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## Secondary School Teacher Perceptions and Role in the Underrepresentation of African American Students in Gifted Education

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# Secondary School Teacher Perceptions and Role in the Underrepresentation of African American Students in Gifted Education

Summer M. White

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Doctor of Education Program

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Secondary School Teacher Perceptions and Role in the Underrepresentation of African American  
Students in Gifted Education

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Concordia University – Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in

Transformational Leadership

Audrey E. Rabas, Ph.D., Faculty Dissertation Committee

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2018

## **Abstract**

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the phenomenon of the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs. The purpose of this study was two-fold. First, the purpose was to explore the perspectives secondary school teachers have towards African American students regarding how secondary middle school teachers identify and refer African American students for enrollment in gifted education programs. Second, the purpose of this study was to understand how secondary middle school teacher perceptions of the identification and referral of African American students influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs. The theoretical framework that guided the conceptual framework was transformational leadership (Shields, 2011) along with collective efficacy and deficit thinking (Bieneman, 2011). A phenomenological design was utilized with a purposeful sample of six secondary school teachers. The research questions were designed so participants could articulate their perspectives on what factors influence the underrepresentation of African Americans in gifted education. Data was collected through in-depth interviews. A phenomenological analysis as well as coding were utilized to analyze the data. The study's findings revealed that teacher perceptions influenced African American student representation in gifted education programs because teachers let outside factors such as personal bias, cultural influence, and more cloud their ability to recognize giftedness in students of color. Recommendations for educational stakeholders is to (a) assess and improve the practices of policies of GATE programs, and (b) provide ongoing professional development for teachers to recognize the abilities of gifted minority students.

*Keywords:* underrepresentation, teacher perceptions, African American

## **Dedication**

First, I would like to thank God for allowing me to be able to embark upon this journey and giving me the knowledge and strength to complete this dissertation. I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Zachary White for the patience, support, and encouragement he gave throughout the course of my endeavor. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Robert and Delaise Towns, my sisters, LaTarsua Young and Tiffney Towns, and my niece, Genesis Young for believing in me and encouraging me to stay the course to complete this doctoral program.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Introduction to the Problem**

The disparities in equitable student representation in gifted education programs in public education, despite the racial demographics among the student population in the United States (U.S.) is becoming more diverse and growing (Peters & Gentry, 2012). There are approximately 3,189,757 students in gifted and talented education (GATE) programs in the U.S. (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2011–2012). Of those students in GATE programs, 60.8% are White, 8.8% are African American, 9.5% are Asian, 16.9% are Hispanic, 0.3% are Islander or other, and 2.8% are two races or more (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2011–2012). These statistics show a substantial difference among the subgroups of the total student population whereby most of the gifted student population in the U.S. is composed of White students. As such, this may foster a narrative in society in which people may perceive that ethnic minority students are not as qualified for GATE programs as compared to White students.

A factor attributed to the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education is teacher referral or nomination, which is the process whereby teachers give their input as related to the identification and referral of students to gifted education programs (Carman, 2011). Although there is limited research on how teacher perceptions impact the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs, some research has shown that teacher perceptions hinder minority students from being recognized as gifted (Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005; Ford & Grantham, 2003) which is evident in the reported disparities among the ethnic groups in GATE programs. The U.S. student population is becoming more diverse (Ford, 2012; Peters & Gentry, 2012) and it is important to add more

perspectives on the phenomenon of underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education programs as all students should have equitable access to educational opportunities. As such, this study sought to explore teacher perceptions regarding the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs in public education because such disparities in student representation can cause negative outcomes for underrepresented students such as low grades and decreased job opportunities (Milner & Ford, 2007; Levine, 2005; McKown & Weinstein, 2008). This chapter includes a background and statement of the problem, the purpose of the research, research questions, rationale and importance of the study, a definition of terms, the assumptions, delimitations, and limitations of the study, as well as a summary.

### **Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem**

In the United States (U.S.) public education, the lack of equal representation for minority students, specifically African American students, in gifted education programs has been a concerning topic that has prompted much discussion (Peters & Gentry, 2012). Even more so, gifted is a term that has been challenging to define in the field of gifted education partly due to the lack of a universal definition (Jordan, Bain, McCallum, & Bell, 2012). All students do not have equitable access to gifted education. For years, it has been documented that certain racial and ethnic groups of students have been underrepresented in gifted programs (Ford, 2011; Yoon & Gentry, 2009). Research has indicated that giftedness occurs across all racial and ethnic backgrounds yet identifying minority students such as African Americans and Hispanics for participation in gifted education programs occurs at a significantly lower rate than for students of White and Asian descent (Stein, Hetzel, & Beck, 2011).

The U.S. is a growing nation filled with diversity, and the disproportionality of minority students is apparent as minority students, specifically African American students, are



significantly underrepresented in gifted education programs (Siegle et al., 2016). As noted in the literature, a contributing factor to the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education programs is teacher perceptions about teacher referral or nomination (Carman, 2011). Often, teacher referral is the first step in the identification and referral of students to gifted education programs (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Research has shown that teachers' stereotypical views and biases may contribute to the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education (Carman, 2011; McBee, 2006). Even more so, research has shown that a cultural barrier, a lack of cultural fluidity between students and teachers of different races and ethnicities, may affect teachers' stereotypical views and biases that influence how teachers refer culturally and linguistically different students for gifted services (Mattai, Wagle, & Williams, 2010).

A cultural barrier among teachers and students of different races and ethnicities can be traced back to the beginning of segregation in schools, due to discriminatory practices supported by slavery and Jim Crow laws. *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) was a federal court case in which the outcome stated that all students should have equitable access to educational opportunities. Much of the U.S. teacher population is predominantly White (Kena et al., 2015) and a cultural barrier may still exist as some of those teachers may hold stereotypical views and biases of certain racial and ethnic student groups. Research indicated minority students may experience difficulties in school because teachers are unable to recognize and understand the cultural and behavioral differences that occur in different racial and ethnic groups (Maydosz, 2014). Cultural and behavioral differences between teachers and students can lead to teachers misjudging the academic potential of minority students (Maydosz, 2014) which is evident because African American students are the leading group of students in the U.S. who are

underrepresented in gifted education programs (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008).

According to Ford and Whiting (2016) and Peters and Gentry (2012) teachers are influential in identifying the ability of gifted students and making decisions in gifted education in the best interests of students. However, if teachers cannot readily identify gifted students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds then inevitably certain racial and ethnic groups of students will be overlooked. A review of the literature has shown that teachers' negative attitudes can hinder the identification and referral of minority students, specifically African American students, for gifted services (Carman, 2011; Ford, Scott, Moore, & Amos, 2013). Furthermore, research has shown that when there is a cultural barrier and teachers lack multicultural training, African American students have reduced access to gifted services (Ford & Whiting, 2016).

From the reported data from the U.S. Department of Education there is a significant difference in student representation in gifted education because approximately 61% of the total student population are White students and approximately 9% are African American students (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2011-2012). Yet, legislation such as *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) require that all students have equal access to educational opportunities. Hence, this phenomenon was worth studying from a transformative perspective to examine how teacher perceptions play a role in the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs.

The world of education is constantly evolving and as such the conceptual framework for this study was grounded in transformative leadership which emphasizes the significance of academic achievement and social transformation (Shields, 2011). To address the issue of the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education a transformative approach may be

appropriate. A transformative approach may be useful in helping school leaders focus on assessing the operation and practices of their gifted education programs so that it may be inclusive of all students and all students are equitably represented.

In addition to transformative leadership, collective efficacy (Bieneman, 2011) and deficit thinking (Bieneman, 2011) may aid in alleviating the inequity in student representation in gifted education programs. Collective efficacy refers to a social group collaborating to achieve a goal (Bieneman, 2011). Deficit thinking is a paradigm that contributes student failure to a student's lack of intellect or intrinsic motivation (Bieneman, 2011). Therefore, if educational stakeholders work together and receive training on how to identify the abilities of potentially minority gifted students it could impact how teachers perceive minority students consequently reducing deficit thinking among teachers. According to Bieneman (2011), deficit thinking is important to deconstruct because it thwarts student achievement.

There have been limited studies conducted on teacher perceptions of minority students and to what effect teacher perceptions influence teacher referral of minority students in gifted education (Ford & Whiting, 2016; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Harradine, Coleman, & Winn, 2014). The aim of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand how teacher perceptions influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education using a conceptual framework of transformative leadership combined with collective efficacy and deficit thinking to bring awareness to the problem in hopes of creating a solution that would result in all student groups being equitably represented in gifted education programs in U.S. public education. This phenomenon is important to study so all students will have equal educational opportunities to develop their skills and gifts to one day effectively contribute to society.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The underrepresentation of minority students, specifically African American students, in gifted education programs is a well-documented issue (Bonner, 2003; Milner & Ford, 2007; Peters & Engerrand, 2016). Legislation such as No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) sought to enhance the academic success levels of all students (Public Law 107–110, 2002), thus there is a need to improve practices in gifted education that support equity and diversity among all students of different ethnic and racial backgrounds. The results of underrepresentation of gifted minority students are evident in the world. From a social perspective, Johnson and Kritsonis (2007) claimed that the consistent inequitable representation of ethnic minority gifted students in the U.S. could be interpreted as a squandering of skill and talent. Another effect of gifted minority student underrepresentation is inequity in the workforce; for example, there is a shortage of African Americans in the field of mathematics and science (Johnson, & Kritsonis, 2007). Thus, the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education has implications that effect society and stifles the potential and opportunities of gifted minority students.

The inequitable classification and assignment of minority students in gifted education, specifically African American students, is contributed to many factors whereby one factor is teacher perceptions. The literature found that teacher perceptions are a persuasive factor in gifted education because it can impact significant decisions regarding students in gifted education programs (Ford & Whiting, 2016). However, in the existing literature there is minimal information about how teachers perceive African American students and how teacher perceptions affect the identification and referral of African American students to gifted education programs. Thus, this study sought to provide insight into what perspectives secondary middle school teachers have of African American students regarding how teachers identify and refer

African American students for enrollment in gifted education programs. Additionally, this study sought to provide insight as to how the perspectives of secondary middle school teachers concerning the identification and referral of African American students for gifted services influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The overall intent of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand how teacher perceptions influence the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education programs. A review of the literature indicated that there is minimal research (Grissom & Redding, 2016; Harradine et al., 2014; Siegle, 2001) that exists on how teacher perceptions of African American students influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education. Thus, the specific purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to garner what perspectives secondary school teachers have towards African American students regarding how secondary middle school teachers identify and refer African American students for enrollment in gifted education programs. Additionally, another purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to gain insight into how secondary middle school teacher perceptions of the identification and referral of African American students influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs.

Thus, this research may contribute to society by providing data on how teacher perceptions influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs which may probe educational stakeholders to examine the operation of their identification practices in regard to teacher input which could lead to improved identification practices of students for gifted services (Peters & Gentry, 2012). As such, improved identification practices could cause an increase in the identification of gifted minority students

and an increase in the equity of student representation in gifted education programs (Peters & Gentry, 2012) allowing students to have access to programs that can develop their potential and skills thus giving students an opportunity to be successful in future endeavors. Additionally, the results of this study could be used to provide effective teacher training on how to recognize potentially gifted minority students, make changes in identification practices, and offer recommendations for future research.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences and perceptions of secondary middle school classroom teachers to understand factors that may influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs. This research was grounded on the conceptual framework of transformative leadership (Shields, 2011) along with collective efficacy (Bieneman, 2011) and deficit thinking (Bieneman, 2011) whereby the three frameworks allow for stakeholders to work together to shift thinking and practices to induce progressive systemic changes in the U.S. public education system (Bieneman, 2011; Shields, 2011). The conceptual framework was used a guide to formulate research questions whereby the research participants could articulate their perspectives on what factors influence the underrepresentation of African Americans in gifted education. The main research question guided the study was: How do teacher perceptions influence minority student representation in secondary gifted education programs, with a specific focus on African American students? To address this question, the following subquestions were included:

Subquestion 1: How are African American students identified and referred for enrollment in gifted education programs, according to secondary school teachers?

Subquestion 2: How do secondary school teacher perceptions of identifying and referring African American students to GATE programs influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education?

### **Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study**

As society evolves, the student demographic in U.S. schools is changing and becoming more diverse (Peters & Gentry, 2012). As such, to successfully deal with diverse students, teachers should be adequately trained and prepared to meet the needs of students from various racial and ethnic backgrounds (Haley, 2000). This study was used to explore the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs through a qualitative phenomenological study that explored teacher perceptions of African American students and what impact teacher perceptions of African American students had on the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education.

This study was significant because there is an ongoing issue of the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education (Grissom & Redding, 2016; Peters & Gentry, 2012; Peters & Engerrand, 2016). Thus, if the issue of the underrepresentation of minority students is addressed it could cause the identification rate of minority students from different racial and ethnic groups to increase. Furthermore, Haley (2000) claimed many teachers do not share the cultural or linguistic backgrounds of the students they teach which hinders the ability of teachers to recognize the academic abilities of diverse students. Thus, recognizing the fact that approximately 85% of the teacher population is White (Kena et al., 2015), it may prove effective for teachers to receive multicultural education training on meeting and nurturing the needs of diverse students.

Overall, the results of this study produced data that could aid in understanding how African American students are perceived by teachers as an element in the identification and referral of gifted students. Additionally, the results of this study could aid in understanding how teacher perceptions of African American students influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs. Results could be used to raise awareness among educational stakeholders such as administrators and teachers on the identification practices in the gifted assignment process of ethnic minority students, which could stimulate reform in the gifted assignment process. Even more so, the results of the study could stimulate future research into this phenomenon.

### **Definition of Terms**

*African American:* This term is defined as one is who is of American and African heritage.

*Minority:* This term is defined as overlooked groups such as African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans.

*Underrepresentation:* This term is defined as a disproportional representation of a group of individuals. The term refers to the fact that minority students are inequitably represented in gifted and talented populations in the United States.

*Gifted and Talented Education Programs:* This term is defined as a program in education that caters to gifted and talented students. It is a federal program, but it is not mandated, and states have the right to fund it or not.

*Cultural Barrier:* This term is defined as a divide caused by an absence of cultural synchronization between teachers and students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds.



## **Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations**

**Assumptions.** According to Creswell (2005) an objective of qualitative research is to understand how individuals perceive phenomena, thus depending on the viewpoints of individuals through investigation and data collection. There were three assumptions associated with this study. The suggested number of participants for a phenomenological study is 6-10 participants (Creswell, 1998; Morse, 2000), therefore because of the small sample size the first assumption was that the selected school would yield the desired amount of research participants needed to achieve the ideal sample size for a qualitative phenomenological study. Second, after reading the confidentiality form to participants I assumed that participants would give honest, detailed, and candid answers to all interview questions because according to Blackstone (2012) potential participants should be given informed consent and researchers should explain how confidentiality will be maintained so participants feel comfortable to share information. Third, I assumed the amount of time allotted for the interviews was adequate to address all interview questions.

