed to maintain healthy relationships with her peers, many of them being her gifted counterparts. These friendships formed in the 6th grade as a result of not only being in the same classes, but also sharing common interests. Jurnee explains how Leeford Middle School’s diversity also allowed her to meet friends of various races. She notes,

These people, they kind of helped me out on my first day and then they started getting closer and closer to me after that. It wasn’t really hard for me because I guess as soon as people saw me, they were like, ‘Oh, she’s cool, let’s try to be friends with her.’ Then I met a whole bunch of other people in 6th grade. Then I had kind of grown up with them in 7th grade… They were all different races. They were Mexican, Indian, White, Black, and they were gifted, a lot of them, and then there were a lot that weren’t. Even if I was gifted and they weren’t, we still loved each other either way.

In fact, what really drew Jurnee to one of her closest friends, Zara, was her the day Jurnee sprained her ankle and Zara, a gifted non-same-race peer who had also been inducted in the National Junior Honor Society, carried her books for her the entire day. Friendships like the one Jurnee shares with Zara allow Jurnee to feel more connected to her school environment.

While Jurnee has made a lot of friends at Leeford Middle School, she has experienced some disconnect with teachers in the past, in both elementary and middle school. Most recently, she has experienced mistreatment by one of her teachers during a research project when she was excluded from working with her peers. Jurnee recalls,
One day I came late and I had always worked with this group of friends and you could only have a group of three. I was put in a group of one [by my teacher]… The first couple of days we started research, I didn’t know what I was going to do. How do I figure that out, because things in life aren’t always going to be with you solving it on your own? You’re also going to have to have people beside you to solve it. I told my mom… So, after that first couple of days, I was paired to that group… It’s so fun to have people with you. I mean, you don’t want to be alone all the time. That’s no fun.

Similarly, in seventh-grade, Jurnee felt as if her math teacher devalued her and didn’t believe in her potential.

Well, I think maybe a little bit my Math teacher in 7th grade, because at first…she was like mean. I used to come home, ‘Do you know what Ms. Matthews did?’ And she would, I guess, say that I needed to try harder on things, and I was trying. At one point, I just kind of felt like she didn’t believe that I couldn’t do it… At that time, I guess math was getting a little complicated, and I started getting real frustrated. Of course, I told my mom because I knew my mom was going to do something about it, so I told her and she ended up talking to me about it, and she handled it… I was really upset when I couldn’t… I was stuck on this plateau, and I couldn’t get things right in math.

Fortunately, as the school year wore on, Jurnee began to work harder and began to see a drastic increase in her grades. She realized, at that point, that it was possible that her teacher had been hard on her initially because she held high expectations for her and knew that Jurnee could perform better.

Jurnee admits that she doesn’t really share any close relationships with any of her school counselors as she has always considered them to be school personnel that you only visit when
you have “problems”. However, she shares, one of her school African-American counselors from her seventh-grade school year, Mr. Thompson, recognized when something was wrong with her because she was generally a happy, bubbly student at school. She also mentioned her desire to get to know her eighth-grade counselor during the school year.

Overall, Jurnee does not find the school curriculum in her either her advanced math class or regular education courses culturally relevant. Until she reached 7th grade, Jurnee admits that she was used to reading about White males in English Language Arts. However, that changed when Jurnee entered her 7th grade Language Arts class where her teacher introduced a new book each quarter, with one book of the four books centered on a group of racially and ethnically diverse characters. Jurnee shares,

Well, last year, my Language Arts teacher, we read a book each quarter. All of our books the main character were White males. She said she wanted something different. We read this book called Tell Us We’re Home. They were three girls. The girl’s name kind of sounded like mine. It was spelled like Jaya but it was supposed to Jia. The one girl was from Trinidad, one was from Slovakia, and I forgot where the other one was from. I think she was Mexican, but they’re Black, Mexican, and I guess you would say, White, but she was Slovakia. They were all different races and they were the main characters. That was kind of different. We’re like, ‘Yeah, we need something other than a White male as the main character every time.’

While most of her classes didn’t adopt a multicultural or culturally relevant curriculum, Jurnee still finds relevance in some of the topics her teachers introduce in class. For example, Jurnee believes problem solving has been a relevant skill learned in her advanced courses that have prepared her for her life as a gifted Black girl:
Problem solving, because you need that for everything in life but especially for my advanced classes. I need to know how to figure things out by using my critical thinking skills.

However, in her 7th grade math, Jurnee recalls reading through word problems and noticing the lack of cultural diversity of the names in the word problems. She recalls,

I remember in 7th grade, you know how when they use word problems they give you an example? They use people’s names. I was saying how my name is so unique. I’m like, ‘You know what? My name will never be up there because nobody will ever think of a name like Jurnee. They’ll probably think of Jen or Jessica.’ I’ll always say that when we go to stores and they have little keychains with names up there. Like, ‘Yeah, my name is never going to be up there.’

Jurnee still feels as if she is properly challenged in her classes, although there are some classes where the pedagogical style of the teacher leads to Jurnee’s boredom. For instance, in classes where her teacher solely lectures or walks students through PowerPoints and videos, Jurnee often becomes academically disengaged.

Jurnee is involved in several activities in her school, which has allowed her to meet new peers and develop stronger relationships with many teachers in the school. For example, because of her high grades and good behavior, she was selected by her teachers to become a member of the Girls Empowerment and Mentoring Society (GEMS), where she represents Leeford, assists with giving tours to new students and their parents, hosts Open Houses at school, and goes on college tours. In addition, she plays the flute in the band, is part of the cheer club, and is planning to try out for the cheerleading team at her new school, Harrison Middle School at the end of the summer.
Jurnee believes that it is important to become involved in school activities offered at school in an effort to “make school fun” and “keep your mind of learning every now and then”. She also admits that her involvement in school activities has helped her to feel more connected to her school because it has enhanced both her social experiences and academic motivation and performance. She contends,

It’s definitely had me share common interests with my friends and other people and teachers. Teachers run these clubs. I didn’t even know they liked that club… For GEMS, you had to maintain a C average. That was easy. If not, she would get you a tutor and you would need to raise it.

When sharing her artistic reflection, Jurnee chose to not only play a song on her flute that she learned that same day, but to also choreograph and perform a lyrical dance that she created. When asked to first share the meaning of the song that she played on the flute, entitled “Titanium”, and how it embodied her experience as a gifted Black female who attends a predominantly White school, Jurnee shares,

I chose this song to play on my flute because it’s basically telling you to push through no matter what comes your way. And the song’s “Titanium.” And it says—the lyrics are,

You sound it out, but I can’t hear a word you say/I’m talking, I’m not saying much/I’m criticized but all your bullets ricochet/You shoot me down, but I get up

And I think it’s kind of powerful because…I’ve been…people have been trying to like shoot me down as I’m on my journey here, and I just keep getting up.

In addition, when asked to describe how the lyrical dance she choreographed and performed, “Like a River”, embodied her experience as a gifted Black female attending a predominantly White school, Jurnee explains,
My dance was pretty much, like me, just being me, I love dancing and choreographing dances. But the song, basically, talks about you just standing up whenever things come your way, like a river… The song is called “Like a River.” So, I liked that song when I first heard it because it kind of gave me little gooseys. And it was really powerful, so I decided to dance to it.

When asked about some of the specific movements she chose, Jurnee shares,

Okay, so, one of them was when I was on the floor, it was like one side pulling me and another side pulling me. It’s like, these are the people who didn’t want me to succeed and these are the people who do want me to succeed. And in the end, I choose this side. And at the end I was kind of like breaking the walls down and I was kind of shaking off all the hard work, like I’ve got this!”
Narrative 6: Kalyn McIntosh

“I’m hard on myself in sports and school...I came home one day with a 96 on a test. My parents were like, ‘Oh, that’s good’. I was like, ‘No, it’s not good...I got this one question wrong that I knew the answer to, but I just forgot to put an answer to this question.’”

Kalyn’s smile was infectious as soon as she emerged from the family room wearing her sweatpants, a large T-shirt, and a headband around her hair, which had been pulled into a high bun. She had the same laughing eyes as her mother, Kelly, who had greeted me at the front door of the family’s large, two-story brick cul-de-sac home. Kelly invited me to have a seat at the large dining room table in the family’s formal dining room so that I could begin my interview with Kalyn.

Kalyn, a tall brown-skinned girl with an athletic build, sat smiling at me bashfully and appeared to be one of the most well-mannered thirteen-year-olds I had come into contact with in a very long time. She waited patiently for me to begin the interview with her hands clasped together on top of the table, swinging her right foot nervously, and smiling brightly.

When asked to describe herself using three adjectives, Kalyn, an only child, selected smart, pretty, and athletic, sharing with me that she plays both volleyball and basketball. Her future goals have somewhat changed, she shares, admitting that, although she initially wanted to study journalism and attend the University of North Cambridge at Chandler with a minor in Sports Management, she now wants to major in Sports Management. However, her father has also encouraged her to consider the WNBA or pursuing a sports commentator position on SportsCenter due to her undeniable athletic prowess as a basketball player. She makes sure to remind me, however, that her parents tell her that she should pursue anything that she feels
comfortable with because they refuse to pressure her into pursuing a career she is not truly interested in.

Kalyn’s mother, Kelly, acknowledges the importance of Kalyn not only receiving an education but also experiencing happiness in life. When sharing her dreams and aspirations for her only child, she shares,

I want her to go to the college of her choice. It would be so great if she could be accepted to wherever she wants to go to school. Don’t want to limit her. I just want her to be successful in whatever she does. We tease her a lot, like, ‘Girl, we doing playing all this basketball; you better get a scholarship.’ I come back and try to remind her, ‘If you do, great. If not, you just need to go to college; you need to be successful in college, and come out and be able to get a job and be happy and be a productive citizen.’ My dream for her is to be happy and enjoy… I don’t want her to end up having to go somewhere she really doesn’t want to go to school, she doesn’t enjoy her college time. I enjoyed mine.

Eighth-grade Kalyn, who is currently enrolled in high school math, Math I, and Advanced English Language Arts, was formally identified as gifted in elementary school following a teacher referral and exceptional standardized test scores. Her parents noticed their young daughter’s intellectual gifts around the first or second grade, however, they were unsure whether or not their beliefs in Kalyn’s abilities were fueled by any parental bias. Kelly asserts,

Every parent thinks their child’s the smartest anyway. As a baby, she would do stuff and then my mother, you can’t go by her, because she thinks she’s a genius. That’s a grandma. In elementary school, her teacher called us in around… I think it was 1st grade, and said, ‘Look. Her reading is so far off the chart, we want to…’ However, they did it, whenever they did reading, move her to the 3rd grade for reading and asked us for our
permission. At first, I was nervous because I was like, ‘I don’t want to set her up to fail. They said, ‘If it doesn’t work we’ll switch it back out. We don’t want to hold her back while we’re trying to get others to come along. If we could do in that time, put her with this group so she can keep excelling.’ I said, ‘Why not? Let’s try it.’ The math piece actually came as a surprise to me around 4th or 5th grade. She just started doing so well in math even when they started doing the…EOGs… And she complains about [math]. She’s like, ‘Oh, my gosh. Math.’ She really was doing well. She tested into this Math I… I was like, okay. I was worried, but she’s doing really well.

In an effort to shape and mold Kalyn’s giftedness, Kelly and her husband emphasized reading, taking their daughter to Barnes & Noble and allowing her to spend up to $100 on books. In addition, Kelly expresses her desire to make and keep learning fun for Kalyn by keeping her in different academic camps during the summer as well as keeping her focused during the summer with workbooks.

When describing her experience being Black at a predominantly White school, Kalyn uses the word fun due to the fact that she is “not the same as everybody”. She cites how she feels special because she comes from a different racial and cultural background than the majority of the peers at her predominantly White school, which often leads to interesting conversations between her and her racially and culturally different peers. She shares,

Sometimes my [White] friends will ask me about stuff and they don’t know…Like sometimes my hair. And they’ll be like, ‘Oh my gosh, Kalyn, what happened? Your hair, you change your hair every day.’ I’m like, ‘Well, we have different hair.’ Then they ask me, ‘You don’t wash your hair every day, why can’t you take your hair out and just put it down?’ I’m like, ‘I can do that but it has to stay in one style.’ It’s kind of funny because
they’re learning things and I’m learning about them, but it’s kind of fun. It’s not bad, but it’s fun.

On the other hand, Kalyn describes her experience as a Black female at a predominantly White school as different, especially because the majority of her friends are athletic Black males while her female friends are cheerleaders who are mostly White and often don’t discuss sports or understand sports terminology. She notes,

I would say it’s different because I have mainly guy friends, so I hang with them so they’re more athletic. So, I talk to them about sports but it’s not really different because they’re Black, too, so I hang around them. But most of my girl friends are mainly White, but they do more cheerleading and stuff like that, so it’s kind of different when I talk to them about sports because they don’t understand basketball terminology or volleyball terminology. When I talk to the boys about sports, I learn about football, and basketball, and baseball, and all the more sports you get dirty in, those sports.

Kalyn feels that her giftedness does not change her experience at her predominantly White school. In fact, Kalyn believes that everyone is treated equally by the teachers and peers at Leeford Middle School, regardless of their race. She shares,

To the teachers, it doesn’t really matter and no one seems to think, ‘Oh, you’re Black, you’re not smart,’ or ‘Oh, you’re White, you should be really smart,’ or some people even say, ‘Oh, you’re Asian, you should be automatically smart.’ We all treat each other equally and we don’t talk about that.

Kalyn does not feel as though she has experienced any racism, sexism, or academic discrimination in school as a result of her giftedness. However, she does express the fact that she often feels as if some of her peers try to take advantage of her because of her giftedness by
constantly asking her for answers to questions on assignments, attributing their desire to get the answers from her to her smartness. She explains, “They say I’m smart and they’ll ask me for help. I’m the first person to ask for help. It’s kind of annoying. I’ll help them, but a lot of people are asking.”

Oftentimes, Kalyn and her African-American friends find themselves joking about the fact that, although she is a Black girl, she enjoys Starbucks. While she has not experienced negativity as it relates to the acting White accusation, her same-race peers have jokingly associated her drinking Starbucks coffee daily with the stereotype that mostly White people frequent Starbucks, claiming that she is “so White”. However, popular Kalyn takes it lightheartedly and utilizes her sense of humor to joke along with them:

We’ll joke about it. I love Starbucks, but that’s a stereotype, that White people love Starbucks. I love Starbucks, I just love it. My parents gave me four Starbucks gift cards for my birthday… I would go every day, every night after school to Starbucks in 6th grade. My friends are like, ‘Kalyn, you’re so White. You’re just so White.’ Then, they tried Starbucks. Now everybody’s drinking Starbucks at school. We’ll joke about it, be like, ‘Oh my gosh, you’re so White. You drink Starbucks.’ We don’t mean to offend anybody. They’ll just joke about it, actually.

One of the most important values that Kelly and her husband have tried to instill in Kalyn is the importance of having pride in who she is and having racial pride, including embracing her body type and natural hair. In fact, Kelly recalls a time when her daughter was in elementary school and wanted to wear her hair straight and questioned why she wasn’t skinny like her friends. She shares,
I think the most important thing for me is to be proud of who you are… She gets it now. She’d come home from elementary school and ‘I want to wear my hair flat.’ That meant straight. Baby girl, we can straighten it, but I guarantee you in a couple of minutes—it’s a wrap. ‘How come I can’t do that?’ Even in elementary school… She’s a big-boned girl. She gets it, honestly. She wanted to know why she wasn’t skinny like her friends… And you have to be proud of who you are and what you have, not make the best of it.’ Now at thirteen, I can actually see all of that. Couldn’t tell if she was listening. Even in sixth-grade a little bit it was kind of like, ‘My gosh, her hair’s so pretty, I want that hair. I want good hair.’ Kalyn, what is good hair? Let’s have a conversation. What is good hair? Just helping her understand. That was the first thing. And then secondly, just trying to make sure that she understood about being a Black girl. Elementary school literally, Kalyn, I think, in 3rd grade, had one other Black girl in her class. Kindergarten through 5th grade at Seemore Creek, she’s the one. She was the one. She was the tallest. Taller than some of her teachers. You go to the school and they had the line up to walk down the hall. In my mind—but it was my same experience. My grandmother always taught us to be proud, because when I was young, I would try to do this.

Other racial socialization messages that Kelly and her husband have communicated to Kalyn include instilling cultural knowledge and preparing their daughter for racial bias. Kelly admits that her husband has been the most influential parent in routinely sharing stories with Kalyn about her heritage, understanding her culture and history in order to help her develop a strong pride in who she is, and teaching her the importance of respecting all races and valuing everyone’s opinion. She shares,
My husband—he’s really Black power. Again, that’s how he grew up. Always getting, as she [Kalyn] calls it, life lesson. She says, ‘Every time I try to tell Daddy a story or a joke, it turns into a life lesson.’ Now she has this running joke. She’ll say something. She’ll say, ‘Here comes life lesson number 377.’ I think the messaging for us is just be proud of who you are, understand your culture and your history, but also understand that everybody’s different for a reason. You should treat everybody the same…. That’s my husband. He is all on that especially right now. His message pretty much is he’s constantly reminding her of what individuals had to go through so that we can have the life that we currently have. And that she has to respect everybody. He’s always talking about respecting all races, no matter what race they are. Then he also likes to piggyback telling her, ‘Look, you have to understand that you may have differences even with your friends. Y’all may disagree or have differences, but that doesn’t mean that you all can’t be friends.’

Kelly believes that the messages that she and her husband have instilled in Kalyn have, undoubtedly, helped prepare her to deal with racial bias, especially when it comes to confronting racism. Moreover, she notes, Kalyn is not afraid to share stories in class about the experiences unique to Black people:

I actually think [the messages we have instilled in her] have helped her a lot. She will tell us stories about conversations that they have sometimes in class. And then they go where she has to say, ‘The reason this is happening is because Black people haven’t always been free. Or Black people haven’t always been able to do that. What people don’t understand is that we haven’t had the same rights as you.’ I think pieces of this message
get to her because they’re having those discussions now, thank goodness, which has been [her father’s] biggest fear—that she has not experienced it directly.

Kelly and her husband find it extremely important to promote independence and develop leadership skills in their young teenager so that she, as a woman, will never have to depend on anyone else in the future, especially a man. Many of Kelly’s gender socialization messages, she admits, stem from her being very independent and maintaining leadership roles prior to marrying her husband, including working in a supervisory role at Florida A&M University the at the tender age of 27 and having an entire unit of much older, tenured faculty and staff reporting to her. In fact, Kelly believes that Black females, in general, should be prepared to assume roles as leader in the future. When discussing the ways in which she has raised Kalyn to be a leader and maintain her independence, Kelly shares,

She sees it here. She makes my husband so mad because she’ll say, ‘Daddy, Mommy does everything. You’re going to have to do more.’ I think…having that leadership quality. That’s at work, that’s at home. That involves so much—prioritizing, no job too big. Sometimes I might have that problem of trying to be Superwoman and I have to bring myself back. It’s like, ‘Okay, wait a minute. You can’t do everything.’ That’s just kind of the way I was raised, so I try to teach Kalyn about how to fix stuff around the house, about the car. When we’re driving I talk to her about stuff in the car and how it works and if something happens to the car, what you do. I don’t know if that’s good or bad, but I always tell her, ‘You don’t have to rely on a man.’ It’s great to have a man that supports you, but baby girl, you can do all of that stuff… I want her to know how to do everything and be…I guess the word is independent, but also have leadership qualities.
Don’t just sit back and wait. Learn. If you don’t know…I told her, ‘Now you got it real good. You can go to YouTube.’

Academically, Kelly and her husband have both worked hard to keep school fun for Kalyn, especially after finding that their daughter often finds school boring event though her grades are nearly impeccable. In addition to their endorsement of education since Kalyn was a tot, the routines and structure that they have put in place for their busy daughter have certainly seemed to impact Kalyn’s academic performance. Kelly believes that Kalyn, who has been playing basketball since she was five years old, has become accustomed to the routine of finishing homework as soon as she returns home from practice and maintaining the same level of focus she has when she plays sports when she is attempting to get her schoolwork done.

Kalyn admits that the messages her parents, and even her maternal grandmother, who has a Ph.D. and works in the field of education, have instilled in her have definitely increased her motivation to be academically successful so that she can get a scholarship when she goes to college. In fact, she shares, her parents have already made it clear that knowledge and education are essential in life:

Oh, my mom and dad said that’s mandatory. I can’t drop out of school. I can’t go out of school early to go to the pros. That’s mandatory. My grandma mainly wants us to get our Ph.D.’s. She wants all of my cousins to get our Ph.D.’s. We don’t want to, but we’re all smart. Because either we’ll get a scholarship in academics or we’ll get a scholarship in sports because those are the two things that we focus on… My grandma, one time in third grade for a vocabulary test, she made me make flash cards. She made me separate a whole binder full of vocab words just to study and get 100 on a test…We’ll be hard on each other with grades, but we know it’s important and it’ll help you. Because
think about it: when I go to the WNBA and I retire, I need a job. You need education to get you a job.

Additionally, Kalyn especially draws on her father’s regular conversations about being the importance of being independent so that she does not have to rely on a man in order to help her deal with sexism and sexual discrimination. She explains,

My dad, he’s told me about recent things like people say ‘Oh, you’re a girl, you probably can’t do this.’ My teacher talks about [sexism], because we just read an article about how girls are housewives. When they get married, they’re just going to be housewives and the man has to do the job. Man gets to go to school. The male gets to do everything while the girl stays home. My dad…he said I’m not allowed to be married, but he said if he decides that I can be married, ‘Marry somebody who will agree with you.’ Because I want to go to the WNBA when I get older. My dad was like, ‘If you can, find somebody who appreciates you for doing your sports. Don’t rely on a man to get money. Don’t rely on a man to do this and that.’ He said, ‘You can have your own job and they can have their own job. Then, you can understand from a point-of-view, and that’ll make it an easy flow of things.’

Kalyn’s parents, who have built their family on a strong Christian foundation, have also shared with her the importance of loving others and respecting diversity. And although she attends predominantly White Leeford Middle School, Kalyn understands the importance of having not only Black friends, but friends of all races and ethnicities. She states,

It’s good to have a diversity of friends. You don’t want to just have mainly Black friends. You’ll have most of them, but you don’t want to have just Black friends, but oh, I don’t want to hang out with those White people because they’re White. I think it’s important
because it spreads positivity through the world so you don’t have to just be like, ‘Oh, I don’t like you because you like so and so. I don’t want to hang out with you because of your skin color. I don’t want to hang out because of your past.’ I think it just spreads positivity and shows people that you don’t have to be the same skin color, but you can still have things in common with other people.

Her respect for others and strong desire to spread love and positivity in the world, may be a direct reflection of her Christian upbringing. While Kalyn admits her family no longer goes to church as often because of her traveling schedule with her basketball league, the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), she and her family still celebrate Christian by opening their gifts at midnight and look through photo albums, a tradition passed down from her grandmother and great-grandfather. More recently, since her grandfather’s passing, her family takes a cruise every Christmas to a new place, since his desire before he passed away was traveling as a family.

Kalyn is extremely popular among all of her peers at school, especially since she is a star athlete at her school. In her majority White advanced math class, for example, Kalyn has developed a close bond with four Black female friends, but has also made friends with a few White females in that class. She has also established close friendships with her peers in her advanced English Language Arts classroom and finds comfort in working with these peers during group assignments. She feels that none of her friends treat each other differently, which allows them to maintain a close relationship with one another.

Kalyn also has an even closer relationship with her Dominican friend Lori, who relocated to the area with her family in seventh-grade, and her two male friends—her best friend since sixth-grade, Jason, who is Black, and her close friend since Kindergarten, Bryson, who is White. She recalls with excitement how she met each of her closest friends:
I have a best friend. He’s been my friend since sixth grade. It was back when it was the first day of school. We didn’t know anybody. He was in my class and he was like, ‘Hey, I know you. You’re in my two periods.’ I was like, “I don’t know you.’ Then, later on, we would talk to each other on occasions in art class. We’ll talk now. Now, we call each other best friends…We have a close relationship mainly because we call each other best friends, and we have a close relationship with each other…. Then I have another friend, Bryson. He’s been my closest friend since Kindergarten. Me and Bryson go everywhere together. He’s like a brother to me. We met in Kindergarten when I think I asked for his crayon…. Then, my friend Lori… I just met her last year. She moved here from Pennsylvania. We’re really close because while she had no friends, I would help her in math class…and I was one of her first friends here when she came to school. I gave her a tour of the school and we’ve been really close ever since. I have a small group of close friends because there’s not many real friends out there anymore. I don’t know what happened. There’s not real people anymore. I keep my circle small. I don’t want to keep it big, because my great grandma told my mom, then my mom told me that your friends should only be counted on one hand. You shouldn’t have ten million friends, because you know they’re all not your true friends. I try to keep my circle small and no big.

However, there have been a few instances at school when Kalyn felt isolated from her peers at school, largely as a result of her resistance to peer pressure. She shares,

I would say ‘hi’ to them in the hallway, but when you hang out with them, sometimes they’re just with the wrong crowd. I’ll talk to them… They decided to go do these things around the school. Our school is connected—high school, middle, and elementary.

They’re like, ‘Let’s do down to the elementary school.’ I’ll be like, ‘We’re not allowed to
go down there. I’m not going to get in trouble for that.’ They’re like, ‘Oh, we do this all the time. We never get caught.’ I’m like, ‘I don’t care, I’m not doing it.’ They call me chicken or something like that.

Overall, Kalyn has had a positive experience with her teachers at school but doesn’t really share a strong relationship with her school counselors or administrators beyond occasionally speaking to them in the hallway. Because of her involvement in the Girls Empowerment and Mentoring Society (GEMS), she has developed a close relationship with one teacher, Ms. Harris, who has become very fond of her academic engagement and work ethic. Other teachers have taken a special interest in Kalyn’s style of dress, particularly admiring the different sneakers she wears each day. She states,

What they tell me is most of my teachers from previous years tell [my parents] about how good I am, because I’m part of the GEMS, which is a girls’ ambassadors, part of the National Junior Honor’s Society, student athlete. I do all of this, and all of this, a lot of stuff. Ms. Harris recently sent an email to my mom about how good I am in class, how engaged I am. They’ll occasionally send emails to my parents about how I’m doing. Then, we’ll occasionally talk and stuff like that, and they talk about my style a lot. I come to school with different pairs of shoes every day. They’ll make fun of me for that. It’s kind of fun having teachers who you have a relationship with.

In both her English Language Arts and Studies classes, Kalyn notes, her teachers have presented a curriculum that includes culturally relevant topics. However, in classes such as math and science, topics that center on culture are not present. She states,

…In ELA right now, we’re learning about South Sudan and we read this book, *A Long Walk to Water*, about how in Sudan, how girls don’t get to learn education and stuff like
that, and their water crisis… I don’t know what else we’re doing in the curriculum, but we’ll be learning more about the culture. We’ll be learning about culture in ELA class [more] than we do in other classes, and in Social Studies we’re doing that, too. Because we’re learning everything from what happened in the colonies all the way up until now, like Charlottesville and all those protesting, and Donald Trump being President and stuff like that. Yeah, we’re going to learn different things and all of that, but it’s not in all our classes. I don’t think culture is based in those classes. It’s basically based in Social Studies and ELA, in my opinion.

Kalyn feels highly connected to her school environment, especially due to her involvement in school activities, such as the National Junior Honor Society and GEMS, where she assists with school tours for rising 6th graders, volunteers, and participates in clothes drives and the diabetes walk, the National Junior Honor Society. In addition, she became the youngest captain of the basketball team and made the volleyball team without any experience playing the sport, and immediately rose to become the 7th grade captain of the team during the prior school year.

Kalyn admits that both her social and academic experiences are enhanced by her involvement in school activities, allowing her to feel even more connected to Leeford Middle School. With her involvement in both the National Junior Honor Society, which is merit-based, and GEMS, Kalyn is expected to maintain a certain grade point average, which increases her motivation to achieve academically. Moreover, she has gained a plethora of new friends through her involvement in school activities. She shares,

I know more people. I’ll be walking around the school, and they’ll be like, ‘Hey.’ I’ll be like, ‘Hey.’ So, then I just know you around school… The cheerleaders, they’ll be like,
‘Oh my gosh, Kalyn, I’m cheering for you. Yay!’… It helps because I have my friends with me there. In my activities, my friends are with me. We’ll talk. Sometimes we’ll talk about each other. We’ll FaceTime each other about homework, not just FaceTime to FaceTime…They’ll help me with homework, I’ll help them with homework. It helps because sometimes we’ll joke around and be like, ‘I got a higher grade than you ’or ‘I’m smarter than you,’ or something like that. It’s kind of cool to be in activities and have academics, too.

When I returned to Kalyn’s house so that she could present her artistic reflection with me, she shared a sketch (see Figure 5) that showed two hands—one Black and one White—embracing under a heart that had the word “unite” in the center. When asked to explain how her sketch embodies her experience as a gifted Black girl at a predominantly White school, Kalyn shared,

So basically, there’s not a lot of Black people, or people like me, at my school. But it’s not like we’re separated. So, I drew a hand and a hand coming together, because I have many diverse friends, and they’re not all Black and they’re not all White, so when we come together—no matter our skin color—how smart we are or something like that. So, I didn’t wanna draw something that separated me from, because that’s not what happens at my school. At my school, we all talk to each other and no matter what we look like…or our interests, we’re just all friends or acquaintances at school.
Figure 5. Kalyn's Sketch
Narrative 7: Kara Davis

“I know a dream of mine is to be President or a Senator, just to be in a position where I can make effective change. Because, especially in today’s times, I feel like if I had an ounce of power, I could say something or do something, because it’s so frustrating for me to sit here as a high schooler with all these opinions and the only outlet for them is like in Twitter or in my clubs and stuff. I’m just so tired of not having a voice. So, when I grow up, I want to have a voice where I can make effective change.

I could tell that Kara Davis was a go-getter from the very first email I received from her expressing her interest in participating in my study. When I first met Kara and her parents, Valerie and Ronald, at the university library that Saturday morning, she maintained a unique presence, standing tall and confident with a maturity that seemed far beyond her sixteen years. A tall, brown-skinned girl who wore her hair in long box braids and had on a dark pink shade of lipstick, Kara’s sonorous voice as she introduced herself to me elicited a few glares from a few of the college students who lounged around the open space as we made our way to a smaller, more private group study room.

Sixteen-year-old Kara attends Radford Charter High School where she is in the 12th grade and maintains an A average. She has taken over five Advanced Placement (AP) classes since enrolling at Radford, including AP Environmental Science, AP European History, and AP Calculus AB. She is the middle child of three children and has an older sister, Andrea, who is only one year her senior, and a 13-year-old brother, Devon.

When disclosing her dreams and future aspirations, Kara maintains,
I just want to help people, but if I wanted a big dream it’d be to be the President of the United States. I think that’s been my goal since I was really little. I remember in elementary school...no, fifth grade for our moving up ceremony, they told us what we were all going to be, and this girl got President. As soon as they said they were going to be President, I was like, ‘I think that’s going to be me.’ So, I know a dream of mine is to be President or a Senator. Just, you know, to be in a position where I can make effective change, because it’s so frustrating for me to sit here as a high schooler with all these opinions and the only outlet for them is like in Twitter or in my clubs and stuff. I’m just so tired of not having a voice. So, when I grow up, I want to have a voice where I can make effective change.

Her parents, have been fully supportive of Kara’s ambitions and have continued to encouraged her to do what makes her happy. However, realizing their daughter is very driven and compassionate about effecting change in the legal system, they both believe that she will find great success in the fields of law or politics. For example, her father, Ronald, or “Ron”, declares, I have the dream because she told me this is her dream. She’s going to Georgetown, she’s gonna become a lawyer by 32, a U.S. Senator, and then she’ll decide whether she will be the Supreme Court nominee or the President of the United States. This is her mind. She has it planned, she has it picked out and I’m like, ‘Let’s follow your path.’

On the other hand, her mother, Valerie, or “Val”, who has an extensive background in law, follows up to her husband, Ron’s response by sharing her strong desire for Kara to attend law school in the future:

If that’s what she wants to do, that’s fine. My dream for her is to definitely… I’m not gonna be so broad and say just do what makes you happy. I really do want her to go to
law school. I feel like she’s been driving that along. I just see that written all over her.

Now, what path she takes with law, I see her being an advocate. I do see her eventually being a judge or something. She’s so motivated with that and I think that’s her thing. She has that written all over her...So that would be my dream—that she go to law school and pursue some type of legal career.

Kara believes that her peers would likely label her an overachiever due to her disdain for failure: They would say I’m definitely...someone who doesn’t like failure. Like, I know it’s okay to fail, but I don’t like to fail at all.”

Kara’s academic and intellectual prowess was certainly not difficult to detect, even before Kara reached elementary school. In fact, because her birthday came later in the year, her parents made the decision to allow her to start Kindergarten at the age of four years old because she was already so advanced. Ron recalls young Kara reading at three or four years of age and possessing an exceptionally sharp memory, even throughout her tenure as a high schooler. Val admits,

She was always a smart little girl. She started reading fairly young. Three or four years old—smart. Just a smart little girl. And then in high school, Kara has just been...she’s amazing and we have been stunned with how smart she really is. And the things that she can remember. It’s nice as a parent, you know, you raise your children, but then when you see who they become and what their personalities become. Even participating in [this study].

Kara’s self-motivated nature and competitive spirit are two qualities that helped both her parents realize she was gifted. Ron, for instance describes how his daughter is unable to relax and is often motivated by her desire to outperform her fellow peers: “She doesn’t know how to
relax… She doesn’t. And she’s competitive. If one of her friends scored a 31 on the ACT, she’s gotta take it again. She’s just not having it.” Similarly, Val notes, that she and her husband are always amazed by Kara’s involvement in new activities:

She’s self-motivated, and she has always, I think, she started out again, into like middle school, high school, being kind of like a non-conformist and just not doing the norm. And we’re just amazed any time she gets involved in something. We’re like, we don’t know what we’re gonna be showing up to or what her classes are gonna be like. I remember when I went to the—maybe a year and-a-half ago—We the People competition… I wasn’t familiar with it, but it was teams of high school students and they had like a team of attorneys who were serving as like the appellate panel and they were arguing. What were they doing? First amendment? I come from a legal background, so I’ve seen that and she’s up there giving legal theory and defending and quoting precedent. And we had no idea that’s what we were going to; didn’t know what she had been doing and she was doing an amazing job with it.

Kara possesses a strong racial identity that centers on maintaining racial pride despite the many adversities the African-American race has faced. When asked to describe what it means to her to be Black she affirms,

I think being Black to me means to be proud. To carry yourself in a way that you know who you are, and you know your worth. I think, for me, that comes from centuries of struggling and knowing that the way you’re perceived is the way you’re treated…Being Black means to carry yourself with pride…I feel everything you do as an African American shapes the way your country sees you. If one person messes up, it’s like the whole race messes up. And so, you have to do your best or else they’re going to take your
instance and turn it into the truth. Turn it into the only narrative for African Americans…So, it means, just like you’re a representative of your race. Every time you step out into the world, whatever you do reflects back on your race.

In addition, Kara finds her Blackness to be of great importance and a true reflection of her Black identity. Kara explains,

…[F]or me, even today’s it’s like, you know, especially with all of the tension going on, being able to know that I’m Black. That that’s who I am and that’s what I stand for. And looking at police shootings, looking at the anthem protests and knowing that they’re not doing it because they hate America but they’re doing it because there’s an issue in this country within our justice system…And like knowing that being Black to me it means I want to whatever I do make it better for African Americans because I talked about justice system last year in my club basically there are issues in it and I see how it affects, I saw how it affected my grandfathers, and my uncles, and my father. I remember this one time, this lady in my neighborhood told me that I should go back to where I came from. And so, for me being Black is important to me because it defines who I am. It defines what I want to be because I know that whatever I want to do I want to make it better for minorities and Black in this country.

Being Black at a predominantly White school has presented Kara with several challenges, although she struggles to negotiate whether to voice her opinion on matters of race and discrimination or face potential scrutiny as fitting the “Angry Black Woman” stereotype. She shares,

I would say, I don’t know the word for it, but like so I’m going to say a process. And because I think that being Black in a majority White school it’s like always been this
struggle or idea that you have your opinions but you don’t want to come off as like the angry Black victim of things. And so, for me, it’s like, I know for me, at Radford Charter, all these kids are really opinionated, and so…I know people who make some off-the-wall kind of comments about race sometimes. And you don’t want to call them off as being this Angry Black Woman like, ‘Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah,’ but you have to find a balance between giving your opinion to like trying to not be the only angry Black voice in the school sounding off and stuff. That’s always been a process to me. How much should I give and how much should I take? To be able to be in school, and be who I am, but not just feel like [I have to] alienate myself and ostracize myself.

On the other hand, being a Black female at a predominantly White school, Kara admits, has been an adventure:

Because I feel like, for me, being a female and being Black are like…they are two separate things that intertwine sometimes. So, have to reconcile being a female and what that means, and then being Black and what that means. And so, I talk a lot about intersectional feminism with my friends and it’s like how some people…so you have to understand I’m not just a female, I’m not just Black. And like, I have issues facing females and issues facing minorities, and sometimes they overlap and sometimes that with feminism you ignore the fact that Black men struggle, too. And then you [look at their male] privilege, ignoring the fact that they’re getting shot down by the police… So, it’s like, for me, it’s like taking a journey to find a way to unite those with myself. And then find a way to speak out about issues facing women, and issues facing minorities, and issues facing African-American women…And so, being able to talk about how all of these things interconnect, interlock and stuff, is something that I try to do.
However, her unique experience as a gifted Black female at a predominantly White school has been empowering:

I think that it empowers me. I know that I chose the school. I knew the demographics of the school. And I knew the school I wanted to be at. And being one of the only Black girls in a predominantly White school, it makes you more aware of who you are, and when you look at social issues, and more aware of what you stand for. It gives you a base… So, when you go in the world, you know, ‘This was my experience and this is where I wanna go from here.’

Kara sometimes feels as if she is the only person representing her race when topics such as Charlottesville or slavery are brought up in classes where she is often the sole African-American student enrolled if not one of very few. Moreover, she finds it difficult to maintain her composure when controversial topics such as the Charlottesville incident or uncomfortable conversations about slavery or racism are discussed in a classroom where she finds herself outnumbered by the dominant race. She shares,

I think it’s always a challenge to do my best and stuff… I think it’s sometimes a challenge to sit there and listen to topics about Charlottesville, like slavery or racism. And being Black and listening to those topics and knowing that you have very strong opinions, but also trying to remain calm when talking about them and collected instead of like shouting it out or just keeping your opinions inside for the time being.

