WHERE ARE ALL THE GIFTED BLACK GIRLS?
GIVING HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS VOICE VIA QUALITATIVE RESEARCH
APPROACH AND BLACK FEMINIST THEORY

by

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DEDICATION

For Daddy and three gifted Black girls
(Jillian, Alexis, and Olivia)

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Gifted programs in the United States under-represent African American (Black) children (Phi Delta Kappan, 1992). In 1993, African-American students were under-represented by 50% in gifted education, and 60% in 1998 (Grantham & Ford, 2003). Further, some speculate that gifted education programs are the most segregated educational programs in the nation (Ford, 1995). This proves especially true for Black gifted girls in urban educational arenas, where gifted Black girls are rarely recognized. And, Black girls' lack of representation in urban gifted programs contradicts research that finds that girls reach several developmental advantages ahead of boys. Girls talk and read earlier (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Silverman, 1986), receive higher grades in elementary school (Callahan, 1979), and drop-out less often (Dowdall & Colangelo, 1982). Why do these apparent advantages not lead females to have an advantage in education and lead girls being the majority of students identified for gifted education and programming? Instead, gifted programs give girls a situation that becomes worse for Black girls due to negative stereotypes. Such stereotyping ultimately increases in urban areas and reduces mainstream cultural acceptance of Blacks in society. And this proves to be the case with gifted Black girls as well. While giftedness aligns with no particular socio-economic level, and many come from lower income homes (Zigler & Farber, 1985), schools in poorer neighborhoods prove less likely to identify and serve gifted children (Cross, 2004).

These difficulties might have been ameliorated by educational policy, but have not been. Few educators would disagree that the landmark case Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954) represents the most important ruling for equal education opportunity and provides precedent for many subsequent legal educational developments (Ford, 1995; Ford et al, 1993). However, inadequate enforcement of legislation intended to include gifted programming in the

realm of equal education opportunity kept minority inclusion out of gifted programs. Likewise, Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act of 1972 (United States Statutes at Large 1972, 1973), which federally sanctions sex discrimination in schools, improved the inclusion of women only in some non-traditional careers. For example, 1994, women received 38% of medical degrees compared to 9% in 1972, and 44% of all doctoral degrees in 1994 went to women, up from 25% in 1977 (University of Iowa, http://liu.edu/cwis/cwp/library/workship/citapa.htm, 2004). But Title IX did little to address girls in gifted education, leading to the conclusion that this legislation too falls short. Likewise, the Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA, 1974) sought to correct inequalities for women by providing finding (via grants and contracts) to colleges and universities, state agencies, and other institutions, to develop and evaluate existing and new educational materials, and revise or create new opportunities for young women. However, lack of funding prohibited this legislation's having the intended effect (Stromquist, 1993). Finally, the Jacob J. Javits Gifted and Talented Act of 1988 attempted to correct the lack of inclusion of minority students in gifted education not only by providing financial assistance to local and state educational agencies for gifted programming, but also by advocating its highest priority to the urban identification of racial minorities and economically disadvantaged students. Yet, urban Black girls, considering these extended efforts to include minorities, remained low.

Thus, the purpose of this research is to examine the circumstances surrounding how urban black girls—identified as showing academic promise—come either to be overlooked as qualified for gifted education or seem not to take up a sense of themselves as gifted, that is they see themselves as not fitting among those who are in gifted education. As will become clearer in chapter 2, three scholarly arenas provide the framework for this research: feminist thought and theory with an emphasis on Black feminist thought, notions of "giftedness" and gifted education,

and policies and processes for identification of gifted Black girls. By melding ideas from each of these scholarly arenas, this research allows understanding the complex intersections between giftedness, its identification, racial and gender identity, and social class in urban education. Ultimately, such an approach will allow proponents such as researchers, parents, and Black gifted girls the information to promote the inclusion of Black girls in the gifted education arena. Likewise, this research holds promise to provide valuable information for the Black educational community, and for those affiliated with gifted education.

It is important to explain the language that is used to define subjects of this research, as racial labels play an important role in defining groups and individuals who belong to those groups. As Black Americans gradually achieved emancipation from slavery in the United States they forged a new culture, institutions, and organizations to serve their needs. Historically, there is a pattern of naming identification for Black Americans with the common goal of finding a group label that was not only positive, but also instilled with pride and positive self-esteem (Smith, 1992). The preferred term for this common goal has changed many times. "Colored" was the dominant term in the mid- to late nineteenth century, and the preferred term when the NAACP was founded in 1909 (Martin, 1991). In the late nineteenth century, however, the name "Negro" replaced "Colored" as it was viewed as a "stronger" and more inclusive term, and became popular among avant-garde Blacks in New York in the 1920s (Martin, 1991; Smith, 1992). By the 1950s, the term "Negro" was widely accepted, but as the civil rights movements progressed in the 1950s and 1960s, it (the term) came under attack as "Uncle Tomism" (Martin, 1991). "Negro" was replaced with "Black" and was viewed as standing for racial pride and power. It was also favored because of the natural balance that it provided to the term "white." As "white" was the proper term for that race; "Black" was the proper term for the opposite race. In

Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech "I have a Dream" for example, he used the term "Black" as an adjective four times, and all four times he used it in parallel to "white" (Smith, 1992). By the 1970s (and well into the 1980s), the term "Black" solidified group consciousness, racial pride, and hopes for racial injustice (Smith, 1992).

As with previous terms used for identification of Black Americans, "Black" received criticism in the late 1980s, and the push for change (re-identify) to "African American" was in full swing. "African American" was thought to be more politically appropriate as it identified Black Americans to their mother countries; much like the terms "Arab American", "Polish American", or "Italian American" do (Martin, 1991; Smith, 1992). However, "African American" has also fallen under scrutiny (1990s) as "African "culture includes other cultures as well (Arab, Coptic, Berber, and other sub-Saharan cultures) (Smith, 1992). In the current era, Martin (1992) has stated from those Black Americans that are polled, that the preferred term is "Black"; and this is especially popular for the younger generation. For all intents and purposes, and for simplicity; I will use the terms "African American" and "Black" interchangeable and where appropriate in this research. Following the prescription of DuBois, "…The feeling of inferiority is in you, not in a name. The name merely evokes what is already there. Exorcise the hateful complex and no name can ever make you hang your head" (Smith, 1992).

As will become clearer in Chapter 3, a qualitative methodology provides a way to explore and to explain urban Black girls' absences from gifted programs, a topic where we know little. Also, such an approach allows developing a detailed understanding of complex, interacting phenomena (Creswell, 2005, p. 39-40). By utilizing a cyclical qualitative research design and ethno-methodology, social issues and the way they interact to influence urban Black girls, particularly in gifted programs for urban Black girls can surface, undergo repetitive analysis, and

begin to contribute solutions for emergent problem-solving. Studying constructs from insiders' perspectives allows understanding the lived experiences of girls directly affected by how students are identified for gifted education and the social consequences of participating in gifted education. The intersectionality of race, urban gifted education, and gender issues suggests using a critical ethnographic approach, which allows encouraging frank and open dialogue with research participants, and listening to their sense of social power and control issues, as well as seeking their input about needed changes.

Let us turn, then, to chapter 2 to explicate the scholarly framework that guides this study.

CHAPTER 2: SCHOLARLY FRAMEWORK

As will become clearer in what follows, three arenas of scholarly thought guide this study: feminist theory and Black feminist thought, notions of giftedness and processes for identifying gifted youth, and an appreciation of the empirical research literature about Black gifted girls in an urban context. In particular, Black feminist thought sets the stage for understanding the social and historical circumstances of Black women in the U.S., especially understanding how their circumstances suggest central conundrums, such as having their histories overlooked in discussion about women, yet being subordinated relative to Black men as white women are to white men (Crenshaw, 1995). Giftedness, as an attribute of students, and identification of gifted students via institutionalized schooling procedures and policies suggest potential ways that gifted Black girls fail to garner the recognition for their intelligence that is routinely noticed in whites, and in black young men. Finally, the empirical research literature about Black urban gifted girls is quite sparse, but Fordham's research in a multicultural Washington, DC high school suggests salient dimensions needing study. Thus, this research serves, in part, as an update to Fordham's study by examining the circumstances of urban Black girls in a Midwestern urban context.

Feminist Theory and Black Feminist Thought

Fewer Black girls are identified as gifted in urban accelerated educational programs, but determining why this is the case has proved difficult. Legislative attempts have been made to address this issue, but have not been successful. As I began to seriously ponder this issue, one theory emerged: that Black women's (and it seems reasonable to argue Black girls') life, social and cultural experiences differ from those of white women, and present unique circumstances. These unique circumstances include educational experiences, which seem to become all too clear

in accelerated education programming where urban Black gifted girls are rarely studied (Ford & Harris, 1991). In fact, society's racist, classist, and sexist views towards African-American females further fractured their circumstance. One way of understanding these circumstances is to address feminist thought, especially Black feminist thought.

Feminist thought includes a wide range of theories and perspectives that describe women's oppression, to discuss its causes and consequences, and suggest positive and successful approaches for women's liberation (Tong, 1989). Feminist inquiries are a source for new ways to consider questions about gifts, knowledge, morality, and other human capacities. Likewise, the strategies of social, political, and educational change offered by feminist theory and analysis prove beneficial to reducing discriminatory practices (McCaughtry, 2004). Postmodern feminism, for example, has pointed out the deceptiveness of imaginings about human nature or right. Under its influence the way in which society and people understand ways of knowing or procuring knowledge help us understand societal errors and promote change (Ellis JL, 1990).

Postmodern Feminism

Postmodern feminist theory has roots in the work of Simone de Beauvoir who asked, "Why are women the second sex?" Postmodern feminist thought takes women's presumed "otherness," and its association with oppression, and molds it into an acceptance of being, thinking, and speaking that allows for openness and plurality. Such a feminist approach looks at the acceptance of differences among women, and therefore the acceptance of unique and diverse perspectives, instead of presuming some common or shared unity of women's experiences. In particular, postmodern feminists believe that no one-true feminist theory or ideal is possible or desirable, because women's experiences differ across cultural, class, and racial lines, as well as with culture, classes, and racial/ethnic communities.

Postmodern feminism has the most strained relationship to traditional notions of feminism, primarily because postmodern feminists reject traditional assumptions about reality, and "fixed identities" (Hughes, 2002, p. 58). Also, this stance avoids writing as if all reinstallations of phallocentric thought become defined as thought around one truth that is "male" in perspective. Women seeking liberation avoid expressions that imply difference as inferiority (Tong, 1989, p. 217), so independent thought may begin. Most postmodern feminist texts maintain a distinction between women as biological and social entities, and the female, feminine, or other; where female is metaphorically used for the other in a relation of difference rather than opposition (Tong, 1989, p. 232).

That females/women are often viewed as always "becoming," and never "being," places women as allies with other groups excluded from the dominant group or society—for instance, with homosexuals, Jews, and racial and ethnic minorities (Tong, 1989, p. 230). Black feminist thought (BFT), for example, suggests a vehicle to explain these thoughts of "becoming," one that can be used as a vehicle of empowerment for Black females, as a brief history and discussion of BFT illustrates.

Black Feminist Thought

Black feminist thought (BFT) provides a way to deconstruct existing frameworks in society, especially economic structures, education, and many academic disciplines (Brewer, 1993). Importantly, BFT makes African American females the center or primary focus of research. Collins (1986) noted that to comprehend the origins of Black women's experiences requires capturing them from Black women's experiences, and from their ways of knowing, and positioning these understandings in the world.

In addition, collective action, incorporated with the study of BFT, allows for the "consciousness" and development of awareness (Chioma Steady, 1993), and advances the determination to eliminate gender bias, discrimination, and exploitation of Black females. This "consciousness" becomes a prerequisite for the transformation of societal perceptions and change. Lastly, this "consciousness" must include the aspirations, wants, and needs of women from diverse (social, economical, political, and sexuality) oppressed groups (pp. 90-92). This notion ensures representing all facets of Black women and disrupts intra-race dilemmas that may exist among social classes, or be rooted in androcentric beliefs.

BFT helps to dispel and dismantle stereotypes about U.S. women of African descent and their intellects, because it offers a framework for change. BFT clarifies the diverse impacts of racism, classism, and sexism on the lives of black women by challenging historical notions about Black women. Perhaps of even greater importance, BFT enables scholars to imagine a world that dispels the subordination of some based on race, class, and sex, and offers hope for transformation (Guy-Sheftall, Beverly, 1999).

The history of Black feminist thought began in the early 19th century with a group of free Black feminists in the North. These women included Sojourner Truth, Maria Stewart, and Frances E. W. Harper. Their involvement in reform efforts—via lectures, writings, and journalism, traditionally men's domains—violated the Victorian ethic of "true" womanhood (submissiveness, domesticity, and illiteracy) and met with considerable resistance (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 1; Banks, 2004, p. 32).

Sojourner Truth (1797-1883) for example, although poor and unable to read or write, stood out as a prominent speaker and evangelist who advocated for the rights of Black and White women. Her now famous "Ain't I a Woman?" speech (1851) not only called for Black women to

be acknowledged as worthy and independent, but also called for recognizing Black females as women. In an era privileging White men, Truth brought attention to the fact that Black women who had worked all their lives, deserved the same consideration as White "pampered ladies," as Truth put it (Halsall, 1997). When some questioned her presence and her gender (in 1850), she bared her breast to the public to prove herself a woman (Painter, 1990).

Similarly, Stewart (1803-1879) lectured publicly regarding the plight of Black women and the need to oppose subservience to men, to urge participation in community building, and to build schools (Guy-Sheftall, 1995). The first women to lecture to racially mixed audiences of men and women about political matters, she spoke on a variety of topics relevant to the Black community (such as literacy, abolition, and economics). Furthermore, she encouraged black women to break free of gender ideologies and to reach their full potential by pursuing formal education and careers, with an emphasis on teaching outside the home and assuming leadership roles. These familiar roles/themes continue to be associated with the Black feminism today (Guy-Sheftall, 1995).

Parallel to Stewart, Frances E. W. Harper (1825-1911) also lectured on women's rights. Her ideals of feminism accepted traditional roles of women, though she argued that women needed to push their influence outside of the home (Logan, 2006). Harper's work during this era (at the lowest point in postbellum African American history) attracted conservative women unwilling to give up what they believed to be their role in society (domestic duties), and allowed their participation. Although not credited during their time, the work of Truth, Stewart, and Harper combine issues of Black women, gender, and oppression—concerns of modern-day BFT—and in time, BFT would come to include another important topic, *education*.

For instance, in 1892, Anna Julia Cooper published *A Voice from the South by a Black Woman of the South* the first full-length feminist analysis of African American experience. Here, she not only described the double-jeopardy of Black women (sexism and racism) (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 8), but she also asserted the importance of education for Black women and acknowledged the unique problems that Black women faced with Black men due to gender subordination within the Black community. One essay entitled "The Status of Women in America" advocated that women have a right to be involved in societal decision-making and politics because of their intelligence and outstanding morals (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 47). She cautioned that Black females must expand their horizons by education, and not lead their lives according to "sexual love" (Guy-Sheftall, p. 43), which challenged prevailing thought regarding Black women. In addition, she lamented that it was a privileged time to be a black women because there was great opportunity, writing that the "race is young" and full of "elasticity" (Guy-Sheftall, p. 49).

In addition to being an activist in her era, Cooper exhibited great educational leadership. For example, due to the lack of Black women's inclusion into the evolving feminist movement of the time, Cooper assisted in developing and establishing local organizations for Black women, young Blacks, and the poor. These organizations addressed many issues prominent to this discussion, especially education, but also included housing and unemployment. When she was teaching, she refused to use textbooks for Black education that she thought were inferior, and she was fired from her teaching position for allegations of incompetence and misconduct. However, it is more likely that she was fired because of her "steadfast resistance to the racist notion that African-Americans have intellectual inferiority" (http://about.usps.com/news/national-releases/2009/pr09_057.htm). In 1925, she successfully defended her doctoral dissertation in

Paris, France, only the fourth Black woman from the United States to earn a PhD, and the first Black woman to do so in France.

Likewise, Amy Jacques Garvey's (1896-1973) work also contributed to Black feminist thought, and continued the ideas of opportunity for Black women. Although not completely acknowledged, her work with the UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement Association, 1920s) founded by her husband, Marcus Garvey, was notable (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 11). Although an integral part of the UNIA, women and their issues took a back seat, such as when many questioned if women's intellect could be as highly developed as men's. Nonetheless, UNIA provided important opportunities for women's developing political voice.

While the white feminist movement seemed stagnant when women's suffrage groups lapsed in the 40 years following the approval of women's suffrage (Nineteenth Amendment, 1920), the Black women's movement continued with a new agenda, the "New Negro Movement." Also called the Harlem Renaissance, this era saw an "unprecedented outpouring of Black women's creative energies" (Guy-Sheftall,1995, p. 77). Elise Johnson McDougald (1925), for example, not only wrote about the plight of Black women and gender discrimination in society, but also about the importance of education for Black women. She specifically lauded the work of sororities Alpha Kappa Alpha and Delta Sigma Theta for their systematic and continuous educational programs through which educated women mentored young girls/students (McDougald, 1995).

Florynce Kennedy (1946) advanced this discussion about girls'/women's education by bringing attention to the institutionalization of racism and sexism, stating "…the continuance of conscious or unconscious subordination diminishes not only the fabric of society, but ultimately

punishes it because society does not advance" (Kennedy, 1946, p. 103). Kennedy also noted that the "withholding of training and education precludes development of potentialities" for subordinate groups (Black women), and that exclusionary tendencies and acts of the dominant society cause an "ever-present threat to societal peace" (Kennedy, 1995). From the 1920s to the 1940s, education came to be considered a road to independence for Black women. But, not all in Black society agreed with this view of Black women's educational right for participation as equals.

Consider, for instance, the work of Zora Neale Hurston during the Harlem Renaissance (1920s to the 1930s). Harlem Renaissance leaders, artists, writers, and others in creative pursuits detailed issues about Black communities in U.S. society and allowed an outlet for exposing such issues. Here, Zora Neale Hurston emerged America's first literary feminist (Perry et al, 1996). Her works (see for instance *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 1937) detailed myriad forms of men's sexism at play in Black life. But, because her writings focused on sexism within the Black community, she became an outcast in her community. "Misunderstood by a patriarchal and racist literary culture," Hurston's work all but disappeared. In the 1970s Hurston's importance to feminist theory re-emerged (Barr, 2002, pp. 101-102). Today, Hurston's fiction and non-fiction works (grounded in her anthropological training) stand side-by-side with other Harlem Renaissance scholars.

Then, in 1953, de Beauvoir's publication of the The Second Sex, a feminist existentialist commentary on white culture, further pushed for women's independence and re-awakened feminist thought in the U.S. While de Beauvoir's work discussed women's sense of self as women, women's loss of identity, and women's roles in society, it failed to resonate with Black women. Lorraine Hansberry's (1957) critique of The Second Sex proved important to Black

feminist thought, not only because it was one of the first critiques of a widely accepted text, but also because it brought to light de Beauvoir's unexamined racism (Guy-Sheffield, 1995). Hansberry's critique took de Beauvoir's work to another level, stating that in the U.S. the most devastating anti-equality myths concerned whether American women had been liberated from *all classes.* In fact, Hansberry wrote against the general notion that "society tells the woman from cradle to the grave that her husband, her home, her children will be the source of all rewards in life, the foundation of true happiness" (pp. 141-142). Hansberry noted that this was not the case for *all* women. In fact, as Hansberry argued, women's difficulties had less to do with women straying from "her place" in society and more to do with women not yet gaining their independence (pp. 138-139). In differing with de Beauvoir, however, Hansberry held women accountable for their "confusion," and ultimately coached them, through her critique, to become independent. Hansberry's critique demonstrates keen insights into the issues of that era for Black women, and as such deepened BFT.

Parallel to Hansberry, bell hooks critiqued Friedan's white-centered text, The Feminine Mystique, another central feminist text, further depicting societal differences between Black and white feminism. Here, hooks (1984) argued that Friedan ignored the existence of non-white women. In fact, the circumstances of "the problem that has no name" reflected only white, college-educated women. hooks wondered if white women who dominated feminist discourse could make claims about the lived experiences of all women, opening a debate about white feminists' awareness of relations of power in regard to class and race (hooks, 1995; Schiller, 2000, p. 120; Crenshaw, 1994, p. 1). Ultimately, critiques of prominent (white) feminist scholarship paved the way for emerging Black feminist scholars to publish and begin to unpack stereotypes and myths about Black women.

Toni Cade's (1970) collection of writings in BFT countered these myths. Cade's anthology clearly defined a Black women's literature that differed dramatically from its white feminist counterpart. Cade not only provided renewed antiracist and anti-sexist priorities, but also debunked myths of Black women as welfare cheats, evil jezebels, and Black matriarchs (Mammies). In addition, Cade's anthology introduced many important, but difficult to locate, Black feminist works.

Here, Francis Beale's essay (1970) provided a new understanding of the critical differences between white and black feminist thought. Beale's pioneering work about "double jeopardy" highlighted the extra burdens carried by Black women and the inadequacies of white models of femininity for Black females. For BFT, understanding the double jeopardy became important in society, as well as in academia. The double jeopardy encompassed economic exploitation of Black women, inequities of pay and work in a capitalist society, and oppression of Black women's voices. According to Guy-Sheftall (1999), double jeopardy grounds BFT, even as it impacts educators, artists, intellectuals, writers, community, leaders, and others. The uniqueness of BFT proves especially salient, since Black women have never been afforded the luxury of staying at home and raising their children, or indulging in consumption central to capitalism, when compared to many of their White women counterparts. Beale contends that Black feminism has nothing in common with the white feminist agenda, except the general influence of male chauvinism (Beale, 1995, pp. 146-153). To combat a double jeopardy and its societal consequences, Beale calls for all members of Black society (especially women) to "be as academically and technologically developed as possible" (p. 149). Beale's work further pressed the notion of independence from systematic oppression by utilizing the vehicle of education. Beale's work in turn influenced Black feminist organizations in continuing the call for education

as a way out of this systematic oppression and its consequences. One organization, the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO), continued this struggle for education and independence.

In 1973, the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) emerged and officially held its first conference in New York City. This historic gathering of Black feminists included attendance from Alice Walker, Shirley Chisholm, and Michelle Wallace. Workshops discussed a variety of issues, including welfare, women's liberation, and education (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 15). The NBFO further supported the need for independence of Black women, as well as addressed an underlying issue of sexism, and depicted it as a "destructive force from within" (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 15). A year later, the Boston chapter of the NBFO formed a more radical organization, re-naming itself the Combahee River Collective. Despite the barriers they faced, especially the difficulty of sustaining a socialist Black organization with lesbian leadership, this Collective worked on a variety of Black feminist issues: reproductive rights, health care, and racism within the white women's movement; raising awareness of homophobia within the Black community. Using collaboration and cohesion, they worked with white feminists and progressive men, and provided opportunities for heterosexuals and lesbians to work together. Although the Collective posted impressive successes, underlying issues of sexism (women and men) within the Black community persisted.

For instance, Michelle Wallace's brought issues of sexism within the Black community to the forefront of the BFT agenda. Her work Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman (1978) sparked controversy and debate in the Black community. Here, Wallace critiqued the misogyny of both Black liberation and Black men's sexism (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 16). Naming "Black liberation" misogynous implicated both the normative sense that if Black men were liberated then women's liberation would also occur, and Black men's presumption of most

leadership roles and their lack of acceptance and inclusion of Black women. Similarly, Ntozake Shange's award-winning Broadway play appeared: *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf* (1976). She depicted the positive self-identity and self-realization of a Black female character, Crystal, who overcame an environment of oppression, abuse, and sexism in modern society (Lester, 1992). Controversy about both Wallace's and Shange's works centered on negative assessments of Black men, leading many to demonize these Black feminist authors (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, pp. 16-17). For instance, an August 1979 issue of *Newsweek* described intra-racial gender tension, saying it "…is tearing marriages apart and fracturing personal relationships." In fact, Robert Staple's essay, in the March/April 1979 issue of *Black Scholar*, included a feminist-bashing response to the works of Wallace and Shange, though some called for a reconciliation of Black women and men, for efforts to clarify the nature of Black relationships, and the importance of reuniting Blacks in the struggle against oppression (Staple, 1979). The 1989 film adaptation of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) also depicted dictatorial Black men, and fueled the controversy. The push for independence and education for Black women persisted in spite of sexism emanating from within the Black community. The 1980s saw Black feminists writing, publishing, and organizing (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 18). Several additional important works emerged: Angela Davis's *Women, Race and Class* (1981), Barbara Smith's <u>Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology</u> (1983), with Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press founded in 1980, and *SAGE: A Scholarly Journal on Black Women* founded in 1984.

In this Black feminist renaissance, bell hooks' <u>Ain't I a Women: Black Women and Feminism</u> (1981) set precedent for future BFT writers and scholars. hooks' book continued to challenge and critique white feminist thought and its impact on Black feminist thought. Here,

hooks introduced a new thesis that depicted slavery as not only a patriarchal and racist social order, but also one that de-feminized slave women. As described by hooks, feminism should be understood as not simply a struggle to end male chauvinism or a movement to ensure that women have equal rights with men, but also should invoke a commitment to eradicating the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels—sex, race, class, among others—and a renewed commitment to reorganizing U.S. society so that the self-development of all people can supersede imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires (pp. 193-194).

This thesis provided a springboard for new feminist writers Audre Lourde, Angela Davis, and June Jordan, among others. These writers redefined Black feminism and argued for a broader movement to end *all* forms of domination. In this climate, Angela Davis further politicalized Black feminist thought and advanced its agendas. Like Hurston, Davis' watershed works expressed uniqueness in the convergence of gender, class, and race (Mendieta, p. 304, 2007). Women, Class, and Race (1981), for instance, included essays on the legacy of slavery and its effects that produced new standards of "womanhood," as well as education and liberation from Black women's perspectives. The Legacy of Slavery: Standards for a New Womanhood (1983) dispelled common beliefs about Black women during slavery, but also clearly implicated how their roles developed into the future. As Davis contends, enslaved Blacks were chattel or profitable labor units, and in such a system women were genderless. This contrasted sharply with white women's circumstances. Here, in a time when white women produced a nineteenth-century definition of femininity—loving mother, homemaker, being gentle and soft; Black women by comparison became anomalies (p. 5). In fact, Black women's predicament differed from men's, because though genderless in "production" (work life), when punished and exploited they

became female, and were repressed and punished in female ways, such as rape (p. 6). Ideologies of (white) femininity evolved during industrialization, and white women became the "inhabitants of a sphere totally severed from the realm of production," a sphere not available to Black women who very clearly worked and worked hard. Thus, some argued that white women came to be thought inferior to men, because of their distance from industrial production. But, the economies of slavery differed markedly and Black women and men could not conform to such ideologies (p. 12). Thus, Davis' contributions to BFT clarified how social class and race intersect with gender in Black women's cases. As such, this postmodern perspective suggests in addition, the very real possibility that Black women's experience will not be the same. That is, Davis' work provides a way to understand how race, class, and gender matter, and matter in varying ways for individuals, all of whom who consider themselves Black women.