**Limitations.** Research naturally has limitations. This qualitative phenomenological study had two potential limitations. First, there was potential research bias because I am an African American teacher who has taught gifted and talented students and the focus of the study was on the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs. To reduce this potential bias, I implemented bracketing which is the removal of bias by the researcher regarding the studied phenomenon (Giorgi, 2009). Employing bracketing fosters objectivity during data analysis in the study (Giorgi, 2009). Second, the results of the study may not be applicable to a larger population as the study took place in one school in Texas. As such, I

ensured data saturation was reached by conducting enough interviews that yielded rich data (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

**Delimitations.** Three delimitations were associated with this study. First, the study was delimited to one school; thus, the findings for the study may be different if more than one school was used. However, the results were expected to be valid because the location was comprised of a majority African American student population (40.3%) (Texas Academic Report, n.d.), which was appropriate because it was representative of the desired student population for the study. Second, purposive sampling was used in which the target population was secondary middle school teachers. As such, the results of the study may yield different findings when used with a different population of teachers such as elementary school teachers as their lived experiences regarding how teacher perceptions of African American students influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education may be different. Third, the study was delimited to educators who were currently teaching whereby if retired teachers were included they may have different perspectives which could impact the findings of this study. Yet, despite the second and third limitations, the expected results were expected to be valid because purposive sampling was used, which allowed for maximum variation of the sampling population (Higginbottom, 2004).

## **Summary**

It has been well documented that certain racial and ethnic groups of students have inequitable access to gifted education programs (Ford & Whiting, 2016; Harradine et al., 2014). Research indicated that minority students are less likely to be identified as gifted when compared to their White peers (Grissom & Redding, 2016). Teachers may have negative perceptions about the giftedness of minority students, which may influence how teachers identify and refer students

for gifted services (Carman, 2011; Siegle et al., 2016). As a result, how teachers perceive minority students may contribute to the disparities in the inequitable representation of minority students in gifted education (Grissom & Redding, 2016; Harradine et al., 2014; Peters & Engerrand, 2016).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand how secondary middle school teachers perceive African American students and how they identify and refer African American students for enrollment in gifted education programs. A second purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how secondary middle school teachers' perceptions as related to the identification and referral of African American students influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education. The remaining content of this dissertation includes a review of the literature related to the research problem, the study's methodology, and a section on data analysis.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

The inequitable representation of minority students in gifted education is a prevalent issue at the K-12 level (Peters & Engerrand, 2016) that causes minority students' talents to be overlooked and inadequately developed. Even more so, according to Plucker, Hardesty, and Burroughs (2013) the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education has led to continuously growing excellence gaps among all students. Minority students have been drastically underrepresented in gifted and talented education (GATE) programs for years (Erwin & Worrell, 2012). According to the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2006, European American students account for 56% of the total school population yet account for nearly 68% of the students in GATE programs (Erwin & Worrell, 2012). In contrast, Asian American students account for less than 5% of the total population but 10% of GATE students (Erwin & Worrell, 2012). Even more so, African American students account for 17% of the total school population but only 9% of GATE students, while Hispanic American students make up 20% of the total school population but only 12% of GATE students (Erwin & Worrell, 2012). Thus, these examples along with additional research indicated a drastic variation in the equitable representation of students in GATE programs; therefore, because enrollment is based on teacher referral it was important to examine the role of teacher perceptions and its impact on minority student representation in GATE programs.

Since the 1970s, the decreased identification and ensuing underrepresentation of students from various cultures, ethnicities, and racial backgrounds in GATE programs has been well recorded (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Yoon & Gentry, 2009). Yet, the disparities in equitable student representation are presently still an increasing concern. Particularly, the representation of minority students, such as African American students, in GATE programs is a current issue

(Siegle et al., 2016). Historically, African American students have been underrepresented gifted education (Siegle et al., 2016).

Teacher referral or nomination is a common screening tool used in the identification process of gifted students (Carman, 2011). Teacher referrals or nominations refer to the process by which teachers give input in the referral of students to gifted education programs (Carman, 2011). Research has shown that in schools in the United States, students of color are less likely to be identified as gifted even when they meet the requirements when compared to White students (Grissom & Redding, 2016). Researchers have attributed this inequity of student representation to the use of teacher discretion since teacher referral is usually the initial step in the identification process of gifted students (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Dependence on teacher referral can hinder minority students of color if teachers have lower standards for them or are unlikely to recognize their gifted potential (Elhoweris et al., 2005; Ford & Grantham, 2003).

Due to cultural diversity and population growth of society, it is important to contribute additional perspectives to the issue of underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education. Disparities in minority student underrepresentation can lead to low grades and an increased rate in student dropouts (Denbo & Moore Beaulieu, 2002; Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005). Consequently, such disparities can affect future outcomes such as income, job opportunities, health, and other outcomes (Levine, 2005; McKown & Weinstein, 2008). Hence, conducting research on how teacher perceptions influence the inequity of minority student representation in gifted education programs may aid in developing teacher training programs and providing resources for teachers to increase gifted student recommendation for minority students. As a result, the future outcomes of underrepresented minority students in gifted education may change as well.

It is not widely known how teacher perceptions impact teacher referral of minority students in gifted education. Thus, this study pursued the following research question: how do teacher perceptions influence minority student representation in secondary gifted education programs, with a specific focus on African American students? A unique conceptual framework using a theory of transformative leadership along with the concepts of collective efficacy and deficit thinking was used to understand what can assist the inequality of minority representation in gifted education (Bieneman, 2011). The remainder of this chapter includes a review of the research and methodological literature, review of methodological issues, an overview of research findings, critique of previous research, and a summary to provide a comprehensive review of the literature relevant to the research problem.

I used several databases to search the literature. The main educational databases that were used was EBSCO, CU Commons, Google Scholar, ProQuest. The key terms utilized in the literature review search included underrepresentation, African American students, gifted education, minority students, and teacher perceptions. These databases yielded literature about the phenomenon of underrepresented students in gifted education.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework stemmed from my professional experiences as an educator. I am a certified administrator, licensed educator, and I am overly concerned with the limited enrollment of minority students in gifted education, especially in Central Texas where the majority of students are minority students. Gifted education is an enriched curriculum with rigor that challenges students to exercise critical thinking skills, teaches them how to problem solve, and more. Thus, gifted education programs are very important in public education (Kettler, Russell, & Puryear, 2015). In Texas, gifted education is important as it is a requirement by the

Texas Education Code (1987) and state funded (Texas Education Code, 1995). The Texas Education Agency has specific protocols for districts to develop and sustain gifted education programs. Prior research on gifted education in Texas has shown that African American, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students are underrepresented in the state (Kettler et al., 2015). Overall, the underrepresentation of minority students, specifically African American students, in gifted education is a growing concern in public education in the United States.

Giftedness is a term filled with ambiguity. The field of education does not have a uniform definition of the term since all states are not required to offer gifted services hence the varying definition of the term (Jordan et al., 2012). The most recent federal definition defines giftedness as “Outstanding talents. . . present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor” (U.S. Department of Education, 1993, p. 26). Presently, all state departments of education have not adopted this definition. Chadwell (2010) asserted that if a federal definition is connected to federal monies backing gifted and talented programs then it could prompt programmatic changes in educational agencies on the federal level.

Before the legislation of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), Kozol (1991), declared that African American children were three times as likely as White children to be identified and placed in special education classes but only half as likely to be placed in gifted education classes (Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2014). Presently, after NCLB, minority students are still underserved and under referred in gifted education programs (Carman, 2011). Research has shown that the excellence gap is growing among students of multiple racial/ethnic groups, low socioeconomic status (SES), gender, and more (Plucker, Burroughs, & Song, 2010). The underrepresentation of minority students, primarily African American students, is a

developing problem marred by many factors. Therefore, looking at this phenomenon from a transformative perspective may assist students, specifically those underrepresented and underserved, in having equitable access to gifted education (Bieneman, 2011).

The conceptual framework for this study operated under the theory of transformative leadership (Shields, 2011). Transformative leadership is a theory that highlights the importance of academic excellence and social transformation (Shields, 2011). Transformative leadership is rooted in multiple principles based on “negotiable acceptable transactions, distributing leadership responsibilities, and...servant leadership” (Shields, 2011, p. 5). Transformative leadership was an appropriate theory as the field of education, educational institutions, and educational stakeholders are constantly changing.

Transformational leaders in education are needed to alleviate the problem of underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education. To reform the practices of gifted education programs to be inclusive of all students, schools should examine how their gifted education programs are operating and transform their practices, specifically identification practices, to combat the issue of inequity of student underrepresentation so that it is inclusive of all students despite race, gender, income, and more (Caldwell et al., 2012). Additionally, leaders should motivate educational stakeholders to invest in a shared vision and create goals to achieve the vision. Leaders must then place their followers in the appropriate places so they can use their talents to achieve the mission of the organization. The process of transformation is a collective effort and when all stakeholders are working together then reform can begin where needed (Caldwell et al., 2012). Overall, transformation is intentional; a combined effort of all stakeholders, and it is a continuous process as things are constantly changing.



In addition to the transformative leadership theory, the social cognitive theory asserts that individuals and groups control their lives based on their views of efficacy. Collective efficacy deals with the duties, performance, thoughts, and the success of groups (Bandura, 1993, 1997b). "Perceived collective efficacy is defined as a group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments" (Bandura, 1997a, p. 478). "For schools, collective efficacy refers to the perceptions of teachers in a school that the faculty as a whole can execute the courses of action necessary to have positive effects on students" (Bieneman, 2011, p. 230).

Hence, the theoretical construct of collective efficacy is a tool that could be utilized in an effort to improve schools. Educational stakeholders function as a collective unit. Bieneman (2011) asserted that a belief system must be pre-established before any actions can occur. If schools appropriately train all teachers to recognize the gifted potential in all students, then it may help transform the perspectives of those teachers when identifying minority students for gifted education programs. Thus, collective efficacy has the potential to lead to sustained school improvement, especially schools that have multiple risk factors. In addition, collective efficacy is also a means for studying the achievement gap among students (Bieneman, 2011).

Deficit thinking (Bieneman, 2011) is a model that assumes students are unsuccessful in school because of internal shortcomings such as a lack of motivation or intelligence. Deficit thinking may be a contributing factor to the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education because Ford (2013) argued deficit thinking prevents teachers from referring African American students for gifted services. As such, deficit thinking is a paradigm that should be utilized and deconstructed to find the underlying causes of educational inequalities and underachievement (Shields, 2010).

It is highly important to deconstruct and contextualize the deficit thinking paradigm regarding students and surrounding school communities. A lack of examination of this paradigm fosters discouragement and futility as well as hinders student academic achievement (Bieneman, 2011). “Creating a school culture that rejects deficit thinking about low-income, racially, ethnically, and linguistically different students is essential to creating pathways to high achievement for these students” (Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2014, p. 105).

Historically, equality in education regarding race has been a longstanding problem in the U.S. This issue stems from the ending of slavery, Jim Crow laws, and legal segregation in public schools leading to the *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* in which it was declared that separate educational institutions were disproportionate (Ford & Whiting, 2016). The overrepresentation of White students in gifted education indicates that covert segregation is still present in U.S. public schools (Chadwell, 2010). There needs to be a shift in current practices to acknowledge and embrace diversity that includes all student populations (Bieneman, 2011).

Moreover, a transformative approach is appropriate when proposing general changes in the U.S. public education school system; this type of approach allows for flexibility and adaptability with environmental outcomes and cultural influences. The underrepresentation of underserved students in gifted education is indicative of limited adaptability associated with referral, testing, and identification procedures and practices within the U.S. public education system (Chadwell, 2010).

Exploring factors that lead to minority students being underrepresented and underserved in gifted education may provide solutions to increase equity in gifted education programs so that

students who have high cognitive abilities and skills are able to exercise them, thus developing their talents and gifts in preparation to become successful and productive citizens of society.

## **Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature**

**Historical perspective of underrepresentation in gifted education.** The field of gifted education has been facing challenges for many years in the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education. The documentation of underrepresentation began in 1936 by Jenkins, in which he found that even if African American students had high intelligence test scores, they were not identified as gifted (Ford et al., 2008). Gifted programs promote inequity in gifted education. Over the years, educational stakeholders and policy makers have failed in recruiting and retaining minority students in gifted education yet the reason behind this failure to recruit and retain minority students in gifted education has not been thoroughly explored. The failure to recruit and retain gifted minority students has resulted in segregated gifted classrooms, which is not in accordance with the law (Ford et al., 2008).

*Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) was an influential case that allowed all students to have unhampered access to educational opportunities (Henfield, Washington, & Owens, 2010). Yet, despite this landmark decision, African American students still do not have the same educational choices as their peers (Henfield et al., 2010). As a result, African American students are one of the most underrepresented groups in the nation regarding participation in gifted education programs (Ford et al., 2008; Henfield et al., 2008). In previous years, research was conducted on the classification and assignment of minority students in gifted education (Ford & Webb, 1994). This research is an indication that minority students, specifically African American students, have been drastically underrepresented in gifted education programs for

years (Alamprese & Erlanger, 1988; Ford & Harris, 1991; Richert, 1987; U.S. Department of Education, 1990).

There have been measures taken to decrease the underrepresentation of minority students as well as low-income students. In 1988 congress passed legislation entitled The Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Program as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, ESEA (Ford & King, 2014). The purpose of this program was to use research based strategies and activities to support elementary and secondary schools in meeting the needs of gifted and talented students. A key function of Javits is to serve students who are traditionally underrepresented in gifted and talented programs to lessen the achievement gap among students at high achievement levels (Ford & King, 2014).

Presently, underrepresentation is such a prevalent problem that it has been a goal of the field of gifted education to identify more students from traditionally underrepresented populations for gifted services (Burney & Beilke, 2008). Current research on underrepresentation indicates that African American, Native American, and Hispanic students, and students from low-income families are drastically underrepresented in gifted and talented populations (Yoon & Gentry, 2009). The underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education is a growing problem because these students represent the fastest growing population in K-12 education, yet their abilities are being underdeveloped or not being identified (Yoon & Gentry, 2009). Thus, the representation of minority students in gifted education programs is still a growing concern.

Plucker et al. (2013) attributed underrepresentation to widening and growing excellence gaps also known as achievement gaps. The federal government defines giftedness as “Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor” (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE],

1993, p. 26). Yet, this inclusive definition of talent development is not readily apparent among gifted students (Peters & Engerrand, 2016). Despite the issue of the underrepresentation of minority students, there is limited information on what factors attribute to the underrepresentation, as such this study explored teacher perceptions and how it affects the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education.