Kara has experienced both covert and overt racism on several occasions at her predominantly White school. In fact, tearing up, she recalls a time when she made the decision to join her White peers by co-signing their racist behaviors:
So, I started talking about people who made off-the-wall types of comments, right? And so, I think someone that did think of it for the shock value thing…So, last year, specifically, they were in my group of friends. They were my friends. Our two friend groups connected and collided so when they would make comments like I know this one person would call Black—I can’t even say the word because it cusses—but basically, it was a derogatory name for Blacks…I know people would drop the “N” word and stuff. And when I would call them out on it, it’d be like, they would just give me this look and stuff. And so, eventually I just gave up. And then, I know one time I gave in and joined them in it. And it was easier than just fighting them on it and so I feel like last year, I still think about that now. I feel like I lost a part of myself that made me me, because it was either I kept fighting or—and be different—or I joined in. I think, yeah, I lost a part of me that also made me speak out and stand out. I lost a part of me, and that’s what.

She attempts to proceed but is interrupted momentarily by a sudden gush of tears and uncontrollable sobs. After a few minutes, Kara is able to gather herself and continue:

Oh, [my White peers] were so comfortable [using the “N” word]. I remember we were preparing to do this AP test and they were talking about it and like it was one of the times where I just gave in and stuff. And then…alright, so I’m going to tell a story. It’s like one of my most…most ashamed in my life. It was like we were at this party and so we were walking and we saw this confederate flag, right? And so, they were like, ‘Hey, we should take a picture of it,’ and they were like, ‘Kara, you should join us.’ And I did. But it’s not just taking a picture, it’s like what we did in the picture that really bothers me. Because…oh God…I’m just so mad I did this. It was just like a Nazi salute. And they were like, ‘Kara come join on” and like I guess I just felt pressure to do it and I did it.
And I’m just thinking now if anybody saw that picture… It’s not just how it affects me, it’s like how I as a person… I feel so ashamed and dirty because I know what the Hitler salute means and I know what the confederate flag means and yet, for some reason, I just did it. It’s like being Black in a majority White school, it feels like you have to fit in and conform. And for me, conforming was just to say, to take that picture, and it was to say these really derogatory names towards Black, and let them use the “N” word and like I feel… I mentioned earlier how I lost a part of me. I lost a part of me that made me so politically active and stand out. I am so passionate about these issues and yet I let this go on for like a year without doing anything about it.

Kara shares that following the incident, despite her shame, she built up the courage to tell one of her teachers, who became the advisor for the Voices for Minorities Club, which Kara later joined and is now the sitting President.

Not only has Kara experienced racism at school that involves her White peers and non-same-race peers, she has also been a victim of intraracism and has been accused of acting White on several occasions by her Black peers, who teased her about her hair, selection of music, and the way she articulated herself. Kara admits that this mistreatment was most pronounced during her middle school years when she attending a majority minority school that consisted of a predominantly Black student body. She recalls,

I think my middle school year I got that the most… I think it’s a predominantly Black school so they can be the most judgmental. And so, they accused me of talking White, acting White…they made fun of me because they… I don’t want to say ‘they’, but people at that school seem to care a lot about their hair, the schools they wore, and I was more there trying to get into high school. So I didn’t care a lot as much as they did, so I got
endless grief for that…But yeah, I’ve been accused of talking White, acting White, being White. Even in Radford Charter, even in my Black group of friends at Radford Charter, and they’re joking about it, but I listen to country music, and so…yeah, really, I don’t really know a lot about…like you know the Janet Jackson or some of the really popular Black singers. I don’t want to listen to them a lot because I listen to country music and they will always joke about that with me.

Surprisingly, Kara also found herself the source of ridicule by a White peer at Radford Charter who suggested that she was “not Black enough” due to her inability to do hair. Her redhead White peer boasted, “I’m more Black than you are, Kara.” These experiences of being accused of acting White, Kara admits, have affected her mentally and emotionally. She explains,

I think for me it more affected me, it’s more like I just sometimes get angry because, you know, it’s like I know I don’t act White, I just act like me. And so, it’s very frustrating to hear them say that I act White because I don’t even know why I act White. I mean, there’s nothing that would drive me…you can’t act a color. I act like me. I’m not sure what they think acting White means because I was like a good student who like just talks normal. It’s like I’m not sure how that clicks acting White, but I would love to see them explain that to me. Because it more just ticks me off more than anything, because I know you can’t act a color, you can’t talk a color, and so it just more seems like maybe they’re internalized stereotypes, and racism of sitting here and saying that somehow being articulate, or talking…I don’t know…is somehow acting White. Because, you know, Black is articulate, too, so it’s just like, this is weird.

Val echoes Kara’s sentiment as she discusses the reverse racism her daughter experienced as a pre-teen in middle school by her Black female peers, which ultimately caused Kara to select
a predominantly White charter school as her high school choice, rather than attending the
assigned predominantly Black high school in her school zone. Kara’s transition to a
predominantly White high school coupled with her budding adolescence inadvertently aided her
self-discovery and racial identity development. Val shares,

She wanted to be somewhere different just because when you’re a little girl, it’s just a girl
thing. It’s a Black girl thing, but it’s a little girl thing, too, that we’re going through those
pre-teen years, and your teenage years, girls are vicious. They’re vicious. And so that hit
Kara; she kind of changed a little bit. She used to be more outgoing and then she became
more reticent because…she’s still a little girl in many respects… She didn’t do too well
in those middle school years…She didn’t fit their norm, whatever that norm was, and
because of that, she started pulling back and closing herself in…. So, that was very much
she insulated herself against people who did not accept her. And so, she felt she needed to
go somewhere where she would be accepted. And so, because of that, because of saying
you don’t act Black or you act White—whatever that means—that hurt her throughout
those years, and so she tries to protect herself from that… I think she’s started to find her
way within the landscape of who she is, what it means for her to be Black, but also to be
Kara. Beyond just being a little Black girl.

In addition to endorsing education, Kara’s parents have instilled in her the importance of
using her voice to advocate for herself and others. Other messages centered on respecting others,
being a lifelong learner, and not being afraid to go against the norm, are also communicated to
Kara and her siblings by Val and Ron. Val states,

…[W]ith Kara, when she was writing one of her essays for college, I started thinking
about what are the things that I have told you? And I’ve always said you have a voice.
You absolutely have a voice, so you don’t have to believe everything that anyone tells you. If you can think for yourself, you just have to be respectful. So that non-conformist mindset that she has, that ‘I don’t have to conform to any type of norm; I have an opinion, and I can do my own research.’ So that’s reiterating the education component. Not just doing well in school. I mean, that’s a part of it, absolutely. You want to do well in school so that you can go to college and do well. But also learning, being aware of what’s happening in your community, your environment, your world, your nation. Just whatever, just understanding that it’s up to you to define what your thoughts are and what your opinions are, has been a big focus on the way that we have raised our kids—all of them. And Kara has really taken that to heart… So just being a lifelong learner. But also, being respectful has been a big value as well. That you can have these opinions, you just need to…it doesn’t matter who the person is, you can challenge; if you feel like something is wrong, you can stand up for yourself… You can challenge that, but you just have to be respectful. And don’t feel like, just because I’m a child or don’t put limitations I guess on yourself based on your age, your gender, your race, your religion or your lack thereof sometimes.

Family traditions for the Davis family include spending time together for the holidays and cooking. In addition, Ron believes that the tradition of pursuing higher education builds with each new Davis generation because parents instill in their children to go further than the generation preceding them. Ron asserts:

But the tradition, it just builds. And you can see the education go. When you go from parents who could have undergrad degrees and the next generation graduate degree, the next generation doctors and lawyers. And that’s what family, that’s what it means. It’s
watching the family just grow. And you go, ‘Wow!’ And where it starts from? Our parents.

Val and Ron Davis have also promoted socialization messages that center on promoting competition in an effort to keep highly competitive Kara motivated to do even better. He explains,

Well, I’ve always used that as her motivation. Especially when she has a little White girl in her elementary school, and they went to middle school. And I’d be like, ‘Kaylie Renee got an A?’ And she would get ticked! But I knew what pushed her. And they were having a reunion in November and I was like, ‘I wonder what school Kaylie Renee is going to.’ And she was like, ‘I really don’t care.’ And I was like, ‘No, yes you do.’

Val and Ron also refuse to allow Kara to use her race as an excuse to succeed:

We’ve always said that was one of the things we told to Kara. We never said, ‘You’re a smart Black child.’ You’re smart, period. I can put you anywhere and you gonna be smart. And we didn’t use her race as to say, everybody else would say it. ‘That’s a smart little Black kid.’ It pisses you off because I’m smart no matter what… So don’t use race as an excuse. It makes you feel like, ‘Oh, I’m just a smart Black child.’ Not that I’m smart. I’m number two in my class regardless. One, two, who’s behind me? You know, so yeah, that is part of the tradition that we taught them. Never use your race as an excuse not to succeed, you know. Get out there and do it.

For years, Ron has introduced Kara and her siblings to speeches by influential Black leaders such as Malcolm X and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in an effort to encourage them to prepare for racial bias by standing up for what they believe is right. Ron declares,
Stand up. Because if you don’t, nobody else will. Even when everybody else [sic] saying that you’re wrong… And I’m a big advocate on speeches, and [Kara and her siblings will] tell you, they listen to Martin Luther King, Malcolm X. And I then take parts of it and I always tell her, listen if it’s not worth you dying for, you got to do it. I don’t care when everybody else telling you you’re wrong. If you believe in your heart that you’re right, then you have to. And I think that it’s helped her because she’s not scared. To even stand up to us as parents.

Val shares her messages about the importance of working harder in order to prepare Kara for the many –isms (i.e., racism, sexism, etc.) and other challenges she is likely to experience in life as a result of both her race and gender. She contends,

…[B]eing aware that you do have…you’re gonna have challenges. When came I came through school and everything, I’m like, ‘Okay, I’m gonna be smart and I’m not gonna, you know, [use] my race.’ But you will be confronted with life, life will happen. There are people who will challenge you, and they will question who you are and what you do, and they will look at your race… But also know that you’re gonna be dealing with –isms…sexism, racism, people adverse to your religion, or whatever. You will always be dealing with people who because they’re different and you’re different and whatever that capacity is just understand.

Moreover, Val also communicates to Kara the importance of striving for excellence by producing her best work, putting forth her best effort, and being a good person in order to prove people wrong about her and, inadvertently combat racism. Val shares,

My [messages] more so, again, it goes back to prove it in what you do and who you are. Being a good person, be smart. Do your best effort. Do your best work. The best way to
kill any type of racism. I’m like, when you get out there in the real world—now I’m gonna become my mama: ‘When you get in the real world, and you see how people are, the best thing you can do is be your best. Be better than the best and just back it up. Prove it.’ Like, prove ‘em wrong.

Academically, Val, Ron, and Ron’s older daughter who passed away when Kara was eight years old, have worked hard to not only introduce culturally relevant books and philosophical conversations that center on controversial topics and historic events, but to also expose Kara to educational resources outside the classroom. Ron states,

I think one of the biggest things is family tradition of the educational component. My older brother who passed—Kara was eight years old—and he gave her the book *100 Years of Lynching*. I mean, they all expect in the same way my wife, these philosophical conversations. We gonna argue and we’re gonna get into it, and we’re not gonna hold back because of your age. You’re gonna work. We always did education and not just in the classroom. I mean, we talk about it, that we went to the zoo every year, same old, same old repetitive. But we did the animals, even the art museum. Those were traditions that we kept year-to-year.

Kara has internalized many of the messages that have been instilled in her by her parents, including proving others wrong by striving for personal excellence, confronting racism directly, understanding that failure is not an option, and taking pride in her racial identity. For example, Kara expresses her need to always do her best and strive for personal excellence in an effort to dismantle the stereotypes and preconceived notions about African Americans in order to prove others wrong. She internalized these values because of the expectations her parents placed on her
around maintaining excellence. because of the expectations her parents communicated around maintaining excellence. She shares,

I think that I always try to achieve. I think part of it is like my mom and dad always told me, ‘Do your best.’ And to do my best, to always take what I don’t understand and understand it. But I think also part of it is like as an African American woman, I know that there are going to be some preconceived notions about who I am and what my work…what’s the best thing I can do. And it’s always there to break those expectations and break those stereotypes and to try and prove that we can all be better and stuff.

Because Kara has a strong sense of identity and takes pride in her race, she is now able to confront racism directly, using her voice to express herself when she disagrees with someone’s actions. She states, for example: “I think part of it is [my parents] told me to not…when you hear, it don’t take. When you hear something, you say something…So, they understand that there are people out there who aren’t going to like you because you’re Black, and to understand that, although that may be true, you still have to carry yourself with an air of dignity. You have to know who you and know your worth.”

With pride, Kara’s father recalls a time when she called him from school to let him know that she was going to be late because she needed to talk to her teacher to express her dismay with a peer who made stereotypical comments about Black people. Kara, he beams, was able to handle the situation by confronting the racism directly without the assistance of her parents. In fact, he admits, just two years prior to the incident, Kara completely naive, believing racism did not exist. However, she is now very conscious of it.
Following a high-profile court case of the shooting of an unarmed Black teen, Kara explains, her parents spoke to her and her brother about the importance of not only exhibiting exceptional behavior in relation to their White counterparts, but also resisting failure:

I think it was after Trayvon Martin or like after Michael Brown when [my parents] sat my brother down, also us down, and said, ‘You live to fight your battle. You live to fight another day.’ And that, ‘You as a Black person have to act 100 times better than a White person because what you do is how they’re going to perceive you. You do one thing wrong and they’ll crucify you and they’ll crucify you in court. So, you can’t ever falter, because if you do, then they’re going to take your failure and they’re going to make your life 100 times worse because of it.

Kara now has a solid mix of Black and White friends at Radford Charter High School. While her core group of friends are majority White, her larger circle of friends—those peers she sits with at lunch and talk to every day—are Black. Kara became friends with most of her White friends through her advanced classes or in band, while her she met most of her Black friends through her involvement in the Voices for Minorities club. One of her closest friends is a Black girl she met during her freshman year who happened to be not only the very first Black girl she met at Radford Charter, which has grown its African American population since that time, but also one of the only Black girls who was enrolled in many of the same classes as Kara. However, all of Kara’s friends, whether Black, White, Hispanic, or Asian, share one unique commonality: “All of them, they’re like supportive of minority issues; we can get along, we can talk, we hold educative discussions about it.”
When expressing her views about the importance of having same-race peers, Kara believes having Black friends is essential in that Black people share a common experience that allows them to “get each other”. She expresses,

I think it can be important to have Black friends. I mean…you know, we can talk, we get each other, it’s just something, again, you have a person to confide in who gets these issues…But with Blacks, we get together, you get the anger, where it’s coming from. You don’t look at like, ‘Oh, what’s his name?’ In the NFL, the football protestors kneeling, you don’t think, ‘Oh, they hate America.’ You get what they’re kneeling for. And so, it’s a way that you can stay connected without having to feel like you’re the only minority in the room screaming. You’re all together with it. It’s a place of peace and you don’t have to feel like you’re always climbing uphill.

While Kara has generally had positive experiences with her teachers, she does recall a time in middle school when a teacher passed out a pamphlet to all her students that she believed would serve as encouragement for them to strive for a high End of Grade test (EOG score. Unfortunately, the pamphlet was extremely offensive to students and devalued them as opposed to uplifted them, and Kara felt the need to express her feelings to her teacher:

So, there was this one teacher in middle school who gave us this pamphlet for the EOG for how like if you get a 1 you’re going to become a janitor. These are the jobs that are open to you. Yeah, and so like a janitor. And so, the higher you got, the better the jobs got. And I mean, little political-active-seventh-grade-year-old heart, it was like not having any of it…And so I gave it to my parents and my dad was like, ‘What? This is crap!’ My mom was like, ‘Kara, what is wrong with this teacher?’ And so, I walked in like a day later like, ‘Okay, well you do know that janitors are useful to society and that
plumbers are also helpful and they make money.’ I just read her the riot act about why this little paper, about why we should get a 4 on the EOG, was basically BS. I was like, ‘Listen lady, you’re wrong!’ And she wasn’t a bad teacher, per se, but that’s like the one thing that she ever did that stood out to me, and that was like across the board…the one that just really irked me the most about one of my teachers.

Nonetheless, Kara’s teachers at Radford Charter—many of them holding Master’s and Doctoral degrees—are extremely warm and inviting, and they work hard to develop strong relationships with her and her peers. In addition, she tells me, they have been extremely supportive of her and continue to hold high expectations for her. She shares,

I think that’s part of what each of [my teachers] do and stuff. They invite this warm and open environment… They know your name before you know theirs… They never make it so you can never talk to them. They’re not closed off. The door’s always open, they’re always smiling, they’re always happy to talk. I feel like, I mean, especially Ms. Clinton, you can have a conversation with her all day about these topics and she wouldn’t even mind. It’s something that they all love to do.

These positive teacher qualities have significantly enhanced Kara’s connectedness to Radford Charter. One teacher, in particular, for instance, Kara believes she can even confide in because she is so passionate about the same issues Kara is compassionate about. This teacher, Ms. Clinton, was Kara’s History teacher last year and currently teaches Kara Constitutional Issues and serves as the advisor for the Voices for Minorities club that Kara participates in. Kara explains why Ms. Clinton has become her favorite teacher throughout her K-12 schooling:

I think because she’s someone I could always talk to. Someone who I felt like who knew me enough that… I could confide in her with the issues and problems I was having and
stuff. And that she was someone who was also passionate about the issues that I was passionate about… When I wrote my paper, she was really supportive of me; she gave me this Equal Justice Initiatives book on lynching and [she’s] someone who just drove me to be better. I think all teachers do that, but she was one that really stands out.

Because the unique school culture of Radford Charter High School, an Honor School of Excellence and National Blue Ribbon School, is committed to creating a culturally rich learning environment, it presents the opportunity for students to become active, social, and creative learners. In addition, the teaching staff is comprised of many teachers who both have graduate-level and post-graduate level degrees and have worked many years in their respective field prior to becoming teachers at Radford Charter. Hence, many of the teachers introduce real-world topics in the academic setting, which reflects strongly in the curriculum. Kara finds the curriculum taught in all of her classes relevant to her life and many of her classes, such as history, are designed to allow students to engage in critical discourse around culturally relevant topics in an effort to embrace multicultural perspectives.

At Radford Charter, Kara is involved in a variety of activities, and serves in many leadership roles:

I’m involved in my school’s Mock Trial team. I actually captain the team. And then I also am the Vice President of our school’s Drama Club. And I’m the President of our school’s Improv Club, and the President of our school’s Voices for Minorities. And then I’m also in the National Honor Society, so I do a lot at school… Our Voices for Minorities [club] where you get your people who love talking about minority issues or love holding conversations about it. And then with Mock Trial, people who want to be lawyers, people who are like professional about the law.
When asked how she manages to maintain a 4.5 GPA while staying involved in her roles as Captain, President, and Vice President of three of the clubs she is involved in, she states:

I think sometimes it involves staying up until 1 o’clock at night, 1 o’clock in the morning. And knowing that, for me, if you want to do everything you have to put in the time to do everything. So, sometimes, you lose sleep because of it, but knowing that…if you’re interested in all of these things you’re going to have to put the time and make it work.

Kara does acknowledge the importance of being involved in school activities. She believes that being involved in clubs and activities in school allows students to meet like-minded people who are into the same things and connect with them. Further, she admits that most of her friendships at school were formed through her participation in school activities and clubs. Additionally, Kara believes that her involvement in school activities has significantly enhanced her social experiences at Radford Charter. She shares,

I think, for me as a gifted Black female, I think that, especially for Voices for Minorities or Mock Trial or Drama, it’s enhanced me because I’ve found people who knew that I wasn’t just Black, wasn’t just female. I was Kara. I was someone who excelled despite everything else going on. So, they knew who I was and my worth and it enhanced it because it allowed teachers to find out who I really was without looking at the preconceived notions that they may or may not have had.

Similarly, her academic experiences have been enhanced due to her involvement in school activities. Kara explains,

I think that [school activities] enhance my academic experiences because when you look at…it’s a big part of our school. We have to give presentations, we have to talk in front of the class. And so, being able to do these clubs and give your opinions on topics, learn
how to formulate them into better things, and then be able to go to class and present. And for Mock Trial, know how to present your case out step-by-step. Or, in Drama, and being able to speak and articulate. And then in Voices for Minorities, being able to take these issues and look at it and break it down by what the problem is. And using all that and combining it into your school work and being able to put that to use.

Due to the expectation that grades must be maintained in both Mock Trial and Drama, Kara says, her academic performance is also significantly influenced by her participation in school activities. Moreover, she shares, being involved in school activities increases her motivation to achieve academically due to her competitive nature. She contends,

   I think being in like Drama, and Mock Trial, and Voices for Minorities, and seeing everything everyone else does and seeing how smart and how intelligent they are and being like you want to keep up with them. So, you always have to push yourself to do the best. They’re doing all of this and making A’s, so should I. Everyone pushes each other to do their best. Still be active, but also still succeed, and not even succeed, but keep getting higher, and higher, and higher grades.

Two weeks later, I met with Kara at the university library again so that she could present me with her artistic reflection. She shared with me a poem that she wrote entitled “Stuck” (see Figure 6). When asked how her poem encapsulates her experiences as a gifted Black girl at a predominantly White school, Kara shares,

   I think it’s because, for me, like, a between place where I know I’m Black and I’m proud, but then, even with my friends, it’s like this place where I guess I just don’t fit in stereotypically to the categories. I know that my friends who talk about listening to country, just joking, and they know full well who I am. But it’s always that if you don’t
fit into a box and you’re one of the “others”, you just don’t fit in. And you’re in this in-between place… I mean, I think the problem is, you create a piece of artwork that helps identify your experience as a gifted Black girl in a predominantly White school and then… I think like, you know the fact that it sums up and it’s like jumping off of, ‘What would it be?’ And I guess I got stuck. And then from there, it was like, ‘Okay, so why are you feeling stuck?’ And from there I got these lists.

I don’t fit in.
It’s not self-pity, it’s self-truth.
Why? It’s because I’m Black, isn’t it?
Timed right, that joke can be funny.
Timed wrong? Well, I never time it wrong.
It’s a joke that eases tension. And believe me, there’s a lot of tension.
Tension because most of the time, it is because I’m Black…

One of my friends tells me sorry because he doesn’t date Black girls,
As if getting with me was even an option.
One of my friends tells me she’s more Black than I am,
As if doing hair is a symbol of being Black.
They’re both White.

There’s tension because some of my friends tease me because I prefer Thomas Rhett over J. Cole.
They tell me to shut up because I listen to country and I can’t rap along perfectly to all the Kendrick verses.
They’re just joking, but there’s a little truth behind every joke.

The truth is, I’m Black, but I’m not Black enough.
Not Black enough for the girls in my school who tease me because I didn’t get my hair done quite as often.
Not Black enough for the guys who laughed because I knew all the lyrics to a Bridgit Mendler song.
The truth is I’m too White to be Black, but too Black too be White.
And all that makes me is stuck.

Figure 6. Kara’s Poem, “Stuck”
Narrative 8: Laila Troy

“I like to learn. I like mastering new skills and new topics, and working them out until I get them right. I think teachers really appreciate that because not all students want to learn, or they want to do the least amount of work possible. But I don’t shy away from it if it means improving.”

When I first pulled up to Laila Troy’s home, I was unsure if my GPS had brought me to the right house, as I couldn’t quite make out the numbers on the front door of the cozy-looking two-story home. Luckily, a silver crossover SUV was zooming toward me just as I was contemplating getting out of the car for a closer look and a middle-aged caramel complexioned woman wearing bright workout leggings and a matching jacket jumped out the car and rushed toward me as if trying to flag me down. She had a ton of energy and greeted me as Evelyn Troy and asked if I was at her home to interview her daughter, Laila. When I told her, yes, she eagerly scurried me to the front door and as soon as we entered the small foyer, she called for Laila to come down while offering me a seat at the dining room table in the small dining room to my left.

Laila came down the stairs and smiled politely, her thick black hair loose and full of body, hanging below her shoulders. She was an average height girl with a dark brown complexion and narrow eyes that peered out at me from behind her glasses. Before she sat down, she handed her signed consent forms to me. Evelyn called her husband into the room from the kitchen in the back to greet me just before we got started. He was a lighter brown complexion, tall with a heavy, athletic build, mustache, and laughing eyes. He greeted me nervously as Ramón and I could tell that he was likely the shy parent while Evelyn was the outspoken one.

Laila, who has managed to maintain a 4.5 GPA at Triangle Research Academy, a predominantly White charter high school, has two much older siblings—a sister, Alexandria, and
brother, Enrico—who left the house eight and ten years ago, respectively. Most influenced by her mother, who instills in her the importance of being confident and performing to her fullest, and older sister, a successful financial advisor who gives her a lot of advice about separating herself from “the pack”, Laila is just beginning her senior year at Triangle Research Academy and hopes to attend Princeton University, and will be the last of the Troy children to flock the nest after the school year ends.

Laila describes herself as deliberative, surprising, and diligent. She believes she is deliberative she takes time when doing her work in an effort to really understand what she is doing. She also thinks of herself as surprising due to the fact that she tends to surprise her friends and parents often with the things that she does. For example, why she professes that she was once very shy, she is now a member of the Speech and Debate team at her school and participates in Theater, which are both activities that usually aren’t reserved for the bashful. Finally, she uses the word diligent to describe her interest in doing task-related things.

In the future, Laila hopes to become a famous author, because she enjoys writing short stories and poems, while her mother Evelyn simply hopes that she receives an academic scholarship to college. Laila shares,

That’s probably my goal, is to become a published author with books and my collections of short stories and poetry in Barnes & Noble or whatever. I’m also really interested in becoming a child psychologist because I love kids and I love talking with it. I also, like, just, the brain fascinates me. I’m really interested in that side of it, too, and behavior and developmental stuff and all that.

Laila, who adopts an identity as both Black and Latina because her father is Puerto Rican, has taken a variety of Advanced Placement (AP) courses at Triangle Research Academy,
including and Independent Study in AP Biology, AP World History, AP Language and Composition, AP U.S. History, AP Literature and Composition, AP Physics, AP Statistics, and AP European History. However, she notes, she is often the only Black girl in her classes and is always the only Hispanic girl.

Her parents first realized their youngest daughter was gifted after she scored in the 99th percentile on the California Achievement Standardized test in third grade and only missed four out of a battery of two hundred questions. Evelyn asserts,

What I’ve relied upon, I guess, to guide what I want from her or to really think about where she really actually can go is I really pay attention to standardized tests. Standardized tests don’t care, they just give you the test; you just do how you do. We know sometimes it might be skewed or whatever, but I’m looking at those results and I’m like, ‘Can’t get any higher than that.’ Wow, okay. Especially with those AP exams. I personally don’t know of anyone, I don’t know anyone else who scored this way… It’s hard to be objective about children. You always think your child is the best… That’s what we use as a guide. When I’ve seen how she can perform, I said, ‘Oh, okay. This is a different level of performance.’ That’s why we’re encouraging her. The sky is the limit. Swing for the fence, baby, swing, because you can get there. And that’s what we believe. We believe she can get there. We have the highest hopes and expectations.

Evelyn believes her daughter’s inner drive is different from most kids her age. For example, she reveals her shock when Laila revealed that she favored taking AP European History rather than opting to take a less rigorous elective so that she could reduce her AP-filled course load a bit during the semester:
I didn’t know this until this year. I’ve raised this child 17 years and we were working on her schedule. School has already been in maybe six weeks or so, we were making the final adjustments to making her senior schedule situated. I was concerned about the academic load because it seemed like all the courses were AP. I was like, ‘I see you have volleyball and you have Speech and Debate,’ and they travel with that. I’m always trying to make sure that everything is balanced. I said, ‘Why don’t we take off AP European History, then you’ll only have three or four.’ I thought it bring more balance. [Laila] got real quiet, and I said, ‘What’s the matter?’ She said, ‘Well, I’ve been looking forward to taking AP European History since I was in 9th grade. I said, ‘As an elective?’ She said, ‘Yes, I want to take it.’ I said I don’t know where this child came from, I don’t know. That’s not what you expect as a parent. This is an elective. You’re telling me you want to take an AP course as an elective.

Laila’s giftedness has certainly played a part in her previous relationships with some of her peers, Evelyn shares. A former White peer, she explains, became jealous and distanced herself from Laila because Laila was outperforming her in the eighth-grade at the private Christian school Laila attended from Kindergarten through eighth-grade. Evelyn declares,

People don’t want you to be too different. People are fickle. Sometimes we do like you to be different, but if you are, they treat you differently as well…. But a lot of it was…that’s what happens if your child excels too much. It doesn’t seem a problem if they excel in sports, though. That never seems to bother them because we can all win. It’s our team. But if it comes down to academics, that seems to really be a different, really drive a wedge, people get real prickly about that if you are too different. I said, ‘Let me tell you
what you don’t do. You don’t turn down that shine. As a matter of fact, I want you to kick it up about 2, 3 notches, okay?’

Laila’s giftedness has also gained her recognition. In fact, Ramón recalls a time when he was extremely proud of Laila’s accomplishment of becoming the Student Athlete Scholar of the Year at Triangle Research Academy, beating out all of the seniors with both a higher GPA and athletic participation her freshman year:

…I think it may have been the same year as freshman year…Yeah, as a cheerleader…She played soccer…She came on Game Busters with the cheer squad and they were even taking her lead on new cheers. Then at the end of the year, on top of her acting classes, she gets awarded the Student Athlete Scholar of the Year…Because the school is so new, that happened, that [Student Athlete Scholar of the Year] covered all four years…She beat out Seniors in terms of Grade Point Average, and activity. That was really good.

Laila, whose friends are predominantly White, is well aware of both her Black racial identity and cultural identity as someone who possesses a Hispanic ethnicity. Believing that being Black simply means to have at least one parent who is Black, she finds that her Blackness is important: “I mean, I like, especially learning about history, things that they don’t teach at school, like The Black Power Movement and other movements that you don’t get to hear about… I wouldn’t say it’s something that I’m always bringing up or wearing out on my sleeve, but it’s important to me. I think it’s an important topic.”

Describing her experience being Black at a predominantly White school, Laila explains, gives her perspective. She believes that it allows her realize how she wants to portray herself and who she wants to be. She shares,
I guess it gives you perspective, ‘cause you realize what you want to be like and whether or not, I don’t know, whether or not being around Black people has anything to do with your goals, I guess, or who you are and how you act. You have to decide… ‘Cause I’m just gonna tell you—most of the Black people at my school are pretty ghetto, and I’m not like that. I don’t know. I care about different things than they care about and we don’t have much common ground. I guess you just realize I’m not like them, and just because I’m Black doesn’t mean I have to be like them or have to like them or have to hang around them…I guess there is something to do with their motivation level. They don’t seem very motivated about school or learning, in general.

As a Black female attending a predominantly White school, however, Laila has found it imperative to teach her peers and teachers not to tiptoe around certain subjects during conversations or being afraid to say the word “Black”, but instead engage in discourse with them so that they are given the opportunity to consider a different perspective. Being a gifted Black female at a predominantly White school has been a nice experience for Laila who enjoys the fact that she is able to easily stand apart from her peers by serving as a role model. She explains: “I mean, people acknowledge you; they notice you because you’re so different from most other people like you, and you’re so different from the other people in your classes.”

One of the reasons Laila’s experiences of standing out as a gifted Black female at a predominantly White school and being seen as “different” may be due to the negative stereotypes she has heard through the media that depict Blacks as loud, “ghetto”, or dangerous, or the stereotypes that have been conveyed about Black females on TV and by her Black male peers in school about Black girls being “ghetto” and dumb. She believes that many of the Black girls are
her school reinforce these stereotypes because of the way they act in school as well as their lack of motivation to achieve in school.

Laila admits that she has had to confront some of her Black male peers in the past who have professed their refusal to date Black girls because they’re too “ghetto”. Pointing out how their views are a form of intraracism, she expresses,

…it’s not true because I’m not ghetto, and my mom’s not ghetto, my sister is not ghetto, and we’re all Black, and point out… There’s this poem that I really like. It’s a spoken word about, it’s called, “To Be Black and Woman and Alive”. It’s really good. There’s a part of it where the poets are talking about how Black guys say, ‘Oh, I don’t date Black girls,’ but it’s like, your mother is Black. Your sister is Black. You came out of a Black woman. A Black man had to love a Black woman for you to be here. It’s like, what you’re saying doesn’t make any sense, so I kind of just point out that.

Moreover, another Black male peer, Laila recalls, once called her an “Oreo”, suggesting that she was Black on the outside but White on the inside and, thus, indirectly accusing her of acting White. However, this same peer, who happened to also be taking advanced classes, Laila later learned, had also been accused of being an “Oreo” by another peer and wanted to say it to someone else in order to make himself feel better. Laila recalls,

My freshman year, a boy in my class called me an Oreo, which I think is interesting because now, he probably…I feel like now, if he were to remember he said that, he might be ashamed because I think his perspective has changed since freshman year…Because he reads a lot about The Black Power Movement and black history, in general. I remember he was writing this article once, and he was interviewing people about Black History Month and what does it mean to be Black. When he asked me, I said…if one of
your parents is Black, and he seemed to agree with that. It just seems that the way I think his perspective has changed. I think he also told me that someone had called him an Oreo and he just wanted to tell someone else that they were an Oreo…. I think it’s dumb to associate knowledge or education with whiteness.

Laila admits that she does not find it important to maintain close relationships with her same-race peers, although she believes it can be nice to have relationships with Black people due to the fact that, because of the Black experience, many Blacks can find common ground. However, she states, aside from Black family, if being Black is the only a Black person has in common with another person, it doesn’t mean they have to become friends.

Evelyn and Ramón have both worked hard to communicate racial, gender, and academic socialization messages to their three children.

Two of their most important values center on religion and family. Ramón, for instance, shares the importance of Laila and her siblings knowing their foundation, and remaining strong in their Christian faith. Evelyn believes that the family traditions, such as celebrating birthdays, holidays, and being together as a family are essential to communicating the importance of family in the Troy household. On Christmas Eve, Ramón shares, for example,

Christmas Eve. At midnight, we let them pick one gift that they could open. And go around and the typical Christmas enjoyment for that night. But for them, it’s a big deal to stay up late. That’s another thing, we put them to bed at dinner. We don’t have kids staying up ‘til they get tired. They go to sleep when we’re tired. So that was a big deal for them, that tradition I had when I was growing up and I enjoyed it so we continued it with them.

Evelyn chimes in,
We like to spend holidays together. You know, everybody doesn’t necessarily do that…Yeah, and I do the typical cooking and stuff. I do some dishes. I can cook some Puerto Rican, I cook what I can. I try to cook what my husband likes. That’s what we try to do, those kinds of traditions like that. I would say most has to do with families, get-togethers, we do birthdays…And we’ve taught them Spanish. I used to teach Spanish, used to teach Spanish II. We’ve taught them Spanish to the degree that you can, a little bit… There’s two different little switches in there for talking, but we talk some Spanish. And there is [sic] some everyday things that we use mostly the Spanish word for. Things like that.

Evelyn also notes her and Ramón’s efforts to teach their children to be proud of their racial identity and cultural heritage as Black Puerto Ricans. She asserts,

We taught them just to be proud of who they happen to be. If we were Irish we’d be teaching you to be proud of your Irish, but we’re not. I’m Black. Your dad’s Puerto Rican. Just enjoy who you are.

These same messages have been influential in teaching Laila how to prepare for any racial bias that she is likely to face in life. Both Evelyn and Ramón, for example, have instilled in Laila the value of having a strong foundation, having pride in her identity, especially her Black racial identity, and not allowing ignorance to impede her happiness with who she is. Evelyn says,

Definitely tell her to have pride in who she is. I said, ‘You are who you are.’ I said, ‘My mother and father Black. I’m Black on both sides. I’m Black over here, I’m Black over there. I’m Black all over the place.’ I said, ‘And you are, too.’ I said, ‘Just like your father’s Puerto Rican, you’re both of them.’ I said, ‘You can be both. You don’t have to explain away somebody else’s uncomfortability [sic] with you to enjoy life. Its’ fine for
people to be uncomfortable and wonder if they don’t know… Your happiness shouldn’t be contingent upon whether this ignorant person can figure out where to put you. Just let them talk to the hand and just get on… There is a lot of foolishness that you don’t have to waste time analyzing. You don’t have to analyze foolishness. They would just say, ‘Okay.’ They just ignorant, just let them go. You don’t have to wonder why, it’s just because they are. Clearly something is missing, but don’t let that take away from your life.

Evelyn has been an influential factor in Laila’s academic success because of the academic resources she has provided Laila with since she was a tot and the academic encouragement she has regularly given. In fact, Evelyn and her husband note the essentiality of education and holding all of their children to high academic standards. Having hailed from a household of educators, Evelyn, whose mother is a retired teacher, and father, a retired high school principal, learned early on that reading was the foundation to academic success, and reading with comprehension was essential. She imparts,

I’ve always told [Laila]—all my children—something that used to be on TV all the time…a program called RIFF. Reading is fundamental. And my mother taught me about that; she’s a teacher. And I told her, it really is fundamental. Actually, my mother said, it’s not just reading with…reading is fundamental, and reading with comprehension is essential. And the way I communicated it to them is as soon as they could walk, we started going to the library. And I would let them check out books. And I would make it seem like the best thing ever. And we would just get excited about going to the library. My mother told me this, she said—I’m not trying to be blunt, but this is the way she communicated to me. She said, “For some reason, Black people don’t like to teach, for
some reason…it didn’t used to be that way.” White people teach their children how to read. She said, teach your children how to read as early as you can. And so, I started taking them to the library, trying to get them excited about reading. Reading was fun.

You just tell them reading is fun. We go to the library, it’s going to be fun.