Thus, Black feminist thought matured, its agenda evolved, and BFT became a respected part of mainstream feminist thought, one articulating its own political agenda. Here, Patricia Hill Collins' <u>Black feminist thought</u> (1990) emerged. Hills' work continued the goals of the 1980s, but also depicted the importance of rejecting stereotypical and controlling images of Black women both within and outside of the Black community. For example, consider the 1990s courtroom drama of Anita Hill's testimony being effectively dismissed (at the Thomas Supreme Court Confirmation Hearings) by equating her with stereotypic white women who "cries rape," while Clarence Thomas' testimony was accepted as a wronged "lynching victim" (Eisenhart & Lawrence, 1994). This analysis suggests the salience of deep-seated stereotypes held in the common imagination. Collins' commentary on the trial (1994) highlighted how society used interpretive structures to reconstruct gender subordination, interpretations shaped by "gender power" (Crenshaw, 1994, pp. 2-3).

And, Black feminist activists and scholars continue to link education to under-cutting such stereotypes. For instance, Black feminists met at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) for their national conference in 1994. As their resolution sent to President Clinton attested, work remained, and this document articulated a blueprint for contemporary Black feminism's future (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 20):

- Black women experience a unique oppression, which is racist, sexist, and classist due to their dual race and gender identity (double jeopardy), uniqueness conditions hinder that access to economic resources.

- Problems, concerns, and the needs of Black women are different and unique from white women's experiences

- Black women must struggle with liberation and gender equality simultaneously

- There is no vital difference between the efforts to eradicate racism, sexism, classism, and any other of the –ism's that plague humanity in general, but independence through the vehicle of education may offer a plan to success

- Black women's experiences derive from lived experiences' which in turn provide support for liberation and justification for Black feminist thought

In addition, they called for a Blue Ribbon Panel about race relations in the United States, research on Black women, an inquiry regarding career advancement for women of color in higher education, and funding for community-based organizations serving poor Black families. Since the American dream never worked for Blacks (Joseph, 1988) and sexism, racism, and classism continued to work against Black women, education remained central to such struggles (Joseph, 1995, p. 463). But, although there is overwhelming evidence that many women suffer from tyranny, such research finds no common bond between all women (hooks, 1984). In fact,

the work of some suggests that with varying combinations of race, class, and gender, circumstances—even Black women's experiences—are not singular or unitary (e.g., Davis, 1981). Considerable evidence substantiates that race and class create differences in social status and quality of life, suggesting that considering feminism only a gender issue limits its value creating solidarity and cohesion. In fact, "[c]lass struggle is inextricably bound to the struggle to end racism." (hooks, 1984, p. 272). Furthermore, little cohesion can exist when current political structures fail to see Black women and routinely overlook differences among social classes, which have been shaped by the racial politics of white supremacy (hooks, 1984). Thus, as scholars argue, studying Black women using feminist lenses interweaves studying social class and the myriad ways Black women struggle to become, and be recognized as, leaders in their own communities. Clearly, educational processes are implicated both in producing leaders and in reproducing white patriarchal notions of leadership. Thus, I began to wonder how young Black women (teens in grades 6-8) who show high academic promise think about and talk about their sense of themselves as women, in their home and school communities, and what their stories tell us about social class.

In what follows, I argue for using giftedness as a lens for identifying which young Black women show this promise, as I work to make their circumstances the focus of this research.

<center>Giftedness</center>

Little consensus exists about how best to define "giftedness." Most states follow the federal definition (1978 version) that describes gifted students as those students who possess demonstrated or potential ability, intellectually or creatively in specific academic areas, the performing of visual arts, and leadership (Cassidy & Hossler, 1992).

Perhaps the most important idea from the 1978 definition is the inclusion of the "potentially" gifted. This statement opens a door to those students who might otherwise be overlooked or go unrecognized, especially among minorities, girls, and low-income students. Sternberg (1988) and Ford (1991) support inclusion of potentially gifted because the educational needs of many gifted students in most states and school districts go unmet when giftedness is defined in a one-dimensional fashion, such as relying solely on high IQ (intelligence quotient) scores. In fact, scholars criticize intelligence testing as a single measure of giftedness, because such tests privilege middle-class ways of life and penalize children with differing linguistic styles (McClellan, 1985). But this sets up a central dilemma for identifying gifted youth. On the one hand, utilizing a set of criteria may prove ineffective if it excludes too many children who later might be considered gifted. On the other hand, a set of characteristics may seem effective, but ultimately include too many youth who are later deemed not gifted (Tannenbaum, 1997, p. 27). Indeed, an emerging paradigm in gifted education perceives giftedness as having multiple forms (Maker, 1996). I began to wonder how IQ tests, creativity, and leadership might be used to determine giftedness (McClellan, 1985).

Other factors also associated with determining giftedness include parental circumstances (Cross, 2004, p. 18), environment, and socioeconomic status of families. Many gifted children have gifted parents, but genetics prove difficult to disentangle from environment. Environmental factors (where the gifted child is born and raised) influence gifted children's life chances. Clearly, social, political, and economic influences play a role in providing access to life chances, such as private music lessons and other ways of enhancing individual attributes. First, research on SES clearly indicates that poverty hinders school success (Cross, 2004, pp. 19-20; Wong, 2003).

Furthermore, location plays a role in whether, and when, children might be identified and what their experiences may be. Based on experiences identifying youth for enhanced math and science opportunities after the USSR's Sputnik launch, researchers felt confident about identification practices; although no little published empirical research exists to support such far-reaching practices. Imagine a gifted child who showed promise in math and science in the U.S. during the Sputnik era , given the attention that Sputnik garnered; now imagine a child gifted in language arts during that same era. Children with math and science interests clearly benefited post-Sputnik, while children with other interests, such as language arts, might not. Thus, political motives affect gifted children's identification as gifted, and build on environmental factors (Cross, 2004, pp. 19-20). A family's place of residence (urban city, suburb, rural) also affects the extent to which gifted children receive educational programs for giftedness, because poorer districts (urban and rural, historically) lack funds to support gifted programs. In fact, funding and educational policy contribute to the availability of gifted programming, and gifted education, because policies vary across US states (Table 1).

Michigan, for example, does not mandate gifted programming, and provides minimal funds for its support (Davidson Institute, 2011). In 2008-2009, Michigan maintained only $285,000 for intermediate school districts to operate summer advanced programs, and for each competitive grant (summer of 2009) awarded, $6,100 provided each grantee required at least 25% matching funds. In 2010, no funding existed (www.davidsongifted.org/db/state_policy_ michigan_10023.aspx). Though Michigan supports gifted programs (albeit minimally), their competitive grants require matching funds, which often leave poorer (urban and rural) districts at a disadvantage because of scarce funds. Thus, gifted children from urban areas ultimately have fewer opportunities, which compounds effects of students' low-income status.

Table 1: Gifted Education Policies Per State

State(s)	Gifted Education Policy	Funding Allocation
Arizona, Georgia, Iowa, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma	Mandated	Fully funded
Alaska, Arkansas, Florida, Idaho, Colorado, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin	Mandated	Partially funded
Alabama, Maryland, New Jersey, Oregon, Pennsylvania	Mandated	No funding available
California, **Michigan**, Nevada, North Dakota, Utah	Not mandated	Minimal funding available
Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Missouri, New Hampshire, New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, Washington DC, Wyoming	Not mandated	No funding is available

The cultural affiliations of a gifted child's parents also weighs heavily on receiving gifted education opportunities, because racial and ethnic affiliations align with SES and because community affiliations that differ from the white, middle-class model followed in most schools may serve as a disincentive for Black youth (Fordham, 1996). Students whose sense of themselves as members of a home community that is not represented in schools may find it difficult to fit into gifted programming. As Bernal wrote: "What is clever and creative for a child in the barrio or on the reservation, where different value systems are in operation, will not be the

same as for the child growing up in the suburbs" (1974, p. 2). Thus, it seems logical to assume that gifted programs serving low-income, urban students from racial and ethnic minority communities should logically differ from those designed for mainstream youth in suburban communities. But, as the following discussion details, this is rarely the case.

History of Gifted Education

Gifted education's history began with ancient philosophers and ultimately became linked with the concept of genius (McClellan, 1985). For instance, Plato (429BC-347BC) advocated gifted identification for those who exhibited skill in metaphysics, philosophy, science, and military leadership (Colangelo & Davis, 1997; Davis & Rimm, 1989). During the Tang Dynasty in China (618-907AD), child prodigies went to the emperor's court for nurturing and development. During the Renaissance era (approximately 14th–17th centuries), governments supported those who exhibited talent in architecture, literature, and art (Karnes & Nugent, 2002).

The study of giftedness began in the late 1800s. Here, Sir Frances Galton (1869) documented the prejudices against women of his era (Silverman, 1990, p. 14). For instance, Galton developed a mental test, assessed 9,337 subjects, and reported that males outperformed females in every dimension (Pearson, 1924). While this should not surprising, since women had much less academic training than men, his move to infer from this that women cannot learn overstepped limitations of his study. Likewise, LeBon (1879, father of social psychology) presumed women represent the most inferior form of human intelligence and are closer to children. In fact, LeBon went further to smear even women who performed well on such examinations, miscasting such women when he wrote: "[They are] as exceptional as the birth of any monstrosity, such as a gorilla born with two brains" (quoted in Pearson, 1924). Many

thought that females had a more restricted range of abilities than men, which (they posited) explained fewer "retarded" women and fewer eminent women (Ellis & Willinsky, 1990, p. 17).

As giftedness became associated with genius, psychologists designed tests to measure intelligence (McClellan, 1985). By 1916, Lewis Terman made formal modifications to what is now called the Stanford/Binet test (www.nhage.org/history.htm, 2004). Though documented as biased in favor of male, middle-class ways of life, they remained almost entirely the way of identifying gifted children. But not all bought into this way of identifying gifted children. And, ultimately, IQ testing prompted researchers, who were dissatisfied with a definition of giftedness based on a single criterion, to develop "broadened" definitions of giftedness, (e.g. Leta Hollingworth, 1926).

Hollingworth (1926) early on challenged the misperception that men's and women's numbers among "mental defectives" differed. She reported that the practice of testing at residential housing made it seem that women and men's numbers among "mental defective" differed because males outnumbered females in the younger group, while the females outnumbered males in the older group. But this was an apples and oranges comparison that overlooked a key issue. In those days, families of mentally retarded boys sent them to residential housing, because they felt that once they became men they would not be able to support themselves and would become a burden on the family. But, families kept mentally retarded girls home to care for children and do other household work. Then, when they were no longer useful, families sent these women to residential housing (Ellis & Willinsky, 1990, p. 18). If one controlled for this social circumstance, men's and women's representations among those with cognitive challenges did not differ.

From this finding, Hollingworth continued to challenge Galton throughout her career, challenging an ideology that equated eminence with superior mental ability and capacity (Hollingworth, 1926, p. 14). Her research showed that those who acquired eminence had fathers with well-above average income, not mental capacities. She argued that education, coupled with opportunity, were the "prime determinants" of achievement, since so many great men came from superior circumstances (had large estates, wealth, servants, and so on). In addition, she focused on the interaction between ability and environmental stimulation, which served to support males while inhibiting females. Thus, Hollingworth studied the relationships between and among education, opportunity, and giftedness (Silverman, 1986, p. 20), especially demonstrating that equal opportunities for women to develop intellectually did not exist. Ultimately, Hollingworth found women's lack of equal educational opportunities contributed to gender gaps in gifted education.

As the 20th Century approached, more provisions were made for gifted education. By 1920, approximately two-thirds of all major U.S. cities had programs in gifted education (Colangelo & Davis, 1997). In 1957, Sputnik's launch by the USSR led to the U.S. instituting advanced placement in science and mathematics, and passed the National Defense Education Act of 1958. By 1972 however, the Marland Report to Congress documented a deterioration in math and science preparation and again raised public awareness about the need for gifted education (Karnes & Nugent, 2002).

Despite efforts to broaden participation for gifted programs, female students remained under-represented by as much as 30% to 40% (Ellis & Willinsky, 1990, p. 2). Excluding girls seemed likely to reduce the intended benefits of gifted programs to society (Ellis & Willinsky, 1990, p. 2), which also contributed to academic potentials of women going unfulfilled (Tong,

1989, p. 2). Many argued that educators have a responsibility to improve opportunities for all students (including women) and to provide opportunities for taking advantage of gifted programs (e.g., Ellis & Willinsky, 1990, p. 1). Thus, I began to wonder about what youth made of "giftedness" and gifted education courses and programs.

This brings us to a discussion about how youth are identified for urban gifted education opportunities.

Identification Processes/Policies in Urban Gifted Education

During the last 40 years, scholarship about gifted education reveals that African-Americans continue to be under-represented in gifted education by 50% in 1993 and by 60% in 1998 (Grantham & Ford, 2003). Despite prominent legislation intended to change these circumstances, gifted education programs remain segregated in the U.S. While little doubt exists that Brown vs. Board of Education (1954) had an important impact and influence on African American education, gifted African American students remain severely underrepresented (U.S. Department of Education, 1993; Ford & Harris, 1991). This under-representation results from a variety of issues: abstract definitions of giftedness; disparaging expectations of African American students; educators' lack of understanding of cultural differences, learning styles, and achievement aspirations of gifted African-American children; the lack of encouragement given to parents of African American children; and the paucity of funding to make education look more like America (Ford, 1995).

Cultural and learning practices of African Americans contribute to difficulty identifying gifted students and providing insufficient programs for Black gifted education. For instance, few teachers have received extensive and continuous instruction on multicultural research, education, and programming, and teacher ignorance about these key issues make it difficult to understand

how culturally diverse students learn and acquire knowledge (Ford, 1995). Recent research suggests, for example, that African American children prefer concrete activities and group work (Obi & Obiakor, 2001). In fact, educators and instructional staff in urban schools who understand these differences identify giftedness more often than those who do not (Ford, 1995; Obi & Obiakor, 2001). However, many teachers misidentify giftedness as synonymous with certain kinds of behaviors, such as cooperation, punctuality, and neatness. While desirable, such behaviors do not correlate with giftedness. Furthermore, Ford et al., (1996, 2002) found the underrepresentation of urban, low-income African-American students in gifted education related to low test scores, student and family choice, a lack of teacher referral, and a mismatch between home and school cultures. I will consider each of these in turn.

Low Test Scores

African-American students score lower on standardized tests than their white counterparts, largely because such tests affirm middle-class, white ways of life. Thus, the rigidity of a single-factor (and testable) notion of giftedness, especially an intelligence (IQ) test, proves a barrier to gifted African-American students. Some argue that testing practices (not children's capabilities) create the illusion of an achievement gap between Black and white children (Perry et al, 2003, p. 134), because current technology, science, and mental measurements cannot adequately measure human potential. Because IQ tests correlate highly with having privileged exposure to test ideas (Perry et al., 2003, p.135), such tests lack construct validity for intelligence (Perry et al., 2003). This is exacerbated by little consensus on a standard definition of intelligence. In fact, the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences recommended not using such measures for decisions regarding student placements in gifted, mentally retarded, or learning disabled programs (Perry et al., 2003, p. 136).

And, parents of Black youth seek testing less often. Parents of white children (56% with children over IQ of 130) proved more adamant about their child's inclusion in a gifted selection process than did Black parents (30% with children over IQ of 130) (Phi Delta Kappan, 1992, p. 344). Thus, with culturally biased tests given too much credence and African American parents seeking testing less often, African American children enter gifted education programs at a lower rate than whites.

Test scores seem (when used for evaluative purposes) to be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, test scores are important because they have a direct effect on opportunity structures, not only influencing admission to prestigious schools, colleges, and universities, but also paralleling education funding, occupational placement in the military, and levels of employment (Hedges & Nowell, 1999; Redd, 2003). However, on the other hand, educational scholars debate what tests measure, and to what extent tests distinguish between "achievement" and "ability." Many psychologists suggest that cannot be disentangled, such as the position taken in 1996 by the American Psychological Association which declared that though test scores are determined jointly by nature and nurture, there is little indication about the contribution of each (Hedges & Nowell, 1999). In fact, the net contributions of these various social circumstances (e.g., low test scores, student and family choice, lack of teacher referral) prove difficult to tease out when they are analyzed together or over a period of time (Berends, Luca, & Penaloza, 2008). Student and family choice also affect the chance of receiving gifted identification.

Student and Family Choice

Social and emotional concerns provide another reason that gifted students and families of gifted students choose not to participate in gifted education and programming. In particular, African American youth who enter gifted programs fear being away from their peers,

experiencing peer pressure, or being viewed as "acting white" or as "race-traitors" (Ford et al., 1992; 1996). Thus, youth's sense of racial identity becomes entangled with academic success and giftedness (a point I return to in a moment).

Researchers conclude that familial background of gifted children bears on the successes of gifted children. Parental involvement in education greatly increases the chances for educational success. However, many African American parents, especially those in low SES groups, face barriers in the acknowledgement of giftedness. Marion (1981) reports that many African American parents experience stress that school personnel may view them suspiciously, because parents are often employed in low-paying jobs, and thus, less educated than school personnel who hold college degrees. These feelings impede communication with teaching and other instructional staff and therefore, impede processes for identification of accelerated and gifted programming. The lack of teacher referral also impacts the number of students who enter gifted identification.

A Lack of Teacher Referral

A lack of teacher referrals for African American students also impacts the number who enter gifted programs. Teachers remain the first identifiers of the gifted, because they consistently observe, instruct, and evaluate their students. But, data indicate that teachers tend not to refer African-American students for screening and placement in gifted programs. Some argue that this relates to deficit thinking—presuming culturally diverse students cannot learn to the same extent as whites—and thus, teachers focus on non-standard English and other markers of African American life rather than on academic strengths. Since many school districts use teacher referral as the first step of the identification process (Davis & Rimm, 2004), prejudices and discrimination may keep African-American students away from challenging and advanced

classes (Grantham & Ford, 2003). The underachievement of African American children thus becomes partly a function of the schools and perpetuates and reinforces the insecurity and ambivalence many African American children feel with regard to their own race and culture in schooling (Obi & Obiakor, 2001). Other popular explanations for the low performance of some Black students help to frame approaches that inevitably limit students' capacities, include identity development. Identity development, for example, sheds some light on additional barriers that some African American girls face.

<div align="center">Cultural Difference Theorists</div>

Cultural difference theorists argued that the disproportionate school failure of African-Americans can be attributed to a mismatch between home and school cultures or to outright conflict between students' home life and culture at school. U.S. school culture mimics the dominant culture or White mainstream America (Perry et al., 2003, p. 53). Salient differences exist across a side range of attributes, but much of the early work about cultural differences focused on language. Rather than acknowledging Black indigenous speech with regional variations across Black communities (Smitherman, 1977, pp. 43, 193, 217, 223), educators acted as if Black culture and language were deficient, that is, that Black children entered school without a proper language. Later, Labov (1972) and others studied Black English and found a systematic, rule-based language that was relevant and contained a full-range of cognitive and intellectual tasks. But, this research rarely found its way into teacher preparation programs or schools, leaving many Black children to be misjudged by teachers. Ultimately, Black communication and language forms influenced teachers' judgments and diminished their sense of the intellectual capabilities of African-American children (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard III, 2003, p.70). But, though these markers of home culture ensure one's community membership, they

work in schools to point up one's mismatch to school culture and can impact or raise doubts about one's belonging in school and one's suitability for gifted education.

In fact, one's self-image derives in large part from how one is viewed by others in school, among family, and by other members of society. Negative views can be internalized and result in lower self-esteem or self-hatred. Thus, as some argue, many Black students internalize negative stereotypes that in turn paralyze performance, cause anxiety, and produce low expectations for achievement (Perry, 2003). One way this happens is through "stereotype threat": the threat of being viewed through a negative stereotype, or a fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm the stereotype. Groups contending with powerful negative stereotypes about their abilities (e.g., women in advanced math, African Americans in all academic areas) experience stress and anxiety (Perry, et al., 2003, p. 123) that inhibits their performance on academic tasks. Thus, instead of one's deep-seated understanding of the world (one's cultural knowledge) providing understandings about how to "do" school, the mismatch in home and school culture inhibits performance on tasks and in social interactions with teachers that identify urban African-American students as anything but gifted in spite of other out-of-school evidence of the contrary.

Thus, I began to wonder about how students talked and thought about test scores, their family's support of their developing academics, the kinds of relationships they had with their teachers, and to what extent the school culture resonated with their home culture, and if not, what this implied for their educational futures. Also, considering the frequent differential between the educational levels of urban Black girls' teachers and some of their parents, I began to wonder the roles that teachers and parents play in urban Black girls' identification for, and inclusion in, gifted programs, and to what extent social status plays a role in identification processes.

Though a large literature examining girls in math and science classrooms clearly substantiates considerable gender bias (e.g., Sadker & Sadker, 1994, for a cogent review), few studies have evaluated teachers' understandings of girls' capabilities for gifted education. Here, I discuss Signithia Fordham's watershed study of academically successful Black girls.

Where Are All the Urban Gifted Black Females?

Only Fordham's (1993) research on high-achieving girls in a multicultural urban high school took up the challenge faced by African-American girls with promise of bright academic futures. Fordham built on Black feminists and described the tendency for public education to expect young Black women to discard both their race and their gendered selves. Fordham found that when young women had a place in academia, their presence required gender passing modeled on white, middle-class ways of life. But, when Black women reject both "whiteness" and masculinity as grounds for their identity, Black women were left with an "other" persona. In her large-scale cultural study of an urban D.C. high school, termed "Capitol" High, Fordham studied a magnet school with a "multilevel and multi-rigorous curriculum" (1993, p. 6). By utilizing qualitative research methodology (ethnography), Fordham observed and interviewed Black adolescent women and men from high and low academic-achievement levels. Here, I discuss Fordham's young women research participants, the "silence" she observed, and its impact on their academic success.

"Those Loud Black Girls" (1993) provides a record of gender diversity and its construction in a U.S. context, but also documents efforts to suppress it. Fordham described the high-achieving females as "phantoms of the opera" because they achieved academic success by being silent or voiceless, and by impersonating male behaviors and actions; that is, becoming the "Other." Rita (a pseudonym), an example of a high-achieving young woman, used the voice of a

clown or comedian (primarily male behaviors), but her young women colleagues refused to accept or join her, not only because clowning would bring attention to themselves, but also because being allowed to speak (have a voice) would cause a "state of tyranny," and created a fear of not "being taken seriously" (Fordham, 1993, p. 17-18). Even though the Black girls were the more academically successful students at Capital High, they were the least visible (silent), because they were forced to conceal their gender and their female voice, and in doing so, they "passed" for people that they were not—white American youth (Fordham, 1993, p. 22-23). The ignorance and lack of support from their parents, teachers, and school counselors reinforced the girls' sense of themselves as tenuously linked to their academic achievements. Fordham's findings parallel the previous discussions regarding gender issues and gifted Black girls.

Of greater importance and pertinent to my discussion of Black gifted girls and their education, "passing" seems rarely identified or discussed, as if academic performance were gender and race and class neutral instead of deeply raced, classed, and sexed (Fordham, 1993). America's social system remains male dominated; priveleges are distributed hierarchically in such a system according to one's fit with "customs." And here, Black girls and women are victimized and suppressed based on multi-layered aspects (Fordham, 1993). Thus, I began to more fully recognize some of the circumstances in play that underping the low numbers of Black girls exists identified for gifted programs, and to recognize what Black girls identified as gifter might experience in their classrooms. I wonder to what extent Fordham's findings might be relevant in the early 21st century to girls in a public high school serving an overwhelmingly Black community.

Looking back then, across the sweep of my argument, several issues guide this research study. First, African-American women's circumstances (and I argue those of girls) differ in ways

that relate to social class. Second, U.S. society presumes to understand African-American women's and girls' circumstances, but all too often uses stereotypes and myths grounded in racist, sexist, and classist systems that obscure these girls' and women's realities. Third, while education is frequently held up as a way to change current circumstances, underfunded urban education, a race-gap in achievement, and a gender-gap in girls' recognition as gifted inhibit, rather than bolster, African-American girls' opportunities to advance. Fourth, African-American girls prove unlikely to be identified as high potential and eligible for gifted education (if enough programs existed), not only because of test bias and stereotype threat, but also because teachers fail to notice and recommend them, parents and families prove reluctant to push for their daughters' access to gifted education opportunities, and because of a cultural mismatch between school culture and African-American culture. Ultimately, only one central study examined high achieving African-American girls in an urban high school setting, and here all of the concerns raised by scholars I reviewed in earlier sections came into play.

As illuminated above, these research questions emerged from the scholarly framework and guide my inquiry:

1. How do young Black women (teens in grades 6-8, who show high academic promise) think about and talk about their sense of themselves as Black women, in their home and school communities, and what might their stories tell us about social class and its impact on their schooling?

2. What might these youth make of "giftedness" and gifted education courses and programs?

3. How were these girls identified as showing promise academically, and to what extent were IQ tests, creativity, and leadership (or other things) used to ascertain giftedness?

4. How do these girls talk and think about test scores, about their family's support of their developing academics, and about their relationships with their teachers?

5. To what extent might school culture resonate with these girls' home culture or not, and what might this imply for their educational futures?

6. What roles might teachers and parents play in urban Black girls' identification for, and inclusion in, gifted programs, and to what extent might the differential social status (between urban teachers and some urban Black girls' parents) play a role in identification processes?

In what follows in Chapter 3, I advance a justification for research methodological decisions to answer these research questions.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research in education depends on data collected from participants that cannot be quantified without losing important ideas. Researchers in this tradition seek descriptions of themes, and analysis that is conducted from the inside, via the study of a real-world setting with as little disruption of it as possible (Creswell, 2005, p. 39). Qualitative research also allows an exploration in topics where little is known, and provides for a detailed understanding of associated phenomena. In qualitative inquiry, the intent is not to generalize about the population, but to develop, explore, and make informed inferences about a phenomenon, and if appropriate to see nuanced differences across members of what would otherwise seem a unified group (Creswell, 2005, pp. 203-204). In addition, a qualitative methodology champions exploration into topics where very little is known about the research problem(s), and advocates a detailed understanding of associated phenomenon (Creswell, 2005, p. 39-40). As such, the qualitative approaches taken in this study allow understanding how race, gender, and social class intersect and impact different participants in varying ways.