**Giftedness.** The term giftedness is traditionally defined by “(a) high scores on IQ tests (130 and higher) and (b) by high scores on achievement tests (often at or above 92nd percentile)” (Ford & King, 2014, p. 301). Consequently, this definition of giftedness is comparable with intelligence that can be measured by standardized tests. This definition of giftedness does not put much emphasis on the cultural aspect and opportunity in the display of giftedness (Ford & King, 2014).

Over the years, the federal government has adopted many definitions of the term giftedness. Ford and King (2014) asserted that the previously mentioned definition from 1993 of giftedness is one of the most inclusive definitions of giftedness as it focused on the potential and talent development of gifted students. Educators who observe a student’s potential recognize the need to assist students who have not developed their gifts. This includes all students such as African American students, economically disadvantaged students, underachievers, and students with special education needs.

A lack of focus on the potential and talent development is an influencing factor to the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education. Therefore, a focus on the potential and talent development of African American students is equitable as talent development can help recruit and retain gifted African American students (Ford & King, 2014). According to Ford and King (2014) the definition provided in 1993 is unlike all the other definitions of

giftedness because it includes ignored aspects specific to African American students as well as students of other diverse cultures. The 1993 federal definition of giftedness stated “(a) students must be compared with others of their age, experience, or environment; and (b) outstanding talents are present in individuals from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor” (Ford & King, 2014, p. 301).

Throughout the years, there have been varying definitions of the term giftedness whereby a lack of a universal description of the term may affect how teachers perceive gifted students. As such, varying definitions of the term may be aiding in the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education. This study explored how giftedness is perceived by teachers as related to identifying and referring African American students to gifted education.

### **Gifted Education Representation**

Research shows that African American students have been inequitably represented throughout the history of gifted education (e.g. Ford, 2010, 2011; Ford et al., 2008) as evidenced by the *Brown v. Board of Education* case in 1954 and in current research whereby researchers report that underrepresentation in gifted education is still a concerning issue (Peters & Engerrand, 2016). Gifted education is not federally mandated and, as such, states have the discretion in deciding whether to fund gifted education programs (Ford & King, 2014). Although these programs may not be federally mandated, the programs serve a vital purpose in public education. These programs offer gifted services to students who have high potential. Yet, most gifted education programs are unequal in terms of ethnic, gender, racial, and economic representation among students. Inequity in gifted education has hindered excellence.

As of 2012, African American students are extremely underrepresented in gifted education (Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2014). African American students represent an

estimated 19% of enrollment in public schools that have gifted education programs but represent only 10% enrollment in such programs. Hispanic students represent an estimated 25% of enrollment in public schools with gifted education programs but account for only 16% gifted education enrollment in those programs (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2012). Moreover, African American and Hispanic males are the most underrepresented groups in gifted education (Olszewski-Kubilius, & Clarenbach, 2014).

Equitable gifted education representation among students has been a concern in the realm of education for many years. Although there may be various factors that affects gifted education representation this study focused on teacher perceptions. The role of teacher perceptions regarding how it attributes to the inequity of student representation in gifted education is a concept that needs further exploration, as such this study sought to explore this phenomenon.

### **Factors that Lead to the Underrepresentation of Minorities in Gifted Education Programs**

A research of the literature revealed that there are multiple factors that may lead to the underrepresentation of minorities in gifted education programs. Multiple factors were explored in this section of the literature review.

**Opportunity to learn.** The inequality of an opportunity to learn (OTL) is a barrier that leads to underrepresentation. Since different topics are taught at different times and to different degrees in tested countries, a standard metric was needed to measure the performance of students to determine if the students performed poorly because they were academically behind or because they had not yet been exposed to instruction (Peters & Engerrand, 2016). As a result, OTL was formed in the 1970s and 1980s as a concept to safeguard comparisons among different cultures on international achievement tests (McDonnell, 1995). Opportunity to learn is a composite variable measured by teachers reporting data concerning the content taught, degree of teacher

quality, and school data. OTL is important because “most tests of ability or intelligence assume some level of similarity in background experience for a given normative group” (Peters & Engerrand, 2016, p. 161). Hence, in regard to intelligence tests if students are compared who have similar OTL and are at the same age level, then the assessments could produce a better measurement of potential and aptitude (Peters & Engerrand, 2016).

Comparing students because they are at the same grade level is an issue if the goal is to identify talent because not all students at the same grade level have been exposed to the same teaching and learning (Peters & Engerrand, 2016). At a particular grade level, students can vary in age in as much as 12 months, and the difference in age can cause some students to appear more intelligent or gifted than others just because they are younger. Often schools assume that students in the same grade have the same opportunity to develop their skills yet even within schools in the same district the quality of opportunities to learn at a grade level greatly differs (Peters & Engerrand, 2016).

Kornrich and Furstenberg (2013) conducted a study in which they looked at parents spending money on their children as related to OTL. In the study, the authors found that parents in low-income brackets spent less on their children than parents in the high-income brackets. This difference in spending in regard to the parents in the high-income brackets allowed them to provide better child-care and education for their children, allowing those children to have access to early educational opportunities and experiences. Consequently, before most children attend school there are substantial disparities in OTL that can contribute to the underrepresentation that occurs in identifying students for gifted education (Peters & Engerrand, 2016).

Minor (2015) also conducted a study on differences in OTL in which he looked at minority students in advanced math classes. Minor used a convenience sample of the



Mathematics Survey of the Enacted Curriculum (SEC) of 100 math teachers from the Wisconsin Center for Education Research. From the study, it was concluded that math teachers whose classrooms were composed of minority students spent more time on certain topics and tasks as compared to math teachers who had a class composed of predominantly White students. Thus, students whose classes were composed of minorities had different opportunities to learn when compared to their non-minority peers (Minor, 2015). This study reported that even at the classroom level there are differences in OTL among cultural groups that can trickle into other areas of education influencing the number of minority students represented in gifted education. OTL is a concept that should be further examined because it could cause student success to be more equitably measured which could allow for more equity in student representation in GATE programs.

**Identification practices for admittance to gifted programs.** Research on African American students not being identified at the same rate as their White peers began in the 1970s. DeMonbreun (1977) found that minority students were not being equitably identified as gifted and asserted that there was an equal number of gifted minority students as the dominant culture. Modern researchers, Peters and Engerrand (2016), asserted that it is important to develop students who have the potential to achieve at higher levels regardless of race, gender, and socioeconomic status. “The information gained through assessment is vital to making effective decisions...including the decision of whether or not a child should receive gifted education services” (McBee, Peters, & Miller, 2016, p. 258). The field of education needs a balance of excellence and equity in gifted education programs especially when developing policies and procedures for identification purposes. A balance of excellence and equity in gifted education

programs could lead to increased minority student representation in gifted education (Peters & Engerrand, 2016).

Chadwell (2010) asserted many K-12 gifted education programs identify students similar to an admission process such as those found at colleges and universities. Students are identified based on if they need or would benefit from the program they are applying for. Each gifted education program has its own goals and allotment for enrollment. Hence, Chadwell (2010) concluded that any discussion on how students are identified must begin with the overall objective of the program. The most recent federal definition of giftedness encompasses the inclusion of all students from various cultures and socioeconomic statuses who have exceptional talent or the potential to perform at high levels. Thus, the overall purpose of gifted education according to the federal definition is to foster excellence in students from all cultures and income groups. This definition focuses on excellence and equity in K-12 gifted education (Chadwell, 2010).

The identification process in gifted education can take place in two stages (National Association for Gifted Children, 2013). The first stage is the nomination stage and the second stage is the screening phase. Depending on the academic setting, in the first stage, potentially gifted students are nominated for gifted services based off nominations from teachers or parents. Additionally, automatic nominations can occur based on test scores, parent, self, or peer nominations (McBee, 2006). If a student tests positive in the first stage of the identification process then that student will continue to the second stage, which is the screening phase. The purpose of the screening phase is to separate students who warrant additional testing for gifted services from those who do not (McBee et al., 2016). Thus, the second stage serves as a confirmatory stage and “influences the pathway through which the majority of students in the

United States are identified as needing additional advanced services” (McBee et al., 2016, p. 260).

McBee et al. (2016) conducted a study on how the nomination stage can affect the efficacy of a gifted identification system. They found that in identification systems where a nomination stage is required before testing, the process resulted in a vast number of students not being identified as gifted. This result showed that the nomination stage should be composed with high reliability and validity along with a low nomination cutoff, if not, it could hinder gifted identification systems and cause students not to be identified as gifted, thus contributing to the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education. “Changes to identification practices are urgently needed in order to ensure that larger numbers of gifted students receive appropriate educational placement and to maintain the integrity of gifted education services” (McBee et al., 2016, p. 258).

In addition, comparing students in the same age groups and environments is a common identification process utilized to identify gifted students. Moreover, another common practice is to compare student scores on standardized tests to their age level peers. On average, minority students and students whose families are of a low socioeconomic status receive lower test scores on academic achievement and ability compared to Whites, Asians, and other peers from high-income families (Plucker et al., 2013; Valencia & Suzuki, 2001). For nonverbal measures of ability (Cognitive Abilities Test-Nonverbal measures of ability [CogAT-NV]) there were notable score differences especially for African American students. Achievement and ability tests are common assessments used in gifted student identification. Thus, it is no surprise that there is a drastic underrepresentation in identified gifted populations. A concern that stems from the

research is whether the cause of the score difference is primarily due to bias or systemic error (Peters & Engerrand, 2016).

Furthermore, minority student abilities may be overlooked due to identification practices based on teacher perceptions, assumptions by parents and educational policy makers regarding student lack of abilities (Coleman, Shah-Coltrane, Harradine, & Timmons, 2007; Davis, 2003; Robinson, Shore, & Enersen, 2007). It was further suggested by Ford, Grantham, and Milner (2004) that test bias, teacher referrals, and deficit-based paradigms are reasons for the continuous underrepresentation of students of color. Overall, minority students do not have the same referral rate to gifted education programs as White students (Harradine et al., 2014). Thus, relying on these practices has resulted in a drastic underrepresentation of minority students over many years, and it may be the same for future instances unless something is done to resolve the problem (Chadwell, 2010).

McBee (2006) conducted a descriptive analysis study on screening gifted students according to race and socioeconomic status. The researcher obtained a population dataset from the Georgia Department of Education. The dataset included information for public school students enrolled in the year 2004. The variables for the study were a student's race, type of lunch received by student, nomination status of the student, and if the student had previously been identified as gifted. The nomination sources were automatic referrals, teacher referrals, parent referrals, self-referrals, peer referrals, and outside referrals.

McBee (2006) found that automatic and teacher referrals were more significant than the other referral types. They also found that White and Asian students were more likely to be nominated for gifted services when compared to African American students. In addition, students who did not pay for their lunch were nominated more for gifted services as compared to minority

students such as African American Americans and Hispanics, who received free or reduced-price lunch who were not nominated as often. Thus, the results indicated that disparities in the nomination process and not assessments could be the main factor in the underrepresentation of minority and low-income students in gifted education (McBee, 2006). Overall, the identification practices for admittance to gifted education programs differ among public schools in the U.S. This study explored what practices teachers use to identify students and how it impacts the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education.

**Testing.** According to Ford, Harris, Tyson, and Trotman (2002) using tests to identify and assess students is a pervasive process in gifted education. Tests scores are important in gifted education as they often determine the identification and placement of students into gifted education programs. It has been documented that many states rely heavily on test scores for identification and placement decisions of gifted students. For example, a study conducted by Van-Tassel-Baska, Patton, and Prillaman (1989) showed that approximately 89% of states depend heavily on standardized tests to identify gifted students. This heavy dependence on test scores for identification and placement decisions “keep the demographics of gifted programs resolutely White and middle class” (Ford et al., 2002, p. 54). Traditional intelligent tests may be useful for identifying and assessing White students, but they are not as effective at identifying and assessing African American students (Ford et al., 2002). Researchers such as Erwin and Worrell (2012) concluded that standardized intelligence tests appropriately measure what they were designed to measure across all different racial and ethnic groups. However, these researchers contend that standardized tests should not be used at the sole identification tool but rather multiple sources should be used to adequately assess a student’s giftedness.

Agencies such as The American Education Research Association (AERA) and the American Psychological Association (APA) consider some standardized tests to be biased towards minority groups (Erwin & Worrell, 2012). Specifically, some standardized tests have content related bias, which “refers to whether questions or instructions from tests are unfair for a specific group (or groups)” (Erwin & Worrell, 2012, p. 78). For example, Reynolds and Carson (2005) asserted that ethnic minority students may not be as familiar with certain content covered over a test as compared to their majority peers. As a result, the ethnic minority students may give incorrect answers that they perceive to be correct according to their cultural background or they have not had the same opportunity as their majority peers to learn the content.

Objective measures such as tests influence the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education. It is an ongoing debate as to whether tests such as the ACT, SAT, IQ tests, and more are equitable for minority students. Many of these students attend schools that are low performing, inadequately staffed, have a lack of funding, few resources, and more. Ford et al. (2008) proposed three reasons for low test performance for culturally and linguistically diverse students also referred to as ethnic minorities: test bias, low quality education and poor instruction, and the cultural background of students. Furthermore, the reason that these students may score lower on tests may be due to inefficient educational opportunities as opposed to their scores being attributed to a lack of motivation, ability, and intelligence (Ford & Whiting, 2016). Although this study does not solely focus on testing it is evidenced by the literature, the role of testing students for admittance into GATE programs is a factor that should be explored further because tests are used by teachers to identify and refer students to gifted education programs. As such, teachers may perceive students in a certain manner based off a test score which could affect student representation in gifted education programs.

**Teacher stereotypes and perceptions.** There have been studies conducted on teacher beliefs and how teacher beliefs influence the enrollment of gifted ethnic minority students. A teacher's attitude, belief, standards, and biases can impact whether students are permitted to gifted programs (Siegle, 2001). One study found that teachers do possess negative attitudes towards gifted students (Greake & Gross, 2008). Research has shown that teachers stereotype students according to their socioeconomic status, which affects teacher perceptions of students, consequently influencing the referrals the teachers make (Frey, 2002; Moon & Brighton, 2008; Rohrer, 1995).

Rohrer (1995) conducted a qualitative study to examine if socioeconomic status is a factor in teacher perceptions of gifted students. He found that teachers would often refer students who came from a two-parent household, whose parents were educated, and had a background that included high-income characteristics. Moreover, Moon and Brighton (2008) conducted a study on primary teacher perceptions of gifted students. They found the one fourth of teachers agreed with idea that socioeconomic status is an indicator of giftedness. Throughout studies conducted and despite factors such as culture, ethnicity, grade an educator teaches, or any other factors, many teachers possess stereotypical views about gifted minority students that can potentially hinder their abilities to refer students for gifted services (Carman, 2011).