Proving that education was an important value in the Troy household, every summer, Evelyn and Ramón enrolled Laila in a reading course sponsored by North Central University every summer through her eleventh-grade year and have witnessed Laila using the same techniques she has learned in the course, which Evelyn declares have aided in both Laila’s reading comprehension and study habits. In addition, Evelyn shares, she made all of her children read during the summer as she continued to instill in each of them the importance of reading:

And so, reading, I told [Laila], no matter what you do, I said, I don’t care what anybody tells you, whatever industry you’re in, you will have to read something. Even if all you’re doing is signing contracts and making a lot of money, somebody has to read with comprehension to make sure that you are getting what you are supposed to. So that’s really the bottom line, that education is not the only way. If you have some talent or something that you take you to… If you were 7’2 and dunking, making you could just have your commercial, but if you’re not, education is going to be the way. Something that will facilitate you getting along that way, no matter what you do, is reading with comprehension. And we must do that. So, I made them read in summer, I made them keep journals. You asked me how I communicate this; I made them do that.

Evelyn also believes that in order for children to be successful, parents have to train them. Evelyn maintains,
You have to train children to do what you want them to do. You have to train them, I hear bits and pieces. And I heard her say, ‘Oh, I just hate B’s.’ How do you think she got like that? I hate average. Average first of all is so low…Sometimes, we just say, “Alright, alright. What do you get for getting average? Nothing, you get nothing. And that’s the world. Like American Idol, the average singer don’t get nothing. They don’t get selected, they don’t get on there. Only the best of the best. Don’t ever try to be average. I hate average.

Evelyn has socialized all of her children, regardless of their gender, to carry themselves in a specific manner—a manner that shows they respect themselves. She maintains, “With respect to how I expect them to carry themselves…I actually have the same standard for them. There is one standard, and it’s my standard. I will hurt somebody if I find out this standard has been broken. You can do anything you want when you get your own house.”

Laila and her sister, Alexandria, were socialized similarly to their brother, Enrico, with the exception of an incident where Enrico tried on his mother’s shoes when he was around two or three years of age. Ramón recollects,

I can’t remember when Enrico was, say around…put on your shoes? And people were so flippant about letting kids do what they want to do. And there was this one thing I had to put the hammer down. I said, ‘Enrico, look at my shoes. Take off your Mama’s shoes. That ain’t funny, don’t do that. You wear my shoes. And, that’s all he did. My son, to this day—he’s 27—he says he remembers that day. He was two or three. He remembers that. ‘Mr. Troy?’ This thing about questioning. Why do you want to question? That was very simple to me: You’re a boy, you’re going to do boy stuff. You’re a girl, we trained them up to be good girls, good boys.
While Evelyn and Ramón typically adopt both gender neutral socialization practices to rear their children, there are some messages that Evelyn has found important to instill in her daughters, in particular, and, thus, invites them to participate in conversations that are slightly different from the one that she and Ramón with their son, Enrico. She explains,

Now my daughters had a different talk…because in college, there’s a safety issue. When [Laila] went to go to residential programs, I said safety is key. Lock your door, don’t be stupid, don’t be out when they say be in our room. I don’t have any sense of humor about curfews and being where you are supposed to be. Be where they say. Do what they say do. You find out something new about your mother if I ever have to…anyway, I said the sex thing. It’s interesting about girls and boys…. When girls and boys get together, they like to play. Now boys sometimes are liars; they pretend to be one way but they are actually another way. Usually you find out that actual other way if you let them into, say, your room. First of all, don’t ever invite a boy into your room unless you actually ready to do whatever it is you do…don’t do that. You can’t, first of all, he’s going to think something different as soon as you invite him in there in the first place. Boys don’t tell you this, boys like the way you look, you have to be very careful, because my daughters, I don’t want to embarrass my daughter. I said, ‘Boys are highly influenced by the way you look. If you are cute and you got cute parts, they want to look at them cute parts. They like them, they like certain parts better than others.’ So, you will have to be careful… You will have to pay attention to who the people actually are before you can actually know us, because sometimes we just like your parts and that’s it. And so, you have to carry yourself a certain way. I know teenagers like to say, ‘Just because I dress like this doesn’t mean—’. I said, ‘Yes it does. And you wouldn’t be dressing like that
unless you admit that. Especially as teenagers, the way you dress, everything about the
to think about what you want to project. You are trying to project something in
in particular? You go ahead and project it, but just know, don’t be surprised if people treat
the way that you project yourself. Carry yourself in the way that you want…respect.’

The messages that Laila has internalized from her parents’ racial, gender, and academic
socialization messages include striving for personal excellence, working hard, being
independent, and understanding that knowledge and education are essential. Laila believes that
her parents have encouraged her to respect herself and be the best she can be, especially in
school:

[My parents have] instilled in me, I guess, how can I put it? To be the best that I can
possibly be, and that helps just a lot with everything because, especially with school, it
teaches me to value my time, and value my work, and value myself so that I treat myself
properly and I don’t let other people treat me any kind of way…

Additionally, other messages, such as instilling in her the necessity of working harder
have helped Laila deal with the sexism she is bound to encounter in adulthood. She asserts,
I don’t really think about sexism that much, but I always have it in my mind that I have to
work harder because I’m a woman, especially because most of my peers are White males.
They’re gonna get by no matter what, but I have to work much harder than they do, so
that’s always in my mind.

Evelyn has also instilled in Laila the importance of being content with being alone,
especially when it comes to peer relationships, driving Laila to become an independent thinker
who values her individualism. Laila shares, “My mother also instilled a lot, like, it’s okay to be
alone. You shouldn’t have to change to be liked. If you have to be alone, then that’s what you gotta do, and it’s not a bad thing.”

Both of Laila’s parents have communicated to her the importance of being kind and having respect for all people by treating them the way that she would want to be treated. One of the primary messages that Laila has deeply internalized from her parents, however, is the notion that knowledge and education are essential. She shares,

My mom always says, ‘Reading is fundamental.’ They taught me to not be afraid of being smart and not to hide being smart, and that education is important. My mom says this a lot, she’s like, ‘Get your lesson,’ and all that. But, yeah, they teach me to value going to school, to respect my teachers, to ask for help, to work hard.

Consequently, when discussing the importance of the messages her parents have instilled in her around education, Laila asserts,

Yes, they are [important] because you can’t do anything without education. You can’t be great. You can’t have a nice house. You can’t get good job without having education of some kind. It doesn’t have to be Master’s degree, but if you want to go into business, you have to have some type of business sense, and so a business education. Education is important. Education is life.

Highly aware that racism and prejudice exists in her predominantly White school as well as other schools throughout the country, Laila expresses her beliefs about what can be done in school to combat racism and prejudice, and finds it vital to integrate culturally relevant curriculum in all schools:

Racism and prejudice in schools, what to be done? More mixing in classes and maybe talking about other histories, besides the whitewashed American history, and actually
discussing the importance of Black people and Hispanic people, and Asian people in America, ‘cause they’ve been here for a very long time and have contributed a lot to society and to the economy. And maybe not blocking it off onto Martin Luther King Day or Black History Month and just talking about it when it’s relevant to the course. In English class, I wish we could read more Black authors, like Maya Angelou.

In her English Language Arts classroom last year, she recalls, her teacher’s failure to provide the class with an opportunity to read Their Eyes Were Watching God, although it was one of the several books they were expecting to read during the school, caused a great deal of disappointment in that not only had she eagerly anticipated reading the book, she also felt as if the Black voice had been silenced and marginalized in favor of the routine monocultural curriculum she is used to getting in her English classes. Furthermore, in Laila’s experiences, this has been a common occurrence in her English classes, in particular, because, as she explains, “there are certain books you have to read and if it’s not on that ‘have to read’ list, then you wait, then maybe you forget, then it happens.”

Despite Triangle Research Academy’s predominantly White school demographic and being the only Black or Hispanic in her classes, Laila still feels well-connected to her school environment. She shares,

But even though I’m typically the only person who is Black or Hispanic in my classes, I don’t feel ostracized, like I said, because I’ve known these people for so long. But I would assume that, like in college, if it were the same sort of makeup in college, I would feel slightly ostracized, but I’m used to making friends who are different than me. It doesn’t bother me that my friends are different from me.
Laila has two close peers at school—Jamie Valdez and Marilyn Dawson. Jamie was the first friend that Laila made at Triangle Research Academy and they both had a few classes together. Laila sparked up a conversation with her by asking if she was Hispanic after Jamie sat down next to her English class. To her surprise, Jamie, who had dark hair and eyes and had a seemingly Hispanic last name shared with her that she was half-Indian and half-White. Laila was especially attracted to Jamie’s sincerity. Marilyn Dawson, a Black girl, became a friend of Laila’s during freshman year when they played soccer together and the pair became even closer during their sophomore year after they shared three classes together. When describing her relationship with Marilyn she shares, “We had chemistry together, and that was a lot of fun… I like that she also had a work ethic, too. Hers is a little different from mine, but we both tend to perform very well. She’s in, like I said, she’s in some of my classes. She’s just really fun and funny, and I like that she’s Black, too, because I don’t know…there’s even more common ground.”

Although she doesn’t share a close relationship with any of the school administrators at Triangle Research Academy, she does express the importance of remaining respectful and being polite in order to make a good impression on them. She admits,

I always try to be really respectful and nice to them. Because I don’t see them on a daily basis, it’s really important that when you do see them, you make a good impression. The ladies, like we have some ladies who work at the front desk, they like me a lot because I’m polite and I’ve been polite since freshman year. Polite high schoolers, I guess, aren’t really common. But, for the most part, the administration, if I need something and ask politely, then they’ll help.
However, Laila admits, she doesn’t believe they hold the same expectations for all students. She shares,

They have expectations for the different groups of kids. Like, okay, we expect all of our AP kids and Honors kids to perform like this, and then the standards perform like this, and then the special needs kids perform like this. I don’t think they hold the same standards for everyone, at least academically. Socially, they hold the same standards for everyone.

Laila has found her school counselors to be resourceful, although she does not find it necessary to meet with them to discuss any personal issues, especially following an incident freshman year when she had a problem with a peer and reported it to her counselor who insisted on a mini intervention with the student, which Laila felt was too confrontational. On the other hand, Laila believes her current school counselor is highly resourceful and committed to assisting her on her journey through the college application process. She recalls a recent incident when she and her mother met with her counselor to go over her college list:

This past week, I met with her; me and my mom met with her to talk about college stuff. We were going over my college list and she was just beaming ‘cause she was like, ‘Oh, you could probably get into all of them.’ She said, ‘It’s gonna be so exciting!’ It’s always nice to see that she’s excited for me and willing to help me.

With the exception of a couple of teachers, the majority of the teachers Laila has had during her stint at Triangle Research Academy have been exceptionally support of her academically. She understands that she can go to most of her teachers for academic support if she needs help in one of her subject areas or clubs. However, she admits, she likely would not
approach any of her teachers for assistance with an emotional problem or family issues. Some of her teachers, Laila explains have even exposed her to new opportunities. She explains,

I think [my teachers have] opened up a lot of opportunities. Like, with my drama teacher, just being exposed to theater and productions and all that stuff, doing things that I wouldn’t normally do because these teachers offer the opportunity. It’s given me a more…a wider range of opportunities, I’d say.

On the other hand, Laila does recall feeling devalued by a former teacher at Triangle Research Charter who didn’t believe in her abilities. While she can no longer remember the specific incident, she does still recall how it made her feel. She shares,

I know it’s happened, but I can’t remember a specific time, but I do know it feels really... It hurts. It’s really disappointing because I expect, I don’t know, I expect my teachers to want to help me when I want to improve. They’re the people who are supposed to make sure you get your education. Whey they seem not to care, it can be…it’s a little disheartening, but then, it’s also, for me, kind of becomes a challenge of if those are not gonna help me, then I’m gonna help myself, or I’m gonna find someone else to help me. I’m gonna prove them wrong.

Laila is involved in many activities at her school. When describing the roles that she has as a member of the volleyball team, Speech and Debate team, Spanish Honor Society, and school play, she explains:

I play volleyball—I’m one of the captains of the teams… There’s the coach, and then the other captains and the players. Mostly, I just encourage the team and all that, and give them pep talks. And I am captain of the Speech and Debate team at my school, so I work closely with my coach for that, Mr. Brownleigh, and other members of the team. Right,
not so much, because of volleyball…I can’t do both of them at the same time… I’m also assistant director for the school play that’s going on right now, so I work with the other actors and the director, Mrs. Finney, so that’s a lot of fun ‘cause you get to see them rehearse and all that… And Spanish Honor Society, so I work with my Spanish teacher—well, she doesn’t teach me Spanish anymore, but she used to.

Moreover, Laila believes that being involved in school activities is a great way to meet new peers, enhance college applications, and learn about new opportunities going on at school. For example, she contends,

One, it’s a great way to meet people. And it’s also a great way to get opportunities that you might not know about if you’re not in tune with what’s going on with the clubs. Especially Speech and Debate because it’s…it looks so great on college applications and it just improves your ability to speak. And if you can’t...if you can’t communicate your ideas, then you’re not gonna get far. So that helps a lot in anything. Plus, it also shows that you care about school because you are willing to do things after school. You don’t just wanna leave as soon as the bell rings. It shows commitment.

In addition, Laila believes being involved in school activities at Triangle Research Academy helps her feel more connected to her school:

So, a lot of the advisors for the different clubs I do have also been my teachers. So, because they know me outside of the class, I think they’re willing to help me more in class and they understand my commitment. But at the same time, they also expect more from me. It makes it easier to connect with the adults in school, and makes it more likely to connect with peers. Some of my best friends are people from my Speech team, because you travel with them, you spend all day with them, you spend all night with them
sometimes. There’s definitely a sense of community is made and you feel more connected.

When discussing how her involvement in school activities enhances her social experiences, Laila describes how she now feels like the “cook kid” because she knows so many people around her school. In addition, her involvement in Speech and Debate has given her the opportunity to spend time with her peers at tournaments and after tournaments, especially when they travel out of town to participate in debates.

On the other hand, her academic experiences at school have also been enhanced by her involvement in school activities. She explains,

I guess it makes me value the time at school more and use it more wisely and get as much as I possibly can from the teachers while I’m in school., because I know that I’m not going to get home until maybe 9 o’clock, so I need to learn as much as I can now and do as much as I can now to lighten the load.

Several weeks later, Laila and I were finally able to meet again—this time via Google Hangouts, due to Laila’s extremely demanding schedule chock full of out-of-town debates, working on early decision college applications to schools such as Princeton University, and her involvement in a play. She shared with me a poem that she wrote entitled, “Teaching My Friends It’s Okay to Say Black” (see Figure 7). When asked to explain how the poem embodies her experience being a gifted Black girl at a predominantly White school, Laila explains,

This poem encapsulates what it’s like to be a Black girl around people who don’t spend much time around Black girls…In the sense that they’re asking me a question that they wouldn’t normally get to ask. And I’m quite able to answer it in a way that…encourages conversation instead of making them feel bad about American history…I think being
‘gifted’ and articulate definitely helps in the conversation because knowing how to speak to people and how to relate with them makes it, definitely, a lot easier when questions do arise, to answer those questions. When situations arise that could be offensive, to explain why those things are offensive in a way… In a way that enlightens instead of attacking. Further, when explaining her motivation behind writing the poem, she shares,

I think it was the start of this year, but early in the year, in my history class. We were basically doing some presentations about the Civil Rights Movement, and one of my friends texted me the night before we had to present. And she was…I could tell she was stressing about whether or not to call… the students who organized the whole [Greensboro Sit-ins] … she was texting me asking me whether or not she should call them Black or call them African American … She told me that she didn’t want to offend anyone. So, I told her, I personally just say Black. And I told her it’s okay to say Black because it’s not an insult. It’s just a fact and that it’s not gonna hurt my feelings. It’s not gonna hurt the other Black girl’s feelings who was also in that class. It’s just the fact…I think a lot of times with my fellow group, which is mostly White, there’s always a bit of hesitation when it comes to discussing race and color. One, because they don’t really…they can’t sort of relate in that sort of first-person perspective. And in other ways because a lot of times a lot of discussions about race, I’ve noticed, tend to be accusatory.

And I think my friends say that they would like to shy away from that. They don’t want…no one wants to feel attacked.

When did color become a curse and not wealth we were born in?
Basing the facts White hurt my feelings, I know I’m Black.
We know we’re Black.
You know we’re Black.
You know I’m Black.
Why should we waste each other’s time?
It is not a bad word.
There will be no soap down your throat, no wringing of your wrist when you speak it.
Other words are such an empty mouthful, extra syllables with less meaning—
Terms created for the camera and not for the heart.
So let the dark rose bloom on your lips.
Say it.
Love it for its pedals and bones.
Black, it is beautiful.
And if your tongue bleeds, thank Heaven, because you are allowed.

Figure 7. Laila’s Poem, “Teaching My Friends It’s Okay to Say ‘Black’”
Narrative 9: Larissa Nixon

“There are some instances when someone mentions something about African-American history or just African history, they all look at me. It’s not necessarily insulting to me, but it just doesn’t feel very great at the same time.”

I first met Larissa one Wednesday evening on a warm late summer day. The sunset made the windows of her family’s grand three-story cul-de-sac home glisten, making it appear even more beautiful. As I climbed the brick stairs up to the front door, I could see a little girl with long braids scurry past the large foyer through the glass-paned door, and finally a middle-aged woman, whom I assumed was Sydney Nixon, Larissa’s mother, opened the door. She greeted me with a hug and seemed to be as pleasant as she had been over the phone when we initially spoke about my research project.

She ushered me toward the back of the house to the family room, where the girl I presumed to be Larissa, sat on one end of the plush beige sofa. Sydney introduced me to her oldest daughter, Larissa, and Larissa smiled up at me nervously. She, too, wore her hair in long braids that flowed down her back just like the girl I had seen running around the house before Sydney first welcomed me in. Larissa, a dark-skinned girl with curious dark brown eyes, wore a navy-blue dress and sandals and took some time to open up to me as I began conversation with her. I could tell that Larissa was extremely shy and reserved.

Thirteen-year-old Larissa, the daughter of Liberian parents, a medical doctor, Sydney, and engineer, Carl, who has a Ph.D., is the oldest of the two Nixon girls. Her younger sister, Sharma, is 10-years-old and is currently a rising in fifth grader. She has attended Marymount Park Middle School since sixth-grade and attended Highland Drive Elementary beginning in
third-grade when her family first relocated to the area from Maryland. When describing herself, Larissa, who has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and is, thus, a twice exceptional student, uses the adjectives shy, generous, and smart. She states,

Well, I would use shy because I’m definitely not a very outgoing person. I guess generous, because usually when people ask me for something, like to borrow something, I am willing to give it to them, I’m willing to help people, and smart. I guess that sounds kind of egotistical, but yeah…I like to learn and I’m always proud of myself when I get good grades in school, and I like to read science books. A lot of times for Christmas I ask for books about different science topics, like the human body, space, weather, things like that.

Larissa hopes to become a doctor one day, although she admits she has considered future professions in teaching and politics when she was younger. She is certain that her parents’ visions for her are to have a career, good relationship with her friends, and remain in good healthy so that she can live a balanced, enjoyable life. Sydney expresses the same interest in her daughter having a work life balance in the future. She asserts,

I just want her to find something she is passionate about. I would hope for her, like us—we’ve been blessed that we really enjoy our careers. We don’t just have jobs. We get a sense of pride in our work, so I would hope the same. Like I said before, I hope she has a life of balance where she is finding both from multiple things, not just her work, but also spirituality or faith, and keeping herself psychically active and finding enjoyment in that. Just to have a balance and happy life.

Larissa’s parents first realized her giftedness as she was entering Kindergarten following an assessment that showed Larissa was “leaps and bounds ahead of the other children when it
came to her reading skills”. Even at the beginning of Kindergarten, Sydney recalls, Larissa’s teacher explained to her and Carl that Larissa’s reading level equivalent was the end of first grade. However, with Larissa being the oldest child, Sydney states, she and Carl didn’t have anything to compare Larissa’s high performance to. It wasn’t until the Nixons reached North Carolina that Larissa was formally identified as gifted and was placed in the AIG program at Highland Drive Elementary as a result of her exceptional standardized test scores.

In an effort to shape and mold Larissa’s giftedness, Carl notes, he and Sydney enrolled her in a reading program and began to buy her Kumon math workbooks. He shares,

When she was younger, we [enrolled her in a reading] program to get her to read early, and Hooked on Phonics was the system we used. She had a very good memory, and so she quickly picked up various sounds and was able to put those together and read at an early age. Recently we’ve been getting both daughters involved in Kuman with regards to math.

In addition, Sydney explains, they even began the process of supplementing their daughters’ education during preschool in an effort to boost both their confidence level and performance level in school.

I think we realized pretty early on that to increase both of our girls’ confidence level, increase their performance in school, it was important to provide educational enrichment at home to supplement what they were learning at school. Even before we did Hooked on Phonics, or no, I guess it would be after… No, yeah, before the Hooked on Phonics, we used to be the Kuman books at Barnes & Noble when the girls were just like preschool age and pre-K. They would do activity books at home with the babysitter. So, we started when they were pretty young with supplementing their learning even at daycare.
When Sydney discusses a time when she was really proud of Larissa, it seems that the efforts she and Carl made to shape and mold Larissa’s giftedness really paid off. She shares,

I don’t know about my husband, but I was pretty anxious about the transition from elementary to middle school. Something changed in Larissa. When she got to middle school, she really stepped up to the plate and became that responsible, self-driven learner. She became organized, and I could see she really developed that love of learning. She always enjoyed learning, but now that she’s learning more complicated subjects and getting deeper into science and history and everything, I can see that she genuinely enjoys learning and is very conscientious of, and I would say really ambitious and motivated, about doing her best and getting her A in pretty much every class. Just to see that drive and that enjoyment of learning just of the sake of learning, that’s something that…it could have gone a couple of different ways. As she’s maturing, we really saw that change happen I would really say in her sixth-grade year.

On the other hand, during her fourth-grade year, Sydney recalls, she and Carl decided to take Larissa off of her ADHD medication for a short stint and noticed a drastic decrease in her test scores as well as Larissa rushing through assignments and not giving her best effort. While Sydney was disappointed in Larissa’s academic performance that year, she and Carl felt as if they had not given her all the tools necessary for success and were, therefore, most disappointed in themselves.

Larissa describes her experience being Black at a predominantly White school as normal because her peers and teachers do not really say anything racist toward her and everyone seems to get along. However, she does recall times when topics about African American or African
history are brought up in class and she feels quite uncomfortable as the only Black person. She shares,

Well, I would say normal for the most part because, really, I just feel like since no one really has any racist feelings towards me, I feel like everyone gets along well. But there are some instances where when someone mentions something about African American history or just African history, they all look at me. It’s not necessarily insulting to me, but it just doesn’t feel very great at the same time.

Her experience being a Black female at a predominantly White school is also normal. She admits that, although some of her peers make inappropriate jokes, her school counselors have attempted to address the situation by coming into the classrooms at Marymount Park Middle School and talking to students about people at her school sexually harassing others.

In her school environment, Larissa feels as though everyone sees her as “just another gifted student”. She says,

I don’t know if anyone expects me to be dumb or not gifted in any way… I mean like they expect me to have good grades, so when they see me, if I told them I was a gifted student, they wouldn’t be like, ‘Wow, really?’ They would be like, ‘Cool.’

The one time that Larissa feels as if she were met with racism at her school is during an incident in science class when a student of Indian descent walked up to her and said “KKK.” She recalls,

One time I was just minding my business in science class, someone walked by me and said, ‘KKK.’ That didn’t defend me, but at the same time, I was still mad about it. I confronted them.
On a positive note, however, Larissa does not believe she has been mistreated because of
gender or giftedness at her school.

Larissa believes that in order for racism and prejudice to be dismantled in school, it
begins with confronting the racism by either standing up to the perpetrator or telling a teacher.
She contends,

I don’t think you can really stop people from having these [racist] feelings, but I think by
standing up to them, or you can tell a teacher. I mean, it doesn’t always work, but you
need to find a way to make sure that the person doesn’t bother you again. But like I said,
you can’t really stop them from having those feelings, unless you decided to try and show
respect to them, even if they didn’t deserve it.

To Larissa, Blackness is defined by having ancestors who came from Africa as opposed
to having dark skin. She does not feel as though her Blackness is as important to her as her
character and actions, which she believes people should be defined by. When discussing the
negative things she has heard about Black people, Larissa recalls,

Well, when I see stories about African American shootings, like when cops shoot Black
people unfairly, that just makes me feel like I don’t know if these people are… It feels
like they’re trying, I don’t know, they might be racist. It feels like, yeah, actually they
are, because some of these people it’s clear they were shot unfairly and that just makes
me feel a little nervous, because it just makes me feel like this could happen to one of my
family members. That’s how it makes me feel when I hear this stuff on the news.

Moreover, she admits that the incidents she has heard about Black people in the media make her
feel angry because it seems as if many people don’t see anything wrong with it.
Larissa, who has a mix of Black, White, and Indian friends at her school, does not recall experiencing any intraracism from her same-race peers, nor has she ever been accused of acting White.

Sydney and Carl have engaged in racial, gender, and academic socialization practices with both of their young daughters. One of the most important messages that Sydney and Carl, who are both from Liberia, have tried to instill in Larissa, for instance, is cultural knowledge, and they have found it useful to instill this knowledge through the form of supplemental education.

Sydney shares,

I don’t know that we have any specific traditions that are unique, per se. We are from Liberia, and we’ve talked to her a lot about family history, and she’s done some research projects at school when she was younger on the country. Also, her dad has been, I would say especially when they were younger, very consistent with teaching them about ancient Egyptian history and culture, and just more of an Afrocentric review of history. That’s been a very important part of their supplemental education. That’s just an aspect of academics we have focused on at home.

Carl agrees:

It’s part of our culture. My big belief is that before you can do other things or learn about other people, you should know who you are and know yourself, and be confident in that…

Additionally, establishing racial pride in Larissa and her sister has been an important focus of Carl’s, who believes Larissa has a strong sense of self and racial confidence. She explains,
Both girls, but particular Larissa, have a very strong sense of self, and I would say racial confidence. A lot of it, in part, is really, I would say, we can attribute that to all the extra work their dad has done with them…Saturday school, Daddy school.

Although Sydney has several friends whose children have faced racism, she admits that she has not been aware of Larissa experiencing racism on a day-to-day basis. However, Carl believes that Larissa is more sensitive about looking out for racism as a child of color and person of African heritage, especially. He shares,

On the one hand, she’s more sensitive about looking out for it and kind of fears it. I think this is probably one can expect from many children of color, especially of African heritage, talking about slavery in class kind of makes her feel uncomfortable and all that, but I feel it is a lot easier for her not to think this is me, because she understands the history is more than that. This is a very small part in a much longer history, so even though something she dreads, she’s less likely to internalize it, I would say, purely in a negative way. We kind of mitigate that by sharing other aspects of her history.

Sydney and Carl have both instilled in their children since they were very young, the importance of obtaining a higher education in the future. Sydney explains,

I mean, I think we’ve instilled in both girls since they were very young, just going as far as they can in school. They understand the correlation between their educational level and having more options when it comes to their career choices and having more job opportunities. I think we’ve emphasized that pretty much from Day One…We lead by example in that regard as well since we both have doctorate level [education], so I think that kind of speaks for itself as well for them.
The Nixons are very involved in their daughter’s education and they also work hard to encourage Larissa to be academically successful, although Carl feels sometimes his pushiness when Larissa does not do her best may be perceived by Larissa as disappointment in her grades. He explains,

I don’t know if I’m sending mixed messages usually if she comes with, let’s say an 89 and she gets really upset, because I always try to inquire, try to figure out why did you get a 95, not because I feel that 89 may not necessarily be good enough, but I always feel she can do better, and I’m trying to understand. Sometimes, she may see that as me not being happy, but my two things, one is she can do better, and the second thing I’m always trying to understand is there something we could have done better to prepare her for a test.

Sydney agrees with Carl, adding,

When [Larissa] comes back with a B or a C, she’s basically asked to try to assess how could she have done better, but it’s a fine line. We don’t want her to feel that we’re being too hard on her, or that we’re expecting perfection, but we want to make sure she’s always trying to learn from her mistakes.

In an effort to prepare Larissa for gender bias that is likely to occur as a result of her femaleness, Carl encourages her to continue her pursuit in an effort regardless of whether women are underrepresented in that area. He shares,

Encouraging her to understand that just because women are underrepresented in a certain area she shouldn’t feel discouraged and try to do well in that area. One good example is she was very interested in the election, last election, and she was definitely rooting for
Hilary Clinton, and disappointed when she didn’t win. When her book came out, she asked us to buy it. She wanted to read it and take it to school.

In addition, Sydney believes that having strong female role models in Larissa’s life have influenced her strong sense of self, which will inadvertently help her to combat any sexism she faces in the future. She explains,

Again, I just think that strong sense of self. Having strong female role models in her life and her family, starting with her family and teaching her she can achieve anything regardless of gender, race. I think that will help her combat any sexism she faces because she won’t let someone else’s ideas about what a woman can or cannot do hold her back, hopefully. She’ll have that strong identity and confidence.

Because they have two daughters, the Nixons feel as though the activities they have selected for them to be involved in are more female-dominated. Even in terms of housework, Sydney believes, she and Carl and pushed Larissa and her sister to take on more stereotypically traditional gender roles. She shares,

I think most of their activities are more female-dominated. They dance, they do Girls on the Run, and they were involved in music. I think most of their activities are more not really co-ed, and yeah. Around the house, of course, all children should be helping out around the house, but I think we’ve pushed towards pitching in and helping with cleaning the kitchen, et cetera, more than most of my peers who have sons, so I’d say they’re kind of modeling some of my behavior in terms of their interest in cooking, and their interest in the arts, per se.

Sydney would also like to see more Black females engaged in STEM fields and politics in the future. Moreover, she recognizes the importance of resilience in preparing Black females
for life success. She also believes that Black women need to possess people skills in order to be able to communicate and share their ideas in a collaborative setting. She explains the importance of these qualities,

Well, I think it’s important to be resilient. Life throws you may curve balls, and being resilient is critical for survival. What goes along with that is just also a sense of flexibility, too. Being able to change as the times change, and being able to reinvent yourself depending on what circumstances occur. I think it’s also critical to have people skills to be successful in this world. You can be the smartest person in the room, but if you don’t have interpersonal skills, you’re not going to get ahead in most careers. Just communication skills, being able to work in a team, being able to share ideas, collaborate. Those are important skills to survive in this world.

Sydney and Carl have instilled many important values in Larissa over the years. Sydney reveals, for example,

I know some of the value we’ve instilled in her are just diligence, making sure she is working hard, putting her best effort forward. Also, responsibility. Being able to be a self-driven, self-directed learner. Taking the responsibility to get her assignments in on time without needing constant micro-management from us. I think also we try to instill in her a sense of balance. We have her involved in… because it’s so important, even as adults, to have that work-life balance and not be unidimensional and focus only on work or only on academics. We try to keep her in physical activity. At one point, she was involved in arts, which was more so… I guess you could count dance as her physical activity and art. At one point, she was playing piano… And also, just a sense of working in her community and helping others. We try to do some volunteer work at times with
her. So, I would say those are some of the values we have emphasized with her. And just striving for excellence. Both my husband and I were raised by parents who they, themselves, had careers and they achieved in school, so they really emphasized the importance of education to us and pushing ourselves to be the best we can be, so we really instilled that ideal in both of our girls.

In addition, Carl also admits that he and Sydney have also instilled the fear of failure in Larissa over the years. She shares,

Only thing I would like to add is the fear of failure or not doing well. We try to combat that. Sometimes, children, when they try something new, are intimidated and there is a fear of failure, so one of the things we try to push them to, I would say, try something challenging without fearing they would fall on their face or do bad, you know.

It is apparent that the many values Sydney and Carl have instilled in Larissa over the years have truly been internalized by her. When describing the important values her parents have instilled in her, she shares,

Well, they teach me respect and kindness, honesty, things like that…I know that all of these values are important because showing someone kindness, then you’ll get their kindness in return. That’s the same for respect. If you’re honest, then if you tell a small lie—like if you keep lying—I guess it will grow into something worse once you get older. So, it’s good to get these values from a young age because then you’ll have them for a long time.

In addition, Larissa adds, her father has provided her with messages that help her to ignore any racism and racial discrimination she faces:
My dad used to tell me that… he said sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me. He said that when I was little, but it wasn’t necessarily about racism, but I guess you can kind of use that with racism even if it wasn’t about that at the time… If someone said something racist to me, I would not let it bother me. If someone said like KKK or was talking about something that could be offensive to me, usually it doesn’t bother me. I don’t want to let it bother me, because then thinking about that person isn’t worth it.

Larissa believes that her father really values her education because he always wants her to study and read. In addition, she admits, her parents have used several learning programs, such as IXL and Kumon Learning Center after school to help provide her and her sister with lessons about various topics so that they can be better in them. In return, Larissa finds these messages about education that her parents have passed down to her very important. She shares,

I believe education is very important when it comes to finding a career. I guess you can build a life out of education. It’s more to building life in that, but that is one component that I think is important.

Additionally, Larissa believes these messages have prepared her for the classes she takes in school. She contends,

I always think about when I don’t want to do my homework, or I don’t feel like studying for a test. I think, ‘How could studying for this test, how could doing my homework, help me, and how would it not help me?’ I know that it’s a lot better to actually do the work than procrastinate and not do it at all.
Moreover, her academic performance has also been significantly influenced by her parents’ messages about education. In fact, Larissa currently has all A’s in her classes and rarely gets into trouble at school.

When explaining the racial and ethnic makeup of her advanced math and English class, Larissa shares,

I would say it’s pretty mixed. I always feel like I’m one of the few Black people in my class, mostly in math. It’s mostly a mix between Asians and White. I don’t think there are any Latino people… It felt like half the class was White and half of it was Asian. By Asian, it’s like a combo of like Indian and… So really, it’s just anyone from Asia…I think I was literally the only Black student in that class.

However, not only does Larissa find herself being the only or one of the only Black students in her advanced classes, she is also one of the only Black students in her regular education classes at Marymount Park Middle School. Her peers—regardless of race—are still sometimes in awe of her grades, Larissa admits. Hence, she believes that her peers perceive her as “pretty good” at doing her schoolwork.

Larissa’s closest friends at school hail from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, including White, Indian, and Black. They all have common interests, she shares, and compatible personalities. These friends, Larissa notes, interact with people of diverse backgrounds and do not act as if they don’t like someone because of their skin color. All of Larissa’s closest friends, she shares, are enrolled in the same advanced classes she takes, and two of them are also in the same core classes as Larissa.

While Larissa does not believe that it is important to have same-race peers. She explains,
I think it’s important to be close to anyone like friends or family…I feel like race doesn’t have to… I don’t feel like your friends have to be Black. I mean, if that’s important to you, if that’s important to anyone, then they can do that, but I just don’t feel like race should be a deciding factor.

While Larissa does not share any particularly close relationships with either her teachers because she feels she should share personal issues only with a school counselor or her parents, she does believe her teachers would acknowledge that she is a good student and, in many cases, might declare that she is one of the best students. In fact, one of her White male teachers once told her that she was one of his best students. Teachers are often proud of Larissa’s work ethic and exceptional test scores. She recalls one incident where one of her male teachers was proud of her superior Language Arts End-of-Grade (EOG) test score, which also caused her to be proud of herself:

This was Language Arts [class]. [My teacher] saw my EOG scores for this year and he gave back my paper with my EOG scores… He said that I did a good job… I felt very proud of myself. I was proud that my scores had improved and I was proud because this was one of the… Since it was the Language Arts EOG where it’s all articles and you have to annotate, I was proud because I normally don’t like annotating, but I decided to annotate for every article.

Ultimately, however, Larissa does not believe that teachers try to build or strengthen the relationships they share with students through student-teacher interactions in class by trying to get to know each student on a personal level.

Marymount Park has a diverse group of counselors on staff that include two White female counselors, one Black female counselor, one Black male counselor, and one White male
counselor. While she does not feel as though she has a special relationship with her current counselor because she does not really feel the need to visit her to discuss any academic or personal matters, she does feel that her counselor works hard to get along with all of her assigned students. Larissa shares,

With my counselor, I feel like she tries to get along with everyone, but since I don’t really need to visit her for anything, so I guess I don’t really have a special relationship with her, but it’s a good relationship anyway.

In addition, Larissa believes that because of the nature of a school counselor’s job, they should remain free of racial bias or prejudice and always encourage and hold high expectations for students, regardless of their race, gender, special needs, or talents. She believes that all of the school counselors at Marymount Park Middle School uphold these expectations.

Larissa admits that she has no personal relationships with the school administrators at her school. However, she shares, the administrators at her school do say hello to every student they see in the hall. In fact, one of Larissa’s administrators knows her by name because her daughter is in Larissa’s dance class.

Larissa finds the curriculum at her school to be relatively relevant, especially the curriculum in science and math, because of the career field she plans to pursue. While she does not find English Language Arts or social studies to be as critical, she does admit that social studies can be important because it allows students to learn about people and learn from history. However, Larissa does admit that the curriculum, often, does not include the narratives of Blacks. In fact, the discourse around Blacks never centered on positive experiences or contributions of Blacks,
They really don’t [focus on other aspects of African American history outside of the realm slavery]. The only time we’ve really talked about Africans other than slavery was in sixth-grade when we talked about ancient Egypt. In seventh-grade, the only time we really mentioned Blacks was when it was about slavery or segregation.

In Larissa’s English Language Arts class, in particular, the teacher attempts to integrate articles that are about various topics, some of them multicultural in nature. Her English Language Arts teacher has also attempted to introduce the class to historical fiction this year, with some books centered on African American history, and other books, such as Between Shades of Gray, being about the Baltic States and Stalin.

Larissa finds her course work most challenging in her advanced classes more than she does her regular education core courses such as science and social studies. She shares,

Well, sometimes it can be challenging. I would say that for the people who study and pay attention, it’s not hard. For the people who find it interesting, it would be easy. But for the people who don’t really work hard on it, it’s hard. I don’t really have any tests—. I don’t recall any tests where everyone thought it was easy, whether they studied or not. Actually, in science, that does happen and social studies it does, too. It’s happened before. We had a test that was only based on memorization.

Further, Larissa shares that she finds some classes boring and becomes academically disengaged when they are not learning about topics that she finds interesting.