Furthermore, an *ethnographic* approach suggests a way to study people embedded in a social situation while simultaneously studying the social setting. In fact, qualitative researchers utilize ethnographic research designs to develop an understanding of a group or community, especially when a situation requires understanding experiences of a culture-sharing group (such as urban African-American girls). Here, culture-sharing implies that historically relevant ways of understanding the world exist and are held as implicit knowledge by insiders. Ultimately, the goal of such research is to make explicit these implicit understandings, that is, to see the world from the vantage point of insiders. Classical ethnography gives central importance to observing everyday life, but contemporary ethnography can use interview-only research and specifics kinds

of interview questions to have insiders describe everyday life. Such an approach is termed quasi-ethnographic.

Ethnographic and quasi-ethnographic designs provide a cyclical approach to research (Spradley, 1980, p. 28). A cyclical research model allows for repeatedly testing and retesting emerging findings, allows for new research questions and data to emerge, and therefore, for solutions when a study anticipates problem solving. Cyclical research designs also call for continuously re-thinking collected data to follow or deepen discoveries and understandings about patterns of behavior that might vary across participants. By utilizing a cyclical qualitative research design (ethnography), issues associated with obstacles to inclusion into gifted programs for urban Black females have room to surface, can undergo repetitive analysis, and thus, allow seeking solutions or problem solving.

Different types of ethnographic designs exist. Due to the nature and sensitivity of the research topics (race, urban education, gender, perhaps even giftedness), this research takes a critical ethnography perspective. Critical ethnography requires researchers to challenge the status quo. As such, critical ethnography creates a dialogue between researchers and research participants, describes social power and control, and seeks to contribute to change in society (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, pp. 1-5).

Ethnographers make informed inferences about what research participants say specifically about their culture, how participants behave and what they do (cultural behavior), and the influence of cultural artifacts (things used and produced by participants) (Spradley, 1980, p.12). These inferences begin with site selection and its description.

Site Selection

According to Spradley (1980, pp. 39-52), four primary criteria underpin site selection: simplicity, accessibility, unobtrusiveness, and permissibleness, which I take up in turn.

GS1 is an urban charter high school (grades ninth through twelfth) serving an overwhelming Black student body. GS1 opened just before the 2005 school year and specializes in curriculum that prepares its students for college preparedness and careers in the 21st century. A non-selective school, no specific testing or criteria exist for admission into the school exists, but accelerated classes are available, and these attract some gifted Black girls. In 2010, GS1 received a first place Magna award at the National School Board Association conference for its innovative curriculum, high graduation rate, and college support staff. Field recognizance indicated that more boys than girls attend GS1, and the boys further concentrate in the accelerated math programming (school year 2010-2011). Such a situation represents a relatively complex one, which will be simplified only slightly by seeing it from the vantage point of girls and with interview data. Because of community contacts, this site is accessible to me, and my access is assured by the building principal. Choosing only one location (GS1) to conduct this research improves the simplicity and accessibility.

Unobtrusiveness refers to the extent to which the research will impose or be noticed in the setting as a researcher. Ultimately, not being a regular member of the community, but also not being thought of as an outsider, allows me to perform data collection without becoming the focus of students and teachers and detracting from learning. Also, my experience living and working with Blacks in the urban community, and being the mother of a gifted Black daughter, provide for my understanding social customs particular to this locale. Being culturally aware of such customs reduces the extent to which I might be thought of as an outsider or intruder.

Permissibleness refers to the ethical appropriateness of my interview and study of this social situation and with those participants in the research. Nothing in the interview touches on topics considered socially or psychologically risky. And, procedures for maintaining confidentiality, improve the permissableness of the research.

Participant Inclusion Criteria and Recruitment

This research will utilize *homogenous sampling*. With homogenous sampling, the researcher purposefully selects sites and research participants that have the same characteristics, and belong to the same subcultures that the researcher proposes to study (Black girls in or qualified for gifted programs for GS1). Eight participants agree to participate from among Black girls ages 14-17 who are taking—or identified as qualified to take—accelerated courses, their parents (3) , and their teachers (3). Research with minors in this age category required obtaining informed consents from them, assents from their parents, and written consent of teachers. All research activities followed the policies of the Wayne State University Institutional Review Board (WSU-IRB). After approval is obtained from the WSU-IRB and with the support of the school principal, the study will be explained to teachers of the accelerated programs, and to gifted Black girls and their parents. I anticipated that about half of the participants would come from those already taking or teaching accelerated courses. A copy of the WSU IRB approval can be found in the Appendix A.

Data Collection

Data collection will encompassed two individual, open-ended, semi-structured interviews with 8 Black girls aged 13 to 17, one individual interview with 3 classroom teachers, and one group interview with 3 parents. Initial interviews with girls centered on their educational goals, their sense of themselves in and out of school and their fit with schooling, the place that

accelerated classes have in their lives (and if not why not), and their relationships with teachers and parents relative to their schooling. Conversations with parents centered on their goals for and decisions affecting their daughters' educations. Interviews with teachers focused on how students are identified for accelerated courses, as well as how they talk about what it means to be gifted. All interviews were recorded and transcribed word for word. All proper nouns were transformed into pseudonyms in all research data to ensure confidentiality. Participant entries in a master list with contact information and pseudonyms will be deleted as soon as data are collected and linked for each participant. Audio recordings will be deleted after defending the dissertation.

Subsequent interviews with students occurred after transcription and preliminary analysis. The second interview served primarily to fill gaps in the research record, clarified confusions and misunderstandings, and provided for member checks on the researcher's interpretation of findings.

Open-ended interviews allow participants to take the lead and describe their experiences fully and in their order of importance, while semi-structured aspects allow the researcher a way to check on earlier empirical findings with similar girls. Such interviews are exploratory in nature and reflect the thoughts of research participants. In fact, the central purpose of many interview-guide items is to encourage the participant to talk at length about particular phenomena and to explain complex social situations and circumstances. Interviews took place during excused school hours at GS1 for all research participants when appropriate. Semi-structured interview questions are important in qualitative research both in the first and the second interviews. For instance, after the initial interview (I1) structured interview items allow capturing the attributes of domains, and questioning, verifying, or expanded upon preliminary interpretations by soliciting additional information. The central purpose of this document

(Appendix B) describes each group of research participants, and the interview guides that were used.

Several advantages accrue to open-ended interviews. First, interviewers remain open to any and all responses, giving the interviewee license to focus on important topics to the interviewee. Second, such interviews allow new domains to emerge, which proves especially important when little is known about a topic. And, third, such interviews allow the perspectives and experiences of interviewees to take center stage (Schensul & LeCompte, 1999, p. 121). Though questions for interview are semi-structured (written ahead of time) and provide a structural map, the interviewer has latitude to follow important issues as they occur, which deepen what the researcher can know about a participant's experiences (Schensul & LeCompte, 1999, p. 149). Semi-structured interviews also allow clarifying domains and factors (Schensul & LeCompte, 1999, p. 150). Thus, by deploying a wide variety of types of interview items—such as key event items, domain elicitation items with insider sorting, and narrative of experience items—each of which provides ways to unpack insider understandings of complex socio-cultural settings (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999).

Domain elicitation will begin immediately after interviews are conducted. Domains are the range of personal knowledge that will be derived from the research subjects (primarily gifted Black girls) about their experiences and personal knowledge. The researcher must be cautious to ensure that domains elicited from interviews reflect concerns of the interviewees and not what those of the researcher. The narratives of experience allow participants to describe in detail their experiences surrounding a particular phenomenon. Key events items provide a way for the researcher to identify events that stand out in the participant's mind, and help them unpack these along a variety of dimensions. These dimensions emerge as sub-categories in the domain

analysis, and provide concrete descriptions as well as feelings that depict history and consequences (positive and negative) important to the research analysis (Schensul & LeCompte, 1999, p. 99). Key events related to their taking accelerated classes or not, which may differ across study participants. The analysis will reflect these differences and help researchers (and educators) move away from thinking of Black urban girls as somehow embued with a sameness that overlooks real differences in their needs and interests (Schensul & LeCompte, 1999, p. 99). Soliciting narrative experiences from the participants allows them to illustrate what happened in their own words, and allows the researcher (me) to obtain information by using probes. Probing also allows the interviewees to recall events, feelings, and experiences that may not have been previously remembered (Schensul & LeCompte, 1999, pps. 138-139).

<div align="center">Ethical Treatment of Research Participants</div>

In all behavioral research and especially research involving human subjects, participant confidentiality proves central. All behavioral research requires a plan to ensure protecting participant confidentiality. This plan includes submission and approval by an internal review board responsible for monitoring federal policies. Ethical treatment of the participants was ensured by following the policies of the WSU-IRB. Notification to the WSU-IRB office regarding any changes to the research project will be filed as amendments and no research activities will be initiated until approval is obtained. Final closure of the study will be filed with the IRB office.

All research participants received a detailed description of the research study, and once participants agreed to participate, they received a copy of the written consent form. Each research participant was assigned a pseudonym, in place of her birth name to protect participant confidentiality. The pseudonym was linked to the participant's name in a separate master list

located in the master study file of the researcher. Only the researcher will have access to the master list, while the dissertation committee Chair and authorized WSU-IRB (Wayne State University Institutional Review Board) and federal regulatory agencies will have access to data. Individual participant's information will be deleted from the master list after linking data.

Record retention will be maintained in a locked file cabinet in a locked room located at the residence of the primary researcher (principal investigator) for a period of five years after study closure. Consents and collected data will be kept in separate locked file drawers.

Analysis Strategies

Data analysis unpacks patterns found in collected data. Members of urban African American communities hold shared (cultural) understandings made evident in their behaviors, artifacts, and knowledge (Spradley, 1980, p. 86). During analysis, semantic domains (categories of meaning) emerge, and these are then organized internally and with respect to one another, and then compared across salient dimensions. Thus, there are three analysis strategies that will be used in this research: domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, and componential analysis.

Domain Analysis

The goal of domain analysis is two-fold: to discover the patterns of sameness in a particular social setting, and to gain a better understanding of the situation studied (Spradley, 1980, p. 97). These patterns may not be readily apparent; but rather be embedded in the data collected (Spradley, 1980, p. 91). The first step is to select *semantic domains*. Semantic domains preserve insiders' meanings and are comprised of included terms all related in the same way (via a semantic relationship) to cover terms from the collected data. Spradley offers widely accepted examples of semantic relationships, such as means-end (X is a way to Y) and strict inclusion (X is a kind of Y) (1980, p. 93). Identifying all the "Xs" that are kinds of "Y" in each piece of data

accrues over time into a domain. Thus, a domain encompasses a large set of included terms. Domain analysis proceeds by repeating this step for all relationships and for each piece of data, with iterations (as needed). Xs that are related to Ys for each domain provide a thorough description of the girls' circumstances that flows from identifying relevant domains to produce an exhaustive search for all included terms. As currently envisioned, domain analysis will occur concurrently with data collection with a first-pass domain analysis to be completed for all first interviews (I1) before the scheduling of any second interviews (I2).

In the interim, a domain analysis worksheet allows collecting and sketching of the semantic relationships to be organized, which begins the transition into taxonomic analysis. The analysis of data and identification of cover terms is a repetitive process and must be repeated as new data are collected (via the cyclical patterns of research).

Taxonomic Analysis

After domain analysis, taxonomic analysis works across the data set to gather up all included terms for each domain, then looking for sub-domains within domains, and organizing domains relative to one another. Taxonomies provide the organizational backbone for findings. The taxonomy reveals the relationships between and among included terms within as well as across domains (Spradley, 1980, p. 113). After selecting a domain, and looking for similarities between and among terms within each domain, a researcher then carefully sorts the terms into sub-domains. Participants provide insights into these organizational efforts during the second interview (I2). Afterwards, it is important to discover larger, more inclusive domains, and to construct a taxonomic worksheet. Focusing subsequent interview findings ensures no important relationships are overlooked and allows understanding nuanced findings. Constructing an

accurate final taxonomy ensures accuracy and completes this analysis (Spradley, 1980, pps. 116-121).

Componential Analysis

Componential analysis provides a process for searching for patterns of difference (or contrast) made evident in domain and taxonomic analysis. Here, researchers prepare a worksheet that illustrates how meanings potentially vary across participants and their check for variations (Spradley, 1980, pp. 136-138). Because this research involves teachers, students, and parents, the perspectives of each group of participants will be examined (across-groups, comparative, and separately). In addition, perspectives of members of each group will be examined (within-group variation). As suggested by scholars, variations may relate complex intersections among race, class, and gender, which will be analyzed to provide explanatory power to the analysis. Here, findings will notably seek to illuminate that variation exists, but also strive to explain why this is the case. As was the case for domain and taxonomic analysis, preliminary comparative findings will be corroborated or expanded during the second round of interviews (Spradley, 1980, pp. 133-139). As such, the componential analysis allows tracking nuanced variations in the ways participants understand the world of gifted education. These data analysis strategies contribute in large measure to ensuring finding are trustworthy.

<div align="center">Trustworthiness</div>

Rather than being an external construct, trustworthiness is built into the process of research in the post-positivist tradition. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness encompasses four necessary criteria: *Credibility* (assurance that the research findings and interpretations represent participants' experiences); *transferability* (how widely the research and its findings might be utilized), *dependability* (how consistent and reliable the research is), and

confirmability (to what extent the process and its findings can be linked to data and whether the researcher minimized bias and maintained neutrality, and through which the research and its finding can be tracked and confirmed). These techniques are briefly discussed here.

Credibility in this research study is established via triangulation of sources, member checks, and peer review. *Triangulation* of sources (3-4 teachers, 6-8 parents, and 6-8 students) depends upon having enough sources to understand the extent of which findings come from a few, several, or most participants or within each group of teachers, parents, and girls. Credibility also improves when a knowledgeable researcher (the dissertation Chair) serves as a foil to discuss emerging findings and deepen analysis (a peer review process). Finally, credibility improves when participants confirm emerging findings during subsequent data-collection activities (such as the second interview).

Transferability refers to readers making judgments about the extent to which this study's findings can be used in another context. Here, rich descriptive accounts allow readers to understand the unique context and compare it to another context of interest to a reader. *Dependability* in this study comes primarily from the dissertation chair's monitoring the research to ensure its integrity, as well as by maintaining an audit trail. *Confirmability* refers to the audit trail and findings that can be traced from data into the findings via a consistent (systematic) research processes. An audit trail (a tag identifying a finding's source in the data) is carried along through each step of the research process, allowing another researcher to confirm findings. The dissertation chair will conduct an inquiry audit to gauge confirmability.

The researcher journal is an integral part of the qualitative research methodology. The researcher journal is an official recordkeeping of schedules, issues, and feelings of the researcher and is kept routinely. It is a formal account of the logistics of the research process. As such, it

may be utilized as part of an audit trial and a source for confirmability. It also notes one's impact on the site, and the site's impact on the researcher, as well as provides a place to record the researcher's sense of emerging findings. These aspects of the researcher journal provide a check on potential researcher bias by raising awareness about the researcher's vantage point to refocus on that of the participants. I will keep a researcher journal to document mistakes, experiences, ideas, fears, and issues that arise during fieldwork (Spradley, 1980, pp. 71-72; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 109). With each journal entry dated, it is not only possible for the researcher to acknowledge personal biases and feelings about the research processes, but it also allows the researcher to utilize another documented source for further investigation if questions arise from fieldwork and field notes. During the analysis phases of the study, the reflexive/researcher journal serves as a valuable source to recall events previously forgotten (Spradley, 1980, pp. 71-72).

Trustworthiness, thus, is indeed a process built into all facets of research. Without trustworthiness, research (and its findings) might prove unreliable or biased. Another issue that warrants discussion that parallels trustworthiness is the importance of neutrality and continuously reducing potential for researcher through research reflexivity.

Researcher Reflexivity

Every researcher must be neutral to ensure researcher has minimal impact on the field and that findings represent those of the participants. Researcher reflexivity involves the ways in which researchers reflect on their own values, interests, experiences, and beliefs, and how these perspectives shape their research. Reflexivity is central to qualitative methodology because it conceptualizes the researchers as active participants in the reproduction of knowledge, rather than neutral bystanders (Hsiung, 2008). That I am the mother of three African-American girls, all

three currently attending courses of study with accelerated programming, suggests why I must be cautious to maintain a neutral stance.

Here then, I explain my connections to this area of research as a way of opening a dialogue with myself, and readers of my research. Many of my personal experiences regarding race, gender, and concepts of giftedness shape the way that I think, read, conduct research, and make inferences about these subjects. Thus, I have a "performance-understanding" of my role in this research. At times it proves difficult to acknowledge my Caucasian cultural subgroup, because I identify strongly with the group being studied (urban African-American girls). While some may worry about my "going native" and losing the ability to enact the role of neutral researcher (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, pp. 303-304), others suggest that my circumstances as a white mother of three Black daughters provide me with important cultural knowledge that provides qualifications for this research. Nonetheless, it is important to accurately interpret and represent the experiences of the cultural group being studied, in this case, urban African American girls (Tillman, 2002, p. 4). This proves a delicate balance, which is managed effectively via triangulation. Likewise, during data analysis, and the reporting of the research findings, pervasive qualities of the research will appear by focusing, and sorting out irrelevant aspects. Likewise, while there are no techniques that can guarantee remaining neutral, awareness of these issues is an important step toward prevention (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304). Ultimately, I know about the experiences of some urban Black gifted girls and believe that this research is warranted, and intend to expand on my limited understandings and represent the voices of the Black, gifted, and girls. Here, in spite of decades of effort, such work is needed to understand these girls' hopes, dreams, and aspiration as a way to promote change in current schooling.

CHAPTER 4: THE "IDENTIFIERS"—TEACHERS DETERMINING GIFTEDNESS

As will become clearer in what follows, teachers remain the first identifiers of the gifted, because they consistently observe, instruct, and evaluate their students. At GS1, teachers identify gifted Black girls through a somewhat systematic, yet un-documented approach. Three teachers at GS1, two females (both Caucasian) and one male (Mexican), participated in interviews about their teaching education and experiences, how they thought about what "gifted" meant, how they identified gifted Black girls, and their experiences with gifted Black girls. The results of their interviews not only corroborate findings previously reported, but also provide new insights into the selection of black girls for gifted programs at GS1. A discussion regarding the education and professional experiences of the interviewed teaching staff begins the teacher findings as these aspects set the stage for understanding how giftedness emerged from each teacher's perspectives at GS1.

Teacher Education

Teacher's perspectives on the educational futures of their students grew out of the school's vision. GS1's vision clearly supported college preparatory goals, something the school principal (Mr. Deacon[1]) encouraged. This vision first became apparent in the education of the three teachers (Taylor, May, Mercury) I interviewed with all three teachers holding multiple degrees and certifications. Taylor for example, holds certifications in German, English, and Social Studies, plus a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Teaching. Taylor currently teaches eleventh-grade honors English, ninth-grade English, a college preparatory class for eleventh-grade students and the advanced placement honors English class for the twelfth grade. Taylor has taught at GS1 since its inception seven years ago (R. Taylor, March 1, 2012, p. 2). May majored in history in college, with a minor in English, and holds a social studies degree. She currently

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[1] All proper nouns are pseudonyms to maintain participant confidentiality

teaches honors English for tenth grade, regular tenth-grade English, and strategic reading for eleventh-grade students. She is the youngest teacher on staff at GS1, completed her student teaching at GS1, subbed long-time at GS1 (as the tenth-grade honors English teacher), and has been teaching there full time for less than a year at the time of her interview (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 4). Mercury has taught at GS1 for five years (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 1). Mercury holds a double major in political science and history, with a minor in English. Upon applying for employment at GS1, Mercury understood that Mr. Deacon needed a course in geography to teach at GS1, which prompted Mercury to return to school to obtain these credits. The educational vision, and teachers' own educational attainments, provide a backdrop for understanding the definition of giftedness at GS1, and ultimately how gifted Black girls are identified.

Each teacher not only felt satisfied about their current teaching situation, but also found redeeming qualities in their teaching careers. For example, May stated that "I always wanted to be a teacher. I had a crappy childhood and I had a lot of good teachers take me in. Sometimes I would stay until 5:00PM in the evening. I just wanted to be that person, so I became that person" [2] (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 21). She went on to add: "I love it…Not just for telling them stuff…I talk a lot to the girls, especially since I am younger. I am the youngest teacher by like five years, I'm younger than our student teacher…I think they trust me, like I'm the 'cool' teacher; they can come to me after school" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p.1). Taylor mimicked May's sentiments: "It's clearly my passion; it's an impactful and rewarding career" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 1). Mercury, who spent the better part of his life and career in the private sector before becoming a teacher stated: "I love it…I laugh every day and I say that I have

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[2] When quoting or paraphrasing participants from the interview data set, this convention is used: speaker name, date, and page. This practice mimics that used by APA in-line citations and allows knowledgeable readers to draw conclusions about the triangulation of findings across participants.

stopped working, I have fun every day" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 5). Teachers described advantages to teaching at GS1 as well.

All three teacher interviewees commented that working at GS1 was beneficial. Taylor, for example had commented on the leadership structure and on teaching: "There are lots of leadership opportunities, Mr. Deacon has provided a horizontal leadership structure for all decisions at GS1…We have a School Improvement Team, and I love working in a small school, you get to know all of the kids, and the kids don't get lost here like in big schools" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 10). May discussed the structure of the school further: "Best part of this school is the block scheduling; we have more time—a whole lesson in 90 minutes—I don't think I could go back to teaching a 65-minute class" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 3). May added, "It's really nice, they get two days for homework, and I get two days to grade; I don't see the same kids every day" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 3). Thus, all three teachers were satisfied with their employment and teaching careers. Let us now turn to differences in the way they defined "giftedness," and how these definitions became evident in their teaching.

Defining Giftedness

Although there was some overlap among the three teachers' definition of giftedness, distinct differences existed. These definitions not only shaped and defined the honors and advanced placement courses at GS1, but also which students were entered into such courses. Teachers hinted at a range of possibilities suggesting not only that "Some people need more than one chance" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 18); but also that "We just don't take anybody; just because you get an 'A' does not mean that you get to be in Honors" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 28). Mercury explained "gifted" saying: "I think of someone as inquisitive, they soak up information readily, almost without prompting. They put context around their learning" (F.

Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 6). He added that "…Like this triggers other questions that they start asking, and I like to get those questions to see how they are processing information and then we build on that" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 6). "Soaking up information readily" was also referenced by Taylor in her reply: "They are natural readers, they are life-long readers. This really distinguishes the girls in your study, they enjoy reading and they do it on their own" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 20). May, however, thought "The only difference I see between the gifted and the non-gifted students is that they get things faster and generally better initial results. I can get the same results from regular tenth-grade English, but it takes me longer" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 28). She added, "Also, we are kind of at a disadvantage because we don't have any special education programs or anything, so automatically our regular tenth-grade English is 'lower,' not all of them are at the same level, averages are brought down because we have no services" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 28). Only May and Taylor taught gifted (accelerated, honors) English courses at GS1, yet their answers proved varied. In fact, May's notion of giftedness saw gifted students as simply quicker, and not as more capable, while Taylor and Mercury understood giftedness as demonstrations of going deeper and taking more initiative for their learning, as having capabilities not seen in other non-gifted students.

However, on further probing it became evident that May used the term "gifted" in novel ways that related to her employment history. At GS1 May "was hired one day before school started this year. Taylor wrote the curriculum, but I taught this class [tenth-grade Honors English] during my student teaching here. You just add in extra books, extra papers. We [Honors English] read a faster scale, 30-40 pages reading as opposed to 20-30 pages in regular English. We have already read like 2-3 more books than regular English" (B. May, February 29, 2012, ps. 6-7). Before she came to GS1 in the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year, May taught at an

adult education facility in the same school district location as GS1. Talking about that setting, she spoke with obvious sarcasm "…I taught those *gifted* girls" (B. May, February 29, 2012, pp. 29-30). Here, May highlighted the distance between the usual sense of "giftedness" and the students in her adult education classes. "In adult ed, it's a different environment, the girls over there are very dedicated for the most part, or pregnant; they chose to go over there, they are not really gifted in terms of what you are looking for [laughs], they do not fit in the traditional role of school." Since May had been at GS1 for only one year, she seemed not to have completely taken up the prevailing (at GS1) interpretation of the term "gifted," as explained by Mercury and Taylor, but to be finding her way from her previous position to the one at GS1.

Not surprisingly, the way that teachers understood "giftedness" underpinned how they identified students for inclusion in gifted programs at GS1, and how these criteria for inclusion affected the education of Black girls.

<div align="center">Inclusion Criteria for Gifted Programming</div>

Inclusion criteria used for entrance into gifted programming affect the education of Black girls at GS1. For instance, no honors or advanced placement courses exist in social studies. The previous chair of the department and Mercury had both agreed that "there was no benefit" of having an advanced placement history, because "teaching to the test" would not benefit the students, primarily because "almost all are deficient in basic knowledge." Students not only come to GS1 from approximately 120 different middle schools, but also because "a lot of [students'] environments are limited to their neighborhoods, so they are not worthy" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 12). Mercury thought obtaining basic knowledge was more important than having advanced placement in social studies/history for these students, and further explained that "for us [social studies/history department at GS1] it is not only social

studies , but the entire academic experience…I've discovered nothing is too basic" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 12). Although Mercury has never taught any gifted courses in his teaching career, he was quite familiar with the gifted students at GS1 and understood gifted educational programming.

In other curriculum areas, demonstrations of student capabilities underpin selection. "We never use testing [as a criterion for entrance into the gifted programing]. We are considering using eighth-grade MEAP scores for next year. We have major deficits in math, but you have to earn your way into an honors section. For English, you must have an A or a B and your writing skill must be high" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 20). Mercury agreed in his interview stating, "[I am] not a big fan of testing" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 18). "Not test scores because you never know what was going on that day" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p.18). Although Mercury has never taught in the gifted program, he was preparing to install the AT (Advanced Topic) program at GS1. Would there be differences between the gifted criteria and AT criteria? He noted: "Half the battle is showing up; if they are here, I'm confident that they are going to get something" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p.17). Thus, selecting students who show up would be key.