Most often, teacher input is the initial screening step in the identification of gifted students, specifically in Texas. Utilizing teacher input is a feasible idea because teachers spend most of a school day with students. However, 85% of the teacher population is predominantly White (Kena et al., 2015). As a result, White students are more referred to gifted education programs than African American students. Research showed that African American students as

well as other minority students are under referred by teachers, due to low ratings on checklists, minimal recommendation letters, and more (Grissom & Redding, 2016).

Even more so, the negative attitudes of teachers may hinder minority representation in gifted education because of differences in culture and socioeconomic status. Ultimately, the differences influence a teacher's decision to identify and refer minority students to gifted education programs (Ford et al., 2013). For example, Tenenbaum and Ruckman (2007) conducted a meta-analysis study that examined teacher expectations, teacher nominations, and patterns of speech. They found that teachers had reduced expectations for minority students and spoke to them in a condescending manner. Reduced expectations could lead to a lower number of referrals and nominations for gifted minority students. Hence, while teacher perspectives are subjective they are a substantial influence in the decision-making process in gifted education (Ford & Whiting, 2016).

Discrimination has been prevalent in the U.S. as evidenced by slavery and Jim Crow laws. With the abolishment of slavery, discrimination continued in society and found its way in the U.S. public school system. Therefore, it should not be a surprise that bias exists on the part of teachers, who are majority white (Kena et al., 2015) in the identification of gifted minority students. Research has shown that teacher recognition of giftedness is very narrow and discriminatory to minority students, which leads to bias in the identification of gifted minority students.

Teacher perceptions are an important factor in the equity of students in gifted education programs. Yet, many teachers lack multicultural training and the framework to be able to recognize the needs and abilities of all their students (Ford et al., 2004) thus contributing to the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education. Poor training of teachers and



inefficient procedures present a barrier for underrepresentation because when teachers have little to no training in gifted education and multicultural education, the likelihood of minority students, especially African American students having access to gifted education is minimal (Ford & Whiting, 2016). Han and Thomas (2010) gave three suggestions for teachers to be a responsible multicultural teacher: recognize their own perspectives, learn about the knowledge of others, and be able to employ various strategies in response to multiple perspectives and cultures.

Furthermore, Haley (2000) proclaimed that for teachers to be successful with students from diverse cultural backgrounds they should build relationships with students and feel comfortable using various strategies to meet the needs of these students. Haley (2000) asserted that there are too many teachers who have no knowledge or do not share the cultural or linguistic backgrounds of their students. A diverse teaching staff is important to have to support the diverse needs of students.

To what extent the role of teacher perceptions play in the disproportionate representation of African American students in GATE programs needs further examination as there are limited to students as to how African American students are affected. This study examined how teacher perceptions affect the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education.

### **Research Studies on Teacher Factors in Gifted Education**

There have been limited research studies conducted regarding teacher factors in gifted education. Harradine et al. (2014) conducted a study to assess how teacher perceptions affect the identification of students of color, the relationship between a teacher's race and barriers for children, and how barriers by teachers influence their ability to recognize potential in children of color. The participants were from schools in North Carolina, Colorado, Louisiana, and Ohio. Approximately 1,100 classroom teachers were utilized. Most of the teachers were female (95%)

and the range of service was equitably split among the teachers. The teachers used the U-STARS~PLUS (Using Science, Talents, and Abilities to Recognize Students---Promoting Learning for Under-Represented Students). The U-STARS~PLUS aids teachers in seeing, developing, and responding to the strengths of children of color. TOPS (Teacher's Observation of Potential in Students) was also used by teachers. This tool helps teachers recognize the high potential in students and recognize student behavior patterns (Harradine et al., 2014).

Teachers completed TOPS Kids Profile for each student they recognized as having high potential based on observations and documentation with TOPS from the spring of each school year. The analysis of the data was exploratory in nature in which descriptive statistics, t-tests, and one-way ANOVA were utilized (Harradine et al., 2014). From the study, the researchers found that TOPS helped teachers recognize strengths in children from traditionally underrepresented groups. The findings from the relationship between a teacher's race and barriers for children showed that a teacher's race may affect whether teachers recognize student behaviors and deterrence in regard to recognizing their strengths. Overall, the findings from the study suggested teacher perceptions play a role in identifying underrepresented minority students as having high potential (Harradine et al., 2014). There were limitations to this study as the majority of the teachers utilized in the study were female, which provides for a limited male perspective of the topic.

Carman (2011) conducted a mixed-methods study to examine the stereotypes of giftedness in education by preservice and in-service teachers. Carman used students from a Midwestern University in undergraduate and graduate classes. The instruments for the research were a written descriptive paragraph about how the teachers imagined a gifted education student

would be and a questionnaire that sought to retrieve information on their imagined gifted student. Participants also provided demographic information about themselves.

From the study, Carman (2011) concluded that preservice and in-service teachers had preconceived thoughts about gifted people in the areas of “gender, ethnicity, age, learning interests, talents, and use of glasses” (p. 799). In addition, new/novice teachers had more stereotypical thoughts about gifted students when compared to experienced teachers. Although there were some significant findings, there were limitations to the study. The sample size for each respective group was small, 91 participants for the preservice teachers and 20 participants for the in-service teachers; therefore, had the size been larger the study may have yielded different results.

Grissom and Redding (2016) used a mixed-methods design to study the degree of teacher discretion and disproportionality of the underrepresentation of students of color with high academic potential in gifted education programs. Data from a nationally representative sample was collected from kindergartners in elementary grades in public schools with gifted programs in reading or math to examine the predictors of gifted assignments in students of color. The predictors used for student assignment to gifted services were school characteristics and achievement test scores.

Grissom and Redding (2016) found that even if African American students had high achievement test scores and were in schools with comparable features to White students, they were less likely to be assigned to gifted services, particularly in reading. In regards to the impact of teacher discretion in which underserved students benefit from teacher diversity, Grissom and Redding (2016) found that teacher discretion can influence the gifted assignment of minority students. In this study, African American students were less referred to gifted programs,

specifically in reading, in the case when the teacher was not African American. Limitations to this study included limited data as the nationally representative sample used did not account for student aptitude.

Usually, research into the differences in achievement and representation have focused primarily on elements that contribute to the problem rather than focus on elements that contribute to the academic success of minority populations from low-income backgrounds. Tomlinson and Jarvis (2014) used a qualitative design to study how teachers and schools impact the academic achievement of minority students who have high academic potential and stem from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The research question proposed in this study was “What are the factors at work in settings that appear to successfully nurture academic talent and achievement in students from minority, low-income backgrounds?” (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014, p. 196). The study was conducted at three schools in the U.S. Data was collected for two years in the form of semi-structured interviews with teachers and administrators, student interviews, and examination of documentation such as student academic achievement data and work samples from students.

From this study Tomlinson and Jarvis (2014) found: even if teachers and schools do not excel in all aspects of their practice they can positively affect achievement and opportunities for student achievement were shaped by teacher expectations and schools’ definitions of success. Additionally, Tomlinson and Jarvis (2014) concluded from the study that a challenging curriculum was necessary to support the high potential of minority students, and teachers who actively invested in the academic success of minority students gave students the ability to navigate across multiple cultures. There were limitations to this study as the number of sites used in the study was small, adding additional sites could strengthen the findings of the study.

Elhoweris et al. (2005) used a quantitative design to study how student ethnicity affected teacher decisions on referring them to gifted education programs. The participants were 207 elementary school teachers from a Midwestern school district. The participants were given a short descriptive vignette about a student classified as gifted according to research-based standards, which was followed by a questionnaire. Additionally, the participants provided demographic information about their race, gender, age, level of education, and teaching experience. The effect of student ethnicity was examined according to teachers' referral and placement decisions.

Elhoweris et al., (2005) found that teacher placement recommendations for GATE programs were not solely based on a student's ethnicity. However, a student's ethnicity did play a factor in the referral decisions of teachers. Teachers were more likely to refer a non-labeled student to a GATE program rather than an African American student. There were some limitations to this study as 92% of the teachers in the study were female which provided a limited male perspective in the study. In addition, the participants stemmed from one part of the county, which geographically limited the study. Overall, the literature indicated that teacher factors have an impact on the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education. However, this phenomenon should be further explored as to ascertain a better understanding of the extent teacher perceptions influence minority student representation in secondary gifted education programs to increase equity in gifted student representation for all students.

### **Cultural and Social Inequality**

Cultural and social inequality exists in the world. These two phenomena are linked to factors such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, and culture. Racial inequality results from "hierarchical distinctions between ethnic groups within a society and often are established based

on characteristics such as skin color and other physical characteristics or an individual's place of origin or culture" (Ford, 2014, p. 146). Often, the differences in treatment and opportunities between people of different races result from some ethnic groups exhibiting an attitude in which they think they are superior above other ethnic groups. Racial injustices such as antilocution, avoidance, and discrimination affect gifted education underrepresentation (Ford, 2014).

Antilocution speaks to the verbal and nonverbal communication relayed to or about other people. Examples of antilocution include name-calling, racial slurs, hateful symbols and signs, and racial jokes. In gifted education, antilocution can be seen in statements such as 'African American kids are not as smart as other kids,' and 'you sound smart and talk well for an African American student.' Hate speech, and disrespectful symbols and signs are the main forms of antilocution that affect the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education (Ford, 2014).

Avoidance is evident when a person or groups works to minimize or eliminate social interactions with others. *White flight* is a term associated with avoidance. An example of this would be White families moving to other neighborhoods to avoid their children going to school with other racial and cultural groups. Gifted education has been used to cause segregation in schools (Ford, 2014). An example of this can be seen in the case of *McFadden vs. Board of Education for Illinois School District U-46* (2008) in which gifted White students were purposely separated from gifted Hispanic students. Moreover, avoidance can also be seen when ethnic minority children and/or their parents do not want them to participate in gifted programs that serve predominantly White students. The reason for avoidance for ethnic students is different from the reason for avoidance for White students. *White flight* is often due to the lack of

quality education while for ethnic minority students avoidance happens because of not wanting to be apart from their classmates and educators (Ford, 2014).

Discrimination exists when a person or a group are denied their rights. Discrimination is illegal in federally funded programs under the Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Ford, 2014). Underrepresentation comes from antilocution, avoidance, and discrimination. The underrepresentation of African American students is high nationally and in most school districts (Ford, 2014). African American students are inequitably served and underrepresented in gifted education, which denies them the education they are subject to legally and morally.

“Discrimination is operating when there is a pattern of teachers not referring African American students for gifted screening, identification, and services” (Ford, 2014, p. 147; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008a, 2008b). Discrimination in education has been prevalent for many years. Teachers may hold preconceived notions about minority students that adversely affect how they identify and refer minority students for gifted education services. This study sought to understand how teacher perceptions affect the underrepresentation of minority students in GATE programs in an effort to add to the literature to combat the issue.

**Cultural barrier.** A lack of cultural synchronization is a factor attributed to the racial and ethnic differences between teachers and students that affect the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education (Mattai et al., 2010). The lack of cultural synchronization can be explained as “the inadequate exposure of teachers in their everyday experiences and in their professional preparation” regarding how cultural characteristics influence the way a student learns” (Mattai et al., 2010, p. 27). The inadequate exposure results in minimal teacher referrals of culturally and linguistically different students for gifted services, whereby this could also be attributed to teacher perceptions of gifted minority students (Mattai et al., 2010).

A cultural barrier can be seen in the teacher workforce whereby most teachers are White (Aud et al., 2013), assessments and tools used to identify gifted students are created by White people, the educators who give and interpret the assessments and information of students are often White, and the curriculum of gifted education is not multicultural (Ford, 2011). Influential decision makers rarely discuss the differences in social and income levels that racial inequality or inequity cause between Whites and non-Whites. Yet, they do discuss how ethnic groups fail to achieve according to normal societal standards. Thus, this practice does not hold Whites accountable regarding the role they play in social inequality (Ford, 2014). According to Ford (2014) it is feasible to assume that the issue of underrepresentation exists because decision makers succumb to the status quo. “Social inequality and underrepresentation go hand in glove- social inequality feeds underrepresentation; underrepresentation feeds social inequality” (Ford, 2014, p. 149).

Researchers such as Siegle (2001) would counter the claim that ethnicity is not a significant factor when determining the identification of a gifted student. Siegle (2001) believed that the identifier and the student referred for gifted services should be culturally similar. Hence, the impact of culture surpasses ethnicity and race factors that contribute to cultural bias. The culture of an individual or group is complex and a hard concept to measure. According to Renzulli (2005), culturally and linguistically different students do not fall into a neat category of being able to take tests well and being good learners, thus ethnic minorities may display their potential in unconventional ways. The idea of a cultural barrier should be further explored to determine how it affects the rate at which minority students are represented in gifted education services which is what the current study sought to explore.



## **Student Outcomes**

The achievement gap is a barrier that contributes to the underrepresentation of minorities in gifted education. The achievement gap can be defined as “the observed disparity on a number of measures between the performance of groups of students, especially groups defined by gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status” (Bieneman, 2011, p. 224). Additionally, the achievement gap refers to minority children from low-income families, mainly African Americans and Latinos and other students from low-income families who do not perform as well as White students (Congero, 2007). The reasons for the gap are multifarious and not readily understood; yet, researchers have proposed some explanations as to why it exists.

The deficit paradigm is a factor that some researchers (Bieneman, 2011; Milner, 2012) attribute to the widening of the achievement gap. The deficit paradigm is grounded in the belief that intellectual and attitude differences in racial groups are inherent and cannot be solved with educational intervention since students from minority groups are more likely to not excel at the same level as their peers from the dominant ethnic group (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014). Therefore, under this perspective the fault for the achievement gap is placed on minority students and their families whose life practices, beliefs, and morals are taken as deficits that hinder their academic success (Ford et al., 2002).

The discontinuity paradigm is another factor that some researchers attribute to the widening of the achievement gap. This paradigm places “the primary responsibility, not necessarily blame, for achievement and failure on members of the schooling system. . .” (Lewis, James, Hancock, & Hill-Jackson, 2008, p. 141–142). Based on this paradigm, minimal student achievement is due to teachers and schools from the dominant culture failing to provide culturally appropriate curriculum and instruction that corresponds to student diversity (Ford,

Milner, & Moore, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1992; Spillane, 2004). Regarding interactions among students, this paradigm is prevalent in the African American culture as the recorded phenomenon of “acting White,” in which students associate high academic achievement with the White culture whereby being academically successful is not living up to one’s racial identity (Ogbu, 2004). Ford et al. (2008), conducted a study on the phenomenon of “acting White” in a study of gifted African American middle and high school students. Many of the students associated “acting White” with being smart and low intelligence and behavior as “acting Black.”