At times, the topics presented in class about oppression or oppressed people often make Larissa feel uncomfortable being singled out by her peers as she is usually the only Black student in her classroom. She recalls, for example,
One time, we had an assembly where these Holocaust…these people were coming and kind of acting out stories from that actual stories of Holocaust, children that were in the Holocaust had written down. One part they were talking about oppressed people and they said, ‘Or African Americans,’ and I felt like everyone was looking in my direction…I think it was just because of my race, obviously, but I didn’t really feel offended. But at the same time, it felt kind of, I guess I felt bothered…

Larissa, who was involved in Minecraft Club in sixth-grade and was recently inducted into the National Junior Honor Society (NJHS) believes that it is very important to be involved in school activities offered at school. She explains,

I would say yes, because it’s important to learn more about the topic you’re interested in, and joining a club could help you learn more. It’s also good to have peers with similar interests, because then you have something to talk about. You can make more friends.

In addition, Larissa believes that school activities can help students to feel more connected to their school environment. She also believes that schools really want students to build relationships and this can be done by students joining more school clubs, which is why schools offer so many clubs for students to participate in. Larissa, herself, has met several new peers through her involvement in school activities, thus, enhancing her social experiences at Marymount Park Middle School. She shares,

I have met a lot more people through clubs. With NJHS, I see a lot of people that I know from my team. You don’t really get to chat with those people, because when you have the meetings, they’re just talking about the new information.

Further, Larissa believes that school activities can also enhance students’ academic experiences, although she admits her involvement in Minecraft Club in sixth-grade did not really
do that. However, she does believe that students who are involved in clubs such as Science Olympiad or a math-related club will find that their academic experiences are enhanced. Moreover, Larissa believes that school activities can also increase students’ motivation to achieve. More specifically, Larissa’s involvement in the National Junior Honor Society has increased her desire to achieve academically because she is expected to maintain a certain GPA to continue her membership. She shares,

I figured since with the members of the National Junior Honor Society are expected to do well, I guess that encourages me to continue doing well in eighth-grade.

Because of the Nixon family’s busy schedule during the week and weekends, it was nearly two months before Larissa and I were able to meet again so that she could present her artistic reflection to me. When we finally met, Larissa presented me with a sketch (see Figure 8) that she drew that embodied her experience being a gifted Black girl at a predominantly White school. When sharing with me how she came up with the idea for the sketch, she states,

So, basically, this is kind of how anytime someone mentions something that has to do with Black oppression, then everyone would look at me. I mean, it’s kind of funny, actually. Sometimes, it made me feel kind of awkward… I guess the [girl in the picture] just symbolizes people. It feels like people just see me as a Black person and I guess I feel like I’m more than that… I guess anyone who’s not Black; it’s not really teachers, it’s just mainly students… I guess there are, sometimes, racial stereotypes… Sometimes [my peers] say stuff like, ‘All Black people like chicken,’ or ‘All Black people like watermelon. You don’t like watermelon?’ And I’m like, ‘That’s not actually true.’ I mean, it’s not big stuff it’s just stuff like that… The blah, blah, blah is, I guess, just the other stuff that the teacher’s talking about and then these are the words [KKK and
slavery] where people would look in my direction, so if they mention anything that has to
deal with oppression, then they’d look in my direction, is basically what it is.

Finally, when asked how the sketch embodied her experience as a gifted Black female
who attends a predominantly White school, Larissa explains,

Well, I guess sometimes, I feel like I’m only known as the Black person. I don’t know…I
think it’s just me. But like I mean, I’m not really thought of as something else. I kind of
want it, for the world to be a place where we’re not just focusing on the color of our skin,
but our character. And I mean, that’s just how I feel like. I guess I feel like I’m only
known as just a Black person.

Figure 8. Larissa’s Sketch
Narrative 10: McKenzie Bond

“I don’t have a choice to fail. I feel like [my motivation to achieve academically] has impacted my choices by me being determined, perseverate, and brave when it comes to what I do educationally. So, I feel like the sky’s the limit. There’s not limit for me and I could achieve anything if I really try.”

McKenzie Bond was sitting in a private study room at the local public library with her mother, Tamara Brockington, when I first arrived. A pretty girl with a cocoa brown complexion and long eyelashes that framed her almond-shaped eyes, McKenzie sat quietly at the rectangular wooden table in the small room wearing a green wind coat. Her mother, Tamara Brockington, sitting to McKenzie’s right, wore an anxious smile as she played with her cell phone, briefly looking up at McKenzie and I occasionally as we began to make small talk.

I learned that McKenzie is the middle child of two siblings—a twenty-three-year-old sister, Nicole, who had recently gotten engaged and moved out of the house, and a younger brother, Jacoby, who plays Varsity football at McKenzie’s old stomping ground, East Maylock Middle School. Her father lives in Florida and her step-father lives in a town just outside of the city. Her mother, Tamara, is a divorcée who works in patient services at a local medical clinic.

McKenzie, a sixteen-year-old junior at Maylock High School, currently has a B- average in school as a result of her underperformance during her freshman year and part of her sophomore year. She expresses her intentions to bring her grades up this school year. For the past couple of years, McKenzie has worked a job after school and on the weekends at a local fast food chain, however, her mother recently made her take a hiatus from working after school until she pulled her grades back up. McKenzie recently chose to enroll in the International
Baccalaureate (IB) program at her school, an academically rigorous internationally recognized two-year program aimed at juniors and seniors with core requirements in each subject that include a battery of assessments that must be passed before an IB Diploma can be granted to students. In addition to being enrolled in IB classes, such as IB Theory of Knowledge, IB Biology SL, and IB History of the Americas HL, McKenzie has also taken AP Human Geography and advanced math classes during her tenure at Maylock High School.

While Maylock High School and her former middle school, East Maylock Middle School, both have a predominantly White student demographic, her elementary school was majority Black and Hispanic with a small number of White students who were mostly lower-class.

When describing herself using three adjectives, McKenzie chooses determined balanced and passionate. She explains,

I’d use determined, because given the things I have to go through, I’m determined to get what I have to do done so I can get to the next level. I’d say very balanced because, again, with the things I have to do, I have to have time for specific things and still be able to have a good well-being. Lastly, I’d say I’m passionate because I love doing the things that I do and it makes me who I am.

McKenzie dreams of one day becoming either a psychologist or therapist to both children and adults because she likes how the brain works. Her mother Tamara’s main dream is for her daughter to succeed in whatever she decides to do in life.

McKenzie has a special knack for music and continues to play in the orchestra at her school. It is at McKenzie’s band concerts that Tamara really becomes amazed at her daughter’s
natural musical talent. She beams with pride when talking about McKenzie’s involvement in the orchestra, sharing,

I always got teary when they had their [band] concerts at school. Being like, you know…not a lot of Black kids wanna participate in orchestra, you know. That’s not our thing. So when I saw her play in the orchestra, or the violin, I always got a little teary because it just made me so proud. And she did so well doin’ it, you know?

In addition to having exceptional gifts in the music arena, Tamara recalls McKenzie being around ten years old when she first realized that her daughter was somewhat different. She notes, “She was a little…a little quicker on or in grabbing things than other children.” Even McKenzie acknowledges the differences she saw in herself in relation to her peers when she was younger:

I was always quick. I was quicker with the schoolwork than the other kids were, and sometimes it took my teachers a step back because they were like, ‘Why are you faster than everybody else?’ They just wanted me to chill out and be on the same pace and level as everyone else. In middle school, I had a lot of Honor classes and I played in the orchestra there. I did basketball and softball in middle school. For orchestra in middle school, I started off sixth grade as beginning violin. Again, I progressed really quickly, so I got moved up to advanced. In seventh grade, I got moved up to advanced. Also, in seventh-grade, I started playing the cello and the violin at the same time, so I’d have a beginning cello class and then an advanced violin class. Once I got to high school, I just switched to cello instead of violin.

While McKenzie was never formally identified for the gifted program at her predominantly Black and Hispanic elementary school, her teachers placed her in accelerated
learning classes where she received points for reading and math and referred her to take advanced math and English courses in middle school because of her exceptional End-of-Grade (EOG) test scores. In an effort to help shape and mold her daughter’s giftedness, Tamara tries to constantly instill the value of education in her daughter, hoping that would motivate young McKenzie, who, she admits, slacked off in school last year. She shares,

> Just motivate her to do her best. Like…freshman and sophomore year, she was a slacker. Well, freshman year, she did pretty good. But last year, she completely fell off the grid. But I told her, her only way out was gonna be school and you gotta get these grades up if you wanna go somewhere and make something of yourself in the future. Not gonna do it being a slacker.

While McKenzie shares that she has not been mistreated because of her giftedness, she does acknowledge that she has been taken advantage of at school because of her giftedness. She states,

> No, I haven’t been mistreated because of [my giftedness]. I feel like I’ve been taken more advantage of because of my giftedness when it comes to school. But when I say ‘taken advantage of’, I mean, they’d either… ‘Can I have your notes? Can I see your homework? Blah, blah,’ type of thing. They only want to connect with me on an academic level rather than a level outside of school.

For McKenzie, her Black identity is a vital part of who she is. While she has not always felt good about her Blackness—as a result of the negative stereotypes she has heard people say about Black people and seen depicted via the media—McKenzie now shares her belief that Black is “royalty taken from its roots.” Discussing the transition in her racial identity development, she explains,
I feel like being Black means always being left out, really. It means always being looked down on, being underestimated, being stereotyped. It always means being inferior sometimes. Until you break out of those stereotypes and classes that people put you in, you’re not going to see yourself outside of what they have established for you to be. I feel like once I really educated myself on what Black was, rather than what people told me it was, it was a completely different thing. For my African Lit class, we just started reading a book called *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates, and it’s basically about his perspective on what Black was and his fear. He felt that Black was beautiful, and that our struggle isn’t unique in that we’re very…we’re royalty, basically. We’re just royalty taken away from its roots. That kind of reflected…once I read that. I feel like that’s how I feel Black is. Royalty taken from their roots.

In addition, McKenzie shares the reason why her Blackness is a crucial part of her identity:

It's my identity. It’s one of the first things people see about me. Sometimes, I like the fact that they underestimate me when they first see, so I can get a chance to be like, ‘Oh.’ Basically, what it is to me is just something…it’s a blessing, honestly, because not everybody can be Black. Not everybody can go through struggles, because struggles end up making you a way better person, a way more independent person, and they just help you. Even though they suck in the moment, they help you throughout life.

When explaining what her experience being Black at a predominantly White school has been like, McKenzie uses the word uncomfortable. She enlightens,

I’d say uncomfortable because…I have an example for this. I’m in the IB program. In the IB program, it’s majority females and it’s majority White females. In that program, I’m singled out because of race. I have this Biology class and I sit at this table with six kids,
and I am one Black girl out of that whole table with six kids. In the whole class, there’s 25 people. There’s three or four Black kids, or people of some type of diversity in that whole class… The only reason I’ve really noticed it in that class is because their conversation and their dialogue at the table, what they’re talking about… I try to jump in and socialize with them, but it’s like we can’t really relate. It gets awkward. They talk about things that are completely different than what me, or people in the same situation, would talk about. I feel like if it were more Black kids at the table, they wouldn’t talk about Trump or anything like that. They’d have conversations about Trump or their views on politics, and it’s just really awkward.

Underestimated is the word McKenzie uses to describe her experience as a Black female at predominantly White school, stating,

I’d say underestimated, because I feel like there’s a stereotype when it comes to Black girls, that they’re very…to use a derogatory word, ratchet or ghetto, or things like that. I feel like they underestimate where I am when it comes to knowledge. Intellectually, I feel like they just don’t think I’m at the same level as they are…. [White students, Asian, and male students] I feel like it’s everybody because everyone has an opinion or a stereotype that they want to put on someone. I feel like I fall under the stereotype because I have been…people assume that I’m not smart, or I’m not intelligent when I first start talking or when I’m just talking about normal stuff that I talk about with friends. They think I’m stupid, but when it gets to the work…when it gets to putting work in and doing those hours, when it comes to studying, it’s a completely different thing. They’re asking me for the answers. It’s kind of nice when that happens.
On the hand, her experience being a gifted Black female at predominantly White school has been much more gratifying for McKenzie, who chooses the word humbling to describe her experience. She shares,

It’s humbling because just to have the opportunity to show people wrong about who you are and what you can be and what your capabilities are is…it’s refreshing, because there’s been centuries of Black people being beat down and made to look stupid and a fool. After the whole race thing, there’s gender. Not only am I Black, but I’m a Black female. I have a whole ‘nother barrier that I have to break through in order to get some type of acknowledgement from other people. I feel like it’s humbling being able to actually get that for once.

While McKenzie doesn’t recall experiencing any overt racism at school, she does admit that she has experienced covert racism in the form of racial microaggressions, mostly by her White peers. In one incident, she shares, some students would suggest that Black girls don’t play instruments like the violin:

I haven’t really experienced anything that’s flat-out racist, because I would have picked up on it and I would’ve replied. But I have had really low-key racist things happen to me where it was…things that would happen in class, like the whole Biology [class] thing, or other times in orchestra. Again, it’s really…they look at you weird when you’re a Black girl playing an instrument from the 1800s. it was like, a place thing because I felt like I had to work harder in orchestra so I could get a certain chair. I wanted first chair, of course, so I had to work harder. They would single me out. They would be like, ‘Oh, you’re a Black girl. Black people don’t really play classical instruments.’ That was mainly in middle school, elementary school area. In elementary school, I just started
learning how to play and became really passionate about it. They would just tell you, ‘It’s not really for you.’ ...kind of thing.

In another incident, her White peers made her feel as if she didn’t belong, causing McKenzie to feel isolated among her peers, especially since she was one of the only Black students in most of her classes. She recalls,

The major time that I can think about is this year in Biology with those girls that sit at my table because it’s so obvious. Painfully obvious. The second you walk in there, you think you’re in a class full of White people. There’s four Black kids, three of them girls, in that whole class. I’m sitting at this table with them. I try not to...the first thing I try to go to isn’t the race, like, ‘Oh, there’s a bunch of White people here; I’m the only Black girl.’ I try to involve myself with them, talk to them, try to relate to them. It’s difficult, but I still try. I feel like they ignore me on purpose. There’s this one girl. She’s really smart. She took her SAT already… I literally sit next to her and I’ll her name, ask her for help. She’ll act like she didn’t hear me or she’ll act like I’m not there. They’ll look at me. Her other friends will look at me and it’s really… I don’t even know how to describe it. It’s awkward, off-putting. I just want to hush, do my work, and get out...

McKenzie feels as though her White peers’ treatment towards her definitely had to do with her race. She shares,

Yes, because, again, I was the only Black girl in the class. I’m easy to find. They picked their groups before I got a chance to pick my groups. It’s just...they really…I didn’t belong with them. I feel like they thought it was a thing that was already preconceived and understood.
While McKenzie’s experiences with racism at school did not significantly affect her mentally, emotionally, socially, or academically, they did cause her to become painfully aware that racism does exists. She admits,

It’s just made me more aware of what is going on, not outside of school, but politically, in general. It’s just made me more aware. I’m not afraid of it. I’m not hurt. It’s just…I’m like, ‘Oh, so this is real.’

McKenzie has experienced being mistreated because of her gender. Some of the mistreatment, she shares, stems from the disrespect boys show toward her and her female peers. She states, “…The boys, basically, because I’m a girl. They try to be all in your face, slap your butt when you’re trying to go to class, everything. It was always stuff like that.” On the other hand, as a female athlete who played basketball in middle school, McKenzie’s eyes were opened to the sexism that exists in women’s sports. She recalls,

When I played sports—I played basketball in middle school. It’s a thing I’ve always seen when it comes to female versus male sports. Males get more applause than the females ever did. In middle school, I was on a basketball team with six, seven girls. You need six people to play, so we didn’t have a lot of people at all. We would be made fun of because we never really won games. The whole team was basically Black. We never really won games. No one would really show up to our games. They’d only show up to our games because we played first and the boys played right after us. It’s kind of disheartening, and it’s discouraging sometimes when people literally show up to make fun of you and watch you fail. That was the whole experience with the gender thing in middle school in sports.

Tamara’s socialization messages to McKenzie have largely centered on valuing the importance of family, preparing her for racial bias, communicating the importance of education,
and instilling independence. Although Tamara admits that she and McKenzie have not really had many conversations around racism and racial discrimination, she does explain to her that “people are ignorant” in an effort to prepare her for the racism and discrimination that she is likely to face at school and in society as a Black female. In fact, she recalls a time when McKenzie experienced racism in school when her White math teacher made disparaging comments directed toward her daughter:

I think [McKenzie] did mention something about [experiencing racism]. That math teacher. Where he made some certain, you know, some specific comments, not really directed towards her, but she may have felt some kind of way about what was said in the classroom… People are ignorant… She told me how she felt about it. We just kind of left it there. You know. I just told her it wasn’t right what he said, but… Yeah, we had a brief conversation about it.

Family is also important to Tamar, who hails from New Jersey. She shares,

More so like the holidays, birthdays, we all get together and try to go to New Jersey, visit family, and just hang out. During the summer, our families get together and we go on like a summer vacation, whether it’s the beach, or museum, or whatever. Like this year, we had gone to visit the African American Museum in D.C., and that was amazing so, we had a really good time.

It is also important to Tamara that McKenzie strive to do her best in school in an effort to prove herself and experience success in life. She maintains,

Education is key… It’s the way out. It’s the way to a better life. You wanna succeed, you gotta start with school. Grades gotta be up to par if you wanna do anything… You gotta
do good in school. No matter what it is, you have to do good in school. You have to prove yourself in school... You gotta get the grades, you have to study.

Tamara believes that the messages she has promoted in the household about the importance of education have helped prepare her daughter for the classes she is currently taking. For example, she notes, “I think they’ve done their job. But Kenzie wants it, so she’s goin’ for it, she’s goin’ after it. If she wants something, she’s gonna do what she gotta do to get it.”

As a Black female, it is imperative, Tamara believe, that McKenzie be independent. In fact, Tamara refuses to socialize her daughters any differently than she socializes her teenage son in terms of their responsibilities in the household. She admits,

No, everybody cook, clean, all of that [sic]... Everybody do they own laundry.

Everybody’s responsible for self... I mean, I know it’s different with boys and girls, but... the general message is all the same. You gotta take care of yourself, you know, in the event that there’s nobody else there to take care of you. You gotta know how to do your laundry, you gotta know how to cook just in case you don’t get married or, you know, whatever. But you get a job, you gotta pay bills. You have responsibilities other than spending your money frivolously...on things that you think you need. But you gotta pay for clothes and pay bills. There’s more to life than fun.

She chuckles as she talks about McKenzie’s transition to becoming more independent as she works her after school and weekend job: “Kenzie has a little job. You know, when they get they little jobs [sic] they buy they own school clothes [sic], they pay they own cell phone bills...” In fact, Tamara expresses her belief that the most important quality for a female to possess in order to successful in life is independence. She explains,
Independence… Why? Because, I just said, you can’t depend on a lot of people. You have to be…able to depend on yourself to do the things that you want or you need in your life. And like Kenzie said, it’s good to have people to depend on, but in the event that you don’t, you can always be strong enough to do what you have to do on your own.

Tamara is also aware of the discrimination that McKenzie has experienced when she played middle school basketball as a result of her gender. She shares,

Maybe like on the basketball team, where parents would come and kind of sit through the girls’ game, but then they’re more so there for the boys’ game. And, maybe just the girls team not getting as much play or as much…publicity, I guess, if you would say, the boys did. But other than that, I haven’t noticed any.

McKenzie has internalized many of the racial, gender, and academic socialization messages that she has received from her mother over the years. One of the key messages that she feels her mother has instilled in her is about education being the key to life success. In fact, as a result of her mother’s messages about education, McKenzie believes that in order to have a successful career and healthy lifestyle, obtaining an education is a necessity. She says,

If I want to get anywhere, school is where it’s at, basically. School is the major thing. If you want to get out of the house, that’s what you do. It’s just…school is very important for your career, not only as a person by yourself or your own personal knowledge and things like that, but for your well-being throughout life in the future, rather than just in the present.

McKenzie acknowledges that the level of rigor her advanced classes sometimes present a challenge with balancing her course-load.
Sometimes I have a challenge with the course-load and I have a challenge with balancing. Because there’s so many classes and each class, they don’t cater to any other class and what any other class has going on. So, I feel like, all the work and then having to balance them out on certain days is really hard.

These challenges have been impacted by McKenzie’s motivation to achieve academically as well as the socialization messages she has internalized around working harder and never giving up, as failure is not an option:

Those messages have prepared me in the sense of don’t give up, basically. You have an end goal and these are the heavy steps…you know the stepping mills at the gym? Those are the steps to get to my goal, basically. You have to make it up there… I don’t have a choice to fail. So, I feel like they’ve impacted my choices by me being determined, perseverate and brave when it comes to what I do educationally. So, I feel like, the sky’s the limit. There’s no limit for me and that I could achieve anything if I really try.

In fact, McKenzie’s drive to succeed influenced her decision to enroll in her school’s IB program toward the end of her sophomore year in an attempt to prove to those who held preconceived notions about her abilities that she was capable of being academically successful:

Honestly, I didn’t want to do [the IB program] at first because I’ve heard from people that it was really hard and it was a lot of work, and I just didn’t want to deal with all that. Basically, I chose it…I went through a lot of stuff last year, so I chose it to prove something, not only to myself, but to everybody else. I felt like people thought I wasn’t going to make it. They thought I was stupid. I knew I was not stupid, so I chose it to prove them all wrong.
Hence, the many academic socialization messages that Tamara has communicated to McKenzie that center on the importance of education and failure not being an option have really resonated with McKenzie, who admits that her academic performance has been influenced by her fear of failure. She shares,

They’ve influenced [my academic performance] because failure is not an answer. If failure is not an answer, A is. An A or B or C, at least, is always the answer. My fear, more so, of failure really impacts my grades because, again, I want to get to that goal so I’m trying to do what I have to do to get to that goal. My grades are going to be exceptional for that goal.

In order to deal with racism and racial discrimination, ore prepare herself for the racial bias she is likely to encounter in life, McKenzie draws on her mother’s three words: “People are ignorant.” She explains, “For someone to single you out for differences that you cannot control and that don’t affect them, it just proves what type of person they are.” She admits that she refuses to let other people’s views of her affect her.

McKenzie’s belief that women have to work hard in life as a result of their gender, did not directly stem from the socialization messages she received from her parents, but rather what she has observed indirectly. She shares,

It’s not even that my parents have instilled it in me, it’s just that it is universally known being a woman is hard. I feel like not only that personal knowledge I’ve grown over the years of growing up, but…with my parents, they’ve just…they didn’t really have to tell me. It’s more of I observed that it’s hard being a mother. It’s hard being a single mother. It’s hard being a woman, being paid less for the same job, being seen as less when you’re doing the same thing. It’s instilled in me that we are stronger and we always make it.
This resilient nature that McKenzie believes women possess has allowed her to value her mother’s messages around independence even more. She admits that these messages have significantly aided in her growth. For instance, she explains,

[Integration of quote]

Finally, McKenzie’s mother has instilled in her the importance of family. For holidays, such as Christmas, and Spring Break, for instance, McKenzie and her siblings travel with their mother to New Jersey to spend time with family.

A self-professed “talkative goof”, McKenzie believes that many of her peers perceive her as an articulate girl when it comes to doing her schoolwork who likes to “think outside the box” and view topics from various perspectives. The peers in her advanced classes, she shares, are mostly privileged White females. She explains,

[Integration of quote]

While McKenzie’s middle school “trio” that consisted of her two best friends was dismantled as soon as they made the transition to high school and one of her best friends went to
Brighton High School, another school in the city, while her other best friend met a new group of friends at Maylock High, she has still been successful at retaining some friendships with peers from her neighborhood. These peers, McKenzie explains, have attended school with her since elementary school and, thus, were able to easily single one another out to form close friendships. However, McKenzie notes, they aren’t quite as close as she and her two former best friends from middle school were. She shares,

Majorly [sic], we grew up together, really. We all went to the same elementary school, middle school, high school. We grew up together. We all watched each other develop. That’s how we became really close, and that’s how we singled each other out in high school, because there’s a group of us from young… And then there’s everybody else. We really held onto each other.

Unfortunately, since early childhood, not only has McKenzie been a victim of the racism perpetuated by many of her White peers, she has also experienced intraracism. She recalls the mistreatment she experienced from her same-race peers,

Honestly, growing up, it was mainly, ‘You talk like a White girl and you listen to White people music.’ When I was younger, I used to listen to EDM and Dubstep and stuff. They’d be like, ‘It’s not even music. That’s that weird stuff White people listen to. You should listen to rap music and stuff like that. You shouldn’t listen to Taylor Swift.’ I was like, ‘What even is Black people music? Music is music, in general.’ Plus, that stemmed from me being so musically involved. I didn’t see a divide when it came to music. That was one major thing I used to be made fun of… then how I speak and what words I use was made fun of. They’d be like, ‘Why are you busting out the big words?’ I’m like,
‘You should have the same vocabulary, too,’ kind of thing. That’s how it really felt for me.

McKenzie believes her same-race peers treatment toward her has something to do with their perception of her as an overachiever who places a significant amount of energy in her motivation to strive for academic excellence. She contends,

They judge me because they think I’m an overachiever, I’m trying too hard, I’m doing too much, I’m trying to prove somebody wrong…which is what I’m trying to do. I feel like…what I’m trying to say is…since I’m in IB and they’re in normal classes, they’re like, ‘Oh, she’s a smart girl. Blah, blah, blah. She acts like a White girl. She talks like a White girl.’ It’s even been to the point where... ‘She listens to White people music.’ It’s that divide; that educational divide, where since they don’t have the same education—as rigorous as I do—they feel like it’s something to make fun of or it’s something to downplay… I feel like they think I should stay in my place, type thing. I feel like it’s something they don’t even realize they’re doing, but they’re doing it. They’re like, ‘Stay in your place. You’re Black. It’s going to be harder for you to succeed, in general. Why succeed and be better than them anyway?’ I feel like, again, that stigma that’s been instilled in us since we were babies, since we were kids, that we’re not good enough and that we will never be good enough. I feel like that just shouldn’t exist.

However, McKenzie does believe it is important to establish relationships with her same-race peers. She states,

I feel like it’s important because I feel like I want somebody I can really relate to and be like, ‘Oh, this crazy thing happened.’ They’d be like, ‘Yeah, this happened to me, too.’
We could just talk about it. I feel like if you have that connection in friendships, it’ll have a good outlet for you to talk.

McKenzie has a great relationship with her school counselor who has counseled her through several social and emotional issues that might have presented barriers to her academic success, including anxiety issues that once left her hospitalized. She shares,

I actually have a really good connection with my school counselor because I’ve had a lot of anxiety problems, so I’ve had to go in and talk to her, on multiple occasions. So, I feel really… She’s another good person I could talk to… I was hospitalized at one point, so I would talk to her and interact with her about that on, like a weekly basis. She was just always someone I could really connect with and have good conversations with… She always treated me with respect and she always heard me out and listened to me. And she was very, she was really easy to talk to… After that, it was really refreshing and it was really calming to having someone that is school-affiliated and you could still talk to them and feel comfortable.

In addition, McKenzie believes that her school administrators, who are majority Black, reserve a special place in their hearts for the African-American students who attend Maylock High, holding high expectations for them, especially:

A lot of our administrators are Black, so I feel like we all have a really ‘Do better’ type, they have expectations for us [Black students]. When it comes to the race, prove them wrong and do better type thing. So, we all have really good connections with them… I feel like some of [our administrators] hold [expectations] a little higher for some students. I feel like some may see them lower because of the light that the students would sometimes portray themselves at. As they show that they have potential, they try to show
that they have no potential and that they’re just not good students. And I feel like, they treat them lower and they don’t show them more opportunity. And they just try to blow them away, type thing. But for some students that show their potential when it comes to their race—and showing their potential outside of their race—I feel like [our administrators] really try and be there for you and just making it easier for you.

Four teachers at McKenzie’s school have helped her to feel more welcome in her school environment because they have supported her academically and emotionally. The in-school detention teacher at Maylock High, McKenzie says, holds great conversations with McKenzie, listening to her whenever she has issues with her grades or wants to discuss her life outside of school. Similarly, another teacher that McKenzie refers to as her “mom at school”, has been influential in providing McKenzie with wisdom and good perspective about situations. McKenzie found her to be most supportive after she got into a physical altercation with another peer at school with whom she had a problem. McKenzie also has found her African American English teacher to be academically supportive, even sharing McKenzie’s work with the class and making her feel proud of her accomplishments. Finally, McKenzie’s relationship with her IB coordinator, Mr. Barry, is an exceptionally close one. Mr. Barry, McKenzie shares, has been extremely helpful in helping her to manage her IB course load and persevere when the work becomes challenging. She states,

I feel like I have a really good relationship with my IB coordinator, Mr. Barry, because he’s very… He loves to talk about what’s going on with you, about your course, if it’s good for you. Because he’s really concerned with you as a person and your school and the activities you do. And he’s just really worried about your well-being outside of the program because he knows how it can be on a person, how it can be on a student who has
a lot of things to do at once. So, I’ve talked to him. I feel comfortable talking to him about my job, my schedule, and what can work for me… He’s made me see it as manageable. That it’s okay and that I will make it. Because sometimes, people see it as really hard and that there is no real way for me to make it. They feel discouraged. And he just really motivates and makes me feel like, ‘You will get through it; you’re gonna be balanced and it’ll all be worth it in the end.’

However, McKenzie did not share a close relationship with her former math teacher, Mr. Edgerton, who left her feeling as if he devalued her academic abilities in mathematics. As one of the few Black students in the class and the only freshman, McKenzie believes Mr. Edgerton’s attitude towards her had to do with her race. His attitude toward her ultimately led to her underachievement. She recalls,

Mr. Edgerton, in that math class, because I was struggling. I made it, but I was struggling and he didn’t explain things to me. He didn’t help me. He would call me out on some…he wouldn’t say my grade, specifically, but he would call me out and be really shady about my grade. Again, this was a class with like, three Black kids. I was a freshman. I was supposed to be in Math I and I was in Math II, so that was a class with a bunch of juniors and sophomores. I feel like he looked down at me, really. He was like, ‘You’re not really showing what they think they saw in you. So, I don’t really believe in you and I’m not really going to try to help you out’ type thing. That’s what I got from him, basically… It kind of made me want to give up a little bit for his class. But I had a bare minimum that I had for myself, so I gave the bare minimum. He made me feel like, ‘I’m not going to reach his standards for grades, so it’s pointless.’
McKenzie feels as though the current political climate make it nearly impossible for teachers to continue to disclose a one-sided narrative of the dominant culture, especially in the IB courses that she is currently enrolled in. She expresses,

Now that I am in IB and now that I’m older, I feel like they have no choice but make [the curriculum] more relevant to me. And plus, with our politics and our President and things that are going on in this decade and this generation, it’s unavoidable for them to talk about things that are relevant to me. Because in history, they like to talk about Columbus and they like to talk about everything that involves him and how he’s a hero and their perspective of him. But in reality, he’s not a hero. He killed hundreds, thousands of people. Killed tribes, cultures, different types of things. And I feel that pertains to me and my culture because my culture was almost eradicated. I didn’t have my own identity; they changed our names to things that had nothing to do with our culture. So, I feel, the things that they teach now are becoming more prevalent to what we’re talking about because, again, they don’t have a choice. We’re going to find out eventually, and then we feel like we’re being lied to because we have been lied to. It’s like, every year, it’s new thing, like ‘Oh, what we taught you last year, it’s not true; so, we’re going to teach you this new version right now.’ And I kind of feel like, they’re trying to hold a mask over me. And show me what they want to show me, now what I deserve to be shown.

Between McKenzie’s IB course load and after school job, it is difficult for her to participate in many activities at her school. She shares,

Well, in high school, I really tried…I didn’t really involve myself when it came to clubs and extracurriculars like that. But I did go to the football games and I did participate in GCA, the Gay Community Alliance at our school, for a little bit. And it was really nice. I
got to see those different communities; I got to see that community at school. But, since
the only reason why I didn’t do any extracurriculars because I have a job and plus, I’m in
IB, so I couldn’t really manage it all. So that’s why I didn’t do any.

While she doesn’t participate in many school activities, however, McKenzie does find it
important to become involved in school activities offered at her school in order to meet new
friends and become accustomed the school’s culture, thus, becoming more connected to the
school environment. She argues,

I feel like it’s important because it gets you more involved in school and the school’s
culture, and also the people at your school. It gives you more friendships, it gives you
more knowledge about certain things and aspects of your high school life. Because high
school is a really big part of your life and it’s really formative for people. So. I feel like
that helps shape who you are… It can help you feel more connected ‘cause you can build
your sense of community. So, it makes you realize there’s more people out to support you
then to see you fail. It gives you more pride when it comes to your school and…not
nationalism but school-ism kind of thing.

Drawing on both her experiences in middle and high school, McKenzie notes how school
activities have enhanced both her social and academic experiences. She shares,

It enhanced my social experiences when I did softball and basketball. I just had to be
more involved with the school, I had to do more things for the school and it was more
like a team effort type of thing, and it was really…it built you as a persona and it was
really nice… For sports, they emphasized that grades come first. So, for that, it kind of
made me work even harder to get better grades and even harder to get where I wanted to
be academically. Because I always knew outside of sports, sports aren’t going to last you
forever and they’re not going to keep you okay forever. So, I wanted to have a Plan B if I ever…sports was the route I wanted to go. So, I feel like they enhance your work ethic in a big way.

When McKenzie and I met a few weeks later so that she could present me with her artistic reflection, she chose to share with me a poem she wrote entitled, “black” (see Figure 9). Explaining her motivation to create the poem, she shares:

When I came up with [my poem]… Last time we talked, I read the book, Between the World and Me. That had a really big impact on me, and my class, and African American Lit. And so that kind of helped me formulate my own opinion, and helped me get some ideas from it. Also, some of the videos we’ve watched on different perspectives of different races on Black issues. That’s how I saw race; as something as more of a category for them to…it makes it easier for them to discriminate against us. I felt I put my own fears into it also. The fear of my brother, because I have a bigger brother. He’s younger than me, but he’s bigger. I have brother, and I never really talk about it, but I do fear for when he’s older, and something happens, or just something like that. I don’t want that fear to define me. I wanted to also portray what we are. How we’re strong, how our strifes and our problems made us better, and stronger people to where we can handle all those problems that come along with being Black.

In addition, McKenzie expresses how “black” embodies her experience as a gifted Black female at a predominantly White school:

[The poem] embodies all my perspectives, really. It embodies how…and it shows my fear. It shows that I am scared, but it also shows that I know who I am, and that I know what I’m capable of, and then I know I actually have nothing to fear, which shows a
contradiction, but it’s a contradiction I can’t really control because I’m scared of police brutality. It is something very relevant in my life, and I do know who I am, and I do know what I’m capable of, and I do know it’s wrong, but still I feel like I don’t really have power when it comes to them, because I am just me. They’re them. I feel like as a community if we really build our self as a community, and stop making ourselves feel, or influencing and instilling this inferiority within ourselves. It’s one thing for them to do it to us before us to continue it, and think of it, and actually believe it’s true is another thing. I feel like once we go away, or diverge from all that preconceived inferiority of White people, or against my race, I feel that’s when our community will be stronger, and that’s when we’ll realize, ‘Hey, we can handle this. We can get through this. We have each other.’

black.
a race imposed by me by those who fear its greatness, and unseen potential.
 imposed by those who are so consumed by their fear that they allow it to influence their perception towards others. black.
something clearly feared enough to murder innocent sons and daughters in justification of their fear, and preservation of their lifestyle. black.
it’s being afraid of your own brothers’ demise, because of the irrational distress others feel in his presence. i suppose his black magic was too much for them, and threatened their sense of self-proclaimed superiority, but for me, black is not what they decide to make it be. black is not just a political category created to inflict further discrimination. black is perseverance; always getting back up regardless if we know we have it. black is strength. having the ability to make your experience build you positively and motivate you rather than allowing them to degrade you. black is beauty. from the ebony skin to this kinky hair. our experience emanates grace. we know who we are, we know what we can do.
we are unstoppable, unrelenting kings and queens.
our experience and strife does not define us.
they formulate us into the strong empowered black community that we are.

Figure 9. McKenzie’s Poem, “black”
Re-Presentation of the Shared Narratives of Ten Gifted Black Female Adolescents

Over the course of the four and-a-half months that I spent listening to the stories of the gifted Black female adolescents and their parents as I conducted this research, I came to hear their stories speak to one another. As I engaged deeply in the reflection and analysis process, I began to understand that although the majority of these participants did not grow up in the same household or city and did not personally know each other, they shared similar experiences and ideas. In fact, each of their individual stories provided me with greater insight into the context with which these girls lived out their daily lives as gifted Black females who attended predominantly White middle and high schools.

Despite the fact that I met with each of these girls in one-on-one circumstances, as I listened to them speak and analyzed their individual narratives and artistic reflections, I could not help but wonder what they would have to say to one another had they been placed in a room together. Hence, I chose to re-present the shared narrative of the influence racial identity, parental socialization, and school connectedness have on the academic experiences of gifted Black female adolescents attending predominantly White schools as a conversation between each of the gifted Black female participants in this study. According to Collins (2000), “Traditionally, U.S. Black women’s efforts to construct individual and collective voices have occurred in…safe spaces. One location involves Black women’s relationships with one another…As mothers, daughters, sisters, and friend to one another, many African American women affirm one another” (p. 102). By re-presenting this conversation, I attempt to provide each of these girls with a safe space to contribute to the collective community of African American females and allow these girls’ voices to affirm one another through a counter-storytelling approach.
During the course of this reflection and analysis, I uncovered three overarching shared themes (see Table 6): **Gifted, Black, and Female, An “Only” in a Sea of White, and Working Hard to Prove Them Wrong.** The **Gifted, Black, and Female** theme includes the subthemes **Underestimated and Stereotyped, Taken Advantage Of, and Unwelcome.** **An “Only in a Sea of White** as a theme includes the subthemes of **Invisible, Yet Detectable, Standing Out to Fit In, and Acting White.** Finally, under the **Working Hard to Prove Them Wrong** theme can be found the subthemes **Prioritizing Education and Striving for Personal Excellence.**

Table 6. Identified Shared Themes and Subthemes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gifted, Black, and Female</th>
<th>An “Only” in a Sea of White</th>
<th>Working Hard to Prove Them Wrong</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Underestimated and Stereotyped</td>
<td>Invisible, Yet Detectable</td>
<td>Prioritizing Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taken Advantage Of</td>
<td>Standing Out to Fit In</td>
<td>Striving for Personal Excellence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unwelcome</td>
<td>Acting White</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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Gifted, Black, and Female

The three most salient intersecting identities for the gifted Black girls were their race, gender, and giftedness. These identities significantly impacted how they experienced their respective predominantly White learning environments. These multiple identities exposed gifted Black girls to exclusion, mistreatment and often made them vulnerable to criticism and stereotypes about their race and gender.