Also, Mercury stated that entrance into the AT programming had to be "more than just a GPA; it has a place but as a group we [faculty at GS1] have said it has to be more than this" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 6). He continued, "An okay GPA, maybe they [students] are here most of the time, but he tries really, really hard, motivation—this could be a huge factor; I put myself in this category. I'm no MENSA candidate. I did not get a 36 on my ACT, but I will work with you" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 18). Mercury voiced this very strongly. He also stated that "I'll get there because you are not going to work harder than me" (F. Mercury, March 1,

2012, p. 19). Here Mercury was speaking of himself. He added "This makes a difference. If I know you are willing to put the work in, you are probably going to produce something acceptable" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 19). "I tell my class that doing the grind work every day of getting it done, getting it done, getting it done is important" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 18).

Taylor, who does teach gifted programming at GS1 (and is in many ways, its founder) has his method for student selection. "I think it involves, our school is a little different in terms of how I view who gets into the gifted classrooms; desire is a big part for me; creativity because gifted students have their own voice and they show depth of analysis. [They] question a lot more, really everything: Writing, authors, *my* interpretation, they lead discussions" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p.19). Mercury was in agreement: "Sometimes they [gifted Black girls) lead discussions [group discussions are open]; they have the ability to carry the conversations" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 8). Mercury also agreed with this in our discussion regarding AT: "Depth of coverage; this is probably essential. I am hoping AT [Advanced Topics], because it has narrow focus; we don't want it to be the be all and end all, we can focus and dig deep, make better connections, and encourage deeper level thinking" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 21). May, on the other hand, believes in a more stringent selection process, partly due to her responsibilities: "You have to earn it; I have to cut three students by next year [due to space]. If they are tardy every day, they are missing stuff. If they are turning things in late, they are going to sink. They have to be able to swim" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 8). Thus, capability and demonstration of it played key roles in inclusion in the gifted programming. May noted that: "If I agree with them [students expressing a desire to stay in the gifted programming], they are in; but obviously if I don't agree they are not staying in Honors. Like the girl who was being a dork in

the hallway; she holds an 'A' average in everything; she has no choice but to stay in Honors. But her friend, who is late on everything and has a 'C'; she's probably gone" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 20). So grades became a factor in inclusion decisions. May continued: "I verbalize this all the time. The first week that is all I said, this is Honors, get over it; you have to do the work. I gave them the option of opting out; no one took it" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 20). Taylor confirmed the decision of the students as well, "We allow them to say no [on admitting/staying in the AP or Honors courses]; if they don't want to do this they don't need to be in it" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 12). May continued, "They have to be able to show improvement, so I'll move people with 'B' averages if they show improvement, and if they showed that they will work hard" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p.8). For a student who had an "A" in the class who was just doing the work, May noted that their inclusion "depends on their behavior. Are they sitting in class, being a jerk and distracting? Are they gonna fit [in the AP or Honors courses]? If they can't fit into the climate, then I can't take you" (B. May, February 29, 2012, pp. 8-9). Taylor also referred to testing/grades, "It's hard when you say 'gifted' because I have had girls get a 17 on their ACT (not gifted by any standard), but do great in college because they worked hard" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 13). Thus, in addition to grades, student motivation and behavior became inclusion criteria for the gifted programming.

The gifted girl's behavior towards each other in class also contributed to their being thought gifted. At the time of the interview, the tenth grade honors class was reading *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Zora Neale Hurston), a layered text that discusses female and male relationships. "We don't go crazy into it, but we are discussing power and respect in relationships; we tie all relationships with teachers, students, and with each other; then how is Janie [main character in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*] acting in this relationship and so on,

they can discuss and teach each other" (B. May, February 29, 2012, pp. 15-16). Taylor (who taught eleventh- and twelfth- gifted Black girls), thought: "They tend to outperform the gifted boys. It's their work ethic; they have been more committed" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 11). Later she added, "They [gifted Black girls] are not afraid of the boys' reaction to them; although this is easy to do, because they out number them in AP" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 14). Taylor did state that "They [the AP class] are really more like a family community. We make fun of each other; there's more social banter. I have not taught lower level honors in four years; it's an "upper honors thing" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 5). Teacher's perceptions of students (especially Black girls) varied widely, and may have opened the door to excluding some for reasons not entirely clear or relevant to gifted education's goals.

Teacher Decisions Regarding Student Inclusion

Teacher discussions regarding students' progress were often discussed at GS1; however, decisions regarding inclusion into gifted programming were determined by one teacher. Taylor decided who entered makes the ninth-grade second-semester English honors because she was the only staff teaching this course. This provided the first opportunity for gifted Black girls to enter the gifted programming and "prove themselves" worthy of inclusion. Only one section of this English course is taught because: "More than one section does not work because classes get too watered down" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 21). The "bubble kids" [students that are in between Honors and regular English courses] are often a topic of discussion among teaching staff (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, ps. 20-21). But, overwhelmingly, there is rarely dialogue, when there is dialogue "it's not really debate" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 9). Mercury confirmed that there is rarely dialogue as well: "I haven't had anyone approach me [for a recommendation]. I value this, this is our job. Who can better identify this? This should be a

huge part [of the identification process]. We have the best window to say who is advanced and who needs the lower" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p.16). This statement from Mercury makes sense, as he does not teach English at GS1. He did state (regarding science programming at GS1) that "I'm not sure how science does this [identifies students for gifted programming]; sometimes I see students in his [science teacher] classroom and I say to myself: 'Wow, he's not an AP student?" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 17). May (who teaches English) answered from a different perspective about possible dialogue among teaching staff about gifted students: "It's not a rare occasion, as no two people are the same, behavior changes from class to class, teacher to teacher" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 10). She added, "[Colleagues] will say this kid did nothing in my class today, and I say: Really? In my class he does everything just fine'... 'I have kids in regular science, math; they don't have the interest in anything else so they don't do anything else" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 10). Mercury confirmed that these conversations do occur: "Colleagues will mention so and so in a conversation and I say 'yeah' or 'no' if I have a difficult time with them" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 17). Thus, here considerable emphasis was placed on students who do well with less or students who can do more. But, how might these practices further vary for Black girls at GS1?

Common Characteristics for Gifted Black Girls

Parallel to the discussion about teachers' notion of giftedness, teachers' views of gifted Black girl's varies on the one hand, Mercury stated that: "They [gifted Black girls] relate to their peers, they look normal," and "They are attentive; they are prepared for it [start of class]; they are tuned in and ready to go" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 20). But on the other hand, and possibly related to their teaching gifted Black girl's, Taylor's and May's responses differed from Mercury. May's primary response was that "If they like you; you're in" (B. May, February 29,

2012, p.16). May was commenting here on student social skills and reactions to the teachers in general. Taylor focused more on the behavior of gifted Black girl's, "[The GBG's have that] *extra little sassiness*." Taylor continued; "They will do satiric jabs [at me]; they are funny! They have a great sense of humor; this is a *big* difference, and they use this sense of humor more often. They take these jabs at me because they know that I am safe; but not always at the boys. Everybody make fun of everybody in this class" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 14). "*They* [GBG's] know how to break the social boundaries and so they are comfortable with me, their peers, and other adults. In the non-gifted classes it's more about individual girls. *I approach them*" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 4). Taylor also explained that "I'm an open teacher; I use relationships as part of my teaching. *The gifted girls give me more of this*. I go to the [school] dance and the gifted girls will all 'jam' (dance really close to) me [laughs]. The other girls [non-gifted] are like "Hi Ms. Taylor [acts timid]" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 4). These sentiments were echoed in May's remarks that the girls were comfortable approaching her about certain topics. But for May, there was an edge to the girls' sassiness, "Sometimes the [gifted Black] girls have a 'catfight attitude' [she points to the corner]; I have two girls that sit by each other and I added another girl who is now best friends with the other girl, so there are social issues" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 16).

Mercury, who has not taught accelerated programming, noted that he found it: "Easy to pick them out. They cannot hide; they can't help it" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 14). "I'll give you an example; we are studying Absolutism in the 14th-15th century [world history]. I do an act from Macbeth on purpose because most high schools don't do this. I ask them about Shakespeare and they out themselves. This is one example where they just can't help themselves, those experiences I was talking about, they are able to apply them in different settings [such as

his classrooms]" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 15). Thus, compared to non-gifted Black girls, teacher's found gifted Black girl's personalities distinct and well-suited in their classrooms as well.

In classes and on coursework, Taylor explained that "the girls are very equipped to be vocal and lead discussions" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 11). May agreed, and stated that "They are self-sustaining; I can leave the room and they would go on" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 15). Taylor added: "They [GBG's] are more creative in their presentations" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 11). Taylor continued: "They tend to not raise their hands as much as the boys; boys participate a little more sometimes" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 12). "Motivation is different [between the Black girls in the gifted classes compared to the Black girls who are not in these classes] too, that comes down to being the bigger deal" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 13). Differences in motivation may be explained by the differences in teacher expectations of gifted Black girl's. In the gifted classrooms, as Taylor describes: "Rubrics are more specific, papers are longer, depth of analysis. The AP class is very specific (from the AP College Board). I teach more to the experience of the literature and to the lessons learned rather than to the test [AP College Board]. Essays are from the test questions, but they are preparing for the exam; but this is where my test preparation stops. They all want to skip freshman English, they really want to pick their own English class" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, pp. 15-16). With regards to the AP College Board Test, "We really only have about 3 or 4 kids that get a score of three to pass; but the rest are about .2 below the global average of passing" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 7). Thus, GBG's exuded independence and motivation; all characteristics that the teachers found conducive to learning. But, teachers also reported being challenged by gifted Black girls.

Teacher Relationships with Gifted Black Girls

Teachers felt challenged by gifted Black girls, as well as had positive and negative experiences with them.

Challenges from Gifted Black Girls

Teachers felt challenged by GBG's in a variety of ways. As Mercury put it: "I feel hugely challenged, and I feel like I need to bring my A-game" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 14). He continued: "They have a confidence streak. If two and two don't *look like* they add up to four, you're gonna' hear about it! They are nice and respectful; but they call it! [You have to] talk slowly to make sure it's [information] coming out of my mouth that I have given it enough thought" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 14). Taylor agreed: "Yes, they will have questions that I cannot answer. I tell them to go look it up and bring it back to us [class]" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 8). May agreed with Mercury and Taylor: "Sometimes their questions are hard" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 14). "The eleventh-grade Honors [students] send me things from the outside of the world that relate to our content. This pushed me to be better" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 8). Mercury agreed: "In the best classrooms, you (as a teacher) learn something too" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 7). Thus, teachers felt challenged by the GBG's, but respected their questioning, and took away positive experiences. Teachers also reported that GBG's seemed to have concerns associated with self-esteem and confidence. May commented that: "Sometimes [they act-out], but it is more 'defeatist,' like 'I quit,' or 'I keep getting a C, I can't do this' I tell them they [gifted Black girls] *can* do this, and we will work on it together" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 14). "They moan and groan, but they do the work" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p.15). "Sometimes they [GBG's] are more cocky and chatty when they don't listen. I make them agree and disagree with each other. I'm a little sarcastic" (B. May, February

29, 2012, p. 12). Thus, the teachers expressed a keen sense of the challenges gifted Black girl's brought to their classrooms and had ways to meet them.

Teaching courses in the gifted programming presented additional challenges. "They move a lot faster, so I have to have more [material], and they go more in depth. There is a lot more for grading, a lot more planning, because I have to go more in depth" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 17). In fact, "Next year in Honors 11; what they lose, it's on me; I'm constantly checking with Taylor about the lesson plans and revising them" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 17). May's determination to make sure these GBG's are prepared to continue their honors classes in future years at GS1 is apparent, and her understanding of their learning needs was also apparent, "I have one girl who writes in fragments; she speaks so fast I'm sure it's all up here [points to her head], but she can't get it out" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 15). "They ask more questions regarding their grades, like "Why did I get a 'C' on this? They are more worried about grades and being successful. They will also email me before its [assignments] due, so I can review it first" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 11). May interpreted their need for pre-grading feedback to a "Confidence gap, this is in general for high school students; 'Am I doing this right?', 'Am I doing this right?', 'Am I doing this right?' May utilizes peer review in her classrooms. She stated the confidence gap occurs more in the Honors class than in regular English because "they want to be on top," and that "it occurs in more boys than girls" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 21). She continued by stating that there is an issue of a need of certainty among Honors students. For instance, "Sally will ask Suzie a question and get an answer, and then Sally will ask me the same question, and get the same answer because there is a trust issue" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 22). "I think this happens more in regular tenth-grade English than in tenth- grade Honors English, but there are two or three students in 10H that as soon as

they say something, they all turn around and ask 'Why did you say that?' I have to be really careful so they don't stop talking" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 22). It is apparent the May understood her students and their relationships, and how to work around issues when they arose. And, on the other end of the spectrum, teachers delineated positive experiences with gifted Black girls.

Positive Experiences with Gifted Black Girls

Another aspect of teachers' experiences with gifted Black girl's concerned positive experiences; ranging from learners who connect across content and courses, learners who take responsibility and see things from various viewpoints, and previous gifted students whom teachers formed long-term lasting relationships. Mercury stated in general that his experiences with the gifted Black girl's "Have been good, they [gifted Black girls] tend to be very confident" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 11). "They always bring something from another classroom. [For example] In Taylor's class [holocaust, genocide], she [Taylor] would tell me that her students used some of my contrast in their PowerPoint, and I appreciate that they can connect topics and know this is not just history, or math; they can cross curriculums" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 7). Mercury also stated that "In a way, its mastery; they have come to a conclusion. I think this is great! They have the information, and they are ready to go" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 11). Gifted Black girls were also learners who took responsibility and saw things from various viewpoints.

Teachers also stated that girls were learners who saw things from various viewpoints. As Mercury stated, "They also have the ability to communicate. But they want to, they have stories to tell. I like this" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 11). May found them (gifted Black girls), "More outspoken, more confident in their ideas. We have a lot of discussion, and I don't lead

this. They do back-and-forth with each other; it's more Socratic than teacher led" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 11). May added; "They speak almost the whole [class] time with this book [*Their Eyes Were Watching God*], a lot of our stuff is from a female's perspective, so it's easier for them to pick up on it. I make them analyze it from a different perspective and they definitely [emphasis] have different perspectives" (B. May, February 29, 2012, pp. 23-24). And, teachers stated that they had long-lasting relationships with previous gifted students.

Teachers also stated that they have long-lasting relationships with previous gifted students. As Taylor illustrated, "I just had a former student, who is in her second semester of theatre, email me and tell me that four out of the five plays that we read in class are on her syllabus. Moments like these are so exciting!" She continued; "Seeing the impact after—the gifted kids come back and tell you" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 7). In addition: "It's really good overall" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 6). "Like the personal relationships are a big thing for me, fourteen out of seventeen students from my AP [senior] class last year emailed me this year, and five sent me their first essay to review" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 6). Thus, teachers' positive experiences' with GBG's included appreciation for effective communication, their viewpoints, and personal relationships (beyond the teacher leader—student learner). And, teachers also expressed less positive experiences.

Negative Experiences with GBG's

Another aspect of teachers' experiences with GBG's concerned negative experiences, not with the teachers, but related to the structure of the classes. For instance, Mercury explained: "It's [a negative experience with GBG's] the rare occasion" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 9). Mercury quickly changed his tone and continued: "They tend to be *keenly aware* of where they are at [regarding grades]. If they are not satisfied; they will ask you. They are *very aware*; they

are confident and they want to protect this. They question more and track more. Others [non-gifted students] are aware; but it's *not* being called-out or questioned" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 9). He continued: "I try to challenge them, but I know what they are capable of, and they are not gonna get a good or better grade because I know you" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 9). In other words, the gifted students do not receive preferential treatment as far as grades are concerned in Mercury's classroom(s) because they are deemed "gifted." Group work was another topic that teachers mentioned as a sometimes negative experience.

Teachers mentioned group work as a source of negativity. Taylor reiterated previous issues discussed with group work activities, "They [gifted Black girls] will verbalize it [issues]. There are *a lot* of group work issues. We had three days of presentation, so I planted a mole in the group. After their group presentation, I asked each mole who did what. They will always tell the truth" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 26). In addition, Taylor remarked: "Sometimes they give push-back and there is conflict [they get frustrated] around projects; they know they can do well by themselves so they don't like to work with others ('I was the same way'). But in college, group projects are becoming a really big part of university work, especially in large lecture classes and group presentations" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, pp. 17-18). Taylor added that "If they pick their groups they are happy, but if I pick them they are *not* happy" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 18). And, gifted Black girls expressed themselves more. May continued, "Sometimes they have short attention spans in group work" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 15). There is "a lot of whining: 'It's so hard', 'I don't want to do this' [May mimics the students]" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 21). Taylor agreed, "They [GBG's] *can* complain more" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 11). "They whine, but they do comply, and they will give you all the reasons they are not going to comply, but then they will comply" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012,

p. 18). Thus, negative experiences for the teachers did not result from not understanding the gifted Black girls, but rather; from the gifted Black girl's dislikes for the class structure. May and Taylor next explained how they thought the gifted Black girls would describe them.

Taylor and May described gifted Black girls thoughts about them as teachers. This time it was Taylor who portrayed sarcasm: "*We love each other* [laughs]…Their interpretation may be different" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 17). May stated: "I almost feel like I have *too much* of an attitude with them, I explain it [material in the gifted programming], and they need to think about it first before they ask me questions" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 21). Thus, Taylor and May were aware of how they were perceived as teachers by the GBG's; but they did not ponder, or let-up on the students because they were gifted. *Cheating* also emerged in gifted programming at GS1.

Both May and Taylor found attempts to cheat, a downside to teaching gifted programming, "if they try to copy, actually; this happened more in AP because of the pressure and the work. This is why they fail in college ['I read a bunch of articles']; they are terrible at cheating" (B. May, February 29, 2012, pp. 12-13). Taylor was in agreement that cheating does occur, and that it occurred "more in gifted classes than in the regular classes" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 28). But, "the *type* of cheating is different. In the gifted classroom their cheating is all doing their homework at the same time (in the class before mine). Is this academically dishonest? It's a gray area" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 28). In addition, she (Taylor) offered an example stating that sometimes gifted Black girls try to help a classmate who copied a gifted Black girl's work. "One of the girls let another boy, who was struggling, look at her paper. I [Taylor] read his first. This was the best paper he had prepared all semester. After I read her paper; I knew it was her paper. He later confirmed that she was not allowing him to

copy; it was 'over-sharing'" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 28). Thus, cheating and its prevention seemed more prevalent in gifted programming. The final section takes up how teachers spoke about the parental support that gifted Black girls enjoyed.

<div align="center">Gifted Black Girl Parental Support</div>

Teachers described parental support for gifted Black girls. Teachers found gifted Black girls' parents supportive, and this support went far beyond parent-teacher conferences. Taylor explained: "They [parents of gifted Black girls] come less to conferences; they already *know* their kid is doing well" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 23). In fact, Taylor continued: "Out of all of the girls in your study, I have only met half of their parents." (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 24.) But, Taylor stated she would call a GBG parent; "when a major assignment is not turned in" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 23). This was not the case for grades falling below an A, since B's and C's were not uncommon. In fact, a "C" for a grade was not a big deal in her gifted classrooms "Because we do not do a lot of testing in here [in the gifted classes she teaches]…They can re-do any essay, [though] they rarely do ['laziness'], but they do it more than the non-gifted students" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 25). May agreed with Taylor in that what they experience is definite teacher support (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 25). For instance, "In the honors classes I do a lot of emailing with parents, they ask more questions and they are very proactive" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 25). She also stated that

"I think when you get to honors level, generally, there's something going right at home. There's better technology, better support, and there's not as many problems…I feel like there is a lot more going right, like I know that they have not had the same experience that some of the other kids have had…I know they have a nice house, know both parents are working, they have a car to get to school" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 26). May continued; "They [honors/gifted kids]

definitely have less suspensions" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 27). Mercury, who does not currently teach gifted programming but has coached girls' sports for a number of years, found gifted Black girl parental support, "is noticeable at sporting events; one or both of the parents are always there. They are *always* involved" (F. Mercury, March 1, 2012, p. 22). Thus, parents of gifted Black girl's supported teachers at GS1.

As detailed above, teachers proved the first identifiers of gifted students; and at GS1; controlled entrance into the gifted programming. At GS1, the decision for inclusion tended to be made by one teacher only; often without discussion or debate. Giftedness varied for these three teachers, demonstrating both a recognition of attention to course work, to good behavior via characteristics such as possessing motivation, being inquisitive, being life-long readers, to showing initiative, to showing improvement, gaining higher grades, and doing things quicker. Despite these differences, teachers at GS1 were not only supportive, but also appeared to understand the culture of these gifted Black girl's. Teachers admitted to feeling challenged by the gifted Black girl's, but respected their questioning, and took away positive experiences. Negative experiences regarding the gifted Black girls were related to the course structure (i.e. work load, group work), not personally or professionally. Teachers found gifted Black girls' parents supportive.

Now I turn to how girls spoke about their expectations and experiences.

CHAPTER 5: THE GIRL' EDUCATIONAL EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

Girls spoke about their own educational goals– as well as those of their parents and teachers, how their own expectations had changed, and thoughts about future education. In this chapter, I argue that the experiences of these gifted Black girls are not like that reported in previous literature. That is, they spoke about teachers' educational expectations and about the girls' relationships with their teachers at GS1 positively, where honesty and fairness were unique traits from the teachers in the AP and Honors sections, and were very important to the girls. Most girls spoke eloquently about how their accelerated courses prepared them for college, and for other aspects of their lives; including what was expected of them in the accelerated programming (AP/Honors English) at GS1 not only discussing how these coursework expectations contributed to their long-term educational goals, but also how positive experiences directly related to the learning processes. In fact, the girls saw their gifted education opportunities in myriad ways; and this was especially true for the unit on feminism (women and culture), which shaped ways they viewed themselves based on knowledge gained from the unit. Maturity, independence, and responsibility emerged as characteristics that the girls portrayed, and this became especially apparent when they first spoke about their understandings of their parental expectations to do well at GS1, particularly in the gifted programming at GS1.

"No, it's what I expect"—Girls' Understandings about Parent Expectations

The girls talked about their parental expectations in regards to their education. Annie for example, stated that, "No, it's what I expect. It's *my* personal thing" (Annie, February 15, 2012, p. 13). She continued, "My Mom isn't really hard on me. She's not stringent; she never asks me if I did my homework. Grades are not a big thing in my house" (Annie, February 15, 2012, ps. 13-14). On the other hand, Lita explained: "It's [getting good grades] kind of expected of me, it's

normal to be like this. My family is supportive" (Lita, February 28, 2012, p. 2). Other girls (Nina, Joan, Sandy) paralleled what Annie and Lita stated. Even Cherie, the most verbal of all of the participants stated that she thought her parents were happy with her academics, but stated that she felt they did not express it: "They are happy. I mean they don't express it, but I know they are happy. They expect all A's. My Dad was mad I got a B, I was like Daddy, "I'm chillin," I'm through, I'm done [senior in high school]" (Cherie, February 9, 2012, p. 1). Other girls (Jackie, Cassandra) commented on the parental choices in terms of their education (i.e., no community college, raised in a cultural atmosphere), but nonetheless alluded to support as well. That is, parental expectations included getting good grades; although not always verbalized; getting good grades was known and commonly understood by the girls.

Parental support was a major factor in the lives of the girls. It provided expectations, at times indirectly, and also aided in the independence of the girls. As many of the girls stated that although their parents did not specifically mention "good grades," they (the girls) knew that this was an expectation. This counters reports of the lack of parental support commonly cited in gifted literature as a barrier, and this is especially true in gifted education with minorities. The girls also spoke to me about their relationships with their teachers.

"Teachers in Honors have different expectations"—Girls' Relationships with Teachers

Girls also spoke about teachers' educational expectations and about the girls' relationships with their teachers at GS1. The teachers from the AP and Honors sections (gifted English educational programming) had different relationships with the girls, in both a personal and educational sense. Annie, for example, stated that stark differences existed between her Honors teachers and her other teachers: "Teachers in Honors have different expectations. Others [teachers] don't say anything. You are good at that subject which is why we are in Honors. It

doesn't mean you will be good at every subject" (Annie, February 15, 2012, p. 1). Annie continued saying: "[They] were coolest [Honors teacher]; I can come to them and talk to them about anything [in and out of school issues]" (Annie, February 15, 2012, p. 1). What about other teachers? I asked Annie; "[Outside of Honors classes] these classes are so much bigger, I have to come on a set schedule to talk to these teachers. I'm not comfortable with going to them for non-school related stuff" (Annie, February 15, 2012, p. 1). Other girls (Nina, Joan, Sandy) agreed with Annie, stating that they were not comfortable talking to their other teachers as personally as they do with the gifted education teachers: "She [AP teacher] is really different from the other teachers. I can't say weird, but like, she makes learning words and how to structure words fun. [She is] more interesting than anyone else. She gets excited about things we learn. It makes learning more exciting!" (Joan, February 2, 2012, p. 28). Academic expectations were also different from the Honors and AP teachers as well, and traits such as honesty and fairness were unique to the AP and Honors teachers, and were at the top of the girls' lists.

Honesty and fairness were unique traits from the teachers in the AP and Honors sections, and were very important to the girls. Even the girls that did not have a personal relationships with the AP and/or Honors teachers stated that they "…were fair and supportive" (Jackie, February 6, 2012, p. 16; Cherie, February 9, 2012, p. 2). The "fairness" that the girls mentioned also spilled over in other areas, such as the academic expectations of the girls from these teachers of gifted education. Lita, for example stated that: "She [AP teacher, R. Taylor] expects us to be very mature. She really treats us like we really are college students and I like that! [She] gives you a taste of what college is going to be like" (Lita, February 28, 2012, p. 18; Annie, March 20, 2012, pp. 5-6). The girls were very verbal about their effort and expectations in the gifted classes, and the importance of trying your best, a sentiment derived directly from the gifted

classes, one imposed by their gifted teachers. Sandy for example, stated: "If you do your work and put in effort you will get a good grade. But she *will not* give a good grade for doing nothing. There are no 'handouts'" (Sandy, January 31, 2012, p. 11). The sentiments of "no handouts" were also verbalized strongly from other girls as well: "You just can't give her any old thing!" (Lita, February 28, 2012, p. 18). Academic expectations were clearly different in the gifted classrooms compared to the standard classes, as some of the girls stated: "They [other teachers outside of the gifted programming] are like "I will teach you this, and if you don't learn it it's not my fault" (Nina, February 13, 2012, ps. 23-24). Thus, teachers' relationships with their students had a direct impact on the students' education. The girls had different relationships with their AP and Honors teachers in comparison to their other teachers outside of the gifted programming at GS1. And, relationships with AP and Honors teachers aided in understanding the academic expectations in gifted classrooms, and thus further solidified their success in the gifted programming. These relationships also enhanced their personal educational expectations and goals.