Ford and King (2014) proclaimed, “the quality of education and access to an equitable education are directly related to racial stratification” (p. 306). Despite the various factors for underrepresentation, inequitable access to gifted education programs has negative impacts on African American students. Inequitable access to gifted education programs hinders and stifles African American students’ potential, academic success, and social and economic growth (Ford & King, 2014). Additionally, when African American students are not afforded the opportunity to participate in gifted education programs, their opportunities in life are hindered. Moreover, underachievement for gifted African American students who are not identified also occurs because they lose focus and are not academically motivated to succeed (Ford, 2010).

Many researchers and scholars promote fair entry to gifted education programs for ethnic minority students to prepare them to be successful in K-12 as well as beyond high school (Ford & Moore, 2013; Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014). Many scholars believe that if gifted ethnic minority students have increased access to gifted education programs then it alleviates problems in underachievement (Ford & Moore, 2013) and helps lessen the achievement gap between them and White students (Ford, 2011; Ford, Moore, & Whiting, 2006). There have been studies conducted on factors that attribute to underrepresentation of minority students in gifted

education. Yet, there is limited research as to the how the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education affect African American students. Additional research should be conducted on this phenomenon to understand how minority students are affected by being underrepresented.

## **Conclusion**

The theoretical framework that guided this research was transformative leadership. In accordance to the transformative leadership theory, the actions of leaders and followers become apparent when the mission of the organization is communicated and the purpose of the change is transmitted from the leadership to the followers. Additionally, there must be a plan in place with proposed recommendations for change. Transformative leaders should work to deconstruct social and educational experiences to increase equity in gifted education programs (Bieneman, 2011). The underrepresentation of African Americans as well as other minority, underserved students in gifted education requires a transformative progressive change and an abandonment of traditional practices to combat the problem of inequity in student representation in gifted education.

Overall, there are many factors and barriers that contribute to the underrepresentation of minorities in schools. Thus far, some studies have focused on looking at how Hispanic, Native American, Asian, and African American students are represented in gifted education (Allen, Robbins, Payne, & Brown, 2016; Esquierdo & Arreguin-Anderson, 2012; Yoon & Gentry, 2009). Yet, there are limited studies that have focused solely on what role teacher perceptions play in the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education. Therefore, there is a need for a study that focuses on how teacher perceptions affect the underrepresentation of African American students as well as uses transformative leadership as a mechanism to

increase the recruitment and retainment of these students so they may have equitable access to gifted education programs to increase their academic success.

### **Review of Methodological Issues**

Currently, the underrepresentation of minority students is still an issue in gifted education, as it has been recorded as a serious problem (Peters & Engerrand, 2016; Peters & Gentry, 2012). Some research showed that the state of gifted education appears as if it is designed for the upper, dominant social class. However, the state of gifted education also indicated that gifted and talented minority students were inadequately having their needs met (Peters & Gentry, 2012).

There are multiple factors that lead to the underrepresentation of minorities in gifted education. One factor is teacher nominations to gifted programs. Often, in the case of gifted education referral, teachers are asked to give recommendations for students to the program. Teacher referrals may be influenced by their perceptions or prejudices (Carman, 2011). It could prove useful to ascertain what role teacher factors play in the inequity of student representation in gifted education.

There has been research conducted on the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education (Henfield, Woo, & Bang, 2016; and Peters & Engerrand, 2016; and Siegle et al., 2016). Yet, there have been limited studies on the role of teacher perceptions in the inequity of student representation in gifted education (Harradine et al., 2014; Ford & Whiting, 2016; and Grissom & Redding, 2016). Thus far, the research that has been conducted in this area has been mixed-methods studies and as such these studies allow for a limiting perspective on the issue of underrepresentation.

A mixed-methods study was conducted by Carman (2011) to review stereotypes in gifted education by current and future teachers in which students at a Midwestern University in undergraduate (preservice teachers) and graduate (in-service) classes were utilized. The qualitative portion of the study included a written descriptive paragraph about an imaginary gifted person and a questionnaire that was used to determine the teachers' level of stereotypical thinking about gifted students. Qualitative and quantitative data analyses was used to determine the range of stereotypic thinking among each group and within each group. Carman (2011) found that the preservice and in-service teachers had stereotypical thoughts about gifted people. Additionally, less experienced teachers had more stereotypical thoughts about gifted students compared to more experienced teachers. However, participants stemmed from only one part of the country, which geographically limited the study. In addition, most of the participants were female in which 70% were preservice teachers and 60% were in-service teachers. Thus, having most of the participants be female gave a limited view of the male teacher perspective regarding their level of stereotypical thinking about gifted students, something the current study was not able to address because KISD has a majority female workforce.

In examining how teachers recognize the academic potential in students of color, Harradine et al. (2014) used a mixed-methods design, which utilized descriptive statistics, t-tests, and a one-way Anova. The qualitative portion of the study used the TOPS (Teacher's Observation of Potential in Students) tool to measure and document the ability of teachers to recognize the academic strengths of 5 to 9 year old students from four different states in nine domains of strengths. TOPS is a tool that helps teachers identify the high potential of students as well as determine student patterns of behavior. Harradine et al. (2014) utilized the TOPS and conducted a quantitative analysis and found that teachers reported that they would have failed to

notice the academic potential of 22% of their students of color, even more specifically, 53% of African American boys. Moreover, 74% of teachers reported that after using TOPS they were more capable of recognizing the high potential of students of different cultures and socioeconomic statuses. Harradine et al. (2014) also examined how barriers influenced teachers from seeing students' strength. A statistically significant relationship was found to exist between the race of teachers and how they perceive student behavior. Limitations to this study included inadequate knowledge as to exactly how teachers use and interpret the TOPS, regarding student behavior. In addition, 95% of the teachers who used the TOPS were female, which provided a partial male perspective in the study. The current study did not utilize TOPS; however, the researcher made sure participants understood how to appropriately utilize and interpret any instruments used in the study.

Grissom and Redding (2016) examined the rate of teacher discretion and disproportionality of the underrepresentation of students of color with high academic potential in gifted education programs using a mixed-methods design. Qualitative data in the form of longitudinal data from a nationally representative sample was collected from kindergartners in elementary grades in public schools with gifted programs in reading or math to predict the number of gifted assignments in students of color. School characteristics and achievement test scores were used as predictors for student assignment to gifted services. Through a qualitative analysis, Grissom and Redding (2016) found that even if African American students were in schools with similar characteristics and had high achievement test scores they were less likely to be assigned to gifted services, particularly in reading. Regarding the impact of teacher discretion in which underserved students benefitted from teacher diversity, Grissom and Redding (2016) found that African American students were under referred to gifted programs, specifically in

reading, in the instance when the teacher was not African American. Limitations included missing data from parents, teachers, and personnel, which limited the conclusion of the study. Therefore, this study addressed this by having all participants fully complete all required documents.

Overall, there have been different types of studies conducted on the role of teacher factors/perceptions and how these factors influence the inequity of student representation in gifted education. Research conducted by Carman (2011), Harradine et al. (2014), and Grissom and Redding (2016) along with others showed that teacher perceptions could impact the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education programs. Yet, those studies were limited in their conclusions because of various factors such as unequal gender representation of participants, utilization and interpretation of TOPS, and missing data. Further studies need to be conducted that show what role teacher perceptions play in influencing the number of minority students represented in gifted education as to increase the equity so that all students may have their needs equally met.

### **Synthesis of Research Findings**

For many years, minority students, especially African American students, have been underrepresented in gifted education (Ford, 2011, 2013a, 2013b). According to Ford and King (2014), an estimated 250,000 African American students are not recognized as gifted; as a result, these students are underrepresented and underserved in gifted education programs and classes. The literature has shown that there are multiple factors that influence the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education. Among these multiple factors, there are commonalities of influential factors affecting the underrepresentation of gifted minority students that have

emerged: teacher attitudes and perceptions, identification practices for the admittance to gifted education programs, and peer influence.

Teacher factors influence the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education. Research has shown that stereotypes held by teachers can determine if minority students are permitted to enter gifted education services (Siegle, 2001). In addition, other studies were conducted that reported how stereotypical views held by teachers can negatively impact minority students in gifted education. These studies indicated that teachers stereotype students based on various factors such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and cultural status (Carman, 2011; Moon & Brighton, 2008). Stereotypical views held by teachers contribute to the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education in that it affects how gifted minority students are perceived and referred for gifted services.

Moreover, the literature revealed that the negative attitudes and stereotypical views of minority students by teachers affect the identification practices whereby students are admitted to gifted education programs. Thus, the identification practices for the admittance of students to gifted programs are another reason for the inequity of student representation in gifted education. The identification of something assumes understanding and knowledge of what that something could be (Lohman & Gambrell, 2012). However, there are multiple definitions of the term gifted, which makes it challenging to identify students who are gifted (Ford & King, 2014). Hence, flaws in the identification practices for admittance to gifted education programs, specifically in teacher referral/nominations is a theme found in the literature that limited the number of gifted minority students represented in gifted education.

Teacher referrals and/or teacher nominations is one of the most common methods used to identify gifted students. Studies have shown that students are not being referred to gifted



education because of various reasons. One reason is the makeup of the teacher workforce whereby the majority of teachers are White (Kena et al., 2015). As such, White students get referred to gifted programs more as compared to non-White students (Ford & Whiting, 2016). Furthermore, research has also shown that teachers' negative attitudes and prejudicial thinking influence their decision to refer minority students for gifted services (Ford et al., 2013).

In addition, it has been documented that teacher perceptions also attribute to the inequity of students in gifted education programs. Teacher perceptions of minority students cause barriers that influence their ability to identify potential students of color (Harradine et al., 2014). Teacher discretion in gifted referrals impact gifted minority student assignment in that they cause minority students to be under referred for gifted services (Grissom & Redding, 2016). Even more so, another common identification practice used to identify gifted students is comparing students to their grade level peers in the same age group and environment. Standardized test scores comparing students to their age level peers are also used to identify gifted students (Chadwell, 2010).

Overall, there are multiple factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education. Research has not confirmed which factors contribute the most to issue of student inequity in gifted education or to what specific affect those factors have on gifted minority student underrepresentation. The theoretical framework of transformative leadership is the theory that guided the basis of this research. Transformative leadership in education seeks to promote change through academic success and social transformation (Shields, 2011). Thus, this theory could help with changing the process and practices of gifted education to help make it inclusive so that all students who are qualified are being identified as gifted and recommended to gifted education programs.

## **Critique of Research**

Harradine et al. (2014) conducted research on what affect teacher perceptions have on the identification of students of color. The study used 1,100 teachers from four different states in which teachers used assessment tools to see if they could recognize the potential in students of color. Findings from the study showed that teacher race was a barrier that affected whether they recognized the high potential in students of color. Harradine et al. (2014), acknowledged limitations to their study whereby they asserted “using multiple sources of information when looking for strengths in students, perhaps by examining perceptions of students’ teachers over time to look for patterns of consistency, would lend meaning to the patterns that emerge” (p. 32). There was sound information produced from the study yet the study still leaves unanswered questions as to what services can be offered to help teachers work through barriers that could prevent them from recognizing the high academic potential in students of color, which is a factor that influences the number of minority students represented in gifted education.

From reviewing the literature, there was not a sufficient amount of research that had been conducted to understand how factors, specifically teacher perceptions, affect the inequity of student representation in gifted education. There are limited studies available and more research needs to be conducted to ascertain what role teacher perceptions play in influencing the underrepresentation of gifted minority students in gifted education. There are possibly many African American students not reaching their potential because they are not being identified as gifted (Ford & King, 2014). This study examined how teacher perceptions influence minority student representation in secondary gifted education programs, with a specific focus on African American students.

## Summary

Historically, minorities, specifically African American students, have been underrepresented and underserved in gifted education (Siegle et al., 2016). Since the 1970s, researchers have documented the rate at which minorities are being identified as gifted and the resulting underrepresentation of these students in gifted education programs (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Yoon & Gentry, 2009). Presently, the inequitable representation of gifted minority students is still a growing concern in the field of gifted education (Ford et al., 2008). According to Grissom and Redding (2016), “substantial race disparities exist in the student receipt of gifted education services in American schools” (p. 1) and despite the efforts to ascertain what leads to the underrepresentation of minorities in gifted education, underrepresentation is still a prevalent problem (Peters & Engerrand, 2016).

This chapter provided an overview of factors leading to the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education. The literature showed that there are multiple factors that contribute to the inequity of student representation in gifted education. These factors include but are not limited to the opportunity to learn, identification practices for admittance to gifted programs, testing, teacher stereotypes and perceptions, peer pressure/racial identity, and cultural and social inequality. Although teacher perceptions are a factor that lead to the inequitable representation of minority students in gifted education, a search of the literature revealed that there have not been many studies conducted on what effect it has on the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education.

Teacher referral is one of the most common methods of identifying gifted students (Carman, 2011). According to Ford et al. (2008) “teacher referral...intentionally or unintentionally, serves as a gatekeeper, closing doors to gifted education classrooms...” (p. 295).

A dependence on teacher referral can hinder ethnic students' participation in gifted education programs because of teachers' perceptions whereby teachers may not recognize students' giftedness. In some schools, even if African American students have met the requirements for gifted services they are under referred to gifted education programs when compared to their White peers (Grissom & Redding, 2016). The underrepresentation of minorities in gifted education has led to a growing academic achievement gap (Bieneman, 2011). Additionally, Ford and King (2014) asserted that underrepresentation hinders African American student academic success and life opportunities.

This literature review developed a unique conceptual framework using a theory of transformative leadership along with the concepts of collective efficacy and deficit thinking to understand what can assist the inequality of minority representation in gifted education, thus there is reason for assuming that inquiry into the impact of teacher perceptions on the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education would yield socially significant findings. I can, therefore, claim that the literature review provided a strong foundation for pursuing a research project to answer the following research question: How do teacher perceptions influence minority student representation in secondary gifted education programs, with a specific focus on African American students?

## **Chapter 3: The Methodology**

### **Introduction**

According to Kettler et al. (2015), gifted education programs are a very important part of public education as gifted education programs help challenge high ability learners and give enhanced educational opportunities that can lead to students being productive workers in the future. Even more so, gifted education programs provide an enhanced curriculum and instruction that helps accelerate student engagement and rigorous experiences (Siegle et al., 2016). The literature has revealed that historically minorities, specifically African Americans, have been significantly underrepresented and underserved in Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) programs (Siegle et al., 2016) and the underrepresentation of these minorities is still a growing problem in public education in the United States (Peters & Engerrand, 2016).