**Underestimated and Stereotyped.** The majority of the gifted Black girls recalled being underestimated by their peers and educators at their schools who held strong to stereotypes
depicting Black people as intellectually inferior and violent, and Black females as loud, promiscuous, and “ratchet” or “ghetto”.

*Taken Advantage Of.* Peers who were aware of the gifted Black girls’ academic talents, strong work ethic and intrinsic motivation to succeed often sought to use these girls’ strengths to their advantage by asking them for information rather than finding it on their own. These peers were often less interested in forming true friendships, but rather only wanted to allow these girls in their social circles if it benefited them.

*Unwelcome.* Many of the gifted Black girls struggled to positive relationship with both their White teachers and White peers. Many of the gifted Black female participants reported having teachers whose attitudes toward them made them feel as if they were not welcome or did not belong in their gifted learning environment. Other girls noted how their White peers isolated themselves from them in class or ignored them. They often felt as if their Blackness was the primary cause of the mistreatment toward them.

**An “Only” in a Sea of White**

Predominantly White learning environments exposed gifted Black girls to the harsh realities of the racial and cultural hegemonic practices that were routinely implemented through various structures of their school environment, from the lack of teachers of color, Eurocentric curriculum, racial and socioeconomic disparities in tracking practices, and lack of students of color in gifted education programs, for example.

*Invisible, Yet Detectable.* Many gifted Black girls found themselves missing from representation, as Black females, in the curriculum taught at their schools. In fact, they often felt as if their unique stories were left untold. However, when topics about Black people were
covered, they often highlighted negative events, such as slavery, making the gifted Black girls feel singled out and hypervisible in their predominantly White classrooms as their peers directed their attention toward the gifted Black girls—who were often one of the only Black faces in their classrooms—and their teachers expected them to act as spokesperson for the Black community.

*Standing Out to Fit In.* Oftentimes, the gifted Black found themselves trying to fit in with a peer group that could provide them with the social and emotional support they needed as both adolescents and a member of a minority racial group in their classroom, but often struggled due to the fact that many of their White peers mistreated or excluded them and their same-race peers shunned them for being too “different”.

*Acting White.* The majority of the gifted Black girls reported being accused of acting White at some point during their K-12 schooling experience. Many of the girls recalled receiving this accusation as a result of their style of dress, the way in which they articulated themselves, their varied taste in music, and pursuit of certain extracurricular activities.

**Working Hard to Prove Them Wrong**

This theme embodies the resilient spirit the gifted Black girls adopted that allowed them to thrive in their predominantly White learning environments. This resilience seemed to be impacted by the racial, gender, and academic socialization messages parents of the gifted Black girls promoted in the household. The strong racial identities and motivation to work hard to disprove stereotypes about Blacks and Black females also served as a promotive factor.

*Prioritizing Education.* The majority of the gifted Black girls demonstrated educational resiliency and prioritized their education because it was instilled in them from an early age that
obtaining an education would position them for better social and economic opportunities in addition to optimal health outcomes.

*Striving for Personal Excellence.* In an effort to dismantle stereotypes and prejudicial views many of their teachers and peers harbored about Blacks or Black females, the gifted Black girls strived to exude their best attitude and behavior, earn the highest grades, and demonstrate a strong work ethic in school at all times.

**Summary**

In the first part of this chapter, the individual narratives of the gifted Black female adolescents were shared with the purpose of allowing each participant the opportunity to share their unique stories. The purpose of the second part of this chapter was to provide an overview of the three major themes (*Gifted, Black, and Female, An “Only” in a Sea of White*, and *Working Hard to Prove Them Wrong*) and accompanying sub-themes (*Underestimated and Stereotyped, Taken Advantage Of, and Unwelcome; Invisible, Yet Detectable, Standing Out to Fit In, Acting White; and Prioritizing Education and Striving for Personal Excellence*) that emerged from the individual and collective counter-stories of the participants. In the following chapter, a discussion of the collective themes that emerged from the findings will be thoroughly examined using a Critical Race Theory lens.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I present a discussion centered on the collective themes that emerged from the individual and shared experiences of the gifted Black girls in the study using a Critical Race Theory analysis. The counter-stories highlighted in the shared narrative expose the experiences common to the girls who participated in this study. This section is divided into four distinct sections. The first section, *Multiple Jeopardy: The Intersecting Nature of Race, Gender, and Class*, discusses the various ways in which the intersecting racial, gender, gifted, and social identities of the gifted Black girls impacted their experiencing of the predominantly White learning environments they attended daily. The second section, *White Power: Access to Knowledge Through Curriculum and Gifted Education* discusses how notions of White supremacy permeated the predominantly White school contexts the girls attended, and examines the ways in which Whiteness as property was revealed in the curriculum, the racial/ethnic composition of the classrooms, and teacher and peer attitudes. The third section, #BlackGirlMagic: Exhibiting Resilience in the Face of Adversity, discusses the many ways in which the gifted Black girls demonstrated resiliency and the key agents in fostering this resilience in the girls, as well as discusses the potential psychological and physiological consequences the gifted Black girls are risk of facing when feeling the need to continually embrace a “prove them wrong” attitude. The final section, *Fight the Power: Using Counter-Storytelling, Documentary Filmmaking to Combat Racism and Sexism in Schools*, discusses the ways in which counter-storytelling was used to give power to the voices of the gifted Black girls by both attempting to fill a gap in the literature on this marginalized student population through both literary-based (i.e., written dissertation) as well as visual-based (i.e., documentary filmmaking) form in an effort to share their stories with a larger audience and, hopefully,
encourage stakeholders to work to bring about effective change in education policies and practice.

**Multiple Jeopardy: The Intersecting Nature of Race, Gender, and Class**

Threaded throughout the narrative of each gifted Black female adolescent’s individual and collective experiences are issues of race, gender, and academic ability, exposing one of the central tenets of Critical Race Theory: *intersectionality*. The academic experiences of the gifted Black girls in the study were significantly impacted by their multiple identities for several reasons. Being Black females, especially, and, thus, having to contend with a double minority status, these girls’ stories shed light on the inequities experienced by both People of Color and females in a society where both Whiteness and maleness function as power and privilege.

Gifted Black female adolescents must contend with at least three simultaneously warring identities as they transition to the adolescent and emerging adulthood stage: their racial identity, gender identity, and gifted identity. In the school context, as they begin to define themselves through their social interactions with others and the world around them, they may find themselves “trying on” new identities on their quest for self-satisfaction and belonging. However, predominantly White school environments can present additional barriers for gifted Black females who, while engaged in the intricate process of identity formation, must also navigate a learning environment where their race sets them apart from the majority of the school’s population. For example, as adolescents, gifted Black girls are likely to want to satisfy their need to belong by gravitating toward peers whom they believe share common interests and characteristics in an effort to increase their chances of being accepted by these peers (Osterman, 2000). However, being that adolescence is also a period in which African American youth begin
to associate themselves as members of the Black race—as their racial identities become increasingly salient—they often feel more comfortable around their same-race peers (Tatum, 1997), whom they feel share similar experiences and backgrounds and are able to provide them with the social support necessary to counteract society’s negative beliefs about Blacks (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009). Unfortunately, this need to belong among their same-race peers is often unmet in predominantly White school contexts, especially when gifted Black females enter the gifted education and advanced-level classrooms where few people of color, if any, are enrolled.

Aside from their race, gender, and academic identities, social class identity may have also played a role in shaping the experiences of some of the gifted Black girls in the study. With the exception of three participants, the majority of the gifted Black girls in the study hailed from two-parent middle- and upper-middle-class households where one or both parents held at least a Bachelor’s degree, with the majority of the parents having Master’s level and Doctoral degrees and working in high-paying professions. One gifted Black girl—Jayda—divided her time between living with her two divorced parents, both of whom had previously obtained Master’s degrees and worked in the banking industry and communication sciences and disorders profession, respectively. While Amber had one parent who had not attended college and was a stay-at-home mom, she did have a father and extremely supportive grandparent—a former educator—who both held Bachelor’s degrees and worked fervently to increase her social capital by keeping her enrolled in private and high-performing public charter schools and supporting her continued involvement in activities, clubs, and organizations that had been traditionally attended by White students. As a result, many of these parents were not only able to afford to purchase homes in neighborhoods that were zoned for some of the “best” (i.e., high-performing) schools in their district, which also happened to be predominantly White, they could also afford to send
their gifted Black daughters to academically rigorous camps and enroll them in extracurricular activities designed to shape and mold their daughters’ unique gifts and talents. In addition, consistent with cultural reproduction theory (Bourdieu, 1986), most of these highly educated parents were able to transmit the social and cultural capital necessary to expose their gifted Black daughters to academic and social opportunities that were inaccessible by many of their lower-class counterparts.

However, out of the ten gifted Black girls who participated in this study, one of them—McKenzie—hailed from a lower-middle-class household and was raised primarily by her divorced, single mother who did not attend college. McKenzie could not participate in extracurricular activities at her school and, thus, become better connected to her school environment because she had to work a job at a popular fast food chain after school and on the weekends. In addition, her social class identity may have played a role in her mother’s lack of extensive racial socialization messages due to the fact that lower SES parents and less educated parents are less likely than their more affluent counterparts to engage in the two forms of racial socialization: cultural socialization and preparation for bias (Friend, Hunter, & Fletcher, 2011; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes, Rodriguez, Smith, Johnson, & Stevenson, 2006; Peck et al., 2014; Thornton et al., 1990). However, social class may have also inadvertently influenced McKenzie’s mother, who does not have a college degree and, therefore, personally understands the impact of not pursuing higher education in terms of occupational choice and income, to engage in some academic socialization by reminding her daughter that “education is key” to a better life in hopes that she take advantage of having a college degree, despite the fact that she may not have been privy to the social and cultural capital of her higher SES counterparts and,
therefore, able to expose McKenzie to as many academic-based opportunities both in and out of school.

McKenzie’s experiences attending her predominantly White middle and high schools and taking part in advanced courses were saturated with experiences of antagonism by both her White and same-race peers, which may have also been inadvertently shaped by her lower social class being that she lacked much of the social capital to identify with and gain acceptance from many of her White gifted peers but was also physically isolated from many of her same-race neighborhood peers when attending her advanced-level IB courses.

The gifted Black girls in the study had to contend with the competing, intersecting nature of their Blackness, femaleness, giftedness, and, sometimes, social class, on a daily basis, serving as a constant reminder of their unique identities in a learning environment where they were one of very few.

*Underestimated and Stereotyped by Teachers and Peers*

For centuries, Black females have not only been subjugated by the intersecting oppressions of their race, gender, and class identities, among others, they have also been victimized by White men, men of color, and White females, who have assaulted them “with a variety of negative images” in an effort to punish them for their willingness to challenge the multifaceted fabric of inequality that has been strategically positioned in society to maintain the status quo (Gilkes, 1983, p. 294). Although men of color, too, must contend with the negative and/or misleading generalizations about their racial and ethnic identities, and White females are often stereotyped about their gendered identities, Black females are dually exploited by elite groups (e.g., Whites, males) who manipulate ideas about Black womanhood through the
exploitation of existing controlling images (or creation of new ones) in an effort to exercise and maintain power (Hill Collins, 2000). In fact, because the objective of stereotypes centers on disguising or mystifying objective social relations (Carby, 1987), these “controlling images are designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life” (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 69), alluding to the bleak truth that social injustices, such as racism, are permanent fixtures in American society.

According to Patricia Hill Collins, “portraying African-American women as stereotypical mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mommas helps justify U.S. Black women’s oppression” (2000, p. 69). Upon conducting hundreds of exhaustive interviews with Black women in an effort to conduct research about Black women in America for their African American Women’s Voices Project, Charisse Jones and Kumea Shorter-Gooden learned that 97-percent of the Black women sampled admitted to being aware of the pejorative stereotypes that have circulated for centuries about Black women. Sadly, 80-percent of the women reported being personally affected by the “persistent racist and sexist assumptions”, or stereotypes (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003, cited in Harris-Perry, 2011). This struggle that Black females have with the blinkered images of themselves has been coined the problem of recognition (Harris-Perry, 2011). The dark-skinned asexual and obese Mammy, hypersexual Jezebel, offensive Sapphire, “Tragic” Mulatto”, breeding Welfare Queen, and emasculating Matriarch all paint a painful portrait of the history of negative stereotypes about Black females that have been used to justify the maltreatment of Black women, in particular, during slavery and segregation (Ashley, 2014; Harris-Perry, 2011; West, 2012; West, 1995). Moreover, for centuries, Black females have found themselves in an unending struggle to reject the deleterious stereotypes that have been perpetuated by the dominant-race group throughout the centuries—stereotypes that have also
been adopted by other minority groups following the presentation of Black females by the media (Ashley, 2014; Harris-Perry, 2011; Holt, 2013; Bunton, 2012, p. 34). Additionally, these images are, undoubtedly, still etched indelibly in the back of the minds of resilient Black females today who struggle to obliterate dominant society’s negative perception of their skin color, body image, personality, and motive.

The majority of the gifted Black girls in this study reported being underestimated by their teachers and peers because of the negative stereotypes perpetuated by both the historical and contemporary subsistence of their intersecting racial, gendered, and gendered racial identities as Black females. Athletically, they were presumed to be physically inferior to their male counterparts because of their gender, while academically, they were assumed to be intellectually inferior to both their White male and female counterparts because of their race. In addition, these girls were also forced to combat negative stereotypes that continue to plague Black girls in school, the media, and society—stereotypes which depict Black females as “loud”, “ghetto”, “unintelligent”, and “hypersexual”, for example. In fact, these girls believed many of their teachers adopted a deficit thinking approach when it came to their Black students, in general, and Black female students, in particular, and failed to consider the stark differences in the gender socialization processes of Black girls in relation to their White counterparts (Buckley & Carter, 2005; Cooper et al., 2011; Skinner et al., 2016). In this way, many of these teachers served as perpetrators of the institutional and systemic racism permeating America’s schools and educational policies that continue to reinforce norms associated with Whiteness.

Eighth-grade Alani used the word underestimated to describe her experience as a Black female at a predominantly White school:
I think not only are you underestimated for being a girl, too, you have to deal with the stereotypes of being a girl and just being a girl in general. Then you have to add this other thing on, too, because now you're Black, too, and you have to deal with the stereotypes from that, and often it's just a lot. You're underestimated. I mean, even all girls, no matter color or background, I think they all deal with a different struggle than maybe males do, not to say males don't deal with different things, but they're not always looked at as not as smart or not as strong or not as athletic. The stereotypes they're given, they tend to benefit them more than for females. It doesn't tend to benefit us.

Similarly, McKenzie added,

I feel like there's a stereotype when it comes to Black girls, that they're very—to use a derogatory word—ratchet or ghetto…things like that. I feel like they underestimate where I am when it comes to knowledge. Intellectually, I feel like they just don't think I'm at the same level as they are.

Amber describes her experience as a double minority in a predominantly White learning environment who is often not taken as seriously as her White male and female counterparts, despite her giftedness, due to the intersecting nature of her race and gender as “not fun”:

People don’t take you as seriously, because, first of all, you’re Black and everybody else is White, and then you’re female. They take you even less seriously because you’re a double minority, and it’s not fun.

These girls’ experiences are further proof of Crenshaw’s (1995) theory of identity politics that argues the importance of taking into account that individuals, affected by the intersecting structures of injustices, are situated in multiple identity groups that are not homogenous. One form of intersectionality—representational intersectionality—for instance, occurs when the
complexity of a group is ignored or distorted by images or tropes that are adopted by others as representative of that specific group (Crenshaw, 1993, 1995). Representations of females, as a whole, on reality TV shows and in music videos, for example, often position women as over-emotional (e.g., incapable of getting along with other females, irrational, dependent on men, etc.), sexual objects (e.g., “eye candy” in music videos, “hos” in misogynistic hip-hop lyrics, *Love & Hip Hop* “sidechicks”) and gold diggers (e.g., *The Bachelor* contestants, *The Real Housewives* and *Basketball Wives* cast members), while the news often over-represents Blacks, on the whole, as criminals living in poverty while under-representing the criminality and low SES of Whites.

Given the aforementioned (mis)representations of Blacks and females, as well as countless others, that have permeated all levels of society, young Black females, in particular, must concern themselves with defending their racial, cultural, and gendered identities often, even at school. For example, the gifted Black girls recalled having to prove their teachers and peers wrong by embracing and presenting a performance identity (see, e.g., Carbado & Gulati, 2001) in school that reflected their ability to be calm rather than loud, restrained rather than aggressive, and smart rather than dimwitted, so that their behaviors and abilities did not reinforce any pejorative stereotypes that their peers or teachers may have held about their intersecting identities as gifted Black females. This rejection of their Black female identities within the public space of the school reflects the disguised attempts to maintain White supremacy and dominant masculinity within their predominantly White schools, and, consequently, governs how these girls construct their racialized gender identities. Hence, the implicit biases about the inherent nature of the gifted Black female adolescents who participated in this study are reflective of not only the endemic nature of racism that is based upon the unconscious notion of White
superiority, privilege, and power, but also the endemic nature of sexism and misogyny reflective of society’s male-over-female ascendency.

*Taken Advantage of for Exhibiting Intellectual Prowess*

Gifted students often become more visible among their peers the more quickly they advance beyond them (Coleman, Micko, & Cross, 2015). In fact, many gifted students exhibit a deeper understanding of the content, exhibit academic agility, and perform at higher levels, among other things, making their differentness even more apparent among both their gifted and non-gifted peers (Coleman, 2011; Coleman & Cross, 2005; Coleman, Micko, & Cross, 2015). For gifted Black females, this differentness is not only apparent due to their giftedness but their race and, sometimes, gender, as well. Because their academic gifts and talents often extend beyond their peers, gifted students, in general, are at a heightened risk for experiencing peer isolation (Cross, Stewart, & Coleman, 2003), and may find it frustrating that their teachers and other adults in their lives have extremely high expectations of them (Berlin, 2009; Pereira & Gentry, 2013; Shaunesy, McHatton, Hughes, Brice, & Ratcliff, 2007).

Many of the gifted Black girls in the study recognized their differentness when comparing their motivation and ability to that of their non-gifted and same-race peers, especially, but also some of their White gifted peers. In fact, this sentiment was likely amplified even further by the intersection of their minority status and giftedness (see Coleman, Micko, & Cross, 2015) within the context of their respective majority White school environments. These girls realized their giftedness placed them in the position to be taken advantage of by their fellow peers, especially their non-gifted peers. While their giftedness allowed them the opportunity to access certain academic and social privileges (e.g., rigorous college-preparatory academic curriculum;
merit-based clubs, camps, and organizations; opportunities to build relationships with high-achieving peers who share similar academic and social interests, etc.), it also caused them to stand out as “different” among both their White and Asian peers (as non-White or Asian, gifted students) as well as their same-race peers (as gifted Black students). Some of their peers took advantage of the gifted Black girls’ unique identities within the school context and utilized their perception of these girls’ strong work ethic and high academic performance in school to approach them for assistance with homework and other school assignments on a regular basis, which sometimes became overwhelming for the gifted Black girls. This also caused many of the gifted Black girls to feel as if they were being taken advantage of by some of their peers as a result of their intellectual and academic prowess.

Used to being the center of attention as her school’s basketball star and volleyball captain, popular Kalyn, for example, finds the excess attention she receives from peers whenever assignments are due quite unflattering and rather annoying. Kalyn even admitted to her mother, Kelly, that she is not sure being smart is a good thing because she feels as if some of her peers take advantage of her academic gifts and talents. Kelly acknowledged that this has caused 13-year-old Kalyn, who is a relatively cheerful young girl, to become stressed. She recalls,

Just this past week, [Kalyn] told me, ‘I don't know if being smart's a good thing because I think people start taking advantage of me.’ At night, in the morning, her phone is going off. ‘Kalyn, can you help me with this? Kalyn, you have an answer for this? Kalyn, where did you get this?’ She's like, ‘Really? They have the same resources I have!’

Also feeling taken advantage of, McKenzie echoes Kalyn’s sentiment, sharing,

I feel like I’ve been taken more advantage of because of my giftedness when it comes to school. But when I say ‘taken advantage of’, I mean they’d either ... ‘Can I have your
notes? Can I see your homework?’ blah, blah, type of thing … They only want to connect with me on an academic level rather than a level outside of school.

In McKenzie’s experience, her peers were not genuinely interested in forming a friendship with her that could satisfy her social and emotional needs both in and out of school, but rather only wanted to form an academic connection with her as a means of using her for her intellect.

Many of the gifted Black girls in the study recalled being victimized by their peers as a result of their giftedness. Their gifted Black identities especially made them a target within the school contexts these girls attended because their academic identities differed from many of their same-race peers while their racial identities were a stark contrast from the majority of their classmates. Peers who were aware of these girls’ academic talents, strong work ethic, and intrinsic motivation to succeed often sought to use these girls’ strengths to their advantage by asking them for information rather than finding it on their own. These peers were not necessarily interested in forming a true friendship with the gifted Black girls, but rather only wanted these girls to be a part of their social circle as long as they could reap the benefits of having them join. In this sense, many of the gifted and non-gifted peers played on the vulnerabilities some of these girls grappled with as gifted Black females yearning to belong in an academic environment that did not necessarily embrace the unique aspects of their multiple identities.

Feeling Unwelcome in Predominantly White Learning Environments

During the turbulent period of adolescence and emerging adulthood, adolescents are most concerned with defining who they are (Keniston, 1971) through their social interaction with others (Brown & Zagefka, 2005; Harter, 1986). Moreover, it is during this phase of experimentation that this group negotiates their place in society-at-large (Arnett, 2000; Erikson,
1968). Needless to say, the school environment is a critical developmental context for adolescents (Chhuon & Wallace, 2014). A vast amount of theoretical and empirical research provides evidence that youth development is significantly impacted by the school environment, among other settings (National Research Council, 2003). In fact, when these students fail to form positive relationships with their teachers and peers, due to factors such as social isolation or feeling disrespected, they often function poorly within their school context (National Research Council, 2003). However, social and educational resiliency can be fostered by positive adult-youth relationships that cultivate feelings of confidence and connectedness in youth experiencing academic underachievement or failure (Englund, Egeland, Oliva, & Collins, 2008).

Many of the gifted Black girls in the study expressed their struggle to form positive relationships with both White teachers and White peers in their schools. For example, many of the girls in the study shared how their teachers’ attitude towards them made them feel as if they were not welcome and did not belong in their advanced classes, and they believed their teachers’ differential treatment toward them in relation to their White peers was due to their race. While nearly all of the girls took on a resilient “prove them wrong” mentality when they came into contact with teachers who adopted attitudes reflective of deficit thinking and racial bias, others, like McKenzie, showed signs of underachievement and low self-esteem. Additionally, as members of a predominantly White classroom community, especially in advanced classes, some of the gifted Black girls experienced isolation and ignoring that surfaced in the form of racial microaggressions (e.g., microinvalidations) (see, for example, Sue et al., 2007) from both their teachers and peers.

Consistent with the literature on racial microaggressions (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue et al., 2007; Sue et al., 2009), 10th grade Amber, for instance, expresses her frustration
with feeling as if her knowledge does not count in the eyes of her White teachers and peers. She recalls, for instance, incidents where her work has been stolen by her White peers who receive credit for her work, as well as times when she answers a question only to have a White peer answer the exact same way and receive praise from the teacher:

"When I’m in class and I say something, I don't get credit for it as when the White girl sitting beside me raises her hand, and says the exact same thing, and they think it’s the greatest thing in the world. Actually, I stopped getting lockers, because people would rob my locker, and take all of my books, and my notes, and stuff, and use my work as their own even though when it's obviously my work.

Similar derogatory slights that contributed to the invalidating and hostile learning experiences that Amber had at Ramsville Community Charter School, were experienced by several other gifted Black girls in the study, including 7th grade Autumn, who shares a time when a White male classmate’s belief that the work in their advanced math class was too hard for her and expressed his surprise when she outscored him on a math test, communicating to her that he found it unusual that someone of her race could be so intelligent (i.e., ascription of intelligence), and McKenzie, who often finds that her White peers ignore her in class, making her feel even more unwelcome. McKenzie shares, for instance,

"It’s painfully obvious. The second you walk in there, you think you’re in a class full of White people… I’m sitting at this table with them. I try not to…the first thing I try to go to isn’t the race, like, ‘Oh, there’s a bunch of White people here. I’m the only Black girl.’ I try to involve myself with them. It’s difficult, but I still try. I feel like they ignore me on purpose… There’s this one girl. She’s really smart… I literally sit next to her and I’ll call
her name, ask her for help. She’ll act like she didn’t hear me…I don’t even know how to describe it. It’s awkward, off-putting. I just want to hush, do my work, and get out.

Jurnee shares feeling left out whenever her teacher assigns the class group projects, especially when she is unable to work with her usual group of friends. One day, she recalls, she arrived to school late from a doctor’s appointment and, as a result, her White male teacher placed her in a group by herself while all of her peers were in a group of three. For two days, Jurnee was forced to work alone on a project that required the collaboration of three students. Fortunately, her mother intervened by contacting the teacher who finally added her to a group of three students, making a group of four.

Stories like these reflect the everyday struggles of gifted Black girls who attend predominantly White schools and are forced to not only contend with being one of few Black students in their schools, but who must also navigate an environment where their voices are often ignored and knowledge questioned or unacknowledged altogether. These girls’ stories shed light on the microaggressive nature of their predominantly White learning environments—environments where Whiteness seems to be preferred and accepted over Blackness. These environments can have a significantly negative impact on gifted Black female adolescents who are in the process of finding their place in school and society-at-large and are often negotiating their varied identities within the context of their social interactions. Unfortunately, the inexorable racism, sexism, and gendered racism that they have faced (or will face in the future) as a result of their Blackness and femaleness, can leave a deleterious impression on their racial and gender identity development.

Fortunately, for many of these girls, including McKenzie, who exhibited lower self-esteem and signs of underachievement in her early high school years, positive adult relationships
were effective in alleviating some of the feelings of isolation in the gifted Black girls’ unwelcoming school environments. In fact, McKenzie found solace in her close relationships with one of her school counselors, as well as her Black female English teacher who believed in her abilities and often praised her work in front of the class, and the IB Coordinator at her school. These strong relationships with adults in her school allowed McKenzie to feel as if she did belong at Maylock High School. Similarly, Amber expresses sharing a close relationship with her AP Academy cohort leader, whom she met for lunch every day and who helped her navigate both the overt and covert racism she experienced at Ramsville Community Charter on a regular basis.

However, Jayda recalls not having positive adult relationships with several of her school counselors and teachers during her parents’ divorce and at the onset of her mother’s failing health. During these years, Jayda, who cannot recall ever having a teacher of color during her K-12 schooling career and being one of only two Black students in her elementary school grade level, remembers that, despite how emotional she became, the teachers and counselors at her school failed to provide her with the support necessary for her to be academically successful. In fact, her grades began to slip during this time and she was even placed in a remedial reading group by her White teacher, although she had been in accelerated reading classes prior to the drastic change in her home life. This lack of positive adult relationships in her predominantly White elementary and middle school environments were detrimental to the developmental needs of Jayda.

Consequently, positive adult-youth relationships in the predominantly White schools were, undoubtedly, necessary in fostering the social and educational resiliency of the gifted
Black girls who experienced isolation and were made to feel as if they were not welcome by their White peers and teachers alike.

**White Power: Access to Knowledge through Curriculum and Gifted Education**

Deeply embedded within the policies and practices promoted within the predominantly White school environments the gifted Black girls in this study attend, White privilege and White supremacy reinforced the notion of *Whiteness as property* in the American education system. In fact, this tenet of CRT functioned within many of these schools’ adopted curriculum, tracking, testing, and disciplinary practices, and hierarchical structures among the faculty and staff members. In addition, the overwhelmingly White school environments that caused the gifted Black girls to sometimes feel isolated in school as a result of their minority race, seemed to inadvertently lead them to experience their school environment differently from the majority of their school population (namely their White peers), leading them to sometimes feel invisible at times, yet highly visible at others, uncomfortable, and isolated and excluded. Moreover, the racial attitudes of many of their White peers, having limited interaction with people outside of their own racial group, were highly influenced by the negative images depicted about Blacks in the media.

Attending school in a predominantly White learning environment, exposed the gifted Black girls to the harsh realities of the racial/cultural hegemonic practices routinely implemented through various structures of the school environment. For instance, the majority of the girls in the study reported having few, if any, teachers of color during their entire K-12 schooling experience, and nearly all of the gifted Black girls admitted the curriculum taught at their schools rarely focused on the narratives of communities of color or women. In addition, the girls all
expressed being one of few minority students, and, oftentimes, the only Black or Black female student, in their gifted and advanced classes, shedding light on the colorblind educational policies and practices enforced by White education policy leaders that have traditionally been designed to exclude People of Color through the implementation of (1) discriminatory tracking practices that relegate low-income students, usually of color, to lower tracks that do not sufficiently prepare them for attaining education beyond the secondary level, while overpopulating gifted education and higher-level tracks with socioeconomically successful groups, who are primarily White (Oakes, 1987), and (2) culturally biased intelligence testing that claims to measure the academic ability and talent of students and serves as gatekeeper to gifted education access.

Experiencing Invisibility and Hypervisibility

Embedded deep within the structures of American society, racism is “not a series of isolated acts, but is endemic in American life, deeply ingrained legally, culturally, and even psychologically (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995, p. 16). Since the colonial period, notions of White supremacy have presented social and economic challenges to People of Color, including, but not limited to, Native Americans, Chinese and Japanese Americans, Mexican Americans, and African Americans. Due to the fact that the culture of Whiteness has permeated every structure of American society—from the education system to the legal system—People of Color have only been given the opportunity to advance at the will of the dominant White race.

Many would argue that the key to upward social and economic mobility is education, and it is within this structure of American society that People of Color have faced some of the harshest forms of oppression. In an attempt to “civilize” the Native American community
through reculturing and forced assimilation efforts, for instance, European Americans set up off-reservation boarding schools where Native American children were forced to conform to non-Indian standards and adopt a Western worldview over their own cultural identities (Au, Brown, & Calderón, 2016). In these boarding schools, they were not only subjected to Western foods and utensils, they were also given American names, haircuts, and forced to speak English and reject their native tongue (Au, Brown, & Calderón, 2016; Brown & Au, 2014). Hence, not only did the explicit curriculum (Eisner, 2002) taught in these boarding schools influence cultural genocide, the embedded curricular aims that operated on the notion that one must “kill the Indian” to “save the man” (Churchill, 2004) shared the same goal (Brown, Au, & Calderón, 2016). The U.S. federal government’s post-Civil War efforts to employ boarding schools in the 1870s was predicated on the deficit view of Native Americans in relation to their White counterparts.

Similar forms of oppression continue to be perpetuated within the American education system today in an effort to maintain White supremacy through hegemonic practices. Not only do colorblind educational policies and initiatives help enforce the repressive ideals of White superiority in schools (Gillborn, 2005; Yosso, 2002), it is often within the three curricula (i.e., explicit, hidden, null) that schools teach (Eisner, 2002) where these existing power structures are most effectively reproduced among students of color and lower-class Whites alike (Anyon, 1980). Coupled with the outside realities of inequities in health care, housing, and employment opportunities, among others, low-income children of color (Pollock, 2008), especially, are faced with insurmountable obstacles both at school and at home as they face issues of racism and classism.
Historically, curriculum development, curriculum history, and the field of curriculum studies have centered the story of White men in the academy while silencing (e.g., Flinders & Thornton, 2012) or giving limited attention to race (Schubert et al., 2002) in the shaping of American curriculum, despite the countless contributions made by communities of color to the ideas of progressivism, social reconstructionism, and critical theory (Au & Colleagues, 2016; Brown & Au, 2014). Hence, just as the multicultural roots of curriculum in America continue to be disregarded, so does the multicultural voice in the curriculum adopted by American schools today.

Missing from representation in the curriculum, several gifted Black girls felt that their unique stories were left untold. In fact, most of their Social Studies and English Language Arts curriculum omitted the diverse experiences of People of Color, especially Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics, and women. When teachers did invite discourse that included the experiences of Black people, in particular, it often centered on negative events (e.g., slavery, segregation) suffered by Blacks as opposed to illuminating the plethora of contributions Blacks made to society-at-large. This created a great deal of tension and uncomfortableness in some of the gifted Black girls in the study who were enrolled in majority White classes, causing them to feel as if they were singled out by their White teachers and peers who often focused their attention on the sole Black student in the classroom whenever such topics were mentioned. This left many girls feeling disconnected from their school environment as well as the curriculum being taught in their schools.

Feeling as if the complex narratives of her people were left out, leaving Blacks “invisible” in the curriculum taught at her school, Laila offers suggestions about how teachers might diversify the curriculum by integrating a multicultural, culturally relevant curriculum in
their classrooms that highlighted the narratives of People of Color rather than simply privileging the narratives of White people:

Talking about other histories, besides the whitewashed American history, and actually discussing the importance of Black people and Hispanic people and Asian people in America, ‘cause they’ve been here for a very long time and have contributed to a lot of society and to the economy. And maybe not blocking it off onto Martin Luther King Day or Black History Month and just talking about it when it’s relevant to the course. In English class, I wish we could read more Black authors, like Maya Angelou. I know last year, we were supposed to get around to Their Eyes Were Watching God, but we didn’t have enough time. That’s the biggest excuse I hear is, they don’t’ have time to put it in the curriculum which is you’re just saying that 12% population can’t fit into the curriculum and their history can’t fit into the curriculum. It’s, I think, starting to value that history and that culture and not just putting it on a pedestal for a couple weeks…

In an analogous vein, Alani recalls feeling as if the curriculum taught at her school privileged the voices of White males, the one being who is, in a sense, the polar opposite of the Black female, which made it even more difficult for her to relate to what she was being taught. She asserts,

The curriculum. It's all usually about White males, and I'm neither of those things. I think that's a challenge a lot of girls’ face. We're learning about the past in Social Studies and, in the past, girls, African-Americans, they weren't really recognized as important figures. So, we're not learning about them because when we're learning about the Civil War and World War I, females weren't in power. So, we're not learning about them. So, sometimes, I think we need to sometimes learn about more recent history. Like Michelle
Obama. We never learn about her in class, but we learn about George Washington every year. So, sometimes, I think the curriculum needs to be more open or teachers need to take it into their own hands, like my teacher last year, who did Reading. She always took things into her own hands.

People of Color have always found their cultural identities dismissed in both the explicit and hidden curriculum taught in schools. It is as if they are forced to adopt a worldview characterized by Whiteness in an effort to experience success in their daily efforts to navigate the school environment. Importantly, due to their minority status, they must often cope with what W. E. B. Du Bois refers to as “double consciousness”, or the idea that one’s experiences, culture, identity and histories are ingrained within the pervasive structure of Whiteness, or “Americanness” (Au, Brown, & Calderón, 2016). Du Bois (1903), himself, describes this rather complex duality embedded within the identity of the Black American:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 2)

The official school curriculum in America works to reinforce the notion that the life experience and knowledge of students of color are not valued, leaving them to feel the “peculiar sensation” described so eloquently by Du Bois (Au, Brown, & Calderón, 2016). It is as though their knowledge does not count in the American schools they attend where textbooks, especially Social Studies textbooks (Alenuma-Nimoh, 2016; Gay, 2009; Jay, 2003; Ravitch, 1990), either omit the experiences of their people or present them in a manner that leads to “contempt and
pity” (Au, Brown, & Calderón, 2016, p. 2). The Social Studies curriculum is especially important in working to promote the idea of a democratic education (Gay, 1997) that fosters a sense of community cohesion by helping to equalize racial, ethnic, class, gender, and ancestral differences (Gay, 2009).

Again, as indicated in nearly every gifted Black girl’s counter-story, the curriculum taught in both their advanced-level and regular education courses was typically void of culturally relevant topics and activities, often privileging the narratives of White males. This promotion of a male-dominated, Eurocentric worldview that consistently dismissed the experiences of People of Color and women, only further marginalized the gifted Black girls in their respective classroom environments, who felt as though they were invisible, as their narratives went unacknowledged in the curriculum adopted at their predominantly White schools. With only a few exceptions, courses designed to involve diverse perspectives, such as English Language Arts and Social Studies, rarely integrated the perspectives of People of Color or women. According to the gifted Black girls, when People of Color or women were included in the discourse, topics largely centered on negative historical events, widely celebrated figures, or special occasions, such as Black History Month.

While most of the gifted Black girls who participated in the study did not have an issue gaining access into their school’s gifted and advanced programs—which may have been due, in large part, to the fact that the majority of the girls hailed from socioeconomiclly successful families with parents who held, at minimum, Bachelor’s degrees, and, thus, had the knowledge and financial resources to not only expose their daughters to the same educational opportunities and experiences as their White counterparts but also advocate for her participation in gifted education programs at their respective schools—they did notice the disproportionately low
number of Black students in relation to White students in their gifted and advanced courses, especially, in relation to the regular education courses offered at their predominantly White schools. Experiencing their advanced-level classroom environment as one of only a few minority students, in general, or, oftentimes, an “only” in a classroom full of White students, made the gifted Black girls feel as if their Black identities made their presence more visible, or easily detectable, among their peers, even though the curriculum taught caused them to feel as if they were invisible in the context of their classrooms. This heightened visibility in majority White classroom contexts caused gifted Black girls like Larissa to feel uncomfortable when negative topics about Blacks were brought up in the curriculum and everyone singled her out as if to say, “They are talking about your people.” Larissa somewhat cringed as she recalled one of the many instances where she felt singled out by her White peers whenever the sensitive topic of oppressed people or slavery was brought up in school. She shares,

One time, we had an assembly where these Holocaust … these people were coming and kind of acting out stories from the actual stories of [the] Holocaust … children that were in the Holocaust had written down. One part they were talking about oppressed people and they said, ‘Or African Americans,’ and I felt like everyone was looking in my direction…I think it was just because of my race, obviously, but I didn’t really feel offended. But at the same time…it was uncomfortable a little bit to be kind of singled out a little bit by everybody.