<div style="text-align:center">Girls' Educational Expectations and Goals</div>

Some girls expected to go to college and this had not changed since they started at GS1. For instance, one commented: "Mine [academic expectations] have not changed; my personal goals have not changed. I don't really care about what they [others] think; just my parents, really" (Jackie, February 6, 2012, p. 6). And, another reported that "No [my academic expectations have not changed]. All A's. It sets the tone for my life. If I jack up now, if I get bad grades, I won't be able to get in a good college. I [would] have to do more things to get back on track. College-yup!" (Cherie, February 9, 2012, p. 15). While a third noted: "I try to do really good in school because I want to get in a good college and everything. Not really [changes in

expectations] cause' I've always had honors classes [in high school]" (Cassandra, February 17, 2012, p. 19). Thus, these girls had high expectation of themselves.

And, most girls (Lita, Cherie, Annie, Jackie, Cassandra, Joan) spoke eloquently about how their accelerated courses prepared them for college, and for other aspects of their lives: "It's preparing us for college, workload, professors, the way she grades" (Lita, February 28, 2012, p. 6). "[It's] preparing me for college writing, reading, analyzing poetry, analysis of writing. Most kids going to college are in AP class." (Cherie, February 9, 2012, p. 6).

> College, life, some of the things that they teach they go in depth, but it's your responsibility to finish it and we have timelines. It's your responsibility to turn in your own work. She [Honors teacher] may not mention your work is due; communication is different. In English, [the class] makes you more diverse and [have] cultural understanding. [You are a] more knowledgeable person and use it outside of life. (Nina, February 13, 2012, p. 21)

Or as Sandy put it:

> [There] are no hand-outs in AP or in the real world. [Class] prepares you for the real-world in general, prepares you for jobs; life is a lot of work." (Sandy, January 31, 2012, p. 15). Adding: "I feel like there is more expected of me. You didn't have to take this course, it was a choice. So it's up to me to do the work." (Sandy, January 31, 2012, p. 1)

Other girls (Joan, Nina) spoke about their expectations as a continual struggle to become better. For instance, Joan agreed that her academic expectations for herself have not changed, but she used getting good grades to motivate doing well: "In school I have *never not* made the honor role. nothing below 3.0 in school. As my GPA increases, I increase my expectations. Makes me

push harder, further, now that I have AP courses" (Joan, February 2, 2012, p. 26.) Or as Nina put it:

> Yes [there has been a change in my academic expectations]. Because like, sometimes you like to go in with that lazy mentality like I'm just gonna' pass in this class. But once you see like everyone else's grades it drives you to do better, because like I want to be the top of the class! It's a motivator, yes! When they [teachers] pass out progress reports everyone's like "I have an A" or "I have a B" but you have a "C," so you don't want to show anyone. It's motivation." (Nina, February 13, 2012, p. 11.)

The analysis clearly indicates that the girls understood not only what educational path they wanted to follow, but also what was expected of them in the accelerated programming (AP/Honors English) at GS1, and how these coursework expectations contributed to their long-term educational goals.. In fact, the girls saw their gifted education opportunities in myriad ways.

<p align="center">Girls Talk About Gifted Education</p>

The girls discussed gifted education, both before they arrived at GS1 and after arriving there. Only a few of the girls had gifted education prior to GS1, and these programs varied widely. Annie for example, skipped kindergarten: " I'm a year younger than everyone in my grade ('I just turned 16'). I went to Kindergarten for a few weeks, I was way ahead, I was in a charter school too. I already knew how to read and write" (Annie, February 15, 2012, ps. 14-15). Annie moved back to Michigan from North Carolina before her 10th grade year; when she started attending GS1. In terms of middle school education, Annie attended English honors class at a local public school (Annie, February 15, 2012, p.4). Nina attended a "regular public school" in a nearby suburb that offered an Honors program, which Nina attended. In contrast, Joan and Lita attended a regular public school that did not offer any gifted education classes. Jackie had honors

classes in middle school (math and French) in a charter school (Jackie, February 6, 2012, p. 6).

Sandy reported: "[My middle school] did not offer these [accelerated] classes, [but] I was an

honor student there" (Sandy, January 31, 2012, p. 20). For middle school for 6th and 7th grades,

Cherie attended a charter school (no honors classes offered). In 8th grade, she (Cherie) moved

and attended a public school but did not attend the honors courses there. Cassandra's charter

middle school offered accelerated programming (separated regular and advanced classes), but

she did not attend them. Overall, most of the girls had not participated in gifted programming

before arriving at GS1, both because such programs were not offered and because they chose not

to participate in them Thus, attending gifted education programming at GS1 was a new

experience for many of the Girls. Selection for gifted programming at GS1 proved a systematic,

but undocumented approach for the girls, as the girls described.

"They put me in it"—Inclusion Criteria for Gifted Programming at GS1

The girls offered different perspectives on inclusion criteria for entrance into the gifted

educational programming at GS1. One credited her grade point average (GPA): "I think my GPA

from my ninth grade year [in her previous school]. They [teachers] put me in it, I had the basics

[at first], and then they bumped me up in the 10th grade second semester" (Annie, February 15,

2012, p. 10). The other eight girls attended GS1 from ninth grade, and all were *placed* in the

gifted programming starting their second semester of their ninth grade year. As one noted:

"[Second semester at GS1] It was my English teacher, she called me in the hallway and told me

she was going to recommend me and asked me if I wanted to be in it. I said 'Sure, ok'" (Lita,

February 28, 2012, p. 10). Echoing what others reported, Jackie said: "You had to have good

grades. People who did not do their work [in previous classes] were not put in this class" (Jackie,

February 6, 2012, p. 11). Thus, school performance in the first half of ninth grade served as a key selection criterion, and influenced subsequent gifted programming opportunities.

Being selected for Honors in the 9th grade also had long-term consequences for subsequent accelerated coursework. Although both fall under the umbrella of gifted education, the girls differentiated "Honors" from "AP;" that is, the girls insisted they differed. First, this distinction signaled one's class standing in school (11th versus 12th grade), which appeared to be of central importance to the girls. Second, if you were in Honors 11, you were automatically placed in AP English (twelfth-grade year) provided your grades were adequate and you kept up with the course assignments. In fact, all four participant juniors in Honors 11 presumed they would be going to the AP course in their senior year. Thus, contra published accounts suggesting test scores played a key role in selection for accelerated academic programs, at GS1 the girls failed to mention testing as a selection criterion, instead focusing on grades and course performance. Though a common tool used to identify gifted students, standardized testing and test scores were not mentioned as criteria for entrance into the gifted programming at GS1. But, the girls talked about their test scores, how they rated themselves as test-takers, and if their course-exam scores were reflective of their academic achievement.

Girls' Talk about Test Scores—Tests Aren't Selection Criteria

Girls' conversations about test scores revolved; around how they rated themselves as test-takers and if their test scores reflected their academic achievement. Three (Annie, Lita, and Cassandra) thought they were not good test takers, saying: "No. I'm not a good test taker" (Annie, February 15, 2012, p. 16). "I'm not a good test taker. Most of my teachers offer re-takes so you can re-take a test if you fail. [Laughs] I actually got a good score on the PLAN [pre-ACT evaluation]. I'm pretty good at Algebra II so yes to the tests here!" (Lita, February 28, 2012, p.

7). "[Automatically laughed] I would say I do okay, I'm not a great test-taker. It's the pressure of taking a test that is not good for me. Tests and scores are not reflective of me." (Cassandra, February 17, 2012, p. 24). Other girls felt their test grades were a direct reflection of their abilities, saying: "I try to maintain a 3.5 GPA. I try to get higher so it [testing] pretty much goes together. It [a test score] reflects how I do in school [and my] abilities" (Nina, February 13, 2012, p. 27). "Grades and tests are pretty good. I would be embarrassed if I did bad in class" (Jackie, February 6, 2012, p. 15). Cherie and Joan both thought their tests directly reflected their academic ability, and spoke about their teacher's feelings on the subject as well. Cherie stated: "Yeah [test scores are reflective of what kind of student I am]. My teachers think the same. One time my coach and my Spanish teacher spoke to my math teacher and said, 'You know Cherie; she does this stuff at the last minute; she procrastinates,' I was like oh dang!" (Cherie, February 9, 2012, p. 3). Thus, when speaking of tests, girls tended to talk about course exams, and not about either intelligence testing or about standardized (norm-referenced) tests that allow comparing one's capabilities against national norms.

Being in gifted programming presented an opportunity for the girls to also specifically discuss their AP and Honors English classes and compare these classes to their other gifted and non-gifted classes as well.

"It's my most challenging class" - AP and Honors English Classes at GS1

All of the girls discussed their gifted programming at GS1—especially the AP and Honors English classes—in a favorable manner. Many of the girls compared their gifted English classes to other gifted programming at GS1, and described the workload of the accelerated English classes, and pointed to the distinct differences in accelerated programming versus standard education classes. Annie, for example reported: "I love my English class, I actually

thought about going to school [for English] because it is so interesting. The teacher is awesome, the stuff we learn, how we get in deep conversations about books and stuff…We just learned about the Holocaust and we read 2-3 books, we just went to the museum yesterday…Now I want to go to the one in Washington, DC" (Annie, February 15, 2012, ps. 6-7). Annie continued, "Chemistry and Spanish [both Honors levels] is *so* easy to me, same as regular classes" (Annie, February 15, 2012, p. 6). Jackie paralleled some feelings that Annie had: "English is my favorite subject. I'm a really good writer and I like to learn about a lot of different literatures. My teacher, Ms. Taylor, she really challenged us. Like, she gives us a lot of homework. She's a perfectionist! She went to a State University and she was a 4.0 honor student. She takes what she learned there and brings it to us so we are ready for college, and it's hard!" (Jackie, February 28, 2012, p. 21). Joan compared it to her pre-calculus course (also under the gifted education umbrella): "[The] AP literature class is harder than pre-calc. It's my most challenging class! I'll just say that I cannot miss AP, or I'll miss a whole lot of work" (Joan, February 2, 2012, p. 27). Other girls commented on the workload as well; Cherie, for example stated:

[I] like learning new things. Reading. [It's] very interesting to me; I like the writing also. Ms. Taylor allows us to do creative writing; I want to become a creative writer. It allows my mind to wander off into another world; it allows me to really express myself. I'm very imaginative, I just kind of wander off. Different genres open my mind to other areas. It's a lot of work, but easy to balance. (Cherie, February 9, 2012, p. 4)

Nina also commented on how she views herself in the class:

I see myself in English; I do really well in writing and so I get to show off my writing skills. In math I'm not the best, but if I slack off my friends will help me and my teacher always answers my questions. I feel pretty good about it [being in Honors English]. In

other classes I get bored easily. In English, there's always an upbeat to it, there's always an assignment to do, and always something in my face. It keeps you pretty busy and I get bored easily!" (Nina, February 13, 2012, p. 12).

Annie added, "We get more in depth, not just the basics" (Annie, February 15, 2012, p.7). Sandy agreed, stating: "It's a lot of work; challenging. It prepares you for the real-world." (Sandy, January 31, 2012, p. 9). The girls' responses regarding their English gifted programming at GS1 was favorable, not only depicting distinct differences in what was taught and the challenges in accelerated English, but also their feelings about the content of the gifted English classes that in turn reflected their personal feelings about their abilities in these accelerated English classes as well.

Annie, Lita, Cherie and Cassandra all agreed that they were comfortable in the course, and felt that the structure of the course contributed to their academic success. "It's [class] so small, we interact well. [I'm] comfortable in class, we respect each other" (Annie, February 15, 2012, p. 9). Lita continued: "Open forum, we have really good discussions! I like to hear the arguments! It never really escalates to a debate. She [R. Taylor] asks us for our input and everybody keeps an open mind" (Lita, February 28, 2012, p. 9). Other girls (Cassandra, Nina, Annie) also remarked on the structure of the class:

> I really do like English. I like learning new things about the world. I like the atmosphere being around people that have the same goals as me. Most of the kids in my class want to be in AP and want to achieve something. Other classes' kids just come to come and not actually' cause they care about anything. I've always felt more comfortable, cause they are the same grade and I've known most of them for a while. (Cassandra, February 17, 2012, p. 8)

Nina continued:

> We learn a lot of different things. It's interesting. [There are] different points of view. We get in a group circle; you get a lot of different opinions. You get to learn from different people and different points of views. Sometimes they pick up on stuff you did not. They interpret things differently. (Nina, February 13, 2012, p. 29)

The girls enjoyed the accelerated (gifted) English programming at GS1. Inclusion into the gifted programming *also* presented an opportunity for the girls to discuss any challenges they felt they faced in the gifted programming and in their other classes as well.

"It's very challenging" - Other Experiences in Gifted Programming at GS1

The girls continued to discuss their feelings regarding the course content and structure of the gifted English programming at GS1, adding challenges that they faced from being in the gifted programming at GS1: "[AP] it's a little challenging, it's very challenging…She wants you to do more than what you think you can do" (Jackie, February 6, 2012, p.4). Challenges arose primarily from two mandatory requirements of the class: the workload and group work. Most of the girls (Lita, Joan, Nina, Jackie, Sandy) negatively commented on the workload of the class, and the mandatory requirement of group work. In some cases, the girls commented that they felt that the workload was causing stress in relation to their other classes: "A lot of work; I may not be able to turn it in on time with all the other classes" (Sandy, January 31, 2012, p. 13). And, although previously reported as understood, girls here commented that they thought that the academic expectations of their AP/Honors teachers were exceptional: "They [AP/Honors English teachers] expect a lot of you. They feel like they can throw a lot at you, like I have other classes and sometimes I can't keep up" (Nina, February 13, 2012, p. 31). Another specific example from the gifted programming that was reported negatively by the girls was "group work."

All of the girls spoke negatively about the mandatory requirement of group work in the AP and Honors classes. Girls' chief complaint was that many of their fellow gifted classmates: "slack a lot, even in AP course!" (Cherie, February 9, 2012, p. 5). Other girls (Cassandra, Sandy, Nina) agreed and some even purported they: "…end up doing other people's work; [because] not everyone does their share" (Jackie, February 6, 2012, p. 8; Sandy, January 31, 2012, p. 14). To this end, some of the girls (Cassandra, Cherie, Jackie, Nina) confessed that they prefer to work alone and even suggested that the group work be eliminated from the gifted programming. The lack of interest in group work is not uncommon for gifted students; and much of the gifted education literature supports this. Thus, even though the girls understood the expectations and the structure from the gifted teachers; they were not completely comfortable with the course requirements (group work, and the heavy workload).

Experiences in the English gifted programming shaped how girls' learned the content in the gifted programming. Although they did not agree with some of the required elements (group work, workload) of the AP/Honors courses; most of the comments and conversations regarding the AP/Honors English classes ended on positive notes. The content of the English gifted programming provided outlets where the girls could listen, learn, and debate in a conducive educational atmosphere; and this became clearer in the subsequent conversations regarding the topics or "units" that were discussed in the gifted English programming. The structure of the AP and Honors English classes offered a variety of topics in units (content) that are unique to the gifted English programming and therefore, offered unique experiences for the girls. One of the units, *Women and Culture*, was not only popular among the girls, but also shaped the way in which they viewed themselves.

 "Unit on feminism that was a good one!"

The unit on feminism (women and culture) was particularly popular with the girls. It included several topics including critical readings and scholarship of Chinese women, stereotypes of women, the Jewish Holocaust, and a critical feminist perspective of fairy tales. The unit on feminism (also called "women and culture") made the girls reflect and think: "[The] unit on feminism; that was a good one! [It gave me] a lot more to think about" (Jackie, February 6, 2012, p. 18). Many of the other girls (Lita, Joan, Annie, and Cassandra) reported they felt that same. Although there was no specific unit on Black feminist theory, girls incorporated their thoughts into the other units and reported many examples of this incorporation. For example, when reflecting on stereotypes, girls reported: "…We learned different stereotypes. Different words depict different stereotypes of women. A lot of times these words portrayed white women, but a lot of times you *assumed* these words were for Black women. For a 'mother role' these were Black." (Cassandra, February 17, 2012, p. 7). And, when discussing the Jewish Holocaust:

> "…African-Americans went through slavery, so we can kinda relate to what the Jews went through and other victims" (Lita, February 28, 2012, p. 17). Girls also reflected on their feelings about stereotypes, and about how they felt about meeting certain societal expectations related to these stereotypes.

Girls talked about stereotypes placed on women, and how they felt about living up to societal expectations of these stereotypes: "People put stereotypes of women [and they] have to conform to [them]. We learned some of the things that women do to get male [attention]. The things they [we] go through in life" (Nina, February 13, 2012, ps. 3-4). The "lengths that women will go through to have men in their lives" (Nina, Jackie) was directly related to the unit on Chinese women and foot-binding, and the societal expectations of what is considered beauty.

According to girls, this unit discussed Chinese female culture; from ancient foot-binding (where Chinese women bound their feet tightly in cloth because during that era, it was considered "beautiful" to have small feet. These acts of foot-binding led to severe infection and bone deformity), to modern young Chinese women who "sleep with men to get money, school tuition, and apartments" (Nina, February 13, 2012, p. 18). *All* of the girls mentioned the importance of this topic, and rejected the idea adamantly that they needed a "man" for money, support, or otherwise. These sentiments were also reflected by family members, as Annie (for example) described a conversation she had with her older sister regarding the Chinese female culture topic:

> [I was] talking to my sister, she was like; "They are teaching you this? You're reading this?" She was shocked! "Really? You're learning about that type of stuff? Why is she teaching you that?" I think she was negative about it. "She's teaching you girls about it, they may get this in their minds." I said that we studied different cultures and that this is how they [Chinese women] survived, like, they depended on that money. Then she [my sister] told me, "Don't get any ideas [laughs]" (Nina, February 13, 2012, ps. 18-19)

To further the point of the importance of female independence, girls told me about another topic in the women and culture unit: a critical review of fairy tales. Girls (Nina, Cassandra, Sandy, Joan, Lita) also enjoyed this topic immensely, telling me: "It [fairy tales] was very interesting, it talked about how fairy tales put in your mind *you have* to be a princess. The princesses are helpless and the men always have to save the women [princesses], and the women can never save themselves!" Discussing stereotypes and societal expectations, and topics that include the promotion of female independence (the façade of fairy tales and the dependence of woman on men in Chinese culture) are progressive; not standard curriculum. Girls realized the importance of this unit's content, and it provided a base of how they thought about their own

place(s) in society. And, even though the unit was not called re Black feminist theory, the girls injected themselves into the unit material, which also aided in the way they viewed themselves, further shaping their self-identity. Ultimately, educational expectations placed on the girls, as well as their own expectations, the rigorous courses in gifted programming, and what the girls took from the women and culture unit, framed how the girls understood themselves and their place in world. This is the topic of chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6: "REPRESENTING" YOUNG, BLACK, AND GIFTED

Girls spoke about themselves as "representing" being young, gifted Black women, and how they analyzed the world around them from a "feminist lens." Gifted Black girls "represented" their race and identity, and it provided a way for the girls to not only matter; but also solidified their presence in their respective communities. Girls also utilized a "feminist lens" to critically analyze topics from the Women and Culture unit (stereotypes and fairy tales). The feminist lens allowed gifted Black girls to view, question, and analyze societal views (i.e. status quo) of how gifted Black girls and Black women are portrayed in society, and further developed their independence. In this chapter, I also argue that the experiences of these gifted Black girls are not like that reported in previous literature. That is, through the content of the women and culture unit (feminist studies); girls not only unearthed inequities in society [status quo, stereotypes of women], but also in *their* gifted education, via the vehicle of the feminist lens. Thus, the unit changed the way the girls viewed themselves as gifted Black girls, and they exhibited resilience to overcome barriers created by stereotypes.

<div align="center">Being Gifted Black Girls</div>

The girls had a variety of ways to talk about being gifted black girls, from representing, to being gifted or accelerated, to talking to others about being in gifted programming.

"I'm *smart*! I don't let it go to my head"—Gifted Black Girls Represent

The girls described themselves as young, Black, and female; and discussed how they felt about being in the gifted classrooms as young Black females. Annie for example, described the GS1 Honors class as small: "It's very small, only like 20 students [in the Honors section]. As a female it's normal to me. It's nothing different as a Black female since most people who are at the school [GS1] are Black" (Annie, February 15, 2012, p. 22). Sandy agreed and stated: "[I'm]

not different from other girls my age. Maybe a little more focused; focused in terms of determined to get good grades" (Sandy, January 31, 2012, p. 23). "[I'm] focused in life because there are certain things I want to do; definitely going to college. [I'm in] the mindset to get where I need to go. I *need* to take classes like this. They [classes] are helping me" (Sandy, January 31, 2012, p. 1). Joan and Cassandra echoed Sandy: "I mean, I feel pretty good about it. I feel nice saying it [that I'm in AP]. I mean I tell people I'm smart, but then I don't want to be like bragging. I believe it, but I don't want to be the type like "Yeah you know it, I'm *smart*! I don't let it go to my head" (Joan, February 2, 2012, p. 25). "I would say I'm pretty advanced. Like a lot of people say I'm mature for my age. I find it good that I'm advanced at something [English]. Being Black ["helps me represent"] always helps, because I know a lot of test scores are really bad for African-Americans; usually a 17 [average ACT score]. I always try my best" (Cassandra, February 17, 2012, p. 20). Other girls mentioned the "represent" factor as well.

The "represent" factor was mentioned by Lita and Nina as well: "Well, there is a lot of discrimination in MUD [Major Urban District] and in Styx [urban area where MUD is located] in general; they say that African-American kids don't want to learn, and they drop out, and they are not doing anything with their lives and I don't think that's true because I know a lot of kids my age that *want* to go to college and *do* something with their lives; and I feel that as an honor student to people like this that I am proving them wrong!" (Lita, February 28, 2012, p. 14). Nina agreed, "Sometimes it's not expected to do as well in accelerated courses. Sometimes people think Styx, like the way I talk and the way I write, [that] it doesn't sound like I'm living or coming from Styx. It's like a stereotype. Just because I live in Styx doesn't mean I have to talk a certain way or act a certain way" (Nina, February 13, 2012, p. 9). Other girls (Jackie, Lita, and Cherie) described "representing" themselves in a different way; focusing on positive descriptions

of their personal selves: "Powerful, strong, joyful, determined. I try to pump myself up" (Cherie, February 9, 2012, p. 14). For better clarification, I asked Cherie, what "powerful" means to her, she responded: "To get where I know what I want. I go after what I want, and I just know things, you know?" (Cherie, February 9, 2012, p. 14). "Knowing where I want to go" was a common theme for other girls as well. It was apparent that for many girls, their environment was a direct influence in the way they described themselves. "Representing" their race and identity provided a way for the girls to not only matter, but also solidified their presence in their respective community. Thus, even though there were issues with their community, its reputation, and its influences in the girls; they did not feel that they were different because they were Black, female, and in gifted classrooms. Girls also spoke about being labeled as *gifted,* and how they felt about their English gifted classes.

"I don't think it's anything special"—Being Gifted/Accelerated

All of the girls stated that they did not feel or acknowledge their abilities (being gifted and their status in the gifted programming) as special or unique. Likewise, *all* the girls stated that being labeled as gifted or as accelerated learners was not of any significance or value: "It feels kind of weird to say that we are *special* [gifted]. I don't say we are *special*, I just say we have the drive to work hard and strive for what we want" (Lita, February 28, 2012, p. 10). And some girls stated that they did not agree with the term "gifted": "I wouldn't really call it gifted. It's like my expectations have always been high for my grades and stuff. I would say 'gifted' is you are just naturally smart, things just come to you; it's just in your head without trying. [But] I try really hard" (Joan, February 2, 2012, p. 24). And: "I never heard of that term 'gifted.' I am just a regular student, I'm interested in learning. I want to succeed in college; I don't see myself as different from them [other students not in the accelerated classes]. It's no problem, you learn

more" (Annie, February 15, 2012, p. 23). "Working hard" was a concept shared by other girls too: "Compared to others, [I'm] *not* gifted. I put in more effort compared to others not in the AP class. [I do] not consider myself gifted because everyone has the ability to learn in a gifted classroom. It's how much you apply yourself; everyone has the potential to do better" (Sandy, January 31, 2012, p. 24). Likewise, all of the girls felt that there were no differences between the gifted and non-gifted classes.

All of the girls stated that they felt that there was anything special about between the AP or Honors classes with regards to their feelings about inclusion into the gifted programming and in comparison to their other classes at GS1: "I don't think it's anything special. Not necessary with the AP courses, I consider it just another class—of more work" (Jackie, February 6, 2012, p. 11). Cherie mimicked Jackie's opinion, stating: "It's a normal class. Not different to me, it's all the same to me. A lot of work, I do it!" (Cherie, February 9, 2012, p. 17). Cassandra added that she felt that: "Environmentally wise, it's *not a thing* at our school. I don't see it as anything different" (Cassandra, February 17, 2012, p. 24). Joan, however, stated that she felt that the material in the gifted programming was different, "I really didn't feel anything [regarding the AP course]. With AP we are learning totally different things, not at all the same [compared to the non-gifted classes]" (Joan, February 2, 2012, p. 19). Jackie agreed, stating: "Ummm…It's not that I don't consider myself gifted, I just view that class like any other class. I don't consider it anything special. Not because the work is harder; it's just *different* work. I think that I'm like, I am comfortable there!" (Jackie, February 6, 2012, p. 5). Thus, girls not only did *not* acknowledge their giftedness and also did not view their gifted classes as special or different from their non-gifted classes; but they also considered themselves simply more hard-working and not gifted per se. Thus, terms like "hard work," "effort," and "applying yourself" emerged

were important to the girls when they talking about themselves as students but not "gifted."

Likewise, outside of school, being in gifted programming was "no big deal."

"Yes, [but] it's no big deal"—Telling Others About Gifted Programming

Telling others outside of school about being in gifted programming proved ordinary. "Yes, [I tell them, but] *it's no big deal*. My friends ask me why I have so much homework; I say I'm in Honors!" (Annie, February 15, 2012, p. 20). "[I say] I'm doing really good, but it's a challenge [AP class]" (Sandy, January 31, 2012, p. 18). "I would say I'm a really good student. I try my best at everything that I do" (Lita, February 28, 2012, p. 20). Some of the girls (stressed again, that their work and abilities to get into and stay in the class, are what they tell others: "Yes. It's a privilege to be in there, so I say it's a lot of work. If you stay focused and you apply yourself, it's a good opportunity for you" (Sandy, January 31, 2012, p. 3). Other girls (Cherie, Nina, Joan) freely stated that they are in gifted classes: "It's cool. [I tell them] the regular classes I have, and I freely state that I have AP English. I let them know. It seems like I'm on a higher level than everyone else. I say, 'I'm in AP,' I say it's a title, I *worked* to get here, and that's why I'm in this class" (Cherie, February 9, 2012, p. 16). Only a few girls (Lita, Cassandra) stated that they do not mention their giftedness: "I guess I'm a modest person. I'm not the type of person to think I've got to tell someone. I know it's a good thing, but I don't feel like it's the best thing in the world" (Cassandra, February 17, 2012, pp. 1-2). Thus, many girls did tell others outside of school about their accelerated classes at GS1; but still refused to acknowledge themselves as gifted. But, these academically challenging courses influenced girls' social lives.