According to Ford and Whiting (2016), the perception of teachers is a very influential factor in gifted education as it can determine important decisions on behalf of students in gifted education programs. In existing literature, there is limited information on how teachers perceive African American students regarding the identification and referral of African American students to gifted education programs. Harradine et al. (2014) suggested a reason that students of color are overlooked for identification and referral to gifted education programs may be due to teacher assumptions of students. Thus, the purpose of the current study sought to understand what perspectives secondary school teachers have regarding African American students as to how they identify and refer African American students for enrollment in gifted education programs and how teacher perceptions influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs.

In order to understand the phenomenon of the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education, a conceptual framework was employed that utilized the theory of transformative leadership, collective efficacy, and deficit thinking (Bieneman, 2011) as this was an important theory that guided the action of this study as education is constantly evolving and transforming. This study used a qualitative phenomenological research approach that allowed for transformative knowledge claims (Creswell, 2013). The remainder of the chapter provides an overview of the research questions, the research purpose and design, and a discussion of the research population and sampling method. Following those sections are an overview of instruments that was used in the study, the data collection process, a discussion of the identification of attributes, data analysis procedures, and limitations and delimitations of the research. The chapter concludes with an overview of the study's validity, expected findings, ethical considerations, and a summary.

### **Research Questions**

According to Peters and Engerrand (2016), the inequity of student representation in GATE programs is not a new concern in education at the K-12 level. Teacher discretion in regard to teacher referral and/or nominations is a common method used to identify and refer students for gifted education. Current research reported that African American students are still not being identified for gifted education programs at the same rate as White students whereby approximately 40% of the U.S. total student population is students of color yet only an estimated 9% of African American students are identified as gifted as compared to White students (Harradine et al., 2014). The literature indicated that there is limited knowledge on how teacher perceptions influence the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education, especially with African American students. Thus, the main research questions that guided this study was:

How do teacher perceptions influence minority student representation in secondary gifted education programs, with a specific focus on African American students? To address this question, the following subquestions were included:

Subquestion 1: How are African American students identified and referred for enrollment in gifted education programs, according to secondary school teachers?

Subquestion 2: How do secondary school teacher perceptions of identifying and referring African American students to GATE programs influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education?

To answer each research question, in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with open-ended questions were conducted with each individual participant. In addition, member checking was also used as a validation technique to increase the credibility of the results (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). Lastly, a researcher journal, a journal of what the researcher observed was utilized to serve as another source of data to provide evidence about the research (Lamb, 2013).

### **Purpose and Design of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was twofold. The first purpose was to ascertain the perspectives of secondary school teachers of African American students as to how secondary school teachers identify and refer African American students to gifted education programs. The second purpose was to explore secondary school teacher perceptions of the identification and referral of African American students for enrollment to gifted education programs to examine how teacher perceptions influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education.

According to Creswell (2013), there are three types of research approaches: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods. Quantitative research is useful for assessing theories by exploring the relationship among variables. This type of research is framed in terms of numbers and the use of close-ended questions (Creswell, 2013). Quantitative research allows for data to be collected from a large number of people and can lead to an increased breadth of understanding of a research problem. However, quantitative research does not allow for assessing the meaning of data (Francisco, Butterfoss, & Capwell, 2001). In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative research “is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2013, p. 32). This research approach uses an inductive style to generate themes from multiple meanings (Creswell, 2013). Even more so, mixed-methods research is a mode of inquiry that involves quantitative and qualitative methods. This type of approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem than either approach used individually. This study used a qualitative research approach as it was the best method to explore a human phenomenon particularly with understanding perceptions when there is little research on that phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). In a similar study by Chadwell (2008) the researcher used a qualitative approach to study the perceptions of teachers and parents regarding the underrepresentation of gifted African American students.

There are many different types of qualitative research designs, which include but are not limited to narrative research, ethnography, action research, case study, and phenomenology. Narrative research is a type of qualitative research design that allows researchers to obtain personal stories about an individual or individuals’ lives. Often, in narrative research the researcher retells the story in a narrative chronology (Creswell, 2013). Narrative research can be useful when a researcher would like to understand a person’s experience, yet it limits the number



of participants in a study, which can affect the validity and reliability. In this study, narrative research is not an appropriate design because it focuses on telling the story of an individual which is not the purpose of this study. The purpose of this study sought to understand the phenomenon of the underrepresentation in gifted education as related to the individuals involved in that phenomenon. Ethnography is another type of qualitative research design that enables researchers to understand a cultural group's shared meanings or behavior over an extended period of time (Creswell, 2013). This study did not warrant an ethnographic design as I did not solely focus on a specific cultural group of teachers, rather I focused on the phenomenon of underrepresented African Americans in gifted education.

As a qualitative research design, the purpose of action research is to understand or solve a problem to lead to improved actions and practice. "Action research...is special in that it is carried out by the people directly responsible for the action" (Stake, 2010, p. 159). Thus, action research would not prove a useful design for this study because this study sought to understand a phenomenon and not solve a problem. Case study is a qualitative inquiry that allows for an in-depth analysis of a case over a prolonged period of time (Creswell, 2013) which was also not the purpose of this study. Although a case study allows for the understanding of individual perceptions, it limits the number of participants and an objective of this study was to solicit perspectives of the phenomenon from multiple participants.

Phenomenology is "a design of inquiry. . . that . . . describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants" (Creswell, 2013, p. 42). Marsh and Willis (2003) characterized phenomenology as getting people to critically think and reflect on what they feel, see, and believe. A phenomenological approach allows the researcher to enter the participant's field of perception as they experience and live the phenomenon, and find

meaning for the experiences of the participants (Creswell, 1998). In this study, the teachers had experienced the phenomena being explored and were asked to verbally relate their experiences to the researcher. Thus, a phenomenological approach was the most appropriate research design as it provided a sound framework for assessing information based on the participant's understanding of the phenomenon, which in this case would be the underrepresented African Americans in gifted education (Creswell, 2005). In a similar study by Letcher (2014), the researcher used a phenomenological design to explore African American community college faculty perceptions to gain a better understanding of how various factors such as history, leadership, and the perceptions of individuals within the community college affected the underrepresentation of African American faculty who are employed in community colleges. Overall, the framework of qualitative research along with the precepts of phenomenology was an appropriate research design as it allowed for the exploration of the research participants lived experiences. Moreover, this method and design was in alignment with the purpose of the study, which was to explore the perceptions of secondary school teachers as to how they identify and refer African American students for enrollment in gifted education programs and how those perspectives of secondary school teachers influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs.

### **Research Population and Sampling Method**

To fulfill the purpose of this study and answer the research questions, the general research population for this study consisted of secondary middle school teachers. The target population consisted of secondary middle school teachers from a public education school district in Central Texas. The school district had diverse student demographics with a varied range of ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic representation. The sample population for the study was

secondary middle school teachers. Among the schools in the district, the site chosen for the study had a majority African American student population (40.3% of the students are African American) (Texas academic Report, n.d.). The chosen school was appropriate because it allowed for representation of the desired student population referenced in this study.

According to Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005), when conducting a study, choosing a sampling method and defining the sample size is an active process and is key to qualitative research. Many qualitative researchers often choose a sampling method that will allow them to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon they seek to study. Purposive sampling is a sampling method whereby the researcher considers the purpose of the research and selects the appropriate sample participants accordingly (Coyne, 1997). In a purposive sample, the researcher draws the sample by beginning with specific perspectives to explore and then identifies research participants who meet the criteria (Blackstone, 2012) to be included in the study because they represent a wide variety of possible perspectives within the realm of the specified purpose (Koerber & McMichael, 2008). According to Higginbottom (2004), a key guiding concept of purposive sampling is maximum variation.

The type of sampling method for this study was purposive sampling because it gave the researcher “some degree of choice in selecting their research sample and...a clear purpose guides their choice” (Koerber & McMichael, 2008, p. 466). Moreover, purposive sampling was utilized because it allowed the researcher to intentionally select individuals and locations to gain an understanding of the phenomena (Creswell, 2005). For this study, the participants were selected based on the following criteria: (a) at least 5 years teaching experience, (b) professional training related to working with the gifted and talented populations, and (c) experience working with diverse student populations. The rationale for choosing teachers that had at least 5 years of

experience was to have teachers who had relevant experience teaching and working with gifted students of multiple ethnicities and races whereby those teachers could expound on those experiences in an interview with the researcher. Overall, this criterion was appropriate for assessing the perspectives of secondary middle school teachers and how they identify and refer African American students for enrollment to gifted education programs as well as how those perceptions influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education.

Morse (2000) and Creswell (1998) asserted that an adequate sample size for a phenomenological study is 6–10. Thus, the sample size for this study was 6–10 participants. However, I sought to initially recruit a larger sample to be proactive in participant recruitment efforts in the event that participants canceled, did not respond, or could not participate for a specific reason. Thus, I recruited research participants until I had reached an adequate number needed for the study as well as for data saturation.

Data saturation occurs when enough information has been obtained to replicate the study (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012; Walker, 2012), when no new data emerges (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006), and when coding the data is not possible (Guest et al., 2006). According to Burmeister and Aitken (2012), data saturation is not necessarily about numbers rather it is about the depth of the data. Moreover, in a phenomenological research design, the use of probing questions helps the researcher attain data saturation (Amerson, 2011; Bucic, Robinson, & Ramburuth, 2010). I ensured data saturation by conducting six interviews to yield rich and thick data (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I knew data saturation was reached once no new data was obtained and there were no more emerging themes from the data (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Qualitative phenomenological research requires the use of interviews. Confidentiality is challenging to maintain in face-to-face interviews; however, all efforts should be made by the

researcher to ensure confidentiality is maintained (Walker, 2007). Leedy and Ormrod (2004) and Nwachukwu (2005) posited that a good way for the researcher to maintain the confidentiality of research participants is to use coding and pseudonyms to prevent the disclosure of participants in a study. A coding system can help “. . . protect the individuals’ identity during the process of data analysis and in the publication of research results” (Walker, 2007, p. 42). Participants were given a numerical pseudonym code PIP, which stood for Phenomenological Interview Participant; the number each participant was assigned was in accordance to the numerical order they were interviewed. For this study, prospective research participants received a consent form that outlined how information obtained from the study would be guarded, stored, and destroyed after the study.

### **Instrumentation**

Interviews are a common data collection tool used in qualitative research (Peters & Halcomb, 2015). Semi-structured interviews are a type of qualitative interview that “. . . can produce powerful data that provides insights into participants’ experiences, perceptions or opinions” (Peters & Halcomb, 2015, p. 6). Thus, for collecting data, I used semi-structured interviews to address the research questions. The interview instrument (see Appendix H) was designed for the specific purpose of soliciting responses from secondary middle school teachers concerning their perceptions of African American students as to how secondary school teachers identify and refer African American students to gifted education programs as well as how those perspectives influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education.

The primary data collection tool was in-depth, face-to-face, one-on-one interview sessions that only included the researcher and research participant. The interview format was semi-structured. According to Hancock and Algozzine (2006), in qualitative interviews

researchers use predetermined questions as well as ask follow-up questions in an effort to solicit more information about the phenomenon of interest. Thus, questions were designed so that participant answers could contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon of the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education. As suggested by Creswell (2013), probing questions were also used to collect new information and/or clarify information.

Following the interview protocol suggested by Creswell (2013), I gave all interviewees standard procedures to follow, asked the interview questions, gave time between questions to document responses, and gave a thank you statement to the interviewees for their time. The interview had 16 semi-structured and open-ended questions that were derived and developed from the research question. The open-ended interview questions included questions about how participants perceive African American students, and how participants believed secondary school teacher perceptions influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education. Example interview questions were: (a) can you explain if you think gifted students equitably exists in all environments regardless of race, culture, or socioeconomic factors, and (b) describe the educational training you have had to identify and understand the needs of minority children. Semi-structured interviews provide rich information about the experiences and perceptions of participants (Peters & Halcomb, 2015). Each interview was anticipated to last approximately 60 to 90 minutes and took place in a designated classroom at the research site. As the interviewer, I took notes during the interview and noted things such as the environment setting and nonverbal aspects of the interviewee such as body language, facial expressions, eye contact, tone of voice, gestures, and more. I audio recorded and transcribed each interview verbatim. In the event the interviewee did not want to be audio recorded I would indicate the requirement outlined on the consent form. Therefore, if a participant was unwilling to consent to

being audio recorded, I would thank the individual for their willingness to participate and recruit other participants in the pool of applicants if necessary.

Validity is founded upon the accuracy of findings from the perspective of the researcher, the participants or readers of an account (Creswell & Miller, 2000). According to Creswell (2013) many qualitative researchers use multiple forms of data such as interviews, documents, observations, and audiovisuals rather than depend on a single source of data. The current study ensured validity through triangulation, the collection of multiple data sources (Creswell, 2013). Triangulation is a means by which qualitative researchers explore various levels and perspectives of a phenomenon (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Qualitative researchers can triangulate different sources of data by examining evidence from the sources and using the data to generate a justification for themes (Creswell, 2013). “If themes are established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding validity to the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251).

The process of member checking was also used to ensure the validity of the data obtained. Member checking is the process of “taking the final report or specific descriptions or themes back to the participants and determining whether these participants feel that they are accurate” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). For this study, all participants received a transcribed script of their interview. The participants were asked to review the documents for correctness of the transcription as well as if the analysis was a correct account of their perceptions collected through the interview.

Finally, I completed a research journal as another validation technique. Data collected in a research journal can be used as supplemental data of other primary data sources (Lamb, 2013). A research journal gives a measure of perspective of the study from the viewpoint of the

researcher (Lamb, 2013). Additionally, “a research journal contributes to. . . the trustworthiness of a research study” (Jasper, 2005, p. 248). Lastly, an exploratory pilot study was conducted to field the effectiveness of potential interview questions.

## **Data Collection**

Initially, a site authorization and permission to conduct the study request letter (see Appendix A) was sent via email to the principal of research site. The letter contained an overview of the study, a request for permission to solicit prospective individuals from the research site to participate in the study, a request for the email addresses of educators at the research site, as well as a request to use the campus to conduct interviews. Once permission was granted and a list of potential participant emails was provided, a recruitment letter email (see Appendix B) was sent to potential participants at the research site that explained the overview of the study, a request for participation, the requirements to participate, and the researchers contact information. To participate in the study participants must have met the purposeful sampling criteria of: (a) at least 5 years teaching experience, (b) professional training on working with the gifted and talented populations, and (c) experience working with diverse student populations. The recruitment letter email requested that participants contact the researcher by email or phone to express interest in participating in the study. The letter also requested that prospective participants provide a contact phone number to the researcher. If potential participants did not respond to the initial email, I continued to email all non-respondent prospective participants once a week until enough responses had been received to meet the requirements suggested by the literature to conduct a phenomenological study.