Similarly, Jurnee recalls a time when her Blackness seemed to be highly visible in her predominantly White classroom following a history lesson on the sensitive topic of slavery. Shortly after receiving the history lesson and being instructed to write down what she learned on construction paper with her group of predominantly White peers, Jurnee recalls being singled out
by a White female peer who pretended to act as though she were a slave owner and pointed a
ruler at her, as if implying that she would beat her if she did not get down. Unfortunately, Jurnee
recognized that her White peer personally chose to target her as opposed to one of her other
groups members who were also standing up on chairs writing, but all of whom happened to be
White.

Being one of few, if not the only, Black students in class, also caused some of the gifted
Black girls to feel as if their teachers and peers looked to them as the “spokesperson” for their
race whenever the class engaged in discourse around the Black experience. Kara, for instance,
shares: “Well, in all of my advanced classes, I’m the only African American in each of them…so
when we talk about Charlottesville or slavery, or things like that, I mean, sometimes, it feels
like I could be the only person representing my race.” Similarly, Amber recalls feeling as if she
is assumed to be an expert on topics concerning racism because she is Black. She explains,

Ever since elementary school, you know, they talk about Black History Month or racism,
the kids always turn and look at you like you should know everything, but I’m like, ‘I’m
learning just like you are.’

These narratives are consistent with studies conducted with Black females attending
schools or classrooms that were predominantly White (see for example Carter Andrews, 2009;
Grantham & Ford, 1998). By being positioned by their White peers and teachers as “experts” on
topics concerning the African American experience or racial issues presented in class by the
teacher simply because of their race, the gifted Black girls in the study experienced racial
microaggressions in the form of racial spotlighting, a term proposed by Carter Andrews (2012)
to “describe how Black students are positioned as hypervisible by Whites when they do not seek
to be” (p. 12). When these girls’ teachers and peers viewed them as “native informants” (hooks,
1994), it caused these girls to be placed in an uncomfortable position. In fact, several girls admit that rather than fulfilling this expectation that had been forced upon them by their White teachers and peers alike, they silenced themselves altogether during race-related discourse in classroom contexts in which they were an “only”, essentially attempting to conceal their hypervisibility by becoming passive. Similarly, in Grantham and Ford’s (1998) study, African-American Danisha felt pressured by her teachers to act as spokesperson, or leader, for her Black peers. These girls’ stories are reflective of their teachers’ and peers’ desires to have them serve as an expert on topics rather than placing the burdensome task of acting as a role model for all of their same-race peers by exhibiting behaviors consistent with the norms associated with Whiteness.

*The Obstacles of Standing Out and Fitting In*

Brewer’s (1991) Optimal Distinctiveness Theory suggests that most people, guided by the simultaneous and often competing nature of their social needs, alter their self-identity accordingly, by engaging in either lowering or raising their perceived distinctiveness through assimilation (i.e., being similar to others, or fitting in) and differentiation (i.e., contrasting from others, or standing out). Concerned with both the psychological experiences related to students’ desires for distinctiveness and assimilation and students’ level of fulfillment in the classroom context (also referred to as standing out while fitting in (SOFI)), recent work by Gray (2017) found that students of color and lower SES students in a predominantly White middle-class high school expressed less fulfillment in their desires to stand out within the context of the classroom, suggesting that students whose racial/ethnic and SES background do not match those of the overwhelming majority in the classroom may suffer greater barriers—both structural (e.g., disparagement) and psychological (e.g., feeling excluded) than their majority race and majority
SES counterparts. Earlier literature presented by Rios Morrison (2011) seems to further confirm Gray’s (2017) analysis. Rios Morrison (2011), for example, argues that, while ethnic minorities are more likely to express their unique opinions about topics for which they feel they have psychological standing (or a sense of legitimacy or entitlement) based upon their own personal experiences, they are less inclined to share their opinions in classrooms where they feel as though their opinions may diverge from the majority, out of fear their peers may find their views inappropriate. Hence, it is likely that many ethnic minorities and lower SES students in predominantly White contexts risk being psychologically unfulfilled (i.e., their desires to stand out are unfulfilled) so that they do not feel “out of place” within the context of their classroom where their ethnic minority identities are more distinguishable among their White peers and their personal perspectives diverge greatly from the experience common among their White middle-class counterparts (Gray, 2017; Rios Morrison, 2011).

There is still much contention in the field of gifted education as to whether gifted students are more vulnerable to social and emotional difficulties or resilient to psychological and social difficulties (Chen et al., 2018; Ford, 2010; Kitano & Lewis, 2005; Matthews, Lin, Zeidner, & Roberts, in press; Reis, Colbert, Hebert, 2004; Schwean et al., 2006). In fact, some might argue gifted students, who sense their differentness (Coleman, Micko, and Cross, 2015; Silverman, 1993), are both vulnerable and resilient. Having to not only contend with social and emotional difficulties that regularly emerge as a result of the unique nature of their giftedness, but also their racial, gendered, and gendered racial experiences, the gifted Black girls in this study often found themselves yearning to fit in with a peer group who might be able to provide them with social and emotional support. However, this was often a difficult task for some of the girls who struggled to form lasting friendships with peers in their gifted classrooms, who were
usually White and, sometimes, excluded or mistreated them, as well as fit in with their same-race peers who often excluded them from their social circles, finding their high academic achievement and extracurricular interests “unusual” or “different from the norm”. Hence, these girls felt as if they stood out among both their White and non-same-race-peers due to their skin color, while they also struggled to fit in with their same-race peers who often shunned them for being “different”. The way that many of the gifted Black girls perceived this common experience led them to feel a stronger sense of disconnection from their predominantly White school environment.

Jayda, for instance, describes her experience being Black at a predominantly White school as awkward, attributing the awkwardness to being looked at different by her White peers and treated differently by some of her White teachers: “Awkward. Because I feel like I would stand out a lot more, which I do, and people look at me differently…and I was treated differently by the teachers.” The awkwardness that Jayda internalizes in her school highlights the notion of her heightened visibility as a Black student at a majority White school. Her peers’ and teachers’ perceived attitude towards her seem to communicate the notion that she is “out of place”, that her school community has not quite extended membership to Blacks, causing her to stand out among her White peers and feel even further marginalized. In learning environments like Jayda’s, gifted Black girls may find themselves questioning their belonging in an environment that seems to reject their presence, and struggle with stereotype threat (see, e.g., Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

While Jurnee also believes that she stands out in her gifted math class largely because of her skin color, she uses some of her non-same-race peers’ negative assumption of Blacks as intellectually inferior to Whites due to their disproportionately low presence in advanced
learning environments to her advantage, helping her to stand out as an intellectually gifted and academically successful Black girl. She explains,

This year, I am the only Black girl in my class. There's a couple of Black boys, but I'm the only Black girl. I try to really not pay attention to that. I know I still have to stand out in my own way…I knew that I had to stand out in a different way than other people because of my color. People automatically think just because I’m Black then I’m not that smart, but they’re wrong.

This approach seems to work well for Jurnee who finds her peers—both White and non-White—gravitating toward her because of her positive attitude and strong work ethic in class, allowing her the opportunity to fit in with both her White and non-White peers alike.

However, other gifted Black girls found it difficult to fit in with the White peers in their predominantly White school environment due to the fact that their skin color caused them to stand out amongst White peers, who already had pre-formed cliques or discussed topics that they could not quite relate to as African Americans. For example, Alani found that she often could not relate to the topics her White peers brought up when they sat in the cafeteria together. She recalls,

Sometimes, when I would be in the lunchroom and sitting with groups of people that maybe aren't African-American, they will be talking about stuff that I just cannot relate to. They're like, ‘Oh, my hair, it won't do this,’ or, ‘I can't do this, or I can't wear this because it doesn't’ … If I can't relate to stuff that they're talking about, I don't always feel included as much. Or even, sometimes, they'll be just talking about stuff that I don't understand at all. And, of course, I bet they feel the same way if they're with a group of
people who maybe are a different race than them, and we're talking about stuff that maybe they don't understand as much.

Many gifted Black girls also felt as if they did not quite fit in with their same-race peers, whom often caused them to feel isolated. Amber remembers feeling as if she were intruding whenever she would try to talk to the other Black students at her school, none of whom were in any of her advanced classes but all of whom comprised of only 9% of their predominantly White school’s student population:

When I was trying to become friends with the other African-American students, I felt isolated because I was trying to befriend… I'm friends with one of the girls, kinda, and none of the other Black children at school like me, and I don't know why they don't like me. 'Cause I don't talk to them, and I don't say anything to them, and I try to be nice because I've known a lot of them for a while, but it's just kinda like I go and try and talk to my friend and they stare at me. Like, ‘Why are you here?’

Similarly, Laila felt as if she had little in common with the other Black students at her predominantly White school because she did not share any common interests in many of the topics they discussed among one another, such as music, clothing, and shoes, and did not feel comfortable using the slang they used. She shares,

I know I don’t fit in with other Black people at my school…They talk about things I have no connection to or I don’t care about at all, like music and shoes and stuff. I don’t care about that, so I don’t talk about it; or, they know different people, so they talk about those people. I’m fine with you as a person, but we don’t have much to talk about, so feeling like I don’t belong there… I would say there's more of an affect socially than anything else. Sometimes I feel a little uncomfortable because I don't know how to use their slang
or I don't keep up with the same things they keep up with. Like I said, it's just like feeling out of the loop.

Fortunately, when many of these girls entered the gifted education learning environment and, especially, participated in merit-based clubs and organizations (e.g., National Junior Honor Society, Beta Club, etc.), it made it easier for them to build an alliance with peers who shared similar abilities, passions, and desires and integrate more easily in an environment where their uniqueness was embraced and valued rather than criticized or ridiculed (see “affiliation” in Mahoney, 1998). Consequently, being enrolled in gifted education courses aided many of the gifted Black girls in developing their gifted identities as it served as a form of both validation by others who advocated for their participation in gifted education and positive affirmation of their gifted self from supportive individuals in their lives (e.g., their parents, teachers, school counselors, etc.), two constructs of Mahoney’s (1998) Gifted Identity Formation Model that are vital to gifted individuals’ identity formation and healthy identity development. Further, embracing both their gifted identities and maintaining positive racial identities that centered on racial pride allowed many of the gifted Black girls to successfully embrace their affiliation with non-Black gifted peer groups without feeling as if they had to compromise their positive Black racial identity or lose their sense of self, thus, allowing them to face optimal outcomes (Mahoney, 1998).

While it is human nature to desire fitting in, especially during adolescence when teens, yearning to belong (Scheff, 1990), begin to spend more time engaged in activities with their peers and forming more intimate friendships, standing out is not always deemed a negative alternative to fitting in. For instance, one study conducted by Lashbrook (2000) found that adolescents’ accounts of peer pressure centered largely on shame-related emotions, such as
feelings of inadequacy, ridicule, and isolation (due to the fear of abandonment). Literature suggests that the looming threat of negative emotions is guided by a person’s self-evaluation in relation to others, which is thought to be the motivational force behind conformity (Lashbrook, 2000). In an effort to reject conformity, some of the gifted Black girls used the distinctiveness of their interacting gifted, Black, and female identities to counteract the awkwardness of being a gifted Black girl who stood out in their predominantly White school contexts by exhibiting resilience, rather than shame, when facing the psychological and social challenges presented by their school environment in association with the combination of their race, gender, and giftedness.

For gifted Black girls like Kara, for instance, who initially struggled to make friends at Radford Charter High School as a shy 9th grader when she ate lunch alone in the cafeteria every day, her ability to stand out as one of the few Black students (and gifted Black students) at her school inadvertently allowed her to fit in. Kara found a way to connect with her school community by connecting with other high-achieving, gifted peers, and joining the Voices for Minorities Club, accompanied by a number of her school’s relatively small Black population. She used her strong desire to stand out among her peers, as someone who possessed a unique passion for enacting change in society regarding race and gender relations, to fit in with a group of peers who shared common interests. Similarly, Alani, Amber, Autumn, Larissa, and Laila, found a strong sense of connectedness at their respective schools by finding peers who shared common interests and possessed similar abilities and attitudes toward learning. Many of these girls found these peers in their gifted education classrooms or through their involvement in school activities, such as Minecraft Club, Art Club, Speech and Debate, and the Honor Society. Essentially, these girls found peers who, like them, may have stood out due to their giftedness,
unique interests and passions, or race, and formed lasting friendships that allowed them to fit in with a peer group that embraced their differences as well, thereby strengthening their social networks in school.

Regardless of race or gender, it is essential for adolescents to feel connected to their school community in order to aide their healthy identity development, and gifted Black girls are certainly no exception. Having positive peer, parent, and educator relationships (i.e., teachers, school counselors, administrators, and coaches) are crucial to the ecological development (see e.g., Brofenbrenner, 1979) of adolescents (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Chhuon & Wallace, 2014; Fiske, 2009; Greenaway, Cruwys, Haslam, & Jetten, 2016; Scarf et al., 2016; Williams, 2009).

*Combatting the Acting White Accusation*

Consistent with the wealth of earlier and more recent literature on oppositional culture and the acting White phenomenon (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Bergin & Cooks, 2002; Durkee & Williams, 2015; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Madyun, Lee, and Jumale, 2010; Neal-Barnett, Stadulis, Singler, Murray, & Demmings, 2010; Ogbu, 1978, 1991, 2003, 2008; Stinson, 2011; Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005; Webb & Linn, 2016), nearly all of the gifted Black girls in the study, with the exception of one (Jayda), experienced the acting White accusation (AWA) at some point during their K-12 schooling, but more frequently during their middle and/or high school years. Research suggests that, while the AWA has been reported by Black youth as early as elementary school, it is most frequently encountered during middle adolescence (Neal-Barnett, 2001; Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus & Harpalani, 2001). The basis for these attacks on Black youth by their same-race peers has often been attributed to their style of dress, style of speech, music/dance preferences, and racial makeup of their friends (Horvat & O’Connor, 2006;
According to Neal-Barnett and her colleagues (2010), however, it is style of speech, or the distinction between “talking proper”, or using Standard American English, and African American Vernacular English that is the most common catalyst for the accusation. In addition, they contend, “acting White is one of the most negative accusations one African American adolescent can hurl at another (p. 103). While the psychological consequences have not been assessed in depth to date, it is likely that the derogatoriness of the label may have significant mental health implications for the person accused (Durkee & Williams, 2015).

The gifted Black girls in the study admit that it is their articulateness and choice to use Standard American English, style of dress, choice in music, and stellar academic performance that often makes them a target by their same-race peers, who begin explicitly (e.g., calling them an “Oreo” or directly saying to them, “You act White”) or indirectly (e.g., telling them they “talk proper” or “dress preppy”) accusing them of “acting White” on the basis of these various behaviors and characteristics reflective of their personal, social, academic, and perceived racial identities. These accusations led many of the girls to exclude themselves from these same-race peers, leaving them feeling disconnected from the one peer group that they felt they could somewhat identify with in their predominantly White school contexts, further marginalizing the gifted Black girls at school.

Since her elementary school days, for example, McKenzie found herself standing out among her same-race peers who often accused her of acting White largely due to her choice of music and robust vocabulary. She shares,

Honestly, growing up, it was mainly, ‘You talk like a White girl and you listen to White people music.’ When I was younger, I used to listen to EDM and Dubstep and stuff.

They’d be like, ‘It’s not even music. That’s that weird stuff White people listen to. You
should listen to rap music and stuff like that. You shouldn’t listen to Taylor Swift or
anything like that.’ I was like, ‘What is even Black people music? Music is music, in
general.’ Then how I speak and what words I use was made fun of. They’d be like, ‘Why
are you busting out the big words?’ I’m like, ‘You should have the same kind of
vocabulary, too.’

For McKenzie, her choice to listen to alternative rock music over hip-hop and use a large
vocabulary caused her to be criticized and ridiculed by her same-race peers. The ostracization
she experienced seems to convey the notion that the racial identities of Blacks are not
multifaceted or complex, but rather immutable.

Alani, one of only three Black students inducted into the National Junior Honor Society
at her school, recalls being targeted by a fellow Black female peer who accused her of acting
White because of her consistently high academic performance, which earned her a regular place
on Marymount Park Middle School’s Honor Roll. She shares,

When I went and got my Honor Roll certificate from a teacher, an African American girl
was like… And I went and carried it back to my locker, just to put it in there, and she was
like, ‘Why are you always acting White and being smart and stuff?’ I told her, ‘Well, I
don’t associate being White and being intelligent together. Intelligence is a thing for
everyone.’ She’s like, ‘That’s not really how I see it.’

In a similar vein, Amber has experienced rejection by her same-race peers on multiple
occasions, leading her to feel less connected with many of the Black students at her
predominantly White rural school that boasts only a 9% Black student population. Her
disconnect stems from her failed attempts at engaging with her same-race peers on a personal
level, who have accused her of acting White. For example, following discussions about her
Advanced Placement courses and her involvement in the community’s etiquette program, Cotillion, her same-race peers assumed she was trying to be White:

I was talking about something with AP Psych or AP Academy and [my Black peers were] just like, ‘Why are you acting so White?’ And then when I mentioned Cotillion, they think I’m acting White or I’m trying to be White. And just because I teach people manners, and I wanna have manners, that doesn’t mean I’m trying to be White.

Amber’s same-race peers seem to communicate their disdain that she enjoys being part of an etiquette program that has traditionally been reserved for middle- and upper-middle class White girls, and appear to deem her involvement in this program as her attempt at being socially White (see, e.g., Fordham, 2008). In addition, they seem to reject Amber’s enrollment in advanced-level classes and her high-achiever identity as her rejection of her Black racial group affiliation. These views only confirm the racism permeating America’s achievement’s process and the overwhelming Whiteness in education (Carter Andrews, 2009; Fordham, 2008). Despite her same-race peers’ perceptions that her social characteristics and academic choices align with White cultural practices, Amber’s strong sense of her identity remained relatively unchanged. Instead of adopting a “raceless” persona by solely embracing White mainstream culture (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986), she, instead, rejects her accusers in favor of peers—no matter what color—who embrace her multifaceted identities as a high-achieving gifted Black female.

Amber’s response to the AWA is consistent with the newer body of work that refutes Fordham and Ogbu’s (1986) early oppositional culture theory framework that proposed Black youth respond to the AWA by embracing an oppositional culture toward mainstream (i.e., White) American values while rejecting Black culture (see, e.g., Carter Andrews, 2009; Carter Andrews, 2012; Neal-Barnett et al., 2001; Spencer et al., 2001), thus, placing Black youth at-risk for
psychological dysfunction (Arroyo & Zigler, 1995; Fordham, 1996). More recently, researchers have acknowledged that Black youth still have the ability to maintain both their racial/ethnic identities and high-achiever identities simultaneously by continuing to perform well in school and embrace their Blackness (Carter, 2005; Carter Andrews, 2012; Flores-González, 1999; Foley, 1991), uninfluenced by their same-race peers’ oppositional attitudes toward their academic achievement. However, Amber, as well as many of her gifted Black female counterparts who also took part in this study, are forced to grapple with the warring nature of their identities as high-achieving gifted Black girls who had to grapple with the challenges of: (1) having their racial identities questioned as their academic achievement became synonymous with racial performance, (2) being and not being socially White; and, (3) respecting and retaining their citizenship as members of the Black racial group, while also fighting for recognition in a male-dominated White society (Carter Andrews, 2009; Fordham, 2008).

However, the acting White accusation did not only surface in predominantly White school contexts. Kara, for example, recalls being accused of acting White by her same-race peers even when she attended a predominantly Black middle school, refuting some of the research that theorizes the AWA occurs primarily in racially integrated school contexts (see, e.g., Tyson, 2011). She shares,

> When I was in middle school, which was majority Black, I got that from Black kids, too: ‘You talk so White.’ And I guess it’s from the fact that for some reason they internalize that, you know, a person can talk White. And so, it’s hard for me to sit there and look at what stereotypes have done to African Americans and what they’ve done to Whites and see how talking…like because I’m articulate, I’m somehow talking White. It’s hard, and it’s frustrating, and it’s annoying.
Fortunately, most of the gifted Black girls in the study were not significantly impacted by the AWA presented by their same-race peers. While many of the girls expressed an interest in maintaining close relationships with their same-race peers and even acknowledged the importance of having same-race peer relationships due to the fact that they could more easily relate to them than they could their White peers—given their common experience as Blacks and Black females—they were still not significantly affected by the accusation. Instead, these girls isolated themselves from same-race peers who accused them of acting White or who shared divergent interests, and revealed that the AWA did not intimidate them, but rather made them angry, frustrated, and resentful, consistent with the literature highlighting the importance of a variable labeled “bother” (Bergin & Cooks, 2002; Murray, 2008; Murray, Neal-Barnett, Demmings, & Stadulis, 2012; Neal-Barnett, 2001; Neal-Barnett et al., 2010).

It is possible that the strong racial identities of many of the gifted Black girls in the study helped reduce depressive symptoms, stress, and psychological dysfunction when they were met with the acting White label. Racial identity literature that draws on the acting White phenomenon examines the relationship between racial/ethnic identity and the acting White insult (Durkee & Williams, 2015; Neal-Barnett et al., 2010; Spencer et al., 2001). For instance, Spencer and colleagues (2001), using the Racial Identity Attitude Scale (Parham & Helms, 1985) to assess over 500 Black youth, found that Black students who identified more deeply with their racial group had higher academic achievement, and found no evidence to support the oppositional culture theory. Similarly, Neal-Barnett et al.’s (2010) use of the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) among African American adolescents found that youth who indirectly experienced the AWA were more bothered if they scored higher on the private regard scale, especially when these associations included social features of the assault, such as “listening to
White music” or “talking proper”, while there was a significant association between public regard and the extent to which youth experienced discomfort or were bothered by the accusation. Durkee and Williams (2015) found that Black youth’s level of discomfort with the AWA was positively associated with private regard, suggesting that Black youth experience more psychological discomfort when they identify with their racial group and are accused of being an inauthentic member of their racial group (Bergin & Cooks, 2008; Fordham, 1996).

Because the gifted Black females in the study, generally, had a positive self-concept reflective of their contentment with their racial/ethnic and academic identities, they were able to reject such claims that their academic achievement, speech and language, or preferred style or music, dress, or interests were synonymous with Whiteness, although many were disappointed by their same-race peers’ claims. Additionally, they were able to embrace their Blackness and still express how salient their race was to their identities as gifted Black females without having to compromise their racial identities or display codeswitching techniques (see, e.g., Carter, 2003; Hemmings, 2006) in an attempt to “perform” their “Blackness” when attempting to gain acceptance by their same-race peers, or “perform Whiteness” in social and academic contexts in which they were an “only” when attempting to gain acceptance by their White peers and educators. For the majority of the gifted Black girls in the study, their allegiance to their Black community had little to do with their social or academic behaviors.

#BlackGirlMagic: Exhibiting Resilience in the Face of Adversity

Despite the many obstacles the gifted Black girls in the study faced as they navigated their predominantly White school contexts and negotiated varying aspects of their racial, gender, academic, and social identities, each of them retained their ability to exhibit academic and
emotional resilience, even when they were routinely mistreated by their White peers, felt socially isolated from their same-race peers, and were placed in classrooms with teachers who devalued their abilities. Further, although the unique nature of their giftedness added yet another complex layer to their identities as gifted Black females, these girls utilized the invaluable socialization messages their parents instilled in them to help them experience success in their predominantly White learning environments. Drawing on the racial/cultural, academic, and gender socialization messages they internalized over the years, these girls found the motivation to “give their all” by working hard to prove their perpetrators (e.g., racist peers, biased teachers, etc.) wrong in two ways: (1) prioritizing their education, and (2) striving for personal excellence in both their academic and personal lives.

While efforts of the Civil Right Movement were crucial in facilitating the steady improvement of race relations in America, the lives of Black people in America are still adversely affected by racism (Brown & Tylka, 2011). Embedded deeply within every structure of American society, racial discrimination has a significantly negative impact on Blacks’ psychological, physiological, and behavioral outcomes (Bowen-Reid & Harrell, 2002; Broman, 1997; Caldwell et al., 2004; Harris-Britt, Valrie, Klonoff, Landrine, & Ullman, 1999; Harris-Britt, Kurtz-Costes, & Rowley, 2007; Neblett, Phillip, Cogburn, & Sellers, 2006; Thompson, 1996; Utsey, 1989), such as threatening the self-esteem, mental health, and academic motivation of African American adolescents (Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003). However, many African American adolescents thrive by exhibiting resiliency, or the capacity to convalesce from or adapt to challenging obstacles in life (Benard, 1991).

While agreement on the conceptualization of resilience has yet to be settled, the majority of researchers investigating resiliency seem to examine two concepts: risk factors and protective
factors (Masten & Reed, 2002). As such, in order for an individual to become resilient, they must first experience a risk, or adversity (Williams & Portman, 2014) that has the potential to lead to an undesirable outcome, such as school failure in youth (Green & Conrad, 2002). On the other hand, protective factors involve support systems, institutions, resources, and personal attributes that aid an individual to combat the effects of risk factors (Fraser et al., 2004) rather than succumb to them (Neblett et al., 2008).

Parental racial socialization is believed to be a possible contributing factor to the resilient nature of African American youth, as these parents’ frequent messages about race seem to influence their children’s racial identity (Brown, 2008; Brown & Tylka, 2011; Peck et al., 2014; White-Johnson & Sellers, 2010). An empirical investigation by Brown and Tylka (2011), for instance, found a link between racial socialization messages and African American college students’ preserved resilience when experiencing racial discrimination. In fact, these students exhibited higher levels of resilience when reporting high levels of racial discrimination if they acknowledged being met with both general racial socialization messages and more specific messages related to appreciating cultural legacy by their caregivers (Brown & Tylka, 2011).

Nearly all of the gifted Black girls shared their motivation to work hard to prove everyone who harbored prejudicial views about Blacks or Black females wrong. This strong work ethic was often preceded by countless conversations with their parents about the struggles they were certain to face in life due to their Blackness and femaleness. While the girls in the study, who predominantly hailed from two-parent households were, undoubtedly, affected by the socialization practices that both of their parents engaged in, it seemed as if for the majority of the girls (with the exception of one—Kalyn), their mothers’ messages were most impactful, possibly because of the common bond they shared as Black females. Many of these girls acknowledged
not only valuing their mothers’ messages, in particular, about racism, sexism, and gendered racism, but also learning from their mothers’ personal experiences with discrimination, especially in the workplace, as a result of both their race and gender. The bond shared between a mother and her daughter has proven to be a vital component of Black womanhood (Hill Collins, 2000), with Black mothers having a profound influence in their daughters’ lives (Bell-Scott et al., 1991). In an effort to empower their Black daughters, Black mothers find it essential to pass on critical knowledge, on a daily basis, that is essential to their daughters’ survival as Black females (Joseph, 1981; Collins, 1987). For example, drawing on Ladner (1972) and Joseph (1981), Hill Collins (2000) notes that Black daughters “learn to expect to work, to strive for an education so they can support themselves, and to anticipate carrying heavy responsibilities in their families and communities”, characteristics essential to their survival and the survival of their future dependents (p. 183). Black females raised in the United States generally exhibit self-reliant and assertive behaviors, despite their mothers’ overly protective nature and strong authoritarian parenting style (Hill Collins, 2000). According to Wade-Gayles (1984), for instance,

[Black mothers] do not socialize their daughters to be “passive” or “irrational.” Quite the contrary, they socialize their daughters to be independent, strong and self-confident.

Black mothers are suffocatingly protective and domineering precisely because they are determined to mold their daughters into whole and self-actualizing persons in a society that devalues Black women. (p. 12)

Many of the gifted Black girls exhibited high levels of racial salience, centrality, and private regard as they described their perceptions of Blackness and how important their Blackness was in shaping their identities. Their beliefs were influenced by their strong sense of
racial pride as well as a sincere desire to resist the negative stereotypes universally held by their teachers, peers, and society about Blacks, females, and Black females. Consequently, these girls understood that they must work twice as hard, so to speak, as their White male and female peers to experience similar levels of success in life. The girls admitted that their views about their racial identity were highly influenced by their parents, who socialized them with racial and cultural socialization messages about their cultural legacy, preparing for racial bias, and the importance of having pride in their race and/or ethnicity. In addition, academic socialization messages inadvertently bled out of the racial socialization messages these Black parents communicated to their daughters. For instance, one way in which these girls were socialized by their parents to combat the negative societal beliefs about Blacks was to prioritize their education in an effort to eventually attend a good college after high school that would prepare them for successful careers, as well as to strive for personal excellence by showcasing their personal best (i.e., academically and behaviorally) at all times.

However, while their resilient nature in the face of adversity is noteworthy, it is important to mention that the task of fighting against racism by resisting stereotypes associated with one’s perceived identities is an arduous one. Consequently, many of the gifted Black girls in the study may find that their efforts to “prove them wrong” by engaging in behaviors not typically associated with Blackness or Black femaleness might inadvertently place them at a heightened risk for suffering from racial battle fatigue, or stress and anxiety that stems from the persistent experiencing of overt and covert racist actions (see Smith, Allen, and Danley, 2007) and gendered racism, as they actively struggle with the burden of working hard to disassociate themselves from behaviors associated with Black females so that they do not risk perpetuating these stereotypic perceptions.
The permanence of racism suggests that racism is not an aberration, but rather serves as a stabilizing function in a society that is built on property, otherwise characterized as Whiteness (Bell, 1992). Consequently, due to the fact that racism is omnipresent and indestructible in our society, it is impractical to believe that stereotypes based on race will somehow be dismantled if minorities merely engage in behaviors that are stereotypically associated with Whiteness, such as exhibiting high academic ability and speaking Standard American English, and reject behaviors stereotypically associated with their racial or ethnic background. Unfortunately, stereotypes are cognitive categorizations, so due to the fact that people have cultural knowledge of the stereotype, they often involuntarily or spontaneously engage in automatic stereotype activation, using stereotypes to pass judgments on others (Devine, 1989; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000; Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas, & Harrison, 2009). Hence, Black females are often viewed and evaluated by others based on stereotypes about the intersection of their race and gender.

One of the more positively viewed stereotypes of Black women is the Strong Black Woman (SBW) stereotype, a fantastical image of the Black woman as a naturally strong and resilient, self-sacrificing, independent, and self-contained woman who is able to handle the many challenges of life (Donovan & West, 2015; Watson & Hunter, 2016; Watson-Singleton, 2017). This stereotype, borne out of the historical image of the Black woman as a strong, independent woman who is capable of playing many roles both in and outside of the household, is nearly synonymous with the Sojourner Syndrome (Mullings, 2002) and the Superwoman Syndrome (SWS), a framework characterized by the Black woman’s (1) perceived obligation to suppress emotions, (2) determination to succeed despite resource limitations, (3) resistance to being vulnerable or dependent, (4) perceived obligation to manifest strength, and (5) the obligation to help others rather than engaging in self-care (Woods-Giscombé, 2010). While Black women
have historically been forced to overcome adverse situations by exuding perseverance and prodigious strength when faced with dismal challenges, their resilience has inadvertently increased their risk of falling victim to negative psychological and physiological outcomes, such as high levels of stress-related health behaviors (e.g., poor sleeping habits, postponement of self-care, poor eating habits), depressive symptoms and anxiety, and strain in romantic relationships (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Donovan & West, 2015; Watson & Hunter, 2017; Watson-Singleton, 2017; Woods-Giscombé, 2010). Hence, these purportedly elevating stereotypes are merely a façade.

It is, thus, important that gifted Black girls remain cognizant of the psychological and physiological consequences that often come with working harder to dispel stereotypes and controlling images about Black females, especially as they transition into adulthood and become mothers, wives, and career women and are forced to contend with the intersectional stressors that emerge from the racialized sexism and gendered racism they will undoubtedly face in life. While these girls are encouraged to pursue the highest levels of academic and occupational attainment and exhibit personal, academic, and professional excellence along the way, they must remember to engage in self-care, successfully manage their emotions, and understand that the paradoxical nature of vulnerability makes it one of their greatest assets in life: “Vulnerability is the only authentic state. Being vulnerable means being open for wounding, but also for treasure. Being open to the wounds of life means also being open to the bounty and beauty” (Russell, 1998, p. 114).
Despite their exposure to personal and environmental adversities, many children and adolescents succeed in school, demonstrating educational resiliency (Wang & Gordon, 1994). For years, researchers have hypothesized the positive role of protective factors in promoting positive academic and developmental outcomes when youth are rooted in environmental interactions among three systems in a youth’s ecological development: family, school, and community (Benard, 1991; Brofenbrenner, 1979, Fraser et al., 2004). These systems can play an important role, either directly or indirectly, in their effect on student outcomes (Williams & Portman, 2014). For example, they can serve as either a protector from risk or act as a buffer between educational failure and academic success (Murry & Brody, 1999). Within these three systems, a lack of protective factors can cause an individual to become vulnerable to negative outcomes (Williams & Portman, 2014).

Recognizing the system designed to maintain White superiority—a system, based on race, that uses ignorance, exploitation, and power to oppress people of color (Marable, 1992; Wellman, 1977), many Black parents engaged in academic socialization practices in which they relentlessly preached to their daughters the importance of pursuing an education in an effort to increase their social and economic mobility. In addition, these parents, aware of the colorblind educational policies and practices governed by the notion of meritocracy, or the belief that hard work is the key determinant of an individual’s success, opportunity, and wealth, were committed to position education as the key to a better future for people of color. While realizing their pursuit of higher education would not make racism or sexism disappear and they were likely to still be presented with challenges that came with their raced and gendered identities, these girls understood that obtaining an education would position them for better social and economic
opportunities, and, overall, better health outcomes. It is also important to note that the majority of the parents participating in the study had successfully obtained high levels of education and had successful professional careers.

Jayda discusses how her mother likened grades to money and how that analogy has helped motivate her to pursue higher education. Further, she acknowledges being inspired by the fact that both of her parents attained Master’s degrees and her older is currently pursuing a Master’s degree. She shares,

My mom said that grades are money, so that's mainly been my thing to push me. And also, when I heard that my mom had a Master’s [degree] and my dad had a Master’s, and then my brother he wanted to get his Master’s. So, I was thinking, and when I was little I didn't know what a Masters was, but I was thinking, I want to get a Master’s. So, once I found out what that was I realized how beneficial that would be, and so I want to do it even more now. So that's the gist of that.

Larissa, whose parents are a medical doctor and engineer, respectively, understands the value of education when it comes to pursuing a career in the future. Her urge to prioritize education motivates her to study and complete her homework, even when she may, otherwise, procrastinate or not want to do it at all. She admits,

I believe that education is very important when it comes to finding a career. I guess you can build a life out of education. It's more to building life in that, but that is one component that I think is important… I always think about when I don't want to do my homework or I don't feel like studying for test, I think how could studying for this test, how could doing my homework, help me, and how would it not help me? I know that it's a lot better to actually do the work than procrastinate or not do it at all.
It was Kalyn’s grandmother who held a Ph.D. as well as her two parents, both of whom held graduate-level degrees, who have stressed the importance of putting her education first, despite the fact that Kalyn is an athlete who shows great promise for a future as a professional athlete. She contends,

Oh, my mom and dad said that [education]'s mandatory. I can't drop out of school. I can't go out of school early to go to the pros. That's mandatory. My grandma mainly wants us to get our Ph.D.’s. She wants all of my cousins to get our Ph.D.’s. We don't want to, but we're all smart. Because, either we'll get a scholarship in academics, or we'll get a scholarship in sports because those are the two things that we focus on. But, it's mandatory. My grandma—one time in third grade for a vocabulary test, she made me make flash cards. She made me separate a whole binder full of vocab words just to study and get 100 on a test. She'll be hard on...We'll be hard on each other with grades, but we know it's important and it'll help you, because think about it. When I go to the WNBA and I retire, I need a job. You need education to get you a job.

Hence, the academic socialization efforts of the parents centered on the importance of obtaining an education as a form of resistance against a system designed to oppress communities of color. By communicating to their daughters the importance of education through their continuous involvement in their daughters’ academics both at school and at home, advocating for their daughters’ academic success by enrolling them in academic programs and activities outside of school, these parents equipped their daughters with the tools necessary to help alleviate some of the burdens of racism—burdens experienced by all Black people, but significantly pronounced for uneducated Blacks. As a result, many of the gifted Black girls continued to persevere in the face of adversity, by resisting anti-achievement attitudes and, rather, exhibiting educational
resiliency and adopting a high-achiever identity that centered education as a priority in their lives.

Exuding Their Personal Best

Consistent with the wealth of literature on racial socialization (see, e.g., Brown & Tylka, 2011; Cooper et al., 2015; Peck et al., 2014; Saleem et al., 2016; Wallace, 2014), the Black parents in the study understood the importance of preparing their gifted Black daughters to deal with the racial stressors she would encounter as a result of her race. For many of the parents, their own experiences with racial discrimination affected the messages they provided to their daughters. Interestingly, not many parents reported conveying racial socialization messages differently based on their daughter’s gender, as some research suggests (e.g., Davis & Stevenson, 2006), being that boys and girls have different experiences with racial discrimination. Instead, most of the parents admit socializing their daughters in the same way that they do their sons, arming all of their children with racial socialization messages—and even academic and gender socialization messages—that would prepare them for (racial and gender) bias and allow them to mitigate the adverse effects of racism, racial discrimination, and sexism. Moreover, the parents in the study were painfully aware of the institutionalized racism present in policies, practices, and economic and political structures that created racial barriers that hindered success for people of color, and especially Blacks, and were, therefore, eager to teach their young daughters about covert, systemic racist practices in addition to overt forms of racism. Hence, having internalized the many racial socialization messages their parents communicated to them over the years, many of the gifted Black girls in the study had a strong awareness of systemic racism and the ways in which it functioned within their predominantly White school contexts as well as in society-at-
large. In response, they adopted resilient attitudes reflective of their abilities to bounce back from, or resist, racial prejudice and discrimination by striving for personal excellence and adopting a “prove them wrong” attitude (Carter Andrews, n.d.).