"No social life at home"—Girls' School, Home, and Community Relationships

Schoolwork demands influenced, but did not define, girls' social lives at school, in their respective communities, and at home. Annie for example, told me that there were differences in

her behavior in school versus at home: "Quiet at school, I don't really talk to kids at school. I mean I have my close group of friends, and I really don't want to say this but some of them [kids at school] think I'm anti-social and I'm like 'No, I just don't want to talk to you.' One time someone called me a 'dork' and I'm like not really, I do my work and chill in class. I'm not really a dork, I'm just smart, *a lot of people are smart*" (Annie, February 15, 2012, pp. 11, 18). Other girls agreed with Annie, suggesting that their peers too did not always understand them. For instance, Cherie told me students outside of the AP class questioned her behavior: "*Oh, you're so aggressive*. I'm not, what do you mean? Like, I personally do not think that I'm *that aggressive*. But they say I am. I don't like this. My friends in AP never say I'm aggressive" (Cherie, February 9, 2012, p. 13). Comments from outside peers regarding the AP/Honors classes appeared to be a trend, as Annie explained; "I asked some of my friends why don't they [others/peers] like me? And they answered 'because they think you are better.' We never even talked! They just automatically don't like me, I'm like, *it is just a class*. I'm judged. It bothers me a little. They ask me if they can copy [my work], and I say "no," I'm not even friends with them" (Annie, February 15, 2012, ps. 2-3). Joan also remarked at others' comments: "At school I'm pretty random, silly outgoing, a lot of kids describe me as, they think I'm, like *not* 'book smart', but kinda slow; not slow but dingy. Kind of stupid; like an airhead. I mean I don't care, I think it's because I'm goofy and silly and I do a lot of random stuff, weird stuff. It's kind of the way I move, I move a lot. Like my friends thought that I had ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) last year. Like I ask a question and they think it's dumb and I'm serious. These are from the outside [of AP class]" (Joan, February 2, 2012, pp. 1-2). Not only were girls treated differently by their peers outside of the gifted programming, but also many girls (Annie, Lita, Nina) also stated that they received a lot of comments regarding the workload of the gifted programming, as

well. Comments like "I'm glad I'm not in that class!" (Lita, February 28, 2012, p. 11); "[that] class is hard!" (Sandy, January 31, 2012, p. 5), and "You all do too much work in that class!" (Joan, February 2, 2012, p. 9) were common sentiments from all of the girls. Nevertheless, the girls pressed on and continued their studies in the gifted programming at GS1. In fact, most girls reported that they had friends both inside and outside of the gifted programming. However, this was not the case for girls' relationships at home; in their respective communities.

"I'm not too fond of the people in my neighborhood"—Social Life and Friends

The girls spoke about their social life, and friendships outside of school, at home in their respective neighborhoods. Most of the girls (Joan, Jackie, Lita, Cherie, Cassandra) stated they had no friends from their respective neighborhoods. Nina for example stated: "I don't do much in my neighborhood. No [emphasis], I do not hang out with anyone from my neighborhood. When I was younger I knew everybody, now there are new people [everyone else moved away] like every month and they always include drama - I stay away from it. I don't want to be involved in that" (Nina, February 13, 2012, p. 7). Most of the girls noted changes in their neighborhoods demographics were not conducive to friendships, saying "they are all too old" (Cherie, February 9, 2012, p. 13), and "there's not a lot of people my age; a lot younger and then way older [in my neighborhood]" (Cassandra, February 17, 2012, p. 14). Thus, girls' social lives were primarily grounded at GS1. And, even though girls' were sometimes misunderstood by their peers (socially and verbally); girls continued to work hard, stay focused and persevered in the gifted programming at GS1. Girls did, however, participate in a variety of social and school activities; with sports being the least favorite.

"No sports!"—Recreational Activities In and Out of GS1

Only a few girls (Cherie and Joan) reported participation in sports at GS1 (basketball, volleyball, and cheerleading). Some girls (Lita, Annie, Sandy) were adamant about not being involved with sports: "Distributive Education Clubs of America [DECA], National Honor Society [NHS], *no sports*!" (Lita, February 28, 2012, p. 5). Many girls were involved in GS1 activities like NHS, Picture Perfect (yearbook), volunteer though NHS "I do it on my own sometimes, like World Medical Relief" (Annie, February 15, 2012, p. 17). And, many girls (Annie, Cassandra, Nina, Lita, Joan) reported hanging out comfortably at home with their families: "We have to watch the news together and things like that. My parents are very supportive so we can kinda do what makes us happy" (Cassandra, February 17, 2012, p. 17). Some girls (Joan, Cherie, Cassandra, Nina) also commented on outside activities that included church attendance and activities. Thus, GS1 activities provided supported networks for girls; but activities did not provide a clear picture as to why the girls failed to recognize their giftedness. The girls' social life and activities in and out of school provided academic support networks primary based at GS1, as well as home life and church, but few peer friendships. And, many of those who knew the girls outside of school considered them special.

"It's like just because I am smart doesn't mean I'm knowledgeable in everything"

Though many outside of school considered the girls special, the girls themselves determined this. Jackie for example stated quickly "yes" others gave her special treatment. "Yes. Definitely people think I'm really smart. I'm number 2 in my class. 'Give me the answer' everybody says this. I hate to sound cocky or anything like that, but people are always happy I'm picked to be in their group" (Jackie, February 6, 2012, p. 19), and "Yeah. In class, other people like when I don't answer questions, they say "You should know this, you are smart!" It's like

just because I am smart doesn't mean I'm knowledgeable in everything. Don't put me on a pedestal that I can't live up to" (Nina, February 13, 2012, p. 20). Cherie had a different response regarding the students, and stated: "At school the kids don't care. The teachers *show me favoritism*. They let me do more things; they give me more opportunities. My teacher invited me to have lunch with Michelle Obama [sophomore year]. It was fun! They had different influential people, Spike Lee too1 I was with Susan Taylor (previous editor of *Essence* magazine). Only seven went from GS1, It was real cool" (Cherie, February 9, 2012, p. 20). This resulted from writing an essay or other qualifying activity, but as Cherie explained: "No, I was just invited. We [students] were nominated. AP is higher than regular English, so they gave it to the AP students first" (Cherie, February 9, 2012, p. 21). Outside of school others:

> "Yeah. Show me favoritism. I feel like I should be treated the same. Like, my great Aunt Laura, she uplifts me, but then she like down' them to the point where they [other family members] stop liking me." How? I ask. "Verbally. Mmm, [she says] "Cherie's going places. Cherie gonna do this, Cherie gonna do that. You'all ain't nothing', like cussin' them out, seriously! She says, 'They a bunch of 3's and 4's [whores].' Me and my cousin were really close and we were on the same level but every year we grow further and further apart. We are the same age, she dropped out [of school] now and she had a baby" (Cherie, February 9, 2012, p. 19). "Then me and my cousin, Jamie were cool, until my Aunt Laura got in her ear and started talkin' a whole bunch of mess, and now like I say 'Hi' and she won't say nothing to me she just walks away. She really makes them not [emphasis] like me" (Cherie, February 9, 2012, p. 20).

Sandy also stated that she felt that adults treated her differently: "Yes. Some adults expect more from me. Like "You're in AP class; I expect you to be a little more mature,

responsible. They [adults] expect us to be really good in grades and behavior. I agree. It's a mature course; we should not be in there goofing off" (Sandy, January 31, 2012, ps. 21-22). Cassandra thought she was treated differently by her teachers; "They [teachers] do that all the time. They say, 'you should know this, you are in Honors' (Cassandra, February 17, 2012, p. 4). Here, higher expectations came with certain privileges, but sometimes led to social conflicts.

Ultimately, though sometimes others thought of the girls as elevated, which came with favoritism and privilege, the girls did not perceive themselves as "special." The demands of their coursework provided both a rationale for not socializing with some and the impetus for the girls' for the girls' privileges. Thus, though it seemed common for others to consider the girls in gifted programming "elevated," the girls downplayed this, while still agreeing that they deserved the privileges and favoritism that came their way. Next, girls talk about the impact of the women and culture unit (feminist studies) in what I call the triple threat: women and culture, feminist studies, and gifted Black girls.

The Triple Threat - Women and Culture, Feminist Studies, and Gifted Black Girls

Girls spoke about the women and culture unit (feminist studies) with a particular fondness for the unit. The women and culture unit and its content had a profound impact on how the girls viewed themselves, and in many ways; provided a solid foundation not only for their future educational endeavors, but also for the ways in which they saw themselves as young, gifted, and Black females.

As previously mentioned, there were three main topics discussed in the feminist unit, Women and Culture: Critical readings and scholarship about Chinese women, stereotypes of women, the Jewish Holocaust, and a critical feminist perspective on fairy tales. The girls related to readings and scholarship on Chinese women and the Jewish holocaust are worthy of further

discussion, and because of the objectification of women in the former and the discrimination reminiscent of slavery, in the latter. Of importance to this discussion are a deeper discussion of what the girls made of stereotypes of women and a critical feminist perspective of fairy tales. Here, the girls learned to utilize what they called the "feminist lens."

Girls defined the feminist lens as a vehicle to view and analyze situations and society from a female [feminist] perspective. For instance, Cherie summed up the purpose of using the feminist lens as: "Analysis, putting on my feminist lens and just analyzing everything. You analyze everything! Break everything down, the position of the man, the position of the woman, what was said, really breaking it all down, taking the symbolism of it" (Cherie, March 13, 2012, p. 18). Other girls stressed the importance of the feminist lens and its analysis: "Not so much how the media looks at it, but how young ladies *should* look at it" (Sandy, March 1, 2012, p. 10). In what follows, I argue that through a "feminist lens," girls were able to relate to their surroundings, evolve their sense of self, and in many ways prepare for their future as Black women. The feminist lens was a vehicle that not only promoted their independence (because it aided girls in analyzing stereotypes and asserting appropriate action to eradicate them), but also how they asserted their giftedness into their everyday lives.

"…If you are quiet, you will find the perfect man"—Stereotypes of Women in Fairy Tales

Girls spoke about stereotypes of women and a critical analysis of fairy tales via the feminist lens. Many of the girls (Nina, Sandy, Cassandra, Annie) stated that there was a realization of information that had been there, but this had not been earlier apparent: "It made me realize a lot of things. Like [how] the fairy tales portray women. Sleeping Beauty was always sleeping and always quiet, never questioned anyone. How Cinderella

waited for someone to save her. It [wearing a feminist lens and analyzing fairy tales] made me question why I do certain things. I re-evaluated myself and the things I do" (Nina, March 16, 2012, p. 8).

This realization, brought about changes in the way girls viewed fairy tales as well:

"A lot changed. When I was younger, I didn't think of fairy tales like that. But then Ms. Taylor said you have to put on your 'feminist lens' and see things from a feminist perspective. I never thought about any of this before. Before I did fit a lot of those stereotypes and I put myself in a lot of those categories. I realize I wanted some of those things in the fairy tales. I wanted Prince Charming, and I didn't think about it at the time; but it is not right to be dependent on somebody! You have to be able to live on your own, because if something happens to them, then what?" (Lita, March 26, 2012, pp. 8-10)

"Prince Charming" was a characteristic that the girls referred to as a desirable man (good-looking, well-mannered, brave), but with some cautionary notes: "[On the] Disney channel, *if you're beautiful*, you will get a man! They scoop you up off your feet and take care of you, but they never really talk about the education side of it" (Sandy, March 1, 2012, p. 10). In this respect and akin to their analysis of fairy tales; girls could only get a man if you are "beautiful."

Girls found other characteristics in fairy tales deemed desirable: "Like in *The Little Mermaid*, one of the songs it says '*if you are quiet you will find the perfect man.*' Think and listen to the lyrics! They go against what we believe as women!" (Cassandra, March 22, 2012, p. 16). In addition:

"They [fairy tales] depict women in a bad way. The bad character (a witch) is usually *a woman* who wants to hold some kind of power, and technically women who hold power are bad! Women who are like the princesses are like damsels in distress. Or they are

quiet, *this is the best thing to keep quiet and then you are the perfect woman*" (Cassandra, March 22, 2012, p. 15; similarly Cherie, March 13, 2012, pp. 10-11, 24)

Girls found these notions about *appropriate* women—being quiet, waiting for men, or being bad if you were powerful—problematic, as they did the idea of being a "damsel in distress." "Damsel in distress" was a warning sign for girls because it depicted a life of dependence on others, and an almost certain marginalization because - without independence - they would not be free to make their own decisions.

The importance of independence (defined as *not* depending on others) was also stated by some girls (Lita, Nina, Annie): "Every girl grows up with fairy tales thinking she's supposed to meet a fairy tale prince and he will take care of her for the rest of her life and he just saves her, but that's basically saying we are "damsels in distress" and that we *need* a man, and we don't need men [to take care of us]! There are a lot of women that are independent!" (Lita, March 26, 2012, p. 16). Asked how they feel about being labeled a "damsel in distress" Nina, Lita, Annie replied: "*Not very happy*" (Lita, March 26, 2012, p. 17). The girls were not happy with the portrayal of women in fairy tales, and they took these portrayals to think more deeply about their own lives, and about the status quo that women should look and act only in certain ways. Sandy for instance, stated:

"Sometimes I'm still a little shocked! Like wow, like this has been around my whole life and I never really realized it until now? It [what was learned in the fairy tale analysis] really affects what I will do in the future. I know if I have a daughter then I'll start her off early about Disney movies; not that I won't let her watch them, but I will let her know how I feel about them and my point of view." "Explain to her that woman *can be* strong also, and that beauty is in the eye of the beholder and society cannot really tell you if you

are beautiful or not! And you don't need a man to make you stronger! Or come rescue you or anything like that!" (Sandy, March 1, 2012, pp. 2-3)

Thus, analysis utilizing the feminist lens not only provided girls with independence, but also that the need not blithely accept the *status quo* in their decision making; and this included future life decisions as young Black women. But girls were not finished talking about the status quo, or what society expected women to look like, or behave.

"Brainwashed! To think a certain way about yourself"—Girls Defy the "Box"

Girls continued to talk more about the status quo, but this time focused on familial and societal expectations, as Nina out it:

"We [women] have to conform to look and talk a certain way. Women are supposed to have big boobs and a small waste, women in general [can be] smart, but *not* question others around them! Men build this 'box' that we females are supposed to be in just to make them happy or that we [need to become] the perfect woman for them. We are expected to [conform]" (Nina, March 16, 2012, pp. 13-15)

This "box" was brought up by other girls as well (Lita, Nina, Annie) and proved to be of importance to girls, as other examples in their lives emerged. Nina for example, stated:

"It made me feel like I have to let other people know [that the "box" is inappropriate]. My Dad, he says: "You are supposed to act like a lady." And I'm like, what is that supposed to mean? What is he trying to say? Like ladies can be fit into one box? We can *do more* than clean, act proper, and stuff!" (Nina, March 16, 2012, p. 9)

Cherie also felt like she needed to let other people know as well:

"I observe people. When I see them talking a certain kind of way that's kinda wrong, making fun of women and putting us in our '*box*,' I check-em' [verbally letting others

know that this misogynistic behavior or language is not acceptable]. Sometimes they look stupid, hanging there with their mouths open, they just look dumb [laughs]! I go hard on them, state' the facts. I get up in their grill [face]. I say 'I don't pertain to those gender roles!' I tell them we are in a day and age where women should not be put in those boxes, and I am not [emphasis] obligated to do what you [they] tell me to do and so forth. I tell them 'do what you need to do and go ahead n' wash those dishes [laughs]!' It makes me mad! But I get stronger, I grow stronger! I know it's kind of preparing me. I know I will experience this in college so it's preparing me, [and] I'm going to be ready!" (Cherie, March 13, 2012, pp. 9-16)

Here, girls went beyond recognizing societal expectations and took responsibility for changing society. Cherie provided another example:

"I used to be in IVD [Innovative Vehicle Design], so I was the only girl in there with 10 dudes at the time, and they were telling me to do the work—to be the secretary basically. I was like, hold up! I'm not doing it, because I felt like they are going to put me 'you are the woman *I can only be* the secretary [another box] and can't do anything else! [Interviewer: Because you wrote well?] *No!* I have chicken scratch and everybody knows this! They kept pushing, like do it! Do it! And I just said 'no.' I just sat there with my legs crossed" (Cherie, March 13, 2012, pp. 20-23)

Girls further explained that the "box" and the status quo made you: "Brainwashed! [It makes you] think a certain way about yourself! You have to learn to accept yourself the way you are and somebody will love you for who you are" (Nina, March 16, 2012, p. 11). Cherie agreed with the brainwashing that Nina proposed, and added an example: "I was in Staples the other day, and they have little flash drives for the Family Guy [a comedy show]. The *male* characters

[flash drives] had heads; but the *women* characters [flash drives] were legs! I was like, really? Private parts are valued over brains and our minds? I got offended and I was real pissed!" (Cherie, March 13, 2012, pp. 20-23). Thus, girls did not accept society's view of the "box," and rebuffed its impact on a young woman's sense of herself, that is, actively refused to fit into the box. Thus, the girls were strong in their stance against societal expectations and refused to accept a standard definition and portrayal of how women should look and act. In this refusal, girls stated reasons why they thought the status quo was wrong, and how they would do their part to try and change it, and this led to common stereotypes of women and their feelings regarding these stereotypes as young Black women.

"Some people say that's all Black women"—Girls Talk about Stereotypes

Girls spoke about stereotypes of women. In the Women and Culture unit, girls did not specifically discuss stereotypes of women by race or culture or differences between, but it was clear that the girls; that they were keenly aware of differences between women from different communities and offered many examples about racial and cultural stereotypes, and about effects on them as young Black women. Some girls (Lita, Annie, and Cassandra) stated that "dumb blond" were automatically equated to white women, as Cassandra described:

"'Dumb blond' was usually a white woman that dressed scantily, very submissive, and they do as they are told." She [paused] added [laughing]: "Technically if you are not an intelligent person, it doesn't really matter what you are, you still count because some people will still call you a "dumb blond" even though you are not blond!" (Cassandra, March 22, 2012, pp. 7-8, similarly Annie, March 20, 2012, p. 4)

Another commonly associated stereotype by girls (Annie, Cassandra) to white women was the "soccer mom." Soccer Moms [defined by girls as "white mom's that are perfect, clean-

cut ladies, caring, always supportive"] are geared more towards Caucasian women, but we see more of this on TV and stuff. It's more because there could be more white soccer moms than Black" (Annie, March 20, 2012, p. 4, similarly Cassandra, March 22, 2012, pp. 8-10). Thus, even though there were commonly associated stereotypes with white women, girls stated their reasons for these assumptions. And, other girls (Lita, Annie) believed that other stereotypes could be neutral in description as well: "The 'B' [Bitch] can really be anybody, someone that is in power and respected. A 'Bitch' and a 'Boss Lady' is someone that is respected all the time. [Interviewer: What makes them a "B" ?] "Their attitude, sassy, aggressive" (Annie, March 20, 2012, p. 3). When girls spoke specifically about Black female stereotypes, they also provided reasons for these assumptions and could provide with distinct differences across different stereotypes.

Girls discussed stereotypes that they believed directly referenced Black women. For instance, Cassandra stated: "When you think of a Black woman you think of the 'lady boss' type, because usually Black women are [a] strong-willed type and business [strict], only because they have been [through] so much oppression over the years and white women get categorized as the 'soccer mom's' (Cassandra, March 22, 2012, pp. 8-10). Other girls (Lita, Joan) agreed with this definition but added: "I think it's like she's [lady boss] her own boss and she knows what she wants and she will go out and get it, and she doesn't care what it takes! She'll work hard enough to succeed. [She's] Power-hungry, a 'B [Bitch],' a crazy woman. *It's mostly males that think this way*. This is what I want to be; she's basically a leader" (Lita, March 26, 2012, pp. 11-13), which contrasted sharply with the "angry Black women" stereotype.

Girls (Nina and Cherie) commented on the "angry Black women" stereotype. For instance:

"A lot of people assume that Black women are angry, and they always have an attitude, and there's always something wrong. A lot of Black women take the lead roles in their households or families. And a lot of white women, they just like are *real* submissive. They can be really emotional" (Nina, March 16, 2012, p. 1).

Cherie agreed with Nina, stating: "I say 'the angry Black woman' if she's assertive, they [others] think she's mad at everything; it's not true. 'Ghetto Black women' [also because] some people say that's *all* Black women; and that's not true! (Cherie, March 13, 2012, pp. 4-5). "We have different types of slang within different cultures and so when we say 'ho' you automatically think of Black women" (Lita, March 26, 2012, ps. 4-5). Here, the girls clearly understood that societal stereotypes about Black women had negative connotations that did not represent women in their world.

In fact, girls discussed the differences between white and Black female stereotypes. The girls thought that white women were sometimes put on a higher pedestal than Black women; and provided an example:

"Well, I have to say that sometimes people put white women on a higher pedestal than Black women; they [people] value them more. I watched this video where this researcher did some research to see if [people] thought Black women were attractive or not, and this was published in a science magazine! And it's not true! It's your opinion and the guy said that their [Black women] bodies are not attractive either. It was just false! I was angry! Why would he do research on this? What was the purpose? It [research] was *not* strong, and I was *extremely offended*" (Cherie, March 13, 2012, pp. 4-7)

Thus, girls specifically differentiated between white and Black female stereotypes, and understood how stereotypes boxed them in, and they expressed anger at being devalued and

limited by stereotypes. Clearly, the girls were developing a critical consciousness about what it meant to be gifted Black girls.

"It should be, 'I feel pretty because I'm me'" –Women and Culture

Girls stated that the Women and Culture unit had affected their everyday lives, due to the content that was discussed and the knowledge that was gained. Here, every girl offered perspectives on what had changed in their lives. Cassandra argued against stereotypic notions of beauty, saying: "It should be 'I feel pretty because I'm me.' I don't have to be a certain shape or weight" (Cassandra, March 22, 2012, pp. 11-12). Cherie felt empowered: "I say I have an upper hand from other students who do not have this course. So when I do teach them [others] about it [course content] I would say my eyes are wide open. I'm more aware and I notice things more" (Cherie, March 13, 2012, p. 8). Nina developed a foundation for future learning: "*I really cared about this stuff* [material from the women and culture unit]. It was really interesting" (Nina, March 16, 2012, pp. 4-5). Sandy's eyes were opened: "Yes because without being in the class I probably would have just sat there and watched the Disney movies; like the regular way!" [Laughs.] (Sandy, March 1, 2012, p. 7). Joan, Annie, Nina, Lita, and Sandy saw new possibilities for themselves: "I realize how I can live above the standard [status quo]. I don't have to live my life like that. I know who I am and it's okay to be an individual" (Joan, March 5, 2012, p. 5). "I used to want to be like everyone else [models, stars], but now I just be myself. I felt like this after [the unit on women and culture was completed]. I was like, I never really thought about that [before the feminist lens]" (Annie, March 20, 2012, p. 13). "You have to realized that sometimes you just can't fit what other people want you to be and that you have to be okay with yourself and confident so you don't compare yourself to someone else" (Nina, March 16, 2012, p. 12). "A lot of the things I looked at before, like the way a male would speak to a female. But now that I

have my feminist lens on, I break things down and see" (Lita, March 26, 2012, pp. 1-2). And, "I notice this in a lot of stuff I watch [television, other media] or just in everyday life" (Sandy, March 1, 2012, p. 1). The unit on Women and Culture changed the girls and looks on life as women, and as gifted students.

The girls also thought they changed as gifted students, which led some girls to reevaluate past and present feelings about their giftedness. For example, Jackie stated that she felt that content changed her as a gifted student and provided a familial example:

"Ummm, like [all] white women could be considered very bright; I don't think that this is true. My Dad [talks about] how a lot of white people grow up in rich homes because I used to go to Rolling Lakes Academy of Scholars [an affluent private school in Rolling Lakes, a suburb outside of Styx]. He's always saying how these [white] kids are prepared, and they have the resources [money and the right school] and are ready for college. But I don't believe this one bit! Because even though I went there way back when, they were so slow. Like, I still talk to a lot of them and nothing has changed! These kids really did not apply themselves! When I was in third grade, there was only two Black girls (me and another). In fifth grade, there were three, then I left; and there was only one. Now it's pretty integrated, a lot of them are on scholarships. How did they get there? *I think about that all the time!* I don't agree with my Dad!" (Jackie, March 12, 2012, pp. 8-12)

And other girls also described inequities in society's view of gifted education as well:

"If you truly focus on abilities and smarts, then there are no differences [between gifted white and Black girls]. Society would think otherwise of course. They would say 'she' will be more gifted and talented. *'She' is a white girl*. I mean I'm offended and angry, but

I live with it and I know it's not true. It doesn't faze me" (Cherie, March 13, 2012, pp. 2-3)

Sandy added: "I think for gifted Black girls or women that the standards are a little higher because you never really hear about gifted Black women that much. I just think it's not portrayed in the media; *you never see* a smart Black woman" (Sandy, March 1, 2012, pp. 4-5). Thus, through the content of the women and culture unit; girls not only unearthed inequities in society [status quo, stereotypes of women], but also in *their* gifted education, via the vehicle of the feminist lens. Thus, the unit changed the way the girls viewed themselves as gifted Black girls, and they exhibited resilience to overcome barriers created by stereotypes. In addition, "representing" became a way not only for the girls to solidify themselves into various settings, but was also a vehicle to correct these stereotypes because they themselves corrected others around them. Likewise, utilizing a feminist lens promoted their independence because it allowed girls to view, question, and analyze societal views (i.e. status quo) of how gifted Black girls and Black women are portrayed. And, girls indeed had strong support for their resilience to overcome these barriers (teachers, gifted programming), and in what follows, parents joined this battle as well.