As responses from interested participants were received, I called each interested participant to ensure they met the requirements to participate in the study. Once screening was



completed, while on the initial screening call I scheduled an interview date and time with each participant. Following the initial screening call, participants received an email with an unsigned consent form (see Appendix C) attached that contained the purpose of the study, confidentiality measures, and a notice of the right for the participant to withdraw from the study at any time. According to Neuman (2003), providing the participants the unsigned consent form gives participants an awareness of their rights and participation in the study. In addition, the email also confirmed the date and time of the interview scheduled between the participant and I during the initial screening call. I asked the participants to provide notice by email or phone if there was a problem with the scheduled interview and time.

Prior to data collection, I conducted a pilot study to trial interview questions to ascertain if those questions were appropriately designed to solicit responses that would aid in answering the research questions for the study. Pilot interviewees were selected from among the participants who wished to volunteer from RMS. Once I received responses from potential participants, I emailed two teachers and asked them to be a part of the pilot study. The participants for the pilot study were two teachers who met the purposeful sampling criteria for the study but were not a part of the sampling population for the study. The participants were informed that they were part of the pilot study.

The pilot study was exploratory in nature. The purpose of the pilot study was to ensure that the interview questions were feasible and appropriate. Thus, the overall reason for the pilot study was to provide feedback on the instrument created by the researcher to answer the research questions. At the beginning of each pilot study interview, I reviewed the consent form with the participants. Once the participants had given consent to participate I read the pilot interview script (see Appendix E) to the participant and the interview began. Each participant was given a

hard copy of the study's research questions and a hard copy of the interview questions (see Appendix D) while they recalled their experiences about the questioned phenomenon of the study (Nwachukwu, 2005). The participants were asked questions to identify the effectiveness of the design of the interview questions. All pilot study participants were given a pilot interview review form to use (see Appendix F) to provide the researcher with feedback about the instrument's design. On the review form, a numerical pseudonym was assigned to the participant for confidentiality purposes. I kept a record of the participants name and numerical pseudonym in the event the researcher needed to contact the participant for any clarification. If necessary, the participant's feedback would be used by the researcher to modify the instrument prior to actual data collection. However, the pilot participants did not have any feedback so no modifications were made to the instrument.

The primary method for collecting data was in-depth, face-to-face, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. At the beginning of each interview, I provided a hard copy of and reviewed the consent form (see Appendix C) and had the participants sign the form as a written confirmation of their willingness to participate in the study. Once the participant had provided consent I read the interview verbal script (see Appendix G) to reiterate that participation in the study was voluntary and that the participant could withdraw at any time. In addition, I reaffirmed the participants' confidentiality, explained to the participants the standard procedures of the study's interview protocol, and I indicated to the participant that it should take less than 1.5 hours for the interview and less than 1 hour for review of the transcript.

All interviews were audio recorded with an iPad and I obtained permission via the consent form from the participants to audio record the interview sessions. I followed the protocol established by Page (2005) to audio record the interview sessions. Page (2005) suggested the

following process for audio-recorded interviews: transcribe the written document in a Microsoft Word document, conduct member checking whereby the participants will receive an email (see Appendix I) of the completed interview transcript for verification and editing purposes. The transcripts were sent to the participant 48 hours after the interview and the participant had 72 hours to return to me. If no response was received from the participant, I assumed that there were no concerns from the participant.

Moreover, I also documented observations of the interview in a research journal. I documented the physical setting of the environment such as the arrangement of the room. In addition, the participants' behavior was documented such as their disposition and attitude as well as any nonverbal aspects of the research context like body language and facial expressions. I used a clipboard and notepad to document observations of the interview. I also described and interpreted my behavior and experiences regarding the context of the research. For example, I documented my facial expressions, body language, use of gestures, and any experience I had with African American students in gifted education. Following this protocol helped to ensure the accuracy of the collected data from the recordings.

I asked the participants 16 open-ended questions (see Appendix H) concerning their perceptions of African American student regarding the identification and referral of African American students to gifted education programs as well as how teacher perceptions of African American students influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education. In addition to member checking, if there was a need for clarification of information the researcher contacted the participants via email or telephone. The data collected from the interviews and the recordings were placed in a secured filing folder and were disposed of by the process of shredding. Additionally, electronic files were stored on an encrypted server with a

password protected system. After I no longer need the collected data, the data stored on the computer will be erased from the hard drive and the recording on the iPad will be deleted after 3 years.

## **Data Analysis**

Research subquestion one sought to understand how African American students are identified and referred for enrollment in gifted education programs, according to secondary school teachers while research subquestion two asked how secondary school teachers' perceptions of identifying and referring African American students to GATE programs influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education. In-depth, face-to-face, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews conducted by me were used to solicit responses from research participants to collect data to answer each research question. In addition, I collected data in the form of documented observations of the interviews to document participant behavior and any nonverbal aspects relevant to the purpose of the study. The participant responses and the researcher's documented observations were analyzed using a phenomenological data analysis method that aided in capturing the participants' perceptions and exploring the phenomenon to generate a description of the individuals' experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Prior to data analysis, I employed bracketing. Bracketing is a method researchers use to delete preconceptions related to the studied phenomenon to increase the rigor of the research. Even more so, Giorgi (2009) described bracketing as a suspension or removal of bias on behalf of the researcher regarding the experiences of the phenomenon being studied. Moreover, Giorgi (2009) asserted that bracketing in qualitative research is important because it allows for objectivity during data analysis. Thus, I applied bracketing by keeping a reflexive journal and identifying and recording any preconceptions during the research process such as I have been a

secondary middle school teacher, I am qualified to teach gifted and talented students, and I have taught gifted African American students. Employing bracketing allowed the researcher to maintain a reflexive viewpoint regarding the research (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

The data analysis process followed a phenomenological analysis outlined by Giorgi (1997, 2009, 2012). In the first step, I collected the data. The purpose of collecting the data was to obtain “a concrete, detailed description of the subject’s experience and actions, as faithful as possible to what happened as experienced by the subject” (Giorgi, 1997, p. 245).

In the second step, I read through the data (entire description) before beginning the analysis to gain an understanding of the studied phenomenon. According to Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) a researcher “cannot begin an analysis of description without knowing how it ends” (p. 252). During interviews, the descriptions that are given are lengthy and may contain information that is not important to the study. Thus, the lengthy descriptions were divided into meaning units, which is the third step in the process. To divide the data into meaning units, I reread the data to construct meaning units connected with the experience and the purpose of the study (Giorgi, 2009, 2012). It is important to note that the meaning units are aligned with the attitude of the researcher and do not carry any theoretical weight (Giorgi, 2012).

In the next step, I transformed the data into expressions relative to the scientific discipline (Giorgi, 1997). In this step, free imaginative variation was important because it allowed me to describe the “essential structure of the concrete, lived experience from the perspective of the discipline” (Giorgi, 1997, p. 247). In the final step, I used the essential structure constructed in step four and utilized it to express how the studied phenomenon coheres or converges. In addition, I used the essential structure to interpret the raw data of the research to synthesize invariant or essential meanings (Giorgi, 1997, 2012).

Coding or categorizing data is an important step in the data analysis process. The process of coding constitutes taking the raw data and dividing it into codes (Wong, 2008). A code is a “descriptive construct designed by the researcher to capture the primary content or essence of the data” (Theron, 2015, p. 3). Coding is an interpretive activity that allows a researcher not only to label data but it also helps link data to an idea (Theron, 2015). According to Saldaña (2013), coding is a cyclic process and the more cycles integrated into the process, the richer the meaning and themes can be constructed from the data.

Conventionally, researchers have had to manually code data, which was done in the current study. To code the data, I read through the participant responses to gain a first impression. I applied open, axial, and selective coding to the data, coding techniques that are commonly used in qualitative studies with a phenomenological approach (Turner, Ownsworth, Cornwell, & Fleming, 2009).

First, open coding was applied to the data. In open coding, I did an initial read through of the participant interviews and reread the participant interview transcripts while highlighting and noting patterns (Turner et al., 2009). Ultimately, I read through the data to get an initial impression. Next, I reread through the data and, for each question answered by the participants, I used highlighters and sticky notes to color code the answers. After the initial open coding, I recorded the codes in Microsoft Word using multiple highlighters and font colors.

Following open coding, I applied axial coding to the data. During the axial coding process, I identified one open coding category and created subcategories around this phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). For each question, I looked at the codes created from open coding, created subcategories, and isolated important statements and placed the codes into larger units of themes. Themes “appear as major findings in qualitative studies . . . they should be

supported by diverse quotations and specific evidence” (Creswell, 2013, p. 249). The themes were also color coded on sticky notes and I noted how many times the themes occurred. Then, I recorded and color coded the themes using highlight and font colors in Microsoft Word. Axial coding allowed me to specify emerging themes and codes and make connections between those themes and codes (Turner et al., 2009). In addition, I also dissected the themes and codes to ensure that each is fully expanded and described (Turner et al., 2009).

The final iteration in the coding process was selective coding of the data. In this stage, I used a higher level of specificity than axial coding (Turner et al., 2009). Additionally, in this step, I integrated key codes and themes to shape a logical picture of the studied phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). When the data did not reveal any new or unique categories, then data saturation was assumed to have been reached and written interpretation of the data began.

Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) posited that qualitative data should be examined to support that codes and themes were gathered from the data. Consequently, this should lead to a written interpretation of the meaning of the data regarding the conceptual framework, research questions, literature review, and the researcher’s views or what Giorgi (1997) termed free imaginative variation. To interpret the data, I used an interpretive outline tool by Bloomberg and Volpe (2008). The interpretive outline tool is a reflective critical inquiry process that assisted the researcher in analyzing the data for emerging patterns and themes. The tool used questions such as what is happening here and how can what is happening be explained. I used these questions to probe for an in-depth understanding of the meanings of the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

## **Limitations**

In the process of conducting research there are limitations, as such this study was no exception as there were elements that were limited. The first limitation of the study was the

utilized research method. A qualitative phenomenological approach was used that allowed for the understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions of research participants regarding the studied phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). However, a limit of using a qualitative research method is it produces an in-depth understanding of the experiences of a phenomenon of a small group of participants but it does not produce findings that are generalizable. As a result, a limitation of using a qualitative research method is that the findings of the analysis may not be representative of a wide population. Even more so, qualitative studies can contain aspects of subjectivity and bias (Creswell, 2007), which can present a limit in a study. To avoid this, I employed bracketing and attempted to suspend any preconceived notions about the studied phenomenon.

A second limitation of this study was the instrumentation. For this study, the instrument used to collect data was semi-structured interviews. Although interviews are one of the most common methods of data collection in phenomenological research (Peters & Halcomb, 2015) the use of a semi-structured interview presents a potential limitation because participants may not be as honest and candid as they could be which affects the validity of the study. Additionally, as the researcher my presence may affect how the participant responds. In order to minimize these actions, I made participants aware that their participation in the study was confidential and had them sign a consent form. I also aimed to make the participants feel as comfortable as possible (Moustakas, 1994) so they could feel free to be as candid as possible. To make the participants feel comfortable I offered them water and snacks. I also asked the participants if they were comfortable. If the participants replied yes then I proceeded with the interview. However, if the participants replied no I asked how she could make them feel comfortable and attempted to accommodate them. Additionally, another limitation of using semi-structured interviews is that



every interview is unique and the results of each interview may be difficult to compare (Peters & Halcomb, 2015).

Furthermore, another potential limitation of the study was the small sample size. It is suggested in the literature that a qualitative study with a phenomenological approach have a small sample size of no more than 6–10 participants (Creswell, 1998). To address this limit, I ensured data saturation had been reached. Lastly, another potential limitation was in the coding process as there are inherent ambiguities in the human language. Thus, data analysis is affected by this limitation (Atieno, 2009) as it can affect the interpretation of the data. As such, I reread and recoded data as needed to allow for effective interpretation of the data.

### **Delimitations**

The sampling method was a potential delimitation of the study. A purposive sampling method was chosen as it allowed me to intentionally select participants who met a certain criterion to gain an understanding of the studied phenomenon (Creswell, 2005). Due to usage of the purposive sampling method, the focus of the study was centered on secondary middle school teachers of gifted and talented students. Consequently, the findings of the study may be different if the participants were elementary or high school teachers of gifted and talented students as they may offer different experiences and perspectives of the studied phenomenon.

Furthermore, a potential delimitation of the study was the location of the study. The study was geographically restricted to Central Texas. The findings of the study may not be able to be considered representative of outside populations, as it may not consider the experiences of teachers from other locations.

Additionally, another potential delimitation was the school district and school where the study was conducted. I was employed at the school in which the study took place as such the

participants of the study may feel uncomfortable when answering interview questions which could affect the validity of the study. According to Moustakas (1994) it is important to make the participants feel comfortable. I created a comfortable environment by ensuring the participants that their participation in the study was confidential and by assigning the participants numerical pseudonyms to prevent them from being identified. Lastly, another potential delimitation of the study was requiring participants to have an email address. As a result, only people who had an email were able to participate, which delimited the participant group for the study.

### **Validation**

According to Creswell (2013), qualitative validity “means that the researcher checks for accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures” (p. 251). Validity is an important strength of qualitative research (Creswell, 2013) and is based on determining if the findings are accurate from the view of the researcher, participants, or the readers of a story (Creswell & Miller, 2000). There are many validation strategies available to check the accuracy of findings. Creswell (2013) suggested that researchers use multiple validations strategies to “enhance the researcher’s ability to assess the accuracy of the findings as well as convince readers of that accuracy” (p. 251).

To validate the qualitative findings in this study I used member checking. Member checking is a technique to explore the credibility of results. In the process of member checking a final report of the data is returned to participants who are in turn asked by the researcher to comment and check for accuracy of their experiences and perspectives related to the studied phenomenon (Birt et al., 2016; Creswell, 2013). I employed member checking and sent a final transcript and copy of the findings to the research participants and the participants were asked to

read the findings and comment with questions or concerns they had about the presented information.

Even more so, credibility and dependability were established using the triangulation of data sources. Hopwood (2004) advised qualitative researchers who utilized triangulation to let the data speak for itself and not allow preconceived notions affect data analysis. Triangulation typically involves examining evidence from different data sources and corroborating the evidence to build and justify themes. Hence, if themes are established based on evidence from multiple data sources then it can add to the validity of the study (Creswell, 2013). Triangulation of data sources for this study included participant interviews, pilot study, reflexive researcher journal, and observations.

Transferability is also an important component of qualitative research. For this study, transferability was achieved through the use of rich, thick description, which was used to convey the study's findings (Creswell, 2013). Rich, thick description helps to "transport readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experiences" (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). Therefore, I provided detailed descriptions of the environment and offered multiple perspectives about themes to make the results realistic and richer (Creswell, 2013). In doing so, this added to the validity of the study.