Most of the parents of the gifted Black girls spent a great deal of their time instilling messages in their daughters that centered on the necessity of working harder as double minorities—Black females—in order to experience academic excellence and life success, in general. Coupled with crucial messages about the African American struggle from slavery to freedom and the inequities that continue to persist between females and their male counterparts, these parents inadvertently prepared their daughters to face the imminent racism, racial discrimination, and sexual discrimination they would eventually encounter in their schools and/or society, in general. In the process, their gifted Black daughters seemed to embrace these messages and draw on them daily in their motivation to exhibit personal excellence through their academic success and attitude towards life. Kara, for example, discusses how her parents’ messages about hard work have helped her work ethic and drive in school. She asserts,

My parents instilled hard work, you're not going to be handed anything in life, you're going to have to work for it. No grades are going to be handed to you, you have to go out and study, and do your homework, and work your best…They also instilled that it's okay to fail, it's okay to not do alright sometimes as long as you tried your best and you did your best. And I think that helps prepare me because it's like, you know, in life, especially in high school and leading into college you're going to have to work for what you want. You can't just go out and become a doctor, become a lawyer…you have to strive for those things. Do the right things. And that's the only way you'll get it. No one's going to hand you a medical degree and say, ‘Go operate on this person’. So, you have to
work for it…. So, I think it's a work ethic and a work drive. So, whatever I do, I give it 100% without a doubt. And then it's okay to fail. I feel like sometimes, especially with the kids who are in high-achieving schools, failure is a sign of weakness, or like you're just not as better as other people, and so it's like I understand the fact that everybody in their life fails. So, it's okay to sometimes not do as well as you need to do, or not get the part that you want, or not succeed in your standards and that it's okay. And when you take your failure and you put it into something better so that even in life when you feel like you're not going to win every race, but as long as you take that loss and you work harder next time. Some days we win. I think that's what helps me.

Autumn acknowledged the level of rigor that comes with transitioning through each grade level and having to work harder in order to experience academic excellence. Her parents’ messages about putting her best foot forward have certainly seemed to pay off for 12-year-old Autumn who admits to feeling giddy inside whenever she earns good grades because she feels that, when she tries her best, she can succeed at anything she puts her mind to. She shares,

…At my school and at this grade, it's going to be kind of hard, because in eighth grade things will start getting harder. Teachers do expect more and then they start wanting you to do things on your own. Then they expect more. You have to push for excellence and actually try… Whenever I get good grades and stuff, I have a good feeling inside of me, like, ‘Oh, I did the best I can. I did great.’ Knowing that I did the best I can, just to get the grade, is not because I want to be better than people. I just want to be able to do my best. When I do that—my best—I feel like I can succeed at anything.
Similarly, Jurnee, who plans to pursue a career in acting when she grows up, has internalized the messages her mother has tried to instill in her regarding the necessity of working harder as a Black female, despite her strong talents, when pursuing a career in the entertainment industry:

I know my mom has told me a bunch of times that I have to try even harder because even though I'm Black, you don't really see a lot of Black leads on TV and stuff. So, it's definitely something that I'm going to have to work on. I have to prove that I'm more than what they see.

While Laila admits that she has never really thought about sexism much during her high school years, she has always held it in her peripheral view, acknowledging its presence in a learning environment largely comprised of White males who, due to their privilege, are often greeted with a paved road to success while she, as a Black Latina girl, will have to work much harder than they do to establish the same or similar level of success. She states,

I don't really think about sexism that much, but I always have it in my mind that I have to work harder because I'm a woman, especially because most of my peers are White males. They're gonna get by no matter what, but I have to work much harder than they do, so that's always in my mind.

McKenzie has found additional motivation in proving her academic excellence to the teachers and peers who did not believe in her academic abilities. Following a two-year adjustment to her high school environment and a period of time where she struggled to succeed academically or socially, this newfound motivation has inspired McKenzie to enroll in her school’s academically rigorous IB program and work hard to prove that she is, in fact, highly intelligent by striving for personal excellence. She contends,
Honestly, I didn't want to do [the IB program] at first because I've heard from people that it was really hard and it was a lot of work, and I just didn't want to have to deal with all that. Basically, I chose it ... I went through a lot of stuff last year, so I chose it to prove something, not only to myself, but to everybody else. I felt like people thought I wasn't going to make it. They thought I was stupid. I knew I was not stupid, so I chose it to prove them all wrong.

Internalizing the messages her parents communicated to her that have helped Amber deal with racism and racial discrimination, Amber tries her best to ignore the negative things people say to her and, instead, focus on having to strive to work much harder than her White peers in order to be successful in life. She shares,

Don't let stuff get to you, because people will say stuff to you, but they're not the ones who are doing the work, so you shouldn't let that affect you that much. And I have to work twice as hard, or ten times as harder as my White friends to get what I want.

Internalizing both their parents’ messages about racism and sexism as well as their personal experiences with racial and sexual discrimination increased the gifted Black girls’ motivation to be successful in all of their endeavors. Drawing on the controlling images and subjective narratives that have historically been articulated about People of Color and women, in general, and Black women, in particular, these girls adopted a “prove them wrong” attitude. Moreover, by rejecting the stereotypes about their social behaviors and academic abilities, among others, these girls enacted resistance in their predominantly White contexts by promoting behaviors that showcased their high abilities, strong academic motivation and work ethic, highlighting an alternative narrative reflective of Black excellence in a society that promotes a narrative of Black inferiority.
Fight the Power: Using Counter-Storytelling, Documentary Filmmaking to Combat Racism and Sexism in Schools

Internalizing the many socialization messages passed down by their parents that centered on racial pride, cultural knowledge, perseverance, and academic excellence, among others, the gifted Black girls in the study became effective change agents working to dismantle the negative stereotypes and prejudices constructed by the dominant group that many of their teachers and peers harbored about Blacks, in general, and Black females, more specifically, by combatting them in two ways: (1) disproving stereotypes through their actions (e.g., excelling academically and receiving academic honors and awards, avoiding arguments and fights with their peers, controlling their tempers, etc.) and (2) revealing their truths through a counter-storytelling, documentary film approach.

As their parents equipped them with messages that taught them to embrace their femaleness and be proud of their Blackness, the majority of the gifted Black girls in the study adopted strong racial and gendered racial identities characterized by an uncanny desire to prove everyone wrong about the intellectual capacity and academic abilities of Blacks and Black females by working harder in school, putting their education first, and striving for personal excellence. As they worked to dispel the stereotypes held against them by society, they were given a glimpse into the reality of the persistence, permanence, and omnipresence of racism in American society (Bell, 1980, 1992) and education (Bobo & Kluegel, 1993; Milner, 2008; Milner, 2017).

Negative media images depicted about Black people, in general, and Black females, more specifically, that have been deeply engrained in the minds of audiences tend to have a strong influential power universally and, often, become difficult to contradict (Gilliam & Bales, 2001).
By agreeing to tell their own stories and, thus, name their own reality (Delgado, 1989; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), these girls allowed their truths to be revealed—truths that are not necessarily universal or socially constructed, but rather situational—existing as a unique part of each girls’ individual experiences as gifted Black girls who attend predominantly White schools. Moreover, disclosing their truths inadvertently served as a healing agent (Delgado, 1989) by allowing the girls to not only realize how they have been oppressed and subjugated as a result of the racial and gendered oppression they have experienced in their respective schools, but to also directly confront the racial and gender injustices that have shaped their experiences as opposed to inflicting mental violence on themselves through self-condemnation and/or the internalization of stereotypic images that have been constructed by certain elements of society in an effort to maintain power (Crenshaw, 1988; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

A documentary filmmaking approach, informed by critical race theory’s counter-storytelling framework, was used to center the inimitable experiences of this marginalized group and allow them to tell their stories to a wider audience than traditional research methods allow in an effort to challenge and disrupt the majoritarian perspectives ingrained in history, policy, the media, and the literature (Alemán & Alemán, 2016). According to Goodman (2004), documentary films tell stories with a beginning, middle, and end, but contains no actors or actresses. Instead, the goal of a documentary is to tell a short story about a real event as well as to elicit involvement and emotion from the audience who are simultaneously engaging in sense-making around the multiple perspectives presented in the film (Goodman, 2004).

Eight of the gifted Black girls assented to have their stories told on camera and five parents of the gifted Black girls who participated in the study gave their consent to be filmed. The narratives they shared with me were even more powerful as the camera successfully
captured the authenticity in their facial expressions, body gestures, uncomfortable pauses, and tears. During the documentary filmmaking process, I made a conscious effort to showcase these emotions, tensions, and expressions within the narrative to validate their truth.

Being given this “voice” through counter-storytelling provided the gifted Black girls in the study with an effective way to communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed, which, according to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), is the “first step on the road to justice” (p. 58). Not only does counter-storytelling affect the oppressor, who has historically justified its power through the use of stories in an effort to construct reality in ways that will maintain their privilege (Delgado et al., 1989; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), it also presents an alternate viewpoint that can alleviate ethnocentrism and viewing the world one-dimensionally (King, 1991; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). According to Delgado (1989), for instance, counter-storytelling is an effective tool for dismantling the power of the oppressor (the dominant group) by using the untold narratives of the marginalized and inadvertently challenging the status quo. He contends:

Stories, parables, chronicles, and narratives are powerful means for destroying mindset—the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared understandings against a background of which legal and political discourse takes place. These matters are rarely focused on. They are like eyeglasses we have worn a long time. They are nearly invisible; we use them to scan and interpret the world and only rarely examine them for themselves. Ideology—the received wisdom—makes current social arrangements seem fair and natural. Those in power sleep well at night—their conduct does not seem to them like opposition. (p. 61)
The cure is storytelling (or as I shall sometimes call it, counter-storytelling). As Derrick Bell, Bruno Bettelheim, and others show, stories can shatter complacency and challenge the status quo. Stories told by underdogs are frequently ironic and satiric; a root word for “humor” is humus—bringing low, down to earth. Along with the tradition of the picaresque novel or story, which tells of humble folk piquing the pompous or powerful and bringing them down to more human levels.

Most who write about storytelling focus on its community-building functions: stories build consensus, a common culture of shared understandings, and deeper, more vital ethics. Counter-stories, which challenge the received wisdom, do that as well. They can open new windows into reality, showing us that there are possibilities for life other than the ones we live...Counterstories can quickly engage conscience. Their graphic quality can stir imagination in ways in which more conventional discourse cannot.

But stories and counterstories can serve an equally important destructive function. They can show that what we believe is ridiculous, self-serving, or cruel. They can show us the way out of the trap of unjustified exclusion. They can help us understand when it is time to reallocate power. They are the other half—the destructive half—of the creative dialectic.

Stories and counterstories, to be effective, must be or must appear to be noncoercive. They invite the reader to suspend judgment, listen for their point or message, and then decide what measure of truth they contain. (Delgado, 1989, p. 2413-2415)

Consequently, if we are to truly engage in a thorough analysis of the educational system, it is imperative that the voice of People of Color is included (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) due
to the fact that the dialogue of People of Color has historically been silenced, contributing to one of the many tragedies of education (Delpit, 1988). Gifted Black girls’ counter-stories have a right to be heard, acknowledged, and used to provide an alternate experience and perspective to the narratives that have traditionally been told and accepted as truth. Through a counter-storytelling, documentary filmmaking approach that centered the knowledge and experiences of gifted Black girls, spoken word expression and visual imagery were used as a form of resistance to dominant ideologies.

**Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a discussion of the findings related to gifted Black female adolescents’ collective academic experiences attending predominantly White schools. Expanding upon the shared narratives of the gifted Black female participants, the comprehensive analysis of the themes and sub-themes were discussed using a CRT lens. Counter-stories were created to help better understand the lived experiences of each gifted Black female adolescent. While the themes helped to summarize and organize the data, the stories highlighted in this chapter display the context and complexities associated with the racialized academic experiences of gifted Black girls who attend predominantly White schools. In Chapter 6, I will provide a brief overview of the study’s major goals as they relate to each specific research questions, discuss study limitations, suggest implications for future research, and offer recommendations for policies and practices.
CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

Restating the Research Purpose

In this study, I have aimed to identify how the academic experiences of gifted Black female adolescents attending predominantly White schools are shaped by their racial identity, the racial/cultural, academic, and gender socialization messages they receive from their parents, and their levels of school connectedness. The following research questions guided this study and connected the use of narrative inquiry, Critical Race Theory, and the overarching purpose of the study:

1. How are the academic experiences of gifted Black female adolescents attending predominantly White schools shaped by their racial identity?

2. How are the academic experiences of gifted Black female adolescents attending predominantly White schools influenced by parental socialization messages (i.e., racial/cultural socialization, academic socialization, and gender socialization)?

3. How are the academic experiences of gifted Black female adolescents attending predominantly White schools impacted by their school connectedness (i.e., relationships with classroom teachers, gifted peers, same-race, non-gifted peers, and other school personnel, including school administrators, school counselors, and coaches; school curriculum; and involvement in school activities)?

Due to the fact that racism and racial discrimination are firmly embedded in every structure of American society, from the institutional, political, and social levels to the psychological level (Brown & Tylka, 2011), it is highly likely that minority youth will experience some form of racial discrimination during their lifetime. In fact, Black adolescents are more likely to experience racial discrimination than any other ethnic minority group (Fisher
et al., 2000). Moreover, one of the first places that minority youth are likely to become aware of the salience of their racial identity and experience racism is in the school (Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003). Consistent with Wong and colleagues’ (2003) research, nearly all of the gifted Black girls in the study discussed experiencing or perceiving racism and racial discrimination in ambiguous situations at their respective schools, many as early as elementary school.

While racial identity was not directly measured using a quantitative scale such as the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (Sellers et al., 1998), several interview questions were designed to probe for racial centrality and racial regard, qualitatively. However, although I initially planned to include an assessment of each girls’ racial centrality and public and private regard in the analysis, I later found it much more beneficial to specifically assess the girls’ racial centrality as it relates to their academic experiences at their respective schools. Analyses of each individual narrative indicated that the majority of the gifted Black girls in the study maintained a strong Black racial identity indicative of their high racial centrality (believing their Blackness to be an important part of their identity) and private regard (expressing their contentment with their Black race). However, many of the girls maintained a low public regard as a result of the many negative stereotypes about Blacks they had been exposed to at school and via the media.

The gifted Black girls who developed a positive Black racial identity, characterized, in this study, by their strong sense of Black pride, were better prepared to confront the racism and racial discrimination they encountered in the school environment in a positive manner and were able to continue to maintain a strong sense of self despite their awareness of the negative stereotypes routinely distributed through the media about Black people and adopted by their non-Black (and, sometimes, same-race) peers and teachers. Sustaining a healthy racial identity allowed these girls to have a more positive academic experience at their predominantly White
schools because they utilized the negative stereotypes and biases held against them and their Black race as an incentive to “prove them wrong” through perseverance, hard work, and academic excellence.

As evidenced in the stories in Chapter 4, specifically, many of the gifted Black girls were equipped with racial socialization messages that centered on racial pride, combatting stereotypes, preparation for bias by working harder, and striving for personal excellence. In fact, the racial socialization most of the girls consistently received from their parents indirectly influenced each of their multiple identities by influencing their racial, academic, and gendered self. For example, parents prepared their daughters for the racism and racial discrimination they were likely to encounter in school and society-at-large by both sharing their own personal stories in which they experienced racial bias as youth and during adulthood (e.g., in the workplace), and communicated the importance of dispelling the myth that Black people are loud, belligerent, and less intelligent than their White counterparts. These messages significantly influenced many of the gifted Black girls in the study to work hard to prove their White teachers and peers wrong by challenging themselves with their continued enrollment in rigorous advanced courses, maintaining high academic performance in their courses despite the obstacles many of them faced in their predominantly White school environment involving peer and teacher relationships and the absence of a culturally relevant academic curriculum that included the narratives of People of Color and women. Having been equipped with positive messages about their racial and cultural identities, the gifted Black girls maintained a positive racial identity, which allowed them to develop a more positive sense of self and racial pride in a learning environment in which they were often misjudged, mistreated, and discouraged as a result of their race, gender, and giftedness.
Moreover, because most of the parents of the gifted Black girls in the study equipped their daughters with the gender socialization messages necessary to become successful, independent Black women by implementing non-traditional gender role expectations for their gifted Black daughters and allowing their daughters the freedom to pursue academic, athletic, and creative interests of their choice despite their gender, the gifted Black girls in the study did not perceive their femaleness to be a hindrance, although many of them were keenly aware of male-dominated society’s attempt to place discriminating restrictions on females’ roles, behaviors, occupation, income, and education.

All of the gifted Black girls in the study believed education was essential, largely due to the messages they had received by their parents since they were young girls about the importance of striving for academic excellence in school and pursuing higher education beyond high school. Many of the academic socialization messages they internalized were also integrated with racial and gender socialization messages, causing the gifted Black girls to “work harder” academically and strive for personal excellence in an effort to defy the stereotypes they knew were routinely perpetuated by the media in a society where Blacks were believed to be intellectually inferior, women were believed to perform worse than their male counterparts in STEM subjects, and Black females were often deemed to be loud, licentious, and angry. On the whole, the academic experiences of the gifted Black girls in the study were strongly affected by the parental socialization messages they internalized, with messages about race and racism seemingly having the strongest influence.

As addressed in the narratives of each gifted Black female adolescent participant in Chapter 4, developing and maintaining close relationships with peers, teachers, school counselors, and administrators, involvement in school activities, and access to culturally relevant
curricula that equally privileged perspectives of marginalized groups, increased the gifted Black girls’ levels of school connectedness and overall academic experience.

Analyses of each gifted Black girls and their parents’ interview data suggest that gifted Black girls feel most connected to their predominantly White school environments and best thrive in academic settings where they: 1) develop close relationships with their both their same-race and non-same-race peers, teachers and/or school counselors; 2) are assigned to teachers and school counselors who are academically and emotionally supportive of their needs; 3) are able to see the value in the curriculum being taught, whether it be relevant to their future careers or culturally relevant to their lives as People of Color, or Black females, more specifically; and 4) are involved in school activities. On the other hand, when gifted Black girls experience teacher bias because of their race and/or gender, perceive their teachers to have low expectations for their academic success, lack counselor presence or emotional support in school, are discontent with a curriculum that is not culturally relevant but rather privileges the narrative of White males and silences females and People of Color, and lack involvement in school activities, they often feel disconnected from their predominantly White school environment, which makes it more difficult for them to experience academic success.

**Recommendations**

In order for gifted Black female adolescents to achieve healthy identities in the environmental contexts in which they navigate daily and the school context, more specifically, they require a positive perception of their self. The significant others in their lives with whom they interact with on a daily basis, such as their parents, peers, teachers, and other school personnel and support staff, are an essential factor in influencing gifted Black female
adolescents’ negative or positive sense of self. Because the threat of racism, sexism, and racial
discrimination is nearly inevitable as these girls become teens and become more aware of other
peoples’ perceptions about various aspects of their individual and social identities as gifted
females of color, it is important that, despite others’ perceptions of them and attitudes toward
them, they continue to maintain a strong sense of pride in who they are and continue to thrive
academically. In order for gifted Black female adolescents to sustain healthy identities in the
school context and beyond, it is imperative that the influential others with whom they
communicate daily are actively involved in providing them with support and responding to them
with empathy and care.

**Recommendations for Education Policymakers**

Education policymakers at the national and state levels must consider the culturally
different and economically disadvantaged students, in particular, and how current colorblind
policies in education, in general, and gifted and special education, in particular, impact equitable
access to opportunity and achievement for students of color. Using this approach will provide
policymakers with the opportunity to rethink gifted education, the constantly fluctuating and ill-
defined federal, state, and local definitions of gifted and talented students, and examine the irony
in gifted education’s predominantly White population and special education’s predominantly
Black and Latino population. It is equally imperative that parents and community advocates of
all races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds are invited to become actively involved in
the decision-making process prior to each education policy’s enactment. These parents and
community advocates may be able to provide counter-narratives that inspire policymakers who
have not been in the communities and classrooms to consider alternative perspectives and
question the ways in which the policies they wish to endorse enhance or hinder the academic experiences and performance of culturally and economically disadvantaged students, in particular.

**Recommendations for Teacher Educator Programs**

Teacher education programs play a vital role in preparing preservice teachers for the challenges they will likely face in the classroom. While it is certainly no substitute for the reality of the field experience itself, teacher education curricula can be designed to promote awareness of personal biases in preservice teachers as well as engage preservice teachers in the study of culturally diverse student populations; students with disabilities and exceptionalities (e.g., twice-exceptional students) and their unique learning needs; gifted education; multicultural education; critical theory and critical pedagogies; culturally relevant teaching practices; and social justice education. It is essential that teacher education programs reform their curriculum to include courses that center on more than specific subject area methods or classroom management strategies. They must also adapt their curriculum to include approaches to teaching the growing racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse population of students in America’s schools. Moreover, teacher education programs across the country must challenge preservice teachers to confront their implicit biases, stereotypes, and deficit thinking throughout their college career and work to instill in these students the power their perceptions and expectations will have on their future students’ academic achievement or academic failure. I believe that preservice teachers must be given the opportunity to spend a significant amount of time in community engagement activities that require them to work directly with families who are culturally and economically disadvantaged. Hopefully, this will allow them to gain a new perspective of the
marginalized groups upon which they may have initially harbored negative feelings and beliefs. It is also important, I believe, that teacher education programs require a substantial number of courses that approach pedagogy from a critical and transformative lens in an effort to allow preservice teachers to question traditional teaching practices and how they may or may not be equitable for all students. Finally, teacher education programs must work harder to recruit and retain more preservice teachers of color.

**Recommendations for Educators**

Given the historical legacy of the legalization of enslaving Africans for free labor, seizing Native American lands, and forcing Native American children to assimilation through the use of boarding schools away from their native lands and families, it is not difficult to understand the permeation of racism into the institutional structures of America, from the legal system, the church, the medicine sector, and the military, to the education system. Given the nature of this unnerving problem in a land often revered by people all over the world for its racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity as well as its rhetoric of freedom, equality, and democracy for all, education proponents across the nation must work fervently to reform both teacher education programs and education policies that disadvantage marginalized students in the classroom. Additionally, professional development centered on the learning needs of culturally different students, promoting multicultural and antiracist teaching, implementing culturally relevant curricula, and challenging personal biases must be prioritized for current teaching, administrative, and support staff.

Teachers, more specifically, must consider the ways that their upbringing and stereotypes that portray people of color and economically disadvantaged people in a negative light may have
influenced their personal biases about culturally different students in their classroom. They must also consider how these biases have led them to adopt attitudes and behaviors that impede the academic achievement, social engagement, and economic plight of students of color, low-income students, and even students from a certain gender. Further, they must work to maintain high expectations for all of their students regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, (dis)ability, socioeconomic status, or sexual orientation by rejecting all deficit thinking models that they have adopted on the basis of racial, cultural, and gender stereotypes. Not only must they confront and work to dismantle these internalized attitudes, they must also actively seek new ways to engage all of their students in a valuable, equitable learning experience. It is imperative that these teachers think of best practices in fostering a democratic classroom environment that encourages new voices, new knowledges and experiences into the classroom discourse. Culturally relevant pedagogical practices that center on culturally diversity and the contributions of communities of color are essential to the learning needs of many culturally different learners, especially Black and Latinos, who must contend with the omission of the non-White perspective in favor of the dominant Eurocentric ideology displayed in both the official school curriculum and promoted through their teachers’ instructional and classroom management styles. These teachers must acquire an empathetic spirit and work tirelessly to develop a stronger relationship with the parents of minority students in their classrooms, learn about the communities in which their students of color are reared through community and home visits, and work to understand their students’ social, emotional, and psychological needs from a systems perspective.

School counselors, administrators, and other school personnel and support staff must all be tasked with similar roles—addressing and confronting their deficit thinking practices, visiting the communities and learning about the families that attend the schools and the needs that
students may require in the school and home environments, and taking full responsibility for the academic outcomes of all students, for example. However, school counselors must also ensure that they are regularly communicating with students about their academic goals, pushing underachieving students who have the ability to do the work toward academic success by offering them opportunities to enroll in more academically rigorous courses (instead of routinely suggesting lower level tracks) and becoming actively involved in activities and organizations at school that will allow them to gain social capital and leadership skills. Further, school counselors must remain exceptionally cognizant of their strategic approaches to distributing important resources about deadlines and guides to completing the FASFA and scholarship applications that students may be eligible for, and financial aid, scholarship, and grant opportunities that will help economically disadvantaged students pay for SAT and ACT testing preparation courses, college admissions testing fees, and college application fees, among others. In addition, they must also be visible and accessible to students in an effort to build meaningful relationships with all of the students whom they are assigned to counsel, and help provide school psychologists with supporting students who have mental health needs.

**Recommendations for Parents**

Parents of gifted Black girls can work both individually and collectively to adopt effective racial and cultural socialization practices that instill in their daughters’ racial pride, moral understanding, and cultural awareness while simultaneously socializing their daughters to retain some *traditional* masculine qualities, such as self-reliance as opposed to dependence, and assertiveness rather than passiveness, in an effort to prepare them for a world where they will not necessarily have everything handed to them. Instilling these qualities will foster in these girls
both a healthy racial identity and a resilient spirit that encourages them to work hard to achieve their goals without the assistance of others—men, or otherwise. Additionally, regular exposure to new learning activities through academic socialization practices will likely increase gifted Black female adolescents’ opportunities for higher education attainment and social mobility in the future. I believe that when racial and academic socialization messages are routinely exposed through achievement-centered parent-child discourse, activities, and interaction in the home—the environment which plays the most vital role in their identity development—gifted Black female adolescents will internalize both the implicit and explicit messages and use them as protective factors that sustain their healthy racial, gendered, academic, and social identities and resist opportunities for underachievement in response to external factors such as racial discrimination or accusations of “acting White” by their same-race peers.

Limitations

While the study yielded important findings, there were several limitations that can be addressed in the future to help improve this study:

1) Data comprising of ten gifted Black female adolescents (and their parents). With a sample of only ten gifted Black girls, it is possible that the few girls represented within the study may provide a narrow view of the academic experiences of gifted Black girls in predominantly White schools and, thus, present a limited understanding of the experiences of such a unique group whose voices have been traditionally marginalized from the literature;

2) Lack of variability in SES. Most of the participants hailed from higher SES, two-parent households—environments in which they not only received support from their parents
who wished to shape and mold their giftedness—and were exposed to various academic and extracurricular activities as a result of their educated parents’ social and cultural capital;

3) Geographic location. The participants in the study resided in a large metropolitan area of the Southeastern region of the United States. However, including other regions across the country may yield new and important data; and

4) Lack of relationship longevity. Due to the fact that many of the participants who provided their consent to participate in the study had no prior relationship with me, it is possible that they were not as comfortable disclosing and sharing all of their academic and personal experiences with me as a distant researcher and/or semi-stranger.

Despite these limitations, the data collected from participants were rather rich in nature and, thus, important for the ongoing scholarship within gifted education that rarely touches on the experiences of gifted Black female adolescents. Additionally, this study created a space in Critical Race Theory that acknowledges experiential knowledge as a legitimate source through counter-storytelling.

**Implications for Future Research**

The dearth of literature on gifted Black girls and their academic experiences are what prompted this study. However, future research is warranted that more thoroughly: 1) explores various constructs of gifted Black girls’ identities, including SES, by including the experiences of gifted Black girls who hail from lower SES rural and urban areas as opposed to mostly middle- and upper-class girls who have greater access to academic and social opportunities as a result of their higher SES; 2) captures data from gifted Black girls who reside in various geographic regions across the country; 3) integrates the experiences of gifted Black girls who
attend predominantly Black urban and predominantly White rural school settings of various types (i.e., public, private, charter); 3) examines racial identity quantitatively and qualitatively using a mixed methods analysis so that racial identity can be sufficiently measured; 4) more closely examines parental socialization practices in relation to parents’ SES; and, 5) investigates the cause of resilience in some gifted Black girls and underachievement in others, while exploring the relationship between parental socialization messages and parental SES.

**Conclusion**

Using narrative inquiry, this study examined the ways in which gifted Black female adolescents’ academic experiences are shaped by their racial identity, parental socialization messages, and levels of school connectedness as evidenced by their respective counter-narratives. The stories of this unique group confirm the endemic racism and sexism that continues to persist in America’s predominantly White schools, in particular. These stories not only provide transferrable data for policymakers, administrators, teachers, and school counselors, but also help to expose the untold narratives of a unique population of gifted students. Ultimately, it is my hope that this study will inform subsequent research that will examine systemic issues that continue to exclude and oppress gifted students of color, including gifted Black female students, who continue to face marginalization in education, in general, and gifted education, more specifically, as a result of flawed education policies and procedures, educator bias, deficit thinking, and lack of effective diversity training. Only when each of the key players in the education system (i.e., teachers and other school personnel, education policymakers) begin to question the ways in which their own personal agendas and subjective beliefs about certain populations perpetuate the underachievement of Black and Latino students and work to change
their thinking, will students of color students, like gifted Black females, gain access to a more equitable schooling experience. However, I believe that for gifted Black female adolescents, in particular, their ability to achieve in a discriminating society is largely influenced by the consistent socialization messages that they receive from their parents and extended kinship network that fosters the healthy racial, gendered, and academic identities and, inadvertently, facilitates their successful outcomes in both the school and society-at-large.
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APPENDICES
Appendix A

Minor Child Interest Flyer/Email Blast

You're Invited to Participate!

You are invited to participate in a doctoral dissertation study conducted by Ms. Johnson, a doctoral candidate at North Carolina State. The study is looking for gifted or potentially gifted non-Hispanic Black or African American female students in grades 7 – 12 who are willing to be interviewed about their experiences in predominantly White classrooms.

The goal of this research is to understand the experiences and provide educators and counselors with tools and information to work better with gifted Black female students. Your opinions count and your voice needs to be heard!

This study involves two face-to-face interviews—two individual interviews—with Ms. Johnson. The first interview will take about 1 ½ hours to 2 hours to complete and the second interview will take up to 1 hour. You will also be asked to design a piece of artwork that embodies your experience as a gifted Black female. If you elect to participate in the documentary portion of this study, your interviews will be video recorded, with you and your parents’ permission. Your parents will also participate in the interview process separately, although their interviews will be much shorter, approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour.

There is unlikely to be any direct benefit or significant risk to you from being in this study. The primary benefit is to gain new knowledge. If you take part in this study, you may help others in the future.

However, if you are interested in participating, please email me at otjohnso@ncsu.edu and I will send you an Interest Survey/Demographic Questionnaire and informed consent forms.

Hurry and don’t delay...space is limited and only 15 girls will be selected to participate. If selected, Ms. Johnson will contact you to give you an information packet.

If you have any questions, please email Ms. Johnson at otjohnso@ncsu.edu or contact her directly at 919-328-1400. Thanks for your consideration!

Sincerely,
Ms. Johnson
Appendix B

Parent Interest Flyer/Email Blast

You're Invited to Participate!

You and your gifted Black female daughter are invited to participate in a doctoral dissertation study conducted by Ms. Johnson, a doctoral candidate at North Carolina State. The study is looking for gifted or potentially gifted Non-Hispanic Black or African American female students in grades 7 – 12 (and between the ages of 12 and 17) who are willing to be interviewed about their experiences in predominantly White classrooms. As the parent/guardian of a gifted Black girl, you must also be willing to be interviewed about your experiences raising a gifted Black daughter.

The goal of this research is to understand the experiences and provide educators and counselors with tools and information to work better with gifted Black female students. Your opinions count and your voice needs to be heard!

This study involves two face-to-face interviews—two individual interviews—with Ms. Johnson. The first interview that your daughter participates in will take about 1 1/2 hours to 2 hours to complete and the second interview will take up to 1 hour. Your daughter will also be asked to design a piece of artwork that embodies her experience as a gifted Black female student who attends a predominantly White school. If you and/or your daughter elect to participate in the documentary portion of this study, your interviews will be video recorded, provided you give your permission for your daughter to participate and she provides her assent to participate. Your interview process will be conducted separately and will be much shorter, approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour.

There is unlikely to be any direct benefit or significant risk to you from being in this study. The primary benefit is to gain new knowledge. If you take part in this study, you may help others in the future. If you are not interested, it is not a problem and will not be held against you.

However, if you are interested in participating, please email me at atjohnso@ncsu.edu and I will send you an Interest Survey/Demographic Questionnaire, parental Consent forms, and a minor child assent form to complete.

Hurry and don't delay...space is limited and only 15 girls will be selected to participate. If selected, Ms. Johnson will contact you to give you an information packet. If you have any questions, please email Ms. Johnson at atjohnso@ncsu.edu or contact her directly at Confidential. Thanks for your consideration!

Sincerely,
Ms. Johnson
Appendix C

Interest Survey/Demographic Questionnaire

Are you interested in participating in a study about gifted Black girls attending a predominantly white school?

(Circle One)           Yes                 No

Name: ___________________________ Grade: _________ Age: _______

Current School: ___________________________ School District: ____________

Current Cumulative GPA: ____________

Have you attended any other middle/high school? (Circle One)   Yes       No
If so, please list the school(s) you have attended and the grade(s) you were in when attending each school:

School Attended: ___________________________ Grade: ____________

School Attended: ___________________________ Grade: ____________

School Attended: ___________________________ Grade: ____________

What types of school activities (clubs, sports, organizations, etc.) do you participate in?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

What type of community activities (e.g., sports leagues, organizations, church activities, scouting, etc.) do you participate in?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Have you or do you participate in any of the following classes/programs? (Circle one)

AIG/Gifted and Talented Program: (Circle One)   Yes       No

If yes, when did you first become eligible for placement? ________________

High School Students:
AP classes: (Circle One)  Yes                  No
If yes, please list all AP courses you have taken/currently taking:

IB courses: (Circle One)  Yes                  No
If yes, please list all IB courses you have taken/currently taking:

Honors Classes: (Circle One)  Yes                  No
If yes, please list all Honors courses you have taken/currently taking:

Middle School Students:
Accelerated Middle School Courses (e.g., Common Core 7 Plus, Common Core 6/7):
(Circle One)  Yes                  No
If yes, please list all accelerated courses you have taken/currently taking:
Appendix D

Parent Consent Form to Participate in Study

North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study: The Role of Racial Identity, Parental Racial Socialization, and School Connectedness on the Academic Experiences of Gifted Black Female Adolescents Attending Predominantly White Schools

Principal Investigator: Oriana Johnson
Faculty Sponsor (if applicable): Dr. Jessica DeQuin Guppy

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a dissertation research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. With your consent, you have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue.

You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher named above.

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of the narrative inquiry/documentary dissertation study is designed to examine the academic experiences of gifted Black female adolescents attending predominantly White schools. More specifically, this study will consider: (1) how the academic experiences of gifted Black female adolescents attending predominantly White schools are shaped by their: (a) racial identity; (b) receptiveness to parental racial socialization messages; and (c) levels of school connectedness.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in one face-to-face interview with the researcher (Ms. Oriana Johnson). The interview will take about 30 minutes to 1 hour to complete. If you elect to participate in the documentary portion of this study, your interview will also be video recorded.

Risks and Benefits
There are some minimal risks associated with participation in this research. These risks include potential psychological stress resulting from the elicitation of experiences that may potentially be hurtful or traumatic in nature and the potential exposure of identities for anyone agreeing to take part in the documentary film. In order to address these potential risks, the researcher will work to build a strong rapport with you prior to the commencement of the study, and can be reached at any time to discuss the best course of action should you experience any stress as a direct result of your participation. Additionally, you have the option to stop participating in the research study at any time, or to decline participation in the documentary film. The indirect benefits of participating in this study include gaining new knowledge that could benefit educators, researchers, and policymakers.

Confidentiality
The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the fullest extent allowed by law. Data will be stored securely in a password-protected laptop computer. No reference will be made in written reports, which could link you to the study. However, if you choose to participate in the documentary film portion of the study, your identity may be exposed because your face will be featured in the film.

Compensation
There is no compensation for participating in this study.

What if you have questions about this study?
If you have questions at any time about the study itself or the procedures implemented in this study, you may contact the researcher, Ms. Oriana Johnson via email at ojohnso@ncsu.edu or via telephone at [phone number].

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?
If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator at depaxton@ncsu.edu or by phone at 1-919-515-4514.

Consent To Participate in Study
I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

Parent Participant’s signature ___________________________ Date ____________

Consent To Participate in Documentary Film Portion of Study
I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in the documentary film portion of the study with the understanding that my interview will be video recorded and my image will be used in a documentary film that may be distributed to a broader audience. I understand that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

Parent Participant’s signature ___________________________ Date ____________
Appendix E

Parent Consent Form for Minor Child to Participate in Study

North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study: The Role of Racial Identity, Parental Racial Socialization, and School Connectedness on the Academic Experiences of Gifted Black Female Adolescents Attending Predominantly White Schools
Principal Investigator: Oriana Johnson
Faculty Sponsor (if applicable): Dr. Jessica Ochoa

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
Your daughter is being asked to take part in a dissertation research study. Her participation in this study is voluntary. With your consent, she has the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue.

You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher named above.

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of the narrative inquiry/documentary dissertation study is designed to examine the academic experiences of gifted Black female adolescents attending predominantly White schools. More specifically, this study will consider: 1) how the academic experiences of gifted Black female adolescents attending predominantly White schools are shaped by their: (a) racial identity; (b) receptiveness to potential racial socialization messages; and (c) levels of school connectedness.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
If you agree to allow your daughter to participate in this study, she will be asked to participate in two separate face-to-face interviews with the researcher (Ms. Oriana Johnson). The first interview will take about 1 1/2 to 2 hours to complete and the second interview will take up to 1 hour. In addition, your daughter will be asked to design a piece of artwork of her choice that embodies her experience as a gifted Black female. If you elect your daughter to participate in the documentary portion of this study, her interviews will also be video recorded.

Risks and Benefits
There are some minimal risks associated with participation in this research. These risks include potential psychological stress resulting from the elicitation of experiences that may potentially be hurtful or traumatic in nature and the potential exposure of identities for participants agreeing to take part in the documentary film. In order to address these potential risks, the researcher will work to build a strong rapport with your daughter prior to the commencement of the study, and can be reached at any time to discuss the best course of action should your daughter experience any stress as a direct result of her participation. Additionally, your daughter has the option to stop participating in the research study at any time, or to decline participation in the documentary film. The indirect benefits of participating in this study include gaining new knowledge that could benefit educators, researchers, and policymakers.

Confidentiality
The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the fullest extent allowed by law. Data will be stored securely in a password-protected laptop computer. No reference will be made in written reports, which could link your daughter to the study. However, if you choose to allow your daughter to participate in the documentary film portion of the study, her identity may be exposed because her face will be featured in the film.

Compensation
There is no compensation for participating in this study.