CHAPTER 7: NORM-BUSTING, MYTH BUSTING, "DISRUPTING" STEREOTYPES FOR PARENTS OF GIFTED BLACK GIRLS

Parents talked about their gifted daughters in great detail, exhibiting a clear understanding of their daughters as young gifted Black women. Three female parents of different gifted Black girls, (two seniors, and one junior) were interviewed in a focus group session. The purpose of conversations with parents included to gain insights into parents for and decisions affecting their daughters' educations. I found that goals and decisions affecting their daughters' educations revolved around trust, independence, and support. Here, unlike earlier scholarship, parents supported their gifted Black daughters fully, in spite of cultural misunderstandings and issues found only in school settings, which occurred before *and* during their attendance at GS1. These problematic experiences proved important because they shaped the way these gifted Black girls are influenced in their academic careers and life choices. In what follows, I argue that not only that parents supported of their gifted Black daughters and thus ensured girls' success, but also that they, too, included feminist perspectives in their parenting.

Some parental responses mimicked the teacher's responses (see Chapter 4). For example, defining what "gifted" means; parents reported a variety of definitions and meanings.

"There was just something unique about her"—Parents Define Giftedness

All three parents provided definitions of what constituted "gifted" and they defined it in relation to their daughters. Olivia Fox (Jackie's mother) told me that she indeed has used the term "gifted" with her daughter, remarking that: "In second grade, there was just something unique about her. Her daycare said that there was something *unusual* about her" (O. Fox, March 28, 2012, p. 27). Fox further added that being "gifted" is more than intellect. Alexis Ford (Lita's mother) agreed with Fox that there was something different about her daughter in her younger

years, and that one time she wrote an assignment in five minutes and it "ended up getting published in a book". In daycare, Lita learned her alphabet in one day (A. Ford, March 28, 2012, p. 28). Jillian Curry (Cherie's mother) described "giftedness" in a different way, but agreed with Fox and Ford regarding her daughter's uniqueness, and that she calls her "mommy's smart baby" compared to her other two children. She (Cherie) excels academically, though Cherie did not have something specific (in terms of a "gift") that was tangible, but she "brings everything together," adding that Cherie is "very different from the others [her other children]" (J. Curry, March 28, 2012, pp. 28-29). Thus, all three parents used the terms "different" and "unique" when defining giftedness. The "different" explanation for gifted children is often used as a description to explain uniqueness, when "unknown" attributes are present but difficult to explain. This "differentness" may cause social issues, and cultural differences from the status quo, as exemplified in remarks that Curry and Fox experienced from the public: "People would tell me that I [Curry] was not raising her [Cherie] right, because I allowed her to have an opinion" (J. Curry, March 28, 2012, pp. 29-30). Fox laughed at this statement and stated "I know what that's like" (O. Fox, March 28, 2012, p. 29). In addition, it appeared the girls also were very strategic in their thinking and planning.

"It's always something big" - Girls, Strategy, and Parental Perceptions

Parents remarked on the strategic planning and thinking of their gifted daughters. For example, Curry explained that Cherie knows how to shift the language of a debate to her favor, and that as a result: "She never wants to buy anything, because she wants to use these resources for bigger things, so that you cannot say 'no.' She declined the 16-year old birthday party, she declined the laptop; instead, she wants to go to Africa to stop sex-trafficking! She went to school and discussed this with her peers and she *could not understand* why they did not understand this,

she has an opinion and she is going to stick with it" (J. Curry, March 28, 2012, p. 30). Both Fox and Ford agreed with the principle of this assessment, as Fox commented; "I think that this is a difficulty as a [gifted] parent, she [Jackie] is now applying to schools [college] and her school of choice is Johns Hopkins. I know how much this costs [college tuition] and we do not get financial aid! They [gifted Black girls] have this world, I get it; and there is *no limit*! She does all the research and says 'Now, how are we gonna make this happen'? *It's not little; it's always something big*!" (O. Fox, March 28, 2012, pp. 31-32). Ford agreed, laughing: "I'm still getting it!" (A. Ford, March 28, 2012, p. 32). Thus, agreement was present from all parents regarding their gifted daughters' seeming to go beyond normal expectations and accepted them as different and unique. Parents stated that this designation of gifted happened early in their daughters' education, and they explained how their daughters were identified for gifted programming at GS1.

"She just comes home and informs me"—Girls Identified for Gifted Programming

Parents reported a lack of formal testing for their daughter's giftedness, such as the use of an intelligence test, before placement into any gifted programming at GS1. All three parents, however, affirmed that their daughters were *placed* in the gifted programming for English in the second semester of their freshman year. None of the parents were formally contacted (letter, phone call, or presentation) by a teacher or administration regarding this placement. However, their daughters did provide permission for inclusion; thus each were confident in her daughter's ability, which also allowed for a more independent approach in terms of scheduling classes at GS1. Ford stated, "She (Lita) just comes home and informs me of different things…She's very quiet and she's very independent" (A. Ford, March 28, 2012, p. 44). "Independence" was also a characteristic in Curry's response as well, "Most of the time she [Cherie] would tell me what she

was doing with her schedule. She may ask me about my opinion, but she would express her opinion about what she wanted to do and how to fit it in with what she wanted to accomplish" (J. Curry, March 28, 2012, p. 43). With Jackie, however, Fox had a different explanation regarding her math placement (although the literature placement appeared to not be an issue). Fox explained: "With math, I had to insist that they put her in a higher math class because she was not being challenged and she knew it too! I went to the parent-teacher conference and the teacher (a white male), said that she *had to prove herself*. I responded, 'That's no problem; she will take a test for you on Monday.' She did; and then he was like 'okay'. Sometimes in my experience, even though they have a set of [test] scores, she [Jackie] just knew she that she should be placed higher" (O. Fox, March 28, 2012, p. 43). Fox's use of place and gender descriptors seemed to indicate a concern about bias against her daughter, a point I return to in a moment. Clearly, parents were not officially informed of their daughters' inclusion into the gifted programming at GS1, and standardized testing was not a part of inclusion decisions, though testing is commonly used. Nonetheless, parents spoke about testing in general, especially their sense of testing as a reflection of their gifted daughters' abilities.

"They may be good in one area and no good in another"—Parents Talk about Testing

Due to an abundance of literature discussing testing, its accuracy, and its placement value for inclusion into gifted education, parents told me about their thoughts on testing. Being somewhat surprised that all three girls were in the gifted programming at GS1 and that the parents were not formally informed about the placement, it seemed important to gauge how closely these parents followed their daughter's academics, and what their feelings were regarding test scores, especially if or how these scores reflected their daughter's academic ability. Ford's mother emphatically denied that tests were adequate: "*No*. I believe that they are not reflective of

her ability. She is not a good test taker; she got a 21 on her ACT. She was shocked!" (A. Ford, March 28, 2012, pp. 10-11.) Fox agreed with Ford, and stated: "No, because it depends on what is happening today. It [testing] has nothing to do with your intellect" (O. Fox, March 28, 2012, pp. 9-10). When I inquired about Jackie specifically, Fox stated: "She does great. She is a great test taker" (O. Fox, March 28, 2012, p. 10). Curry explained that "Colleges utilize tests; but *everybody brings different things to the table.* It [a test score] is not indicative of their ability. They may be good in one area and no good in another" (J Curry, March 28, 2012, pp. 10-11). Curry added; "She [Cherie] did well on her ACT; but she's a little rebellious. She said she's going to keep taking it and taking it [to get a higher score]." (J. Curry, March 28, 2012, p. 10.) Fox laughed and stated exuberantly, "She [Jackie] was like that too [all laughed]" (O. Fox, March 28, 2012, p. 10). Thus, while parents agreed with their daughters' placements into the gifted programming, they denied the importance of testing to indicate academic abilities. Parents found gifted programming benefited their daughters and had serious teachers.

"Ms. Taylor don't play" - Parents' Perspectives on Gifted Programming at GS1

There was consensus from all three parents regarding gifted programming at GS1, however; their answers offered different perspectives. Fox declared that:

"Mrs. Taylor is an excellent teacher and pushes the kid. One student [laughing] went to Ms. Dean (a school counselor at GS1) and told her that she needed to get out of the [accelerated/gifted] class because it's causing her 'anxiety.'[The] mom said her [daughter's] blood pressure was up!" (O. Fox, March 28, 2012, p. 4)

Ford agreed and added: "I agree, my son had her [Mrs. Taylor] too and she pushed him; with Lita having her now, he [Lita's brother] says [to Lita] 'you know Ms. Taylor don't play.' Fox added, "She has those students afraid of her, she's not taking any stuff" (A. Ford, March 28,

2012, p. 4). Curry added: "I would say that it is one of her [Cherie] more challenging classes and she loves the class" (J. Curry, March 28, 2012, p. 5). By saying the teachers "don't play" and "she [Taylor] has those kids afraid of her," parents signaled that she (Taylor) was a strict, no-nonsense kind of teacher. In fact, though a bit in awe of them, parents had good relationships with teachers at the school, especially gifted teachers.

"Reminds me of Alien the movie"—Relationships with Teachers and the Gifted Programming

Parents talked about their relationships with the teachers of gifted programming at GS1. All three parents were in agreement that they felt that the gifted programming challenged their daughters: "I like it because it's challenging them, it's pushing them, if you want it; you go and find it. I agree with that" (A. Ford, March 28, 2012, p. 11). Parents also encouraged their daughter's to interact at GS1. As curry detailed:

"Most of the time I encourage her [Cherie] to go to the teachers and then to Mr. Deacon [Principal at GS1] because I think it's important to teach them autonomy; push her to see how bad she want it. We did have an issue with English last year. One issue we had was with AP Psychology; they [teachers, school administration] told her [Cherie] 'last year you didn't get it, so you can't do it [take AP Psychology] this year.' 'Let me convince Mr. Deacon' she [Cherie] said, and then Curry stated very clearly that he (Mr. Deacon) was irritated by this; mainly because Cherie had taken Psychology I and Psychology II at the same time, because she felt like she could do both; they [teachers and administration] said that this "is impossible". Cherie kept talking to them and then finally Mr. Deacon gave in, and she did it! *It was kind of a little show-up.*" (J. Curry, March 28, 2012, pp. 39-40)

Fox agreed and shook her head in approval and then stated: "It's kind of an attitude; Jackie has Spanish I and Spanish II right now; it's almost an attitude [from the school], *you gotta prove yourself, you gotta prove yourself*" (O. Fox, March 28, 2012, p. 40). In addition, Curry stated that the teacher and Mr. Deacon knew each other well, and that is was the "annoyance" and then he (Mr. Deacon, Principal) said to me, "Wow, she reminds me of *Alien* the movie." Curry confessed that her husband laughed at this remark. She continued,

"I guess in *Alien* they try and take you over, overcome you. I don't remember the movie, but whatever it was it was a *very aggressive attitude*. There was a part of me that was upset at this, but there was a part of me that liked the aggression that Cherie has and the assertiveness to nag and nag, he told me 'She will not take 'no' for an answer.' (J. Curry, March 28, 2012, pp. 40-41)

I could indeed tell that Curry was upset by the remark made by Deacon, and it was clear that even though she did not remember the film she knew that the comparison was not only made because of the portrayed aggressive nature of Cherie, but also one of intimidation. The other two parents nodded in agreement and corroborated their support for their daughters' being assertive to the point of aggressively pursuing a goal if it furthered their education. Parents also spoke about racial undertones in their daughters' educational experiences.

"Black kids don't learn"—Previous Gifted Education Teacher Issues

Parents spoke about previous issues with teachers prior to girls' attendance at GS1. Fox piggybacked on a story told by Curry and described past gifted education teacher incidents:

"It's my experience that GS1 provides better opportunities for that [challenging students academically]. Jackie went to Rolling Lakes Academy of Scholars and it's a predominantly white school. We pulled her out even though she loved it because we felt

like they were killing her spirit! When she thought her teacher was wrong or inappropriate, she would say it. But what came back was - and it happened several times - that the *white* teachers could not handle this from a *Black girl*; we just saw this. She lived in detention over the stupidest things! Jackie came home and said she heard her [the white female teacher] make a remark like "Black kids don't learn." And we were like "No." We always wanted diversity, GS1 does not really have this, but it "fits" her. Here's another example, she turned in something to this teacher at Rolling Lakes Academy of Scholars, and the teacher said that she did not turn it in, she [Jackie] received a penalty for it, and at the end of the day she had it on her desk and she never came back to me to tell me she had it or to apologize. Another time a teacher called me crying [from Rolling Lakes Academy of Scholars] about something inappropriate. She had said something to Jackie in front of the whole class; she said "You are such a stupid little girl." She [the teacher] was crying because she was sorry and wrong. (O. Fox, March 28, 2012, pp. 12-13)

Rolling Lakes Academy of Scholars is a private, tuition-based school that resides in Rolling Lakes, a very prestigious and affluent suburb of Styx. Fox was not the only parent who had prior issues with gifted education in affluent suburbs. As Curry explained:

"She [Cherie] went to an African-centered school, predominantly Black with a "global perspective." We moved to Heaven Heights [another affluent suburb of Styx], I have to admit that Cherie's personality was *not* well-received. She *too* got into it a lot with the teachers. I never understood why because she has a hard time explaining to me what had happened to cause the teacher response. [Cherie] would find it more difficult to satisfy the expectation(s) and what would happen is she would try to handle it and the response

was always a "power-struggle" and turn into a debate and she would be shut-down by the teacher. She's my "chocolate baby," she's the darker of all my children, and I never wanted her to be downed by African-Americans or others of ethnicity. So I made it a point to make sure her self-esteem was high, and we do not perm our hair. That's a choice I made financially in my graduate study; we do our hair naturally. I taught my children to be proud of what they have and who they are; and when she was in middle school [in Heaven Heights], people would make comments. Most of the difficulty was with the teachers, not how she looked or how she dressed. It was, "I'm smarter, I'm the teacher, you are the student. You can never supersede the point I [the teacher(s)] am trying to make." And so now it was Cherie always trying to prove them [the teachers] wrong, so it was a power-struggle. I don't get this much from GS1, but I'm used to something different from the African-centered schools" (J. Curry, March 28, 2012, pp. 13-16)

And, parallel to Jackie's incident, all of the teachers were white, except for one:

"What was interesting was after a while one of the Black teachers made a comment to me about the way she [Cherie] carried herself, drew attention to herself, and how she needed to "calm down" and "not say certain things." It was almost as if this teacher felt intimidated by Cherie, but also Cherie *became like this lashing point*, like "I better stay away from you so you don't cause problems for me." But we could never identify what the problem was, [and] I would tell her [Cherie] to *keep trying*! Eventually I had to go up to the school because she [teacher] *would not* return my phone calls or emails. She was *immediately offensive*, she would not change her [Cherie's] grade, she said she didn't have to answer me, and she didn't have to change that, and then she would tell me: "If Cherie was so smart, she would do this, and this, and this. Then I said

"*ok,*" show me the work; she [the teacher] made it up; this grade, and this grade, etc. Basically, she called my bluff; she thought I would back-off" (J. Curry, March 28, 2012, pp. 13-17)

Thus, parents experienced intolerance and discrimination towards their daughters, while the academic aspects of these schools were purported to be better, in affluent suburban schools (even in one instance from a Black teacher). Parents however, did not report these experiences with teachers and administrative staff at GS1, but had other concerns.

"You can shoot high but it's likely you are going to fall"—Other Parental Concerns

Parents did not always find GS1 supportive of gifted Black girls. As Curry explained: "You run into these issues when you have a child that is outside the norm, *whatever people are identifying as 'outside of the norm.'* You have a hard time pushing them to their potential because they can only go as high as they are challenged! Then after that, you have to try and add [additional education] and because you are in [that] environment, they [students] may not get the same; they [teachers, staff] may ignore them, or keep them [students] on one level. So before Cherie came to GS1, we [Curry and Deacon, the Principal at GS1] had a conversation that Cherie is *different*. He then began to tell me about his daughter and I wanted to tell him 'your daughter is grown, my daughter is a child' (J. Curry, March 28, 2012, pp. 9-10)

All three parents were laughing at this, and nodded their heads up and down in agreement. Curry continued, "*I told him Cherie was different; and he began to challenge me then*. I don't know what the issue was; I am not trying to bash them [GS1]. When you have children like this you have to shelter them and protect them from what's coming, because if you don't they will get their self-esteem knocked" (J. Curry, March 28, 2012, pp. 10-11). Curry then said he (Deacon) never recognized it [Cheri's giftedness], there was no support, and he never

said anything else. Both Fox and Ford agreed again with Curry; further questioning the support role(s) from administration at GS1.

And, this lack of vision for gifted Black girl education came through elsewhere. Fox commented, "You know, when the kids were filling out their college applications, Jackie said that when she listed her colleges of choice, Mr. Sew told the student's that 'there's nothing wrong with community college,' and that they needed to put a community college down. Jackie said she could not believe this" (O. Fox, March 28, 2012, p. 22). It was subsequently revealed Mr. Sew was white, and the conversation continued with parents talking about their feelings about their daughter's attending community college: "It's the expectation that you can shoot high, but it's likely you are going to fall" (J. Curry, March 28, 2012, p. 22). "*Exactly, that's what I said*," remarked Fox, emphasizing agreement. Parents could not identify a reason for such behaviors: "I don't know [looking a little perplexed], I have thought about this *a lot*; it could be the City (where GS1 is located), not necessarily color [of skin/ethnicity]. It may be a certain representation. Could it be that they [population that GS1 has] have a lot of MUD (Major Urban District) children and they do not think highly of them, and this is why the expectation is low?" (J. Curry, March 28, 2012, p. 24). Fox added information about the persistence of these issues at GS1, saying: "*it's a lot of little things they do*," to which all three parents agreed. For these parents and their daughters, suggesting that they aim for a community college instead of a 4-year college or university meant GS1 did not understand and support their daughters. Such treatment seemed unique to the school's teachers and administrative staff. However, all three parents agreed that there was *no* bullying at GS1, and stated that they thought "the other kids respected them" in regards to peer treatment at school (J. Curry, March 28, 2012, pp. 7-8). In terms of their respective communities, parents stated that "everyone compliments her on how she carries

herself" (A. Ford, March 28, 2012, p. 7), and "they always say she's very smart and it's always positive" (O. Fox, March 28, 2012, p. 7). Thus, parents of gifted Black girls *only* reported difficulties others had understanding and accepting their daughters' uniqueness among teachers and administrative staff. Parents raised their gifted Black daughters to be independent, not only in their academic decision making, but also in their communication (with peers and especially adults). And, the girls were not shy about questioning adults regarding their academics. Some of the girl's assertiveness came from school studies and some from parental encouragement, and clearly not all school personnel were comfortable with their actions. What, then, did the parents make of their daughters' feminist lens?

<div align="center">"Liked this, and appreciated it"—Parents and the Feminist Perspective</div>

All three parents were aware of the women and culture unit and were eager to share their insights not only on the subject matter (fairy tales and its content), but also shared their philosophy on how they raise their daughters and its similarity to feminist perspectives. All three parents reported discussing the course content on women and culture with their daughters. Parents received a synopsis of the fairy tale discussion from the women and culture unit, and parents learned that their daughters (and other's) had a lot to say about both about fairy tales, "damsel in distress" and notions like this, when viewed from a critical feminist perspective. The synopsis explained that the girls learned that females in the fairy tales are often thought helpless, requiring a male character to save them, but this is a façade; and that a feminist lens supports women being independent. Parents agreed with this assessment saying: "*Liked* this, and *appreciated it* [perspective that females need to be independent]" (A. Ford, March 28, 2012, p. 33), and

"I don't know how people handle their household, [but] this has always been my stance. I am married, but you have to make sure that in the event that anything happens, you have to be able to stand on your own feet. I coach her on that; I coach women, the troubles that affect us as African-American women…I have had this conversation with Jackie and how she views her world and her place in it" (O. Fox, March 28, 2012, pp. 33-34).

Curry also agreed, but added

"We talk about this. I love her [Cherie] personality, but I always say, that 'I have to groom her.' I tell her to pick her battles; she goes to the highest limit. She's very critical, she has a critical mind. I'm not quite like that. I've always had to push. Once she overcame judgment, she would judge others and then reflect on herself. You can't do that, because when you do you are paralyzed! *She is very independent*" (J. Curry, March 28, 2012, pp. 34-35)

Ford also added; "She [Lita] should be able to take care of herself; we talk about this all the time" (A. Ford, March 28, 2012, p. 36). Thus, parents not only agreed with the women and studies unit's content, but also provided support for it by enforcing its feminist principles, which led to parents' future plans for their gifted Black daughters.

"I see her doing something greater than medicine"—Future Plans for Gifted Daughters

Parents agreed that independence and self-sustainability are key elements in their gifted Black daughters' futures, and shared their future plans; further eliciting independent decision making. Curry exclaimed:

"Whatever she [Cherie] wants to do! She says she wants to be a physician, but I feel like she is selling herself short. She is extremely creative; I pray she will find something that allows her to express herself and energy. Medicine is - it robs you of anything else you

want to do, [the] responsibility is very high, patients are very unforgiving, you are held accountable for things that are not in your control. *Cherie is open-minded and opinionated!* She likes to debate, medicine is very hierarchical. *I see her doing something greater than medicine.* The stress is very heavy; if she wants to be a physician, fine, but she has so much more" (J. Curry, March 28, 2012, p. 1)

Curry is herself a physician, and it was clear that she understood not only her profession, but also her daughter, and she expressed for her daughter's future as a doctor. Fox's answer depicted an understanding of her daughter [Jackie] as well, "Last year it was architecture. She went to Columbia last summer. I think she enjoyed New York more! She lights up in Spanish, she loves it, and is great at it! We all find our way; I feel like, if we provide the foundation, they will be alright wherever they go" (O. Fox, March 28, 2012, p. 2).

Ultimately, parental support proved important in the lives of these gifted Black girls, and given their unique abilities, cultural history, and societal circumstances. These parents of gifted Black girls not only understood their daughter's uniqueness, but also the importance of their independence and security as Black females. Parents buffered certain untoward events in their daughters' educations, but continued to expect the best of them. Parental support and their familial views aided their gifted Black daughter's not only in their academic careers, but also in their lives. Many of these parents' follow feminist principles. These parents defied a rather large literature that casts all Black parents are unsupportive, and as lacking sound decision-making regarding their children's educations.

In the final chapter, I illuminate how these findings—about the teachers role in educating gifted Black girls; the gifted Black girl's sense of educational expectations and experiences; the

triple threat of being gifted, Black, and girls; and the myriad ways parents support their daughters—contribute to the literature framing this study.

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION OF MAJOR FINDINGS

Findings about teachers' roles in educating gifted Black girls; gifted Black girls sense of their educational expectations and experiences; the triple threat of being gifted, Black, and girls; and the myriad ways parents support their daughters contribute to the literature framing this study, not only corroborating earlier work but also contradicting it. And, importantly, this study adds to this research area by providing information that dispels common stereotypes about Black women and gifted Black girls. Two major theoretical positions (giftedness and Black Feminist theory) discussed in this research guided understanding: Where are all the gifted Black girls?

In what follows, I take up giftedness, girls' relationships with teachers and parents, the woman and culture unit, critical analysis of fairy tales, the girls' identity, and being labeled as gifted, then turn to the issues of transferability, a subsequent research agenda, prescriptive advice to parents and teachers, and final thoughts.

Giftedness Defined

Giftedness for instance—how it was defined, how gifted Black girls were identified, and how others perceived their giftedness—directly affected gifted Black girls and influenced how they saw themselves not only as gifted, but also as young Black women. Gifted programming teachers at GS1 had a somewhat systematic, yet undocumented, approach in identifying Black girls for inclusion into the gifted programming at GS1. In fact, the way these teachers understood and defined giftedness almost completely controlled which Black girls were included in the gifted programming at GS1. Although some overlap existed among the three teachers' definitions of giftedness; there were distinct differences, ranging from conservative notions of having an "…A or B in English and your writing skills must be high" (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p.20), to liberal interpretations of being "…willing to put the work in" (F. Mercury, March

1, 2012, p. 19). In addition to motivation, student behavior also became exclusion criteria for those remembered as "…sitting in class being a jerk? Or distracting?" (B. May, February 29, 2012, p. 8), regardless of the other inclusion criteria. Teachers' also stated a variety of student characteristics that were important to them for inclusion into the gifted programming: inquisitive, natural readers, students who readily soak-up information, and have a desire to be included into the gifted programming. Although all three teachers agreed that they were the first identifiers of the gifted, for all study participants the decisions regarding inclusion into the gifted programming were made by one teacher only (R. Taylor) and often without discussion or debate. Upon critical review of these varied inclusion criteria, coupled with this decision-making process at odds with the norms of identifying giftedness (Cross, 2004, pp. 19-20; McClellan, 1985), one might consider this process of identification and inclusion biased.

However, despite their differences, teachers at GS1 were supportive, demonstrated a clear understanding of these gifted Black girls and understood their culture, and were in cooperative and supportive relationships with these gifted Black girls. And, although all three teachers also admitted to sometimes feeling intimidated and challenged by gifted Black girls, they still respected their questioning (about grades, curriculum, class structure), and took away positive experiences from them. Also contradicting earlier reports (Marion, 1981), teachers reported unanimously that their involvement with parents was enjoyable, proactive, and supportive. Thus, teachers of gifted education at GS1 contradict scholars who report that teachers often carry prejudices and discrimination towards Black students (e.g., Grantham & Ford, 2003), due to misunderstandings regarding Black students and their culture (Perry, Steel, & Hilliard III, 2003, p. 70), or even due to gender bias towards Black girls in education (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Parents also agreed with teachers in defining their daughter's giftedness, including characteristics

like motivation, uniqueness, and being "different." Thus, parents and teachers both agreed that being gifted encompassed more than just intellect.

The girls added their perspective on giftedness, agreeing with teachers that good grades were essential for inclusion and that completing course assignments was mandatory. Girls reported favorable experiences in the gifted programming, and often relayed knowledge gained to others outside of the classroom, including their peers and family members. Finding that teachers, parents, and students were in a cohesive, well-understood collaboration sets a new precedent in the study of gifted Black girls; and as such, warrants further study.