What if you have questions about this study?
If you have questions at any time about the study itself or the procedures implemented in this study, you may contact the researcher, Ms. Oriana Johnson via email at ojohnson@ncsu.edu or via telephone at (334) 348-6814.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?
If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator at dmpaxton@ncsu.edu or by phone at 1-919-515-4514.

Consent To Participate in Study
“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to allow my daughter _____________ to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

Parent of Minor Child Participant’s signature __________________________ Date ________________

Consent To Participate in Documentary Film Portion of Study
“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to allow my daughter _____________ to participate in the documentary film portion of the study with the understanding that her interviews will be video recorded and her image will be used in a documentary film that may be distributed to a broader audience. I understand that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

Parent of Minor Child Participant’s signature __________________________ Date ________________
Appendix F

Minor Child Assent Form to Participate in Study

North Carolina State University
INFORMED ASSENT FORM for RESEARCH
Title of Study: The Role of Racial Identity, Parental Racial Socialization, and School Connectedness on the Academic Experiences of Gifted Black Female Adolescents Attending Predominantly White Schools
Principal Investigator: Oriana Johnson
Faculty Sponsor (if applicable): Dr. Jessica DeDuck

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study about gifted Black girls who attend majority White schools. A research study is a way to learn more about people. If you decide that you want to be part of this study, you will be asked to participate in two face-to-face interviews. The first interview will last about two hours and the second interview will last about an hour. You will also be asked to create a work of art (poem, play, short story, collage, drawing, etc.) that represents how you feel about being a gifted Black girl at your school.

What is the purpose of this study?
This research study will explore how your experiences at school are impacted by the things you learn from your parents at home, how you feel about being a gifted Black girl, and how close you feel to your school environment.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
There are some things about this study you should know. If you want to participate in this study and your parents agree to allow you to participate in this study, taking part in the two interviews will take up about three hours of your time, and you may also spend another hour or two designing a piece of artwork of your choice that you will be asked to bring to your second interview. Something else that you should know about the study is that there is a documentary film portion, which you have the option of participating in. If you decide you want to be a part of the documentary film, your interviews will be video recorded on camera and your identity, therefore, more be exposed to the public. However, your identity will always be kept confidential so that anyone who reads the report will not be able to tell who you are.

Risks and Benefits
There are some small risks that come with your participation in this research study. The questions that are asked in the interviews may possibly cause you to remember and ask you to talk about past situations that were hurtful to you. Also, if you choose to participate in the documentary film, your face will be on camera and people who watch the film may be able to tell who you are. If you ever feel uncomfortable during the interviews, you do not have to continue. You can also quit the study whenever you would like if you feel any kind of stress because of your participation in the study.

Not everyone who takes part in this study will benefit. A benefit means that something good happens to you. A possible benefit of participating in this study is the opportunity to gain new knowledge that can help educators, researchers, and policymakers.

Confidentiality
When the researcher has finished with this study, she will write a report about what was learned. This report will not include your name or that you were in the study. However, if you choose to participate in the documentary film, your identity may be exposed because your face will be featured in the film.

Compensation
You will not be paid to participate in this study.

What if you have questions about this study?
If you have questions at any time about this study, you can contact the researcher, Ms. Oriana Johnson, by email at ojohnso@ncsu.edu or by telephone at 1-919-515-4014.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?
If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator at dpaxton@ncsu.edu or by phone at 1-919-515-4514.

Assent To Participate in Study
“I have read and understand the information in this assent form. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study and understand that I may decide that I no longer want to participate at any time.”

Minor Child Participant’s signature ___________________________ Date ______________

Assent To Participate in Documentary Film Portion of Study
“I have read and understand the information in this assent form. I agree to participate in the documentary film part of the study with the understanding that my interviews will be video recorded and my face will be seen to people who watch the documentary film. I understand that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without loss of any benefits that I am otherwise entitled to receive.”

Minor Child Participant’s signature ___________________________ Date ______________
Appendix G

Interview Protocol for Gifted Black Female Participants

Background Information

1. If you could describe yourself using three adjectives, what adjectives would you use, and why?

2. Tell me about your family. (Probe for: head of household (single parent home, married/divorced parents, etc.), family members in the home (e.g. siblings), family members residing outside of the home, special situations, family values, influential family members)

3. Tell me about the schools you attended before your current school. (Probe for: neighborhood, racial composition, moving patterns, academics, activities, supports (e.g. counselors, teachers)
   - Elementary
   - Middle
   - High School/Transfer

4. How might you describe your ability to do well in the following subjects:
   - Math
   - Science
   - Social studies
   - English Language Arts

5. How might you describe your academic performance in the following areas:
   - Mathematics
   - Science
   - Social Studies
   - English Language Arts

6. Tell me about your dreams/aspirations in life.

Reflections

7. If you could use one word to describe the experience of being Black at a predominantly White school, what word would you use and why?

8. If you could use one word to describe the experience of being a Black female at a predominantly White school, what word would you use and why?

9. If you could use one word to describe the experience of being a gifted Black female at a predominantly White school, what word would you use and why?

10. Recall all of your experiences at your predominantly White school. Can you recall any specific experiences where you felt you were mistreated because of your race by anyone at your school?

11. Recall all of your experiences at your predominantly White school. Can you recall any specific experiences where you felt you were mistreated because of your gender by anyone at your school?

12. Recall all of your experiences at your predominantly White school. Can you recall any specific experiences where you felt you were mistreated because of your giftedness by anyone at your school?
Research Question 1:
How are the academic experiences of gifted Black female adolescents attending predominantly White schools shaped by their racial identity?

Racial Identity
1. Describe what it means to be Black.
2. How important is your Blackness to you?
3. Of what racial/ethnicity are the majority of your friends? What is it about these particular friends that draws you toward them? How do they get along with other racial/ethnic groups?
4. What are some of the negative things you hear about Black people? Where have you heard these things? How do you respond to these assertions?
5. What are some of the negative things you hear about Black females? Where have you heard these things? How do you respond to these assertions?
6. Do you feel that it is important to maintain close relationships with other Black people (e.g., family, mentors, friends)? Why or why not?
   a. More specifically, do you feel that it is important to have Black friends? Why or why not?
7. In your opinion, what can be done about racism and prejudice in schools?

Research Question 2:
How are the academic experiences of gifted Black female adolescents attending predominantly White schools influenced by parental socialization messages?

Parental socialization practices
8. What important values have your parents instilled in you? How do you believe these values prepare you for the future?
9. What messages, if any, have your parents communicated to you that have helped (or will help) you to deal with racism and/or racial discrimination?
10. What messages, if any, have your parents communicated to you that have helped (or will help) you to deal with sexism?
11. Tell me about the messages that your parents have communicated to you about education. Are these messages important to you? If so, why? How have these messages prepared you for the classes you currently take and the school you currently attend? How have they influenced your academic performance? In your opinion, how will these messages prepare you for life success in the future?
12. Describe the traditions and practices that your parents or other family members have passed on to you? Why do you think they believe these traditions and practices are so important to pass on?
13. What do you believe your parents’ dreams and visions are for your future?

Research Question 3:
How are the academic experiences of gifted Black female adolescents attending predominantly White schools impacted by their school connectedness (classroom teachers, gifted peers, same-race, non-gifted peers; other school personnel, including school
School connectedness: teacher relationships

14. Think back across your entire K-12 school career. Who was your favorite teacher, and why? What is/was it about this particular teacher that makes them stand out among all of the others? Did you share a personal relationship with this teacher? How did this teacher interact with you and treat you on a daily basis?

15. Think back across your entire K-12 school. Who was your least favorite teacher, and why? What qualities did this teacher possess that made you dislike them? How did this teacher interact with you and treat you on a daily basis?

16. What qualities do you believe a “good” teacher must possess? Based on the qualities you listed, do you have any “good” teachers this year?

17. Briefly tell me about each of your core teachers this year. (Probe for: racial/ethnic makeup, age, perceived passion for teaching, pedagogical style, etc.)

18. Describe the relationships you currently share with each of your core (i.e. science, math, social studies, ELA) teachers this year, both in and out of the classroom. (Probe for: perceived effort to build/strengthen relationship with participant based on student-teacher interactions, pedagogical practices and delivery of instruction, and other factors that influence a more personal relationship in and out of the classroom)
   a. For the teachers whom you do not share a close relationship, what actions do you feel they must take in order to strengthen their relationship with you both in and out of the classroom?

19. How might the teachers in your gifted education and/or advanced classes, more specifically, describe you as a student to another teacher? Do you think their perception of you is accurate? Why or why not?

20. Describe a time when you felt your teacher devalued you and/or didn’t believe in your abilities (whether a regular education teacher or a gifted/advanced classroom teacher). How did that make you feel? How did you react? What did you do about it? Do you believe that your race, gender, and/or giftedness had anything to do with your teacher’s attitude toward you? Why or why not?

21. Tell me about a time when you felt your teacher was proud of you academically (whether a regular education teacher or a gifted/advanced classroom teacher). Do you believe that your race, gender, and/or giftedness had anything to do with your teacher’s attitude toward you? Why or why not?

School connectedness: peer relationships

22. Tell me about the peers in your gifted education program and/or advanced classes. (Probe for: weak/strong relationships; racial, ethnic, and gender makeup)
   a. How would you compare your academic abilities (i.e., your ability to be academically successful) to other students in your gifted education/advanced classes?
   b. How would you compare your academic performance (i.e., GPA, grades earned/received) in your classes (regular education classes and gifted/advanced classes) in relation to most of your peers?
23. In relation to other students in your classes (regular education classes and gifted/advanced classes), how would you describe your motivation to be academically successful in your classes?

24. If they were to describe you to someone else, tell me what one of your peers might say about you academically?
If they were to describe you to someone else, tell me what one of your peers might say about you socially?

25. Tell me about your closest friends at school. (Probe for: how they met their friends, how long they have been friends, whether it was difficult making friends, same-race peers, culturally different, non-Black peers, gifted peers, etc.) What qualities do they possess that make them a good friend to you?

a. Describe a time in school when you felt you really needed your friend(s).

b. Describe a time outside of school when you felt you really needed your friend(s).

c. Have you ever felt isolated from your friends at school? If so, why? Please share that experience with me.
   i. Do you feel that these feelings of isolation had anything to do with your race, gender, and/or giftedness? Why or why not?

d. Has there ever been a time when you’ve been among a group of peers at school (whether they were friends, acquaintances, or classroom peers) when you felt you just didn’t belong? Describe that experience. How did you feel? What did you do? How did you cope with that experience? How did that experience affect you: (a) mentally or emotionally? (b) socially? and/or (c) academically? Do you feel that these feelings of not belonging had anything to do with your race, gender, and/or giftedness? Why or why not?

26. Tell me more about the relationships you share with same-race peers at your school and in your community (e.g., church, neighborhood, community organizations, etc.).

a. Have any of these peers ever accused you of “acting White”? If so, tell me more about that experience? How did it make you feel? How did you cope with the accusation? How do you think the experience affected you: (a) mentally or emotionally? (b) socially? and/or (c) academically?

School connectedness: relationships with school counselors and other school personnel

27. Tell me about the relationship(s) you currently share with your school’s counselor(s).

a. Do you feel the school counselors at your school hold high expectations for all students at your school, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, special needs, talents, etc.? Why or why not?

b. Tell me about a memorable time when you interacted with your school guidance counselor. Describe the interaction. What were they like? How did they treat you? How did you feel about the interaction?
   i. During this interaction, was there any evidence that their attitude toward you had anything to do with your race, gender, and/or giftedness? Why or why not?

28. Tell me about the relationship(s) you currently share with your school’s administrator(s).

a. Do you feel the administrators at your school hold high expectations for all students at your school, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, special needs, talents, etc.? Why or why not?
b. Tell me about a memorable time when you interacted with an administrator at your school. Describe the interaction. What were they like? How did they treat you? How did you feel about the interaction?
   i. During this interaction, was there any evidence that their attitude toward you had anything to do with your race, gender, and/or giftedness? Why or why not?

29. Tell me about the relationship(s) you currently share with other school personnel (e.g., athletic coaches, mentors, support staff, school psychologists, etc.).
   a. What role(s) do these adults play in your school?
   b. How have they impacted the way that you experience your school?

30. Tell me about a time when you needed help with a problem with a peer at school. What did you do? Where did you go? Who helped you?

31. Tell me about a time when you needed academic support at school. What did you do? Where did you go? Who helped you?

School connectedness: the curriculum and other classroom dynamics

32. Do you find the content taught in your regular education courses meaningful and/or relevant to your life? Why or why not? (Probe for: cultural relevance, multicultural curriculum)

33. Do you find the content taught in your gifted education and/or advanced-level courses meaningful and/or relevant to your life as a gifted Black female? Why or why not? (Probe for: cultural relevance, multicultural curriculum)

34. How rigorous are your core classes? Do you feel challenged? Do you ever feel bored? Tell me why.

35. How rigorous are your gifted/advanced classes? Do you feel challenged? Do you ever feel bored? Tell me why.

36. If your close friend who, is also a Black female, received a referral to gifted/advanced classes next year and wanted you to describe what the experience is like, what would you tell her?

37. What challenges, if any, do you face in your gifted and/or advanced classes? (Probe for: curriculum/content disconnection; lack of teacher support/interventions/understanding; being a female/being Black in advanced predominantly White classroom; lack of peer support, etc.) In what ways do you think your motivation to achieve and academic performance are impacted by these challenges?

School connectedness: involvement in school activities

38. What activities, if any, are you involved in at school? Describe your role(s) and the people you work closely with.

39. In your school community, do you believe that it is important to be involved in school activities offered at school? Why or why not?

40. In what ways does your involvement in school activities help you to feel more connected to your school?
   a. As a gifted Black female student, how has being involved in extracurricular activities at your school enhanced your social experiences at your school?
   b. As a gifted Black female student, how has being involved in extracurricular activities at your school enhanced your academic experiences at your school?
what ways has your involvement in school activities increased your motivation to achieve academically?
Appendix H

Follow-Up Interview Protocol for Gifted Black Female Participants

[TBD based on data from initial interviews]

General focus areas might include:

- Elaborating on specific race-related incidents in the classroom or school context
- Elaborating on specific gender-related incidents in the classroom or school context
- Elaborating on specific parental socialization messages that either stood out or weren’t described well enough
- Details about certain relationships with teachers, peers, and/or other school personnel
Appendix I

Interview Protocol for Parent/Guardian Participants

Background Information

1. Why are you allowing your child to participate in this study?
2. Why are you participating in this study?
3. At what age was your daughter when you realized your daughter was academically and/or intellectually gifted?
   a. What kinds of things did you notice about her various abilities (academic or otherwise)?
   b. What did you do to help shape and mold her talents/abilities (e.g., additional training/coaching/lessons, buying books, enrollment in special programs, getting her involved in activities in the school, community, etc.)
      i. Why did you take this approach? How do you feel your gifted daughter benefited from it?

Research Question 2:
How are the academic experiences of gifted Black female adolescents attending predominantly White schools influenced by parental socialization messages?

General Parental Socialization and Reflections

4. What important values have you tried to instill in your gifted daughter over the years? How do you believe embracing these values will prepare her for the future?
5. What dreams and visions do you have for your daughter’s future?
6. Describe a time when your daughter made you really proud by doing well in school. Why does this particular time resonate with you most? Why were you so proud?
7. Describe a time when your daughter failed to live up to your expectations academically. Why does this particular moment resonate with you most? Why do you believe you were so disappointed in her academic underachievement?

Racial/cultural socialization messages

8. What traditions and practices have you or other family members passed on to your gifted daughter?
   a. Why do you and your family value these traditions and practices enough to pass them on?
9. What messages, if any, have you communicated to your daughter that you believe have helped (or will help) her to deal with racism and/or racial discrimination?
   a. How have they helped (or will help) her to confront racism and/or racial discrimination in the classroom or school context?
10. Tell me about a time, that you are aware of, when your gifted daughter experienced racism and/or racial discrimination in the classroom or school context. What did you do? How did your gifted daughter react to the racism/racial discrimination?
   a. Following the incident, describe the communication you had with your daughter regarding the incident.
**Academic socialization messages**

11. Tell me about the messages that you have communicated to your gifted daughter about education. In your opinion, why are these messages so important for your daughter’s life success? How have these messages prepared her for the classes she is currently taking and the school she currently attends?

12. Tell me about a time when your gifted daughter experienced discrimination in the classroom or school context as a result of her giftedness. What did you do? How did your gifted daughter react to the discrimination?
   a. Following the incident, describe the communication you had with your daughter regarding the incident.

**Gender socialization messages**

13. In your household, in what ways are sons and daughters (if applicable to the specific family context) socialized similarly and/or differently? Why?
   a. What roles do you believe Black females need to be prepared to assume in the future? (Probe for: workplace/career, future household, traditional/androgynous gender roles, etc.) Why?
   b. What qualities/characteristics do you believe are important for Black females to possess in order to be successful in life? Why?

14. What messages, if any, have you communicated to your gifted daughter that you believe have helped (or will help) her to deal with sexism?
   a. How have they helped (or will help) her to confront sexism in the classroom or school context?

15. Tell me about a time, that you are aware of, when your gifted daughter experienced sexism and/or sexual discrimination in the classroom or school context because of her gender. What did you do? How did your gifted daughter react to the sexism/sexual discrimination?
   a. Following the incident, describe the communication you had with your daughter regarding the incident.
Appendix J

The Role of Racial Identity, Parental Socialization, and School Connectedness on the Academic Experiences of Gifted Black Female Adolescents Attending Predominantly White Schools

*Codebook*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Code</th>
<th>Secondary Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background Info</td>
<td></td>
<td>Participants discuss information about their family and education background.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family information</td>
<td></td>
<td>Participants discuss their family background.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents’ Aspirations</td>
<td></td>
<td>Participants discuss the dreams and aspirations their parents have for their future.</td>
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<td>Single parent household</td>
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<td>Participants discuss being raised or currently living in a single-parent household.</td>
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<td>Participants discuss being raised or currently living with both parents.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Divorced parents household</td>
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<td>Participants discuss being raised or currently living in a divorced parent household.</td>
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<td>Participants discuss living in a household with a step-parent.</td>
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<td>Participants discuss having one or more siblings.</td>
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<td>Participants discuss being an only child.</td>
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<td>Parent Educational Background</td>
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<td>Participants discuss their parents’ educational background, or participants’ educational background (level of education) is discussed.</td>
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<td>Topic</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent Occupation</td>
<td>Participants discuss their parent’s occupation, or participants’ occupation is discussed.</td>
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<td>Influential Family Members or People</td>
<td>Participants discuss people (family members, mentors, etc.) who have been a great influence in their lives.</td>
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<td>School/Classroom Context</td>
<td>Participants discuss school or classroom context.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Racial and/or gender composition</td>
<td>Participants discuss racial and/or gender composition of the school(s) they attend(ed) or classes they are enrolled in.</td>
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<td>Moving patterns</td>
<td>Participants discuss transitioning between schools.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Participants discuss events at their elementary school.</td>
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<td>Middle School</td>
<td>Participants discuss events at their middle school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Participants discuss events at their high school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic Courses</td>
<td>Participants discuss the courses (e.g., advanced level, subject area, etc.) they are currently taking or previously took.</td>
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<td>Academic Grade Level</td>
<td>Participants discuss their grade level they are currently in or were previously enrolled in.</td>
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<td>Favorite Subject(s)</td>
<td>Participants discuss their favorite subject(s).</td>
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<td>Least Favorite Subject(s)</td>
<td>Participants discuss their least favorite subject(s).</td>
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<td>Academic Support in School</td>
<td>Participants discuss professionals or adults who supported them academically in the school(s) they attend(ed).</td>
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<td>Perceived Academic Ability</td>
<td>Participants discuss their perceived academic ability.</td>
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<td>Perceived High Ability</td>
<td>Participants perceive their ability to do well academically in a subject.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived Low Ability</td>
<td>Participants perceive their ability to do poorly academically in a subject.</td>
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<td>Academic Traits</td>
<td>Participant discusses the academic traits/qualities that define her.</td>
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<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Participants discuss their level of academic motivation.</td>
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<td>Participants use positive adjectives/qualities to describe themselves.</td>
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<td>Negative</td>
<td>Participants use negative adjectives/qualities to describe themselves.</td>
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<td>Participants describe unique and important aspects of their social identity.</td>
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<td>Participants describe unique and important aspects of their academic identity.</td>
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<td>Future goals</td>
<td>Participants discuss their future goals.</td>
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<td>Participants discuss their future dreams/aspirations in life.</td>
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<td>Predominantly White Schools</td>
<td><strong>Participants discuss their various experiences attending a predominantly White school.</strong></td>
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<td>Perception of Being Black at PW School</td>
<td>Words participants use to describe their experience being Black and attending a predominantly White school.</td>
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<td>Perception of Being Black Female at PW School</td>
<td>Words participants use to describe their experience being Black and female and attending a predominantly White school.</td>
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<td>Perception of Being Gifted Black Female at PW School</td>
<td>Words participants use to describe their experience being gifted, Black, and female and attending a predominantly White school.</td>
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<td>Obstacles</td>
<td>Participants discuss obstacles they have faced while attending predominantly White schools.</td>
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<td>Participants discuss the advantages of attending predominantly White schools.</td>
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<td>Connectedness: standing out</td>
<td>Participants discuss feeling the need to stand out because of their predominantly White school environment.</td>
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<td>Participants discuss feeling the need to fit in because of their predominantly White school environment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Racial discrimination</td>
<td>Participants discuss being discriminated against because of their race at their predominantly</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>White school.</th>
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<td><strong>Academic discrimination</strong></td>
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<td><strong>School Culture</strong></td>
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<td><strong>African American Adolescent Racial Identity</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Pre-encounter (Stage 1)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Encounter (Stage 2)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Immersion-Emersion (Stage 3)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Commitment (Stage 5)</strong></td>
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<td>Oppressed Minority Ideology</td>
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<tr>
<th>Giftedness</th>
<th>Participants discuss aspects of their giftedness, or the experience of being gifted at school.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Characteristics</td>
<td>Participants describe the characteristics/traits their daughter possessed that alluded to her giftedness.</td>
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<td>Identification</td>
<td>Participants discuss the time they were first identified as gifted or referred to gifted program(s) at their school.</td>
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<td>Mistreatment because of giftedness</td>
<td>Participants discuss being mistreated because of their giftedness (e.g., being teased about being smart, having assignments stolen, etc.).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taken advantage of giftedness</td>
<td>Participants discuss being taken advantage of because of their giftedness (e.g., constantly being approached to provide answers to homework, etc.).</td>
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<td>Realization of giftedness</td>
<td>Participants describe the moment when they first realized their daughter was academically and/or intellectually gifted.</td>
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<td>Shaping/molding giftedness</td>
<td>Participants discuss the various steps they took to shape and mold their daughter’s academic and/or intellectual giftedness.</td>
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<td><strong>General Parental Socialization Practices</strong></td>
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<td>Dreams and Visions</td>
<td>Participants discuss dreams and visions they have for their daughter’s life.</td>
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<td>Important Values</td>
<td>Participants discuss the important values they have tried to instill in their daughter over the years.</td>
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<td>Parents discuss how the values they</td>
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<tr>
<td>have instilled through socialization</td>
<td>messages will prepare their daughter for the future.</td>
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<td>Proud Moment</td>
<td>Participants describe a moment when they felt proud of their daughter academically.</td>
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<td>Disappointed Moment</td>
<td>Participants describe a moment when they felt disappointed by their daughter academically.</td>
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<td>Mother-Daughter Relationship</td>
<td>Participants discuss relationship they share with their mothers.</td>
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<td>Father-Daughter Relationship</td>
<td>Participants discuss relationship they share with their fathers.</td>
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<td>Roles and Qualities of Black Females</td>
<td>Participants discuss roles they believe Black females should be prepared to assume in the future and qualities they must possess in order to be successful in life.</td>
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<td><strong>Racial/Cultural Socialization Practices</strong></td>
<td><strong>Participants engage in the process of transmitting implicit (e.g., verbal directives) and explicit (e.g., modeled behavior, exposure to opportunities, and interactive experiences) meanings of Blackness, preparing their children for adult roles and assuming responsibilities by transmitting values, beliefs, and ideas around healthy lifestyles.</strong></td>
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<td>Religion and Spirituality</td>
<td>Participants discuss ways in which they promote messages around religion and/or spirituality to their child.</td>
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<td>Family Traditions</td>
<td>Participants discuss ways in which they celebrate and pass down family traditions to their child.</td>
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<td>Family Values</td>
<td>Participants discuss the specific family values they promote in their</td>
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<td><strong>Instilling Cultural Knowledge</strong></td>
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<td>Racial Pride</td>
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<td>Meaning of Blackness</td>
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<td>Preparing for Racial Bias</td>
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<td>Working Twice as Hard</td>
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<td>Combating Stereotypes</td>
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<td>Striving for Excellence</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Academic Socialization Practices</strong></th>
<th><strong>Participants discuss adopting beliefs and behaviors that influence their child’s school-related development.</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promote Competition</td>
<td>Participants discuss encouraging their child to be/become academically competitive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endorsing Education</td>
<td>Participants discuss endorsing higher education when communicating with their child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Encouragement</td>
<td>Participants discuss encouraging their child to be academically successful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Involvement</td>
<td>Participants discuss being involved in their child’s academics (e.g., attending school events, assisting with homework/projects, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Resources</td>
<td>Participants discuss increasing their child’s social capital with academic resources, such as encouraging their involvement in clubs, camps, and extracurricular activities that have an academic focus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Socialization</td>
<td><strong>Participants discuss adopting beliefs and behaviors that influence their child’s gender development.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting Independence</td>
<td>Participants discuss raising their daughters to be independent, self-reliant, and strong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting stereotypically traditional gender roles</td>
<td>Participants discuss raising their daughters to assume stereotypically traditional female gender roles (e.g., dependence, submissiveness, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting gender neutral socialization practices</td>
<td>Participants describe basing role expectations and parenting of their daughters on factors other than gender, while aiming to instill similar traits in all of their children, whether male or female.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing for Gender Bias</td>
<td>Participants discuss raising their daughters to be prepared for gender bias.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internalized Socialization Messages</td>
<td><strong>Participants discuss ways in which they have internalized their parents’ socialization (racial, gender, or academic) messages.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race and/or Gender Doesn’t Define Me</td>
<td>Participants discuss internalizing messages that help them to reject stereotypes and definitions based on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category</strong></td>
<td><strong>Description</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love Yourself</td>
<td>Participants discuss internalizing messages centered on loving oneself and/or taking pride in their unique racial identity or heritage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turning to Religion</td>
<td>Participants discuss internalizing messages that center on the importance of turning to religion to help guide them through their daily life experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family First</td>
<td>Participants discuss internalizing messages that center on the importance of keeping family the focus of their daily lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditions and Practices</td>
<td>Participants discuss the cultural traditions and/or practices that have been passed down to them by their parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never Give Up</td>
<td>Participants discuss receiving messages that have instilled in them to never give up when they are faced with obstacles and challenges in life (e.g., racism, sexism, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prove Them Wrong</td>
<td>Participants discuss adopting a “prove them wrong” mentality when confronted with racism, sexism, and/or academic discrimination in school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strive for Personal Excellence</td>
<td>Participants discuss being encouraged to strive for personal excellence in everything they do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and Education are Essential</td>
<td>Participants discuss being met with messages from their parents about education and knowledge being essential for their life success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignoring</td>
<td>Participants discuss ignoring racism and/or sexism when they experience it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking for One’s Self</td>
<td>Participants discuss understanding the importance of thinking for themselves and knowing how to problem solve when faced with discrimination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Hard</td>
<td>Participants discuss internalizing messages centered on having to work harder to get what they want because of their skin color and/or gender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Participants discuss internalizing messages centered on being independent and learning not to rely on anyone but themselves in life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindness and Respect</td>
<td>Participants discuss being kind to others or maintaining their manners whenever they experience discrimination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism is Omnipresent</td>
<td>Participants discuss understanding that racism is everywhere and will always exist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexism is Omnipresent</td>
<td>Participants discuss understanding that sexism is everywhere and will always exist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confronting Racism and/or Sexism</td>
<td>Participants discuss directly confronting racism and/or sexism when they experience it and/or using their voice as power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning from the Experience</td>
<td>Participants discuss learning from the racism and/or sexism they experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure Is Not An Option</td>
<td>Participants discuss internalizing messages that failure is not an option.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know Your Worth</td>
<td>Participants discuss internalizing messages that center on knowing and/or valuing their worth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Messages</td>
<td>Participants discuss the external messages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>about Race and/or Gender</td>
<td>messages they have received about their race and/or gender outside of the school environment, such as the media or their community-at-large.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Messages about Black People</td>
<td>Participants discuss the external messages they have received about Black people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Messages about Black Females</td>
<td>Participants discuss the external messages they have received about Black females.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Messages about Black Males</td>
<td>Participants discuss the external messages they have received about Black males.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Messages about Other Minorities</td>
<td>Participants discuss the external messages they have received about other minorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experiencing Discrimination</strong></td>
<td><strong>Participants discuss their experiencing of any form of discrimination.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overt Racism and/or Racial Discrimination</td>
<td>Participants discuss experiencing a form of overt racism (microassaults) and/or racial discrimination in school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexism and/or Sexual Discrimination</td>
<td>Participants discuss experiencing a form of sexism and/or sexual discrimination in school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifted/Academic Discrimination</td>
<td>Participants discuss experiencing a form of gifted and/or academic discrimination in school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intraracism</td>
<td>Participants discuss experiencing intraracism (e.g., colorism) by same-race peers at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Microaggressions</td>
<td>Participants discuss experiencing two forms of racial microaggressions (microinsults, microinvalidations).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplinary Treatment</td>
<td>Participants discuss being subjected to harsh or unfair disciplinary treatment in relation to their non-same-race and White peers (male or female).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Stereotyped</td>
<td>Participants discuss various ways in which they have been stereotyped due to their race and/or gender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving as Spokesperson</td>
<td>Participants discuss being expected to serve as spokesperson for Black people or representative of the Black experience in the school or classroom context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorblind Racism</td>
<td>Participants discuss encounters with teachers, peers, and/or other school personnel who claim they don’t see color or take on a colorblind approach in assuming everyone’s experiences are the same.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**School Connectedness: General School Community**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sense of belonging/embraced</th>
<th>The extent to which participants express a sense of belonging to or feeling embraced by their general school community.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sense of isolation/excluded</td>
<td>The extent to which participants express feeling a sense of isolation or feeling excluded from their general school community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**School Connectedness: Peer Relationships**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling Isolated</th>
<th>Participants describe feeling isolated from their peers at school.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Background of Friend</td>
<td>Participants describe the demographic background (e.g., age, race, gender, SES, etc.) of their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship Qualities</td>
<td>Participants describe the qualities that a good friend should possess or qualities that their close friends possess.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Support</td>
<td>Participants describe a time when they needed or received support from a peer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with Other Racial/Ethnic Groups</td>
<td>Participants describe their closest peers’ relationships with other racial/ethnic groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting White</td>
<td>Participants discuss being told they are “Acting White” by a same-race or non-same-race peer in school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitting In/Belonging</td>
<td>The extent to which a participant feels as though they fit in or belong to their school environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standing Out</td>
<td>The extent to which a participant feels as though they stand out in their school environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistreatment by Non-Same-Race or White Peer</td>
<td>Participant describes being mistreated by a non-same-race peer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistreatment by Same-Race Peer</td>
<td>Participant describes being mistreated by a same-race peer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Levels of Connectedness</td>
<td>The extent to which participants feel relationships with peers leads to higher levels of connectedness at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Levels of Connectedness</td>
<td>The extent to which participants feel relationships with peers leads to lower levels of connectedness at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with Same-Race Peers</td>
<td>Participants describe their relationships with same-race peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with Non-Same-Race Peers</td>
<td>Participants describe their relationships with non-same-race peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with Non-Same-Race Peers</td>
<td>Participants describe their relationships with non-same-race peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Connectedness: Teacher Relationships</td>
<td>Participants describe their relationships with teachers at their school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same-Race Peers</td>
<td>relationships with non-same-race peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Same-Race Peer Relationships</td>
<td>The extent to which participants believe it is important to maintain relationships with same-race peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Support</td>
<td>Participants discuss receiving academic support from their teacher(s).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Teacher Qualities</td>
<td>Participant discusses positive teacher qualities in a current or former teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Teacher Qualities</td>
<td>Participant discusses negative teacher qualities in a current or former teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling Devalued</td>
<td>Participants describe a time when they felt their teachers devalued them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling Proud</td>
<td>Participants describe a time when they felt their teachers were proud of them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holding High Expectations</td>
<td>Participants discuss the teachers at their school holding high expectations for them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogical Style</td>
<td>Participants discuss a teacher’s pedagogical style.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Bias</td>
<td>Participants discuss being victim to (or witnessing another student of color/ or female being victim to) teacher bias in school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Perceptions</td>
<td>Participants describe the perceptions their teachers (of regular education and advanced classes) likely have of them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistreatment by Teacher</td>
<td>Participant describes being mistreated by their teacher(s).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passion for Teaching</td>
<td>Participants discuss their teacher's passion (or perceived passion) for teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Trust</td>
<td>Extent to which participants express trusting their current or former teachers and/or teacher qualities that allowed that trust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Background</td>
<td>Participants describe demographic background of their teachers (e.g., race/ethnicity, age, gender, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Striving for equality</td>
<td>Participants discuss teachers who strive for equality for all students in or out of the classroom or school context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorite Teacher</td>
<td>Participants discuss their favorite teacher(s).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Least Favorite Teacher</td>
<td>Participants discuss their least favorite teacher(s).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Levels of Connectedness</td>
<td>The extent to which participants feel relationships with teachers leads to higher levels of connectedness at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Levels of Connectedness</td>
<td>The extent to which participants feel relationships with teachers leads to lower levels of connectedness at school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**School Connectedness: School Counselors and Other Personnel**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Participants describe their relationships with school counselors and other school personnel at their school.</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approachability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holding High Expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resourcefulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tending to Emotional Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closeness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling Discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Levels of Connectedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Levels of Connectedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Connectedness: Curriculum and Classroom Dynamics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Disengagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful course content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-meaningful course content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Rigor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controversial Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culturally relevant or multicultural course content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monocultural curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-based or Hands-on Learning Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture-based classroom environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion-driven classroom environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textbook-driven classroom environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test-driven classroom environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher Levels of Connectedness</td>
<td>The extent to which participants feel curriculum and other classroom dynamics lead to higher levels of connectedness at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Levels of Connectedness</td>
<td>The extent to which participants feel curriculum and other classroom dynamics lead to lower levels of connectedness at school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Connectedness: School Involvement</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Athletics and Sports</td>
<td>Participants discuss their participation in sports and athletics (e.g., basketball team, cheerleading, etc.) at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic (Merit-Based) Clubs, Organizations, and Societies</td>
<td>Participants discuss their participation in academic (or merit-based) clubs (e.g., National Junior Honor Society, Spanish Honor Society, Quiz Bowl, Science Olympiad, Battle of the Books, etc.), organizations, and societies at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Club Type</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual/Fine Arts Clubs and Activities</td>
<td>Participants discuss their participation in visual (e.g., art) or fine arts (e.g., band, theater, etc.) clubs, organizations, and societies at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Clubs, Organizations, and Activities</td>
<td>Participants discuss their participation in service clubs (e.g., Junior Beta Club, Junior Civitan Club, Key Club, S.A.D.D., tutoring, volunteering, etc.), organizations, and activities at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice Clubs, Organizations, and Activities</td>
<td>Participants discuss their participation in social justice-oriented clubs, organizations, and activities (e.g., Gay/Straight Alliance, Students of Color, etc.) at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership, Public Speaking, and/or Legal/Government Clubs, Organizations, and Activities</td>
<td>Participants discuss their participation in leadership, public speaking, and/or legal/government clubs, organizations, and activities (e.g., Speech and Debate Club, Student Government, Mock Trial, etc.) at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering and Technology-Based Clubs, Organizations, and Activities</td>
<td>Participants discuss their participation in engineering and technology-based clubs, organizations, and activities (e.g., Robotics Club, Minecraft, Women in Engineering, etc.) at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Levels of Connectedness</td>
<td>The extent to which participants feel participation in school activities leads to higher levels of school connectedness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Levels of Connectedness</td>
<td>The extent to which participants feel participation in school activities leads to lower levels of school connectedness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Closeness</td>
<td>Participants discuss the relationship they share with peers who are involved in their school activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Perceptions</td>
<td>Participants describe the perceptions their peers likely have of them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Composition</td>
<td>Participants discuss the racial/ethnic makeup of the school activities they are involved in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advantages</td>
<td>Participants discuss advantages of being involved in school activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantages</td>
<td>Participants discuss disadvantages of being involved in school activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influences Academic Performance</td>
<td>The extent to which participants believe their involvement in school activities influences their academic performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influences Academic Motivation</td>
<td>The extent to which participants believe their involvement in school activities influences their academic motivation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhances Academic Experiences</td>
<td>The extent to which participants believe their involvement in school activities enhances their academic experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersectionality</td>
<td>Participants discuss experiencing oppression based on two or more of their social identities. Includes the intersection of racial and gender microaggressions (gendered racial microaggressions--subtle and everyday verbal, behavioral, and environmental expressions of oppression based on the intersection of one’s race and gender).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silenced and</td>
<td>The extent to which participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginalized</td>
<td>express feeling silenced and marginalized (e.g., struggle for respect; invisibility) in the classroom or at school context or feel as if their contributions are minimized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projected Stereotypes</td>
<td>The extent to which participants express being viewed as or potentially viewed as embodying a stereotype (e.g., expectation of the Jezebel; expectation of the Angry Black Woman) as a result of the intersection of his/her race and gender by a non-Black peer, teacher, or other school personnel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions of Style and Beauty</td>
<td>The extent to which participants feel they are reduced to their communication styles, physical appearance, and body type in verbal and nonverbal ways.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combatting Racism in Schools</td>
<td>Participants discuss what can be done to combat racism and prejudice in schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifted Black Female in Advanced Classes</td>
<td>Participants discuss the experience of being a gifted Black female in advanced classes and/or offer hypothetical advice to a Black female friend who receives a referral to gifted/advanced classes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix K

*In A Sea of White* Documentary Trailer Link

https://youtu.be/pYNp41NEL7Q