<div align="center">Teacher, Parent, and Gifted Black Girls' Relationships</div>

Teachers unanimously reported that their experiences with parents of gifted Black girls were enjoyable, proactive, and supportive and went well beyond parent-teacher conferences. And, conversely, parents expressed the same support for the teachers, although offering a variety of perspectives; stating, for example, that "Ms. Taylor don't play" (A. Ford, March 28, 2012, p. 4) signaled that Taylor was a no-nonsense kind of teacher, who challenged their daughters intellectually in many aspects of the gifted programming they appreciated. And, girls corroborated their parents' feelings about their teachers and their relationships with them, stating that honesty and fairness were unique traits possessed by the gifted programming teachers (Jackie, February 6, 2012, p. 16; Cherie, February 9, 2012, p. 2). Students were expected to be mature and try their best. The relationships between teachers and parents, and teachers and students proved important to academic success, and this was especially true for these parents, since they reported having issues of a racist and discrimination nature with administration and teachers prior to their daughters' attendance at GS1. These prior teacher relationships unfortunately corroborate present literature regarding stereotype threat (Perry, 2003), and

cultural difference theories (Perry et al., 2003, p. 53). But, this seemed not to happen at GS1 for study participants. Teachers at GS1 not only understood the gifted Black girls' culture, but further strengthened their relationships with the girls and with their parents by presenting and enforcing clear expectations for the gifted programming. Meeting these criteria further solidified the girls' success in the gifted programming at GS1. Gifted teachers also reported how prior students from the gifted programming stayed in touch after their departure from GS1 (R. Taylor, February 29, 2012, p. 6). Teacher, parent, and gifted Black girls' relationships provided a supportive triad important to the success of gifted Black girls' at GS1, something rarely (if ever) reported in the literature when negative cases overwhelm reports (Perry, et al., 2003, p. 123; Grantham & Ford, 2003; Obi & Obiaker, 2001). However, it was the curriculum of the gifted programming at GS1 that ultimately contributed greatly not only to how girls saw themselves as gifted, but also how they understood reports as young Black women.

<div align="center">Curriculum, Women and Culture, and Black Feminist Theory</div>

Central to the girls' sense of self was a unit on women and culture in the curriculum of the English gifted programming. This curriculum contributed greatly to how girls' saw themselves not only as gifted, but also as Black women; and in many ways, provided a solid foundation for their educational endeavors. Although the unit on women and culture was not called Black feminist theory, girls' injected themselves into this unit material, and maintained an ownership of the material; further shaping their self-identity. The content of the Women and Culture unit in the gifted programming at GS1 included a variety of topics. Of importance here were the units on critical readings and scholarship about Chinese women (teaching about women's societal subordination and about stereotypes of women), the Jewish Holocaust, and a critical-feminist perspective on fairy tales. Girls' related to readings and scholarship on Chinese

women and the Holocaust because of the objectification of women in the former, and the prejudice and discrimination reminiscent of slavery in the latter. Pertinent to this discussion were the topics of the stereotypes of women, and the critical perspective on fairy tales, and because here girls learned to utilize what they called the "feminist lens." Girls' defined the feminist lens as a vehicle to view and analyze situations and society from a female [feminist] perspective. Through the feminist lens, girls' were able to relate to their surroundings and situations, and evolve their sense of self. For example, most of the girls stated that they were aware of stereotypes that are imposed on women; but after the unit was completed, they stated that this content had lasting effects on them. Many girls stated that they thought about things that they normally would not have considered, analyzed things through the feminist lens that were not apparent to them before the women and culture unit, and that now they were analyzing women's roles in everyday life regularly. And, even though the unit on women and culture did not call for the comparison of stereotypes between women of different races, girls did this and showed a depth of critical thinking and maturity in their discussions.

Although not a requirement of the unit on women and culture, girls told me about their thoughts regarding stereotypes of women across racial and cultural lines. Without prompting, girls provided clarity and exhibited a higher degree of maturity by not blaming other cultural groups or accepting these stereotypes as truth, but instead—by viewing these stereotypes from the feminist lens—they chose to analyze deeper, think clearer, and provide appropriate analysis of the explanation of the stereotype, in turn deflecting its intended meaning. For example, girls stated that "dumb blond" was automatically equated with white women, but added that technically, if you are not intelligent, it doesn't matter what race or ethnicity you are and that you could still be considered a dumb blond. "Soccer mom" was automatically equated with a white

female as well, but the reason for this according to the girls was because there were more whites playing soccer (in the U.S.) than Blacks. Girls also discussed stereotypes that they believed were directly related to Black women, such as "lady boss" because Black women are strong-willed and have been through so much oppression over the years. Other girls added that the lady boss is a leader regardless of race; she knows what she wants, and will work hard to succeed. Other stereotypes that girls equated to Black women were "angry Black woman" and "ghetto." Although girls stated that they believed that these stereotypes were false, they did not provide further explanation. Here, girls clearly understood these societal stereotypes had negative connotations. Girls also spoke about society's views of gifted education as it related to stereotypes of gifted education and as gifted Black girls stating that, if the focus was strictly on abilities, there would be no differences [between gifted white and Black girls], but that at times, society often thinks otherwise, and the "she" is more gifted and talented and that "she" is white. Other girls agreed with this assessment and added that they thought that the standards were higher for gifted Black girls because you never hear of gifted Black women, that it's not portrayed in the media. Thus, the girls' use of a feminist lens was critical, because it provided them with a tool for resilience to overcome barriers created by stereotypes, and it aided in their self-development as bright young Black women. It gave them ways to position and imagine themselves in relation to their unique cultural past, and their current and future cultural demands.

Other aids were apparent as girls specifically stated examples of how they felt the media brainwashed both women into both physical looks by highlighting "private parts over our brains" (in commercials and music videos, flash drives)—and acceptance via social expectations—what women did to be beautiful themselves and accepted into society (Chinese foot binding), the "ideal woman" (meek, quiet, passive), and economically (insulted by the "housewife" stereotype,

as if women are only good for cleaning), the value of education ("…useless because we worked in the house cleaning"). From this unit, girls' learned the importance of not fitting into these stereotypes, the need to learn to accept yourself as you are, and the relevance of confidence to self-acceptance and worth. Each of these three lessons proved important to gifted Black girls, because some aspects of their unique and cultural past continue to impact them, and these aspects that must be actively countered. Likewise, the critical analysis of fairy tales also had a direct impact on how girls' viewed their sense of themselves and others around them.

Critical Analysis of Fairy Tales

Critical analysis of fairy tales via the feminist lens also had a direct impact on how girls viewed themselves now and thought about their futures. Girls understood how princesses (considered "good") in fairy tales are viewed as helpless, quiet/meek, and "damsels in distress," a role that signified if you are beautiful, you will get a man. In fact, notions of the "ideal woman" were also found in the fairy tale analysis, as girls commented about the lyrics to one popular Disney soundtrack, The Little Mermaid; "…if you are quiet you will find the perfect man."

Other women in fairy tales—notably witches—hold some kind of power and are considered to be evil. Girls commented that the "bad women" in stories would be aggressive, ambitious, and that "if you think about it today, if someone sees an independent woman and [who] goes for what she wants, they say she's a 'B' [bitch]." The presumption that women having power equates with being evil, aggressive, even bad comes into direct conflict with why many women seek education: to become independent and self-sustaining. Also, a contradiction also spoke to perceptions about their social status, and many of the girls remarked on education being in conflict with being "good" and might affect their futures. For example, one participant stated that if she bears female children in the future, she will explain to them early on that

women can be strong and independent without a man, and that beauty should be judged from within. Other girls' commented that the female characters in fairy tales are often viewed as weak and the male characters as strong, and that the realization of the depiction of these gender roles had been "shocking." That they had never previously thought of fairy tales in this way. Girls also expressed clear disdain for the labeling of females as "damsels in distress," because it insinuated a life of dependence on others, and an almost certain marginalization, because without independence they would not be free to make their own decisions. The girls found these stereotypes of ideal women (quiet, meek, subordinate) and bad women (motivation, ambitious, aggressive) problematic and such analysis led to their taking actions that ensured they transcend these stereotypes. For example, some girls stated that they verbally let others know that certain behaviors or inappropriate language towards them would not be tolerated ("I check-em," "I let them know," "I would say that is so wrong," "It should be 'I feel pretty because I'm me'"). Girls not only applied the knowledge that they gained to their everyday life, but they also acted on it. And, in this regard, utilizing a feminist lens taught girls that status-quo societal expectations are not a determining factor for success. Here girls' feelings and knowledge parallel Collins' (1990) work that depicts the importance of rejecting stereotypical images of Black women inside and outside of the Black community. Another example of acting on their knowledge was a common theme of "representing" themselves as gifted Black girls.

<center>Gifted Black Girls "Representing"</center>

Girls told me that it was important to them to "represent" their race and that they felt good about being able to represent Black females. This was especially important because even though they did not attend the major urban district (MUD) schools where they resided, they still felt its effects lingering, especially discrimination and social stigma. Here, the girls continued to

feel that others might miscast them as like the stereotypical disinterested students in the urban district. Girls' spoke about how others stated that in MUD, Black students don't want to learn, the drop-out rate is high, and that sometimes it is not expected that Black students from Styx (where MUD is located) will do well in accelerated (gifted) programming. Girls also stated that just because they live in Styx does not mean that they "have to talk a certain way or act a certain way." Environmental factors (where gifted children reside) do influence gifted children's life chances (Cross, 2004, pp. 19-20). Involvement in gifted programming changed these perceptions and girls told others that they were indeed in gifted programming, were honors students, and where they were from (Styx). In stark contrast then to Fordham's (1993) findings, these gifted Black girls were neither silent ("phantoms of the opera") nor voiceless, and perhaps more importantly; were not forced to pass for people they were not, white American youth (Fordham, 1993, pp. 22-23). Instead, the feminist curriculum and the feminist lens provided in the gifted programming at GS1 provided outlets for girls' voices. Unlike Fordham's gifted Black girls (Fordham, 1993, pp. 22-23), they were not forced to conceal their female gender or voice because they were Black. And, unlike Fordham's study, these gifted Black girls were supported by their teachers and family. In fact, parents interviewed not only understood their gifted daughters' uniqueness, but also the importance of their independence and security as young Black women. Parents unanimously agreed that the feminist content and theory that was introduced to their daughters was beneficial, a fact clearly conveyed when parents spoke about their parenting philosophies with respect to their gifted Black daughters. In fact, these paralleled feminist perspectives by way of education and independence. As Black women themselves, sharing their experiences with their gifted daughters proved important both in a mentoring capacity, and in preparation for societal, political, and economic situations that might arise in the

future for their daughters. This study, then, provides a strong rebuttal to earlier research where parents lacked the resources or experiences to be advocates for their daughters as "gifted" girls. Thus, contra documenting current literature that Black parental support in education, especially in gifted educations, was inadequate or nonexistent, this study's findings suggest how improving the educational and social class circumstances of parents contribute to deeper educational support for daughters. Despite teacher and parental support, and similar to Fordham's work, these girls danced around being labeled "gifted."

Labeled as Gifted

All girls refused to acknowledge themselves as intellectually superior, the usual sense of being gifted. At GS1 where "gifted" had shifting definitions, girls seemed uncomfortable with conceptions termed highly intelligent, accelerated, and/or advanced. Thus, though not thinking of themselves as "gifted," most girls spoke eloquently about the gifted English programming, adding that they felt it was a privilege to be included in these classes, that good grades were expected to remain in the gifted programming, that trying their best was important, and that the gifted English programming was challenging. Expectations for the gifted programming included a higher level of maturity (…"she really treats us like we are college students") and a higher degree of independence ("…there are no handouts in AP or in the real world"). Thus, in the GS1 context, "gifted" meant meeting these expectations, *not* any particular innate capabilities. Although girls did not agree with some of the required elements (group work, workload of the classes) of the gifted programming courses, content taught provided outlets where the girls could listen, learn, and debate in an educational atmosphere conducive to learning. Girls also agreed that they were comfortable in the class, and that they felt that the course contributed to their academic success.

Thus, although some of the girls did acknowledge their gifts (i.e. good writer, good reader), none of the girls acknowledged themselves as gifted. In fact, some girls stated that the gifted programming classes were like other classes with the only difference being more work and different content. Ultimately, in expressing the educational expectations placed on them as well as their own, along with the knowledge gained from the women and culture unit, the girls understood themselves as something other than giftedness, because they and others (teachers) set their academic standards high, and this was in turn not viewed as something special or unique, but rather as a stepping stone to the next part of their academic careers, college entrance and secondary education. These findings suggest how Black girls recast the definition of giftedness for Black females. The girls' "giftedness" encompassed hard work that leads to successful outcomes, motivation (also picked up by the GS1 teachers), and for many girls a humble reality that "[being labeled as gifted] should not have to be a big thing for something that you should already be doing" (Lita, February 28, 2012, p.13). This new definition also encompassed considerably more individual power—to decide to enter the courses, to decide to work hard, to decide to act in their own best interest—than an "innate ability" definition. And, although no empirical research that mentions giftedness and Black Feminist Theory exists, it is clear that the meshing of these two disciplines proved beneficial for understanding how these Black girls constructed a definition for "gifted" that proved consistent with Black feminist thought, one that transcended stereotypes about Black women in play in U. S. society, but did not threaten a girl's membership in the Black community (as had been the case for Fordham's gifted girls). Where then, are all the gifted Black girls?

WHERE ARE ALL THE GIFTED BLACK GIRLS? Literature hasn't looked at it, programs are hard to find, and when you find one and talk to the girls, they don't use the term "gifted" to refer to themselves. Gifted Black girls are there; albeit hiding in plain site!

Ultimately, the findings of the present study contribute in central ways to expanding what we know about he lives of gifted, Black girls in high schools. As I explain below, however, there are limits in the extent of transferability.

<div align="center">Extent of Transferability</div>

Transferability refers to the extent of which results of qualitative research might be transferred to other contexts and settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290), and if results are found credible. Credibility here was primarily underpinned by multiple interviews with multiple participants, and made evident in the "audit trail" where the source of quotes to the data were indicated (allowing readers to see different girls speak about a particular finding). Thus the audit trail is assured and the complete set of data analysis documents are on file and an audit check was conducted by the Committee Chair. Inquiry and access to this "paper trail" allowed her to gauge the systematicity of research practices and to understand the research site, and to make judgments about the triangulation of findings. However, though credible, the findings of this study can only be transferred to sites and participants similar to that of the site and participants where it was conducted. transfer of the conclusions of this research study to other similar research studies. In this study, there were two primary limitations: the socio-economic status of the parents interviewed and the type of school the girls attended.

The higher socio-economic status of parents in this research study limits the transfer of findings to similar parents. All parents interviewed were educated, professional women. Commonly, educated parents want their children educated, so the expectation to excel

academically is almost always present. This became apparent when all three parents interviewed divulged that they indeed live in Styx, but purposely chose to educate their daughters outside of MUD. Due to their socio-economic status, these parents were able to take advantage of educational opportunities that might have been foreclosed to other girls, and being at GS1 led to the identification for inclusion into the gifted programming. However, parents of these gifted Black girls encouraged independent thinking and strategy in making decisions regarding their daughter's academic choices at GS1, which became apparent in parents' lack of information regarding their daughters' placement, and permission for inclusion in, the gifted programming at GS1. All three parents interviewed wanted their daughters to find something that would provide them with independence and sustainability, but one parent expressed her concern for her daughter's career choice, because as a physician herself she understood the limitations of medicine (hierarchy, stress, and unforgiving patients). Some aspects and comparison of Fordham's (1993) research and findings of high-achieving Black girls may also present potential limitations to this study.

Also, the girls attended a charter school serving an almost entirely African American student body, where parents are known to be more supportive of education, and where entrenched district-wide dilemmas may not exist and the learning climate is often described as more stable and less prone to violence. GS1 is located in an urban area, but not in the inner city. GS1 is also considered to be a charter school, publicly funded but not a "neighborhood-serving" public school. Thus, most GS1 students must provide their own transportation, as much of the student body does not live in the same location as GS1. This requires a certain level of economic standing that may be beyond the reach of many families in the inner city. Thus, GS1 is not representative of inner-city schools in the large district. Also, the student body at GS1 is

overwhelmingly African American. Thus, opportunities for cross-cultural tensions to form, so common to multiethnic schools like Fordham's Capitol High, are diminished. Thus, the results from this study appear to hold potential for transferability to urban, predominantly African American, charter schools serving a student body whose families have the socio-economic resources to provide transportation for their children. However, the ultimate decision about transferability must be made by readers based on a clear understanding of the circumstances of a particular school of interest.

Forward, findings from this research indicate a subsequent research agenda.

Subsequent Research Agenda

Findings from this research suggest at least three new routes for researching gifted Black girls: longitudinal studies, peer relationships, and further research involving a feminist curricula. Longitudinal studies of gifted Black girls and women, for example, could provide a deeper understanding of the importance not only of education, but also of other social avenues such as mentoring for becoming educated Black women. Participant-graduates of GS1 (gifted Black girls), who become parents of daughters, could be studied to ascertain to what extent knowledge (especially regarding gender roles and critical feminist critique of fairy tales, for examples) continued to prove salient in their lives and those of their daughters.

Studying peer relationships between gifted and non-gifted students might also suggest new areas of research. Though considerable research regarding emotional lives of gifted students exists, little is known about their peer relationships and how these relationships affect their educational decisions. Studying how students move between accelerated and other courses and how they relate to students would provide new understandings, especially for gifted Black children and girls.

Finally, further research on feminist curricula and its impacts on all Black girls might prove worthwhile. This part of the participants' education was completely unanticipated in the research plan. Yet, it had an enormous impact on the girls, how they thought about themselves, how they "read" the world, and how they made decisions about their own actions, behaviors, relationships, and education. Organizing a study to introduce the Unit to a larger and more (socioeconomically) diverse group of girls would allow better understanding the strengths of the curriculum and its impact.

Lastly, I offer some prescriptive advice to teachers and parents of gifted Black girls.

Prescriptive Advice to Teachers and Parents

Teachers and parents interviewed for this study were very supportive of their gifted Black girl students, because they understood them as young Black women, understood their culture, and their expectations for academic success were clear, concise, and thoroughgoing. Teachers and parents need to work together to ensure progress and this is likely true for other gifted programs. One way to do this is clear communication. It is not enough to state that gifted Black girls are responsible and trustworthy, simply because they are highly independent and have a higher maturity level (as with girls in this study). Continued conversation and communication are key. And, as parents in this study noted, the lack of both provided sources for discriminating events that occurred both before and during the girls' tenure at GS1, which further shaped the way these gifted Black girls saw themselves and the world around them. Misunderstandings often lead to conflict, suggesting that inquiry and clear communication may reduce conflict and prevent its spread. Teachers of gifted programming and those interviewed at GS1 understood the importance of communication; and in return, provided a comfortable and conducive place for gifted Black girls to learn and grow academically. Lastly, teacher education should include

intense cultural awareness and diversity training. Teachers (like those in this study) who constantly reflect and revise have a deep and abiding respect for diversity. Teachers at GS1 were successful because they taught in a school where improving teaching and serving their students was highly valued.

Final Thoughts

The importance of qualitative research methodology cannot be undermined in this research study, because it allowed gifted Black girls to have a voice *and* be heard. Utilizing qualitative methodology in the search for understanding gifted Black girls, and utilizing Black Feminist Thought (Theory) aided understanding how these gifted Black girls viewed themselves and how they lived their everyday lives. And, although no empirical research that mentions giftedness and Black Feminist Theory exists, it is clear that the meshing of these two disciplines is beneficial. Utilizing a feminist lens to observe, evaluate, and critique girls' surroundings not only provided a valuable educational experience; but also aided in the future development not only of their academic futures, but also in their world and how they perceive it.

But, finding where the gifted Black girls were—a research site—proved very difficult. In Styx, for example, there were schools that did have gifted programming, but their political and economic plight precluded their considering the research project. After several attempts to replace the original site, where administrative changes derailed my access, GS1 came to my attention. There, I found hard-working, knowledgeable, dedicated teachers—the sort that exist in so many schools and who receive so little appreciation in today's educational climate. But, more importantly, I met and came to know extraordinary gifted, Black, girls, and they gave generously of their ideas, time, and energy.

Returning full circle to my reasons for this study, these girls, their parents, teachers, and school restored my hopes for the futures of gifted, Black girls—especially the three I am raising, just as what I found here made evident why I have concerns with Michigan state policies that neither require gifted programming, nor make it easy to fund such programming (in an economically retrenching state). And, when I realized the impact that the woman and culture unit was having on the lives of these young Black women, I wondered why so few received such important educational experiences when the potential of empowering Black women is so great. Overall, this project has solidified my resolve to continue to advocate for gifted programming, for recognizing this needs in multiethnic circumstances, and for the importance of educational learning opportunities like the Women and Culture unit in systematically empowering all students.

APPENDIX A

WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

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NOTICE OF EXPEDITED APPROVAL

To: Mary Montie
Anesthesiology
DRH/UHC, Annex 2T

From: Dr. Scott Millis
Chairperson, Behavioral Institutional Review Board (B3)

Date: December 01, 2011

RE: IRB #: 115511B3E

Protocol Title: Where Are All The Gifted Black Girls? Giving High School Girls Voice Via Qualitative Research Approach and Black Feminist Theory

Funding Source:

Protocol #: 1111010336

Expiration Date: November 30, 2012

Risk Level / Category: 45 CFR 46.404 - Research not involving greater than minimal risk/Research not involving greater than minimal risk

The above-referenced protocol and items listed below (if applicable) were APPROVED following Expedited Review Category (#6)* by the Chairperson/designee for the Wayne State University Institutional Review Board (B3) for the period of 12/01/2011 through 11/30/2012. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals that may be required.

- Revised Protocol Summary Form (received in the IRB Office 11/30/2011)
- Protocol (received in the IRB Office 11/10/2011)
- The request for a waiver of the requirement for written documentation of informed consent for parents and teachers has been granted according to 45 CFR 46.117(f)(2). Justification for this request has been provided by the PI in the Protocol Summary Form. The waiver satisfies the following criteria: (i) The only record linking the participant and the research would be the consent document, (ii) the principal risk would be potential harm resulting from a breach of confidentiality, (iii) each participant will be asked whether he or she wants documentation linking the participant with the research, and the participant's wishes will govern, (iv) the consent process is appropriate, (v) when used requested by the participants consent documentation will be appropriate, (vi) the research is not subject to FDA regulations, and (vii) an information sheet disclosing the required and appropriate additional elements of consent disclosure will be provided to participants not requesting documentation of consent.
- Research Information Sheet for Teachers (dated 11/30/2011)
- School Parental Permission/Research Informed Consent/Information Sheet (dated 10/17/2011)
- Behavioral Documentation of Adolescent Assent Form for ages 13-17 (dated 10/17/2011)
- Data collection tools: Student Interview I, Teachers Interview, Parent Focus Group Questions, and Student Interview II.
- Receipt of letter of support from Ferndale Public Schools University High School (dated 10/19/2011)

* Federal regulations require that all research be reviewed at least annually. You may receive a "Continuation Renewal Reminder" approximately two months prior to the expiration date; however, it is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date. Data collected during a period of lapsed approval is unapproved research and can never be reported or published as research data.

* All changes or amendments to the above referenced protocol require review and approval by the IRB BEFORE implementation.

APPENDIX B

Title: *Where are all the Gifted Black Girls?*   Mary L. Montie

Interview Protocol: Teachers (Individual)

Introduction to the interview: "Hello, my name is Mary Montie. I am a graduate student at Wayne State University. Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research. I am going to ask you a few questions about your accelerated classes here at school. I am very interested in what you have to say. I also want you to know that although I am recording this interview, and I will be taking notes during this interview, that you will not be identified in the results of this research with your name (I will give you another name to protect confidentiality). Any and all answers to the questions that I ask will also be kept confidential, are you comfortable with this? Is this okay with you? Let's get started."

Research Question(s)	Interview Questions
How were these girls Identified as showing promise academically, and to what extent were IC tests, creativity, and leadership (or other things) used to ascertain giftedness?	*Tell me about why you became a teacher…How does teaching make you feel?* (Probes: Defines career goals, sets the introductory atmosphere…)
	What are your majors and minors (subjects/interests) in your teaching career?
	What do you currently teach? *Are you personally interested in gifted education? How so? Can you describe this for me.*
	Tell me what it is like to teach here…Are there advantages? How long have you been teaching at this school? (Probes: Defines participants (teachers) thoughts on the charter school, its practices, its policies, provides a history of teaching experience…)
	What are the courses that you teach? Are these accelerated courses? What are the differences between the accelerated and non-accelerated courses? (Probes: Establishes participant knowledge regarding the course content, may provide differences in teaching methods, differences and opinions in students in each course…)
	Do you have any formal education or training in accelerated education? (Probes: Is this training at a school (professional development)? College (professional instruction)? Was this elective? In other words, did they solicit the knowledge? Experience? Qualifications?)
	Can you tell me about how you define the word "gifted"? *How do you recommend Black girls for the accelerated classes(es)?*

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ABSTRACT

WHERE ARE ALL THE GIFTED BLACK GIRLS?
GIVING HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS VOICE VIA QUALITATIVE RESEARCH
APPROACH AND BLACK FEMINIST THEORY

by

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Gifted programs in the United States under-represent African American (Black) children (Phi Delta Kappan, 1992). In 1993, African-American students were under-represented by 50% in gifted education, and 60% in 1998 (Grantham & Ford, 2003). Further, some speculate that gifted education programs are the most segregated educational programs in the nation (Ford, 1995). This proves especially true for Black gifted girl in urban educational arenas, where gifted Black girls are rarely recognized. The purpose of this research was to examine the circumstances surrounding how urban black girls—identified as showing academic promise—come either to be overlooked as qualified for gifted education or seem not to take up a sense of themselves as gifted, that is they see themselves as not fitting among those who are in gifted education. Three scholarly arenas frame this study: Feminist thought and theory, with an emphasis on Black feminist thought, notions of "giftedness" and gifted education, and policies and processes for identification of gifted Black girls. Eight gifted Black girls were individually interviewed twice, three teachers were individually interviewed, and three parents were interviewed in a focus group session. Four interview guides were constructed to focus on students' perspectives of GS1

(pseudonym) and gifted education, parent strategies, and teachers' roles in the identification of these gifted Black girls. Qualitative analysis strategies (Spradley1980) were utilized for data analysis. The curriculum of the gifted programming at GS1 (pseudonym) ultimately contributed greatly not only to how girls saw themselves as gifted, but also how they understood stereotypes about young Black women. The feminist curriculum and the "feminist lens" provided in the gifted programming at GS1 provided outlets for girls' voices. Teachers interviewed not only understood the gifted Black girls' culture, but also strengthened their relationships with the girls and with their parents by presenting and enforcing clear expectations for the gifted programming. Parents interviewed not only understood their gifted daughters' uniqueness, but also the importance of their independence and security as young Black women.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Mary L. Montie was born in Detroit, Michigan. She has three daughters and currently resides in Michigan. She has earned the following degrees: Associate Degree in Liberal Arts, Bachelor Degree in Criminal Justice (with a Minor in Legal Studies), Master's Degree in Interdisciplinary Studies, Master's Degree in Urban Planning, and now a Doctorate of Philosophy. She has accomplished much, and plans to accomplish more.