### **Expected Findings**

The underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education is a relevant issue in educational research (Peters & Engerrand, 2016). Based on a review of the literature, studies have shown that identification practices that utilize teacher perceptions tend to overlook minority students for enrollment in gifted education (Coleman et al., 2007; Davis, 2003; Robinson et al., 2007). Moreover, a review of the literature also showed that the negative

attitudes of teachers hinder the representation of minority students in gifted education. As such, the negative attitudes of the teachers influence how they identify and refer minority students to gifted education (Ford et al., 2013). Therefore, I anticipated the findings from the study to be like Harradine et al. (2014) which showed that teacher perceptions had a negative effect on the identification and referral of African American students to gifted education. Thus, I expected the current study's findings to report teacher perceptions as to how the teacher plays a role in how African American students are identified and referred for enrollment to gifted education.

Ford et al., (2004) asserted that teacher perceptions play a significant role in the equal representation of students in gifted education programs. Grissom and Redding (2016) conducted a study on how teacher perceptions affect the underrepresentation of students of color in gifted education programs. The researchers found that African American students who had exceptional high achievement test scores were not readily assigned to gifted services. Thus, Grissom and Redding (2016) concluded that teacher perceptions influence the gifted assignment of minority students. Grissom and Redding (2016) came to this conclusion because the study reported that African American students were less referred to gifted programs when compared to students who were not African American. Therefore, I also anticipated the findings of this study would show that teacher perceptions do influence the gifted assignment of African American students whereby it influences African American student enrollment and causes African American students to be underrepresented in gifted education.

### **Ethical Issues**

Ethical issues may arise in the process of conducting research. The ethical consideration of this study was guided by the basic principles outlined in the Belmont Report (United States, 1978). The three basic principles outlined are "respect for persons, beneficence, and justice"

(United States, 1978, p. 10). I should respect all participants' right to share information of the studied phenomenon. Therefore, to safeguard ethical consideration as well as confidentiality each participant was asked to sign an informed consent form prior to data collection. According to Blackstone (2012), research should be founded on voluntary informed consent from research participants. Additionally, informed consent constitutes a responsibility on behalf of the researcher to fully divulge to research participants(s) what the research is about. Additionally, informed consent means that the participants are also aware of their power to choose or decline participation in the research, know the benefits and risks of the study, and how confidentiality will be maintained (Blackstone, 2012). For this study, the potential participants were given an informed consent (See Appendix C) containing the elements suggested by Blackstone (2012) accompanied with a verbal explanation of the study.

Additionally, to ensure beneficence and ensure no harm come to the participant the research protected participant confidentiality by de-identifying information and using numeral pseudonyms. Participants were assigned a numerical pseudonym code PIP, which stood for Phenomenological Interview Participant; the number each participant was assigned was in accordance to the numerical order they were interviewed. For example, the first participant interviewed was given the numerical pseudonym code PIP 001 and each participant thereafter was coded in the order they were interviewed. This coding system attempted to eliminate the possibility of participant's identity being revealed. Moreover, this coding system according to Creswell (2009) posits validity and builds credibility and respect. Even more so, I ensured the principle of justice was upheld by ensuring all participants were treated fairly, whereby all participants were asked the same interview questions and the same interview protocol was followed for all participants.

As the researcher, I fully informed all participants of the study's purpose, conducted the interviews, and analyzed all data. Therefore, a potential ethical concern was that of researcher bias. Potential bias to this study was that I am a secondary school teacher, I am qualified to teach gifted and talented students, and I am an African American. These potential biases were noted in a journal to make the researcher aware and avoid biases during the interview. In addition, I used bracketing, which allowed the researcher to maintain objectivity during the research (Tufford & Newman, 2010) and helped address concerns related to research or bias.

### **Summary**

A qualitative study with a phenomenological approach was utilized for this study. The methodology of qualitative research along with the phenomenological approach was an appropriate research method and design as it allowed for the investigation of the research participants lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). As stated in the purpose and design of the study section of this chapter, this method and design allowed me to explore the perceptions of secondary school teachers as to how they identify and refer African American students for enrollment in gifted education programs and how those perspectives of secondary school teachers influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs. The sample population of the study was secondary middle school teachers from the chosen data collection site and they were selected based on purposive sampling.

The data collection and data analysis process followed an amended version of the Descriptive Phenomenology Approach created by Amedeo Giorgi (2012). The research and analysis process of Giorgi (1997, 2009, 2012) assisted in the coding and transcribing of the participants' experiences. I used the semi-structured interviews to note the experiences of the participants but also bracket past knowledge regarding the studied phenomenon.

Lastly, I employed ethical consideration to protect the participants' confidentiality by having them sign a consent form to inform them of their rights, purpose of the study, and inform them that their participation in the study is voluntary and they may withdraw at any time (Blackstone, 2012). In addition, the participants were ensured that there would be no information that could link them to the study as each participant was assigned numerical pseudonyms. Based on the literature I anticipated that the findings from this study would show that teacher perceptions affect the gifted assignment of African American students and cause African American students to be underrepresented in gifted education. The data analysis and results were discussed and presented in Chapter 4. More specifically, chapter 4 contains a chapter overview, a description of the research population and participants, a discussion on the applicability of the research methodology and analysis to the study, a summary of the data, and a report of the data and results.

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results**

### **Introduction**

This qualitative, phenomenological study was conducted for two purposes. The first purpose of this study was to explore how secondary school teachers perceive African American students regarding how secondary school teachers identify and refer African American students for gifted services. Additionally, a second purpose of this study was to examine secondary school teacher perceptions on the identification and referral of African American students for admission into gifted education programs to understand how teacher perceptions influence the underrepresentation of African American student in gifted education programs.

For this study, a qualitative approach along with a phenomenological research design was utilized. A qualitative methodology was utilized as it was the best research method to investigate human phenomena, which in the case of this study was understanding perceptions (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, phenomenology was the best research design as it allowed for the studying of an individual's lived experiences of a phenomenon (Cilesiz, 2011). The main research question in this study asked how do teacher perceptions influence minority student representation in secondary gifted education programs, with a specific focus on African American students? To explore this phenomenon, rich, thick description (Creswell, 2013) is needed thus a qualitative, phenomenological approach was the best method to utilize in regard to the purpose of the study.

As discussed in Chapter 2, there is an underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education (Peters & Engerrand, 2012). As such, a literature review was conducted on factors that contribute to the inequity of students represented in gifted education programs. One factor that was shown to contribute to the inequity of students represented in gifted education programs was teacher perceptions. The literature review revealed that there was limited information on the



impact of teacher perceptions on the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education programs. Thus, the study sought to add to the literature by addressing what influence teacher perceptions have on the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education programs.

In order to address the main research question, the following subquestions were also developed. The first subquestion was: How are African American students identified and referred for enrollment in gifted education programs, according to secondary school teachers? The second subquestion was: How do secondary school teacher perceptions of identifying and referring African American students to GATE programs influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education? In order to answer each research question, in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with open-ended questions were conducted with each individual participant. In addition, a researcher journal was also utilized to serve as a supplemental data source to provide evidence about the research (Lamb, 2013).

As the researcher, I had multiple roles in this study in which one role was to disseminate information to each participant regarding the purpose of the study, facilitate interviews to gather data, and conduct data analysis and code the collected data. Even more so, according to Lichtman (2001), it is important that a researcher has some knowledge and experience related to the problems and issues. As such, it is imperative to note that an aspect of qualitative research considers the perspectives and biases of the researcher (Janesick, 2004). As a teacher, I have connections relevant to this study. I was a teacher in a secondary school setting for six years. In addition, I am certified to teach gifted and talented students, and I am an African American. The connections I have to this investigation caused me to be thoroughly invested in this study.

A non-evaluative report of the data analysis and results are discussed and presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 4 begins with an introduction that describes the overview of the study.

Following the introduction is a description of the research population and participant sample. Next, is a discussion on the applicability of the research methodology and analysis to the study. The research methodology and analysis section contains specific details on the phenomenological analysis of the data as well as the coding of the data. The results from the data analysis is interpreted and a detailed description of the summary of the findings is reported and presented.

### **Description of the Sample**

Recruitment for this study was initiated through email with permission from the building principal of the research site. I recruited potential participants from December into the first two weeks in January. Over 80 people received the recruitment email and only eight responses were received. As such, I followed the data collection procedures of continuing to email all non-respondent prospective participants once a week until enough responses had been received to meet the requirements suggested by the literature to conduct a phenomenological study. I received a total of eight responses from potential participants, however due to personal reasons two potential participants decided not to participate in the study. Thus, the final sample for this study consisted of six participants which was sufficient as the literature suggests that a sufficient sample size for a phenomenological study is 6–10 (Creswell, 1998; Morse, 2000).

The ethical consideration of this study guided by the Belmont Report (United States, 1978) was safeguarded as each participant was asked to sign an informed consent form, prior to data collection. Additionally, each participant was assigned a numerical pseudonym to ensure the confidentiality of their identity in the study. Participants were assigned a numerical pseudonym code (PIP); the number each participant was assigned was in accordance to the numerical order they were interviewed (ex: PIP 001).

For the intent of this qualitative study, I used purposive sampling to select participants. The participants were selected based on the criteria discussed in the data collection section of the study. All participants (a) taught for a minimum of 5 years, (b) had professional training in gifted and talented education, and (c) worked with diverse student populations. The sample of participants consisted of one man and five women from various ethnicities and backgrounds. Demographic data was obtained from all participants such as ethnicity, gender, and age. Even more so, other descriptive information was collected from participants such as years of experience in public education and grades taught. A total of six participants were interviewed. The participant's demographics along with additional characteristics are further outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

Numerical Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Teaching Experience (years)	Grades Taught
PIP 001	54	African American	Female	14	6, 7, 8
PIP 002	41	African American	Female	8	6, 9-12
PIP 003	34	White	Female	6	6, 7
PIP 004	39	Hispanic	Female	16	6, 7, 8
PIP 005	42	African American	Male	9	6, 7, 8
PIP 006	30	Hispanic	Female	6	6, 7, 8

**PIP 001.** Phenomenological interview participant one (PIP 001) is a 54-year-old African American female. PIP 001 has taught for 14 years and in those 14 years has been the department head for math. Throughout her teaching career she has taught 6–8th grade. PIP 001 has a Master’s degree in Curriculum. She is currently enrolled in a principal certification program.

**PIP 002.** Phenomenological interview participant two (PIP 002) is a 41-year-old African American female. She has taught for eight years in various schools throughout the U.S. as she is a military wife. Throughout her teaching career she has taught science at the 6th grade level as well as at the 9–12th grade level. She is currently the department head for science for the school where she works.

**PIP 003.** Phenomenological interview participant three (PIP 003) is a 34-year-old White female. She has taught for 6 years in different states as she is a military wife. PIP 003 has taught 6th and 7th grade math, however she currently teaches 6th grade math. For the majority of her teaching career she has worked with students in the special education program.

**PIP 004.** Phenomenological interview participant four (PIP 004) is a 39-year-old Hispanic female. Of all the participants in this research study she has taught the longest as she has taught for 16 years. She has taught 6–8th grade math. Currently, she is the department head for math for the school where she works. PIP 004 holds a Master’s degree in education as well as a principal certification.

**PIP 005.** Phenomenological interview participant five (PIP 005) is a 42-year-old African American male. He has taught for 10 years. Throughout his teaching career he has taught history and English for grades 6–8th. PIP 004 is also a middle school coach. As a student, he was labeled as a gifted and talented. PIP 004 also has a son that was labeled as a gifted and talented.

**PIP 006.** Phenomenological interview participant six (PIP 006) is a 30-year-old Hispanic female. She has taught for 6 years. She has only taught math for grades 6–8th. She mainly teaches students labeled as Pre-Advanced Placement.

### **Research Methodology and Analysis**

**Pilot interview.** Prior to data collection, I conducted a pilot study to field interview questions in order to ascertain if the questions were appropriately designed to generate responses from participants that would help in answering the research questions for the study. The participants for the pilot study were two teachers from the same school as the study's participants and who met the purposeful sampling criteria for the study. Yet, the pilot interview participant's information was not used as part of the sampling population for the study. I followed the data collection procedure for the pilot study outlined in Chapter 3. The pilot interview participants concluded that all interview questions were feasible and appropriate, thus no changes were made to the interview questions for the study.

**Bracketing.** Before data analysis began I employed bracketing. Bracketing was employed to remove researcher bias regarding the studied phenomenon. I kept a journal during the process of the study and noted preconceptions during the research process. I also used bracketing as a means to address bias during data analysis.

The primary data collection instrument for this study was in-depth, face-to-face, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. The purpose of using interviews for a phenomenological study is to gather a rich description of the phenomenon that the participants has experienced (Giorgi, 2009). In the case of this study, the phenomenon being studied was the underrepresentation of African American students in GATE programs in public education in the U.S.

**Phenomenology.** The overall purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand how teacher perceptions influence the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education programs. The data analysis process utilized for this research study was a phenomenological analysis outline by Giorgi (1997, 1999, 2012). According to Giorgi (2009) a phenomenological analysis allows the researcher to find the core of the experienced phenomenon as well as understand the meaning of its description as depicted. For this study, the phenomenological analysis was developed based on the main research question which correlated with the interview question number 13 (see Appendix H). The phenomenological analysis outline by Giorgi (1997, 1999, 2012) consisted of five steps: collecting the data, reading through the data, determining meaning units, transforming the data into expressions relative to the scientific discipline, and utilizing the essential structure to express the coherency of the phenomenon as well as synthesize essential meanings.

**Phenomenological analysis.** The first step in the phenomenological analysis was collecting the data. In this step, I conducted the interviews to collect information from secondary middle school teachers regarding the phenomenon of the underrepresentation of African American students in GATE programs. After the interviews were conducted the researcher transcribed the interviews verbatim and conducted member checking. I did not receive any emails from the participants stating the need of corrections to their transcript whereby the researcher continued with data analysis.

The second step in the phenomenological analysis was reading through the data. I read through the data collected from the interviews to gain an understanding of the experienced phenomenon. Giorgi (2012) suggested researchers do an initial read through of the data until one had a holistic perspective of the information, as such, reading the data to obtain a holistic point

of views allows a researcher to understand what the information is about. During this step, there was no analysis of the information by the researcher.

Often during interviews, the descriptions that participants give are lengthy and sometimes contain information not pertinent to the intent of the study. Thus, the third step in the phenomenological analysis was taking the lengthy descriptions and dividing those descriptions into meaning units. Based on the main research question, I read through the data of each participant multiple times, specifically, interview question number 13 and broke the lengthy descriptions down into meaning units. The process of breaking down lengthy descriptions to determine meaning units is described as constituting parts (Giorgi, 2012). The meaning units were key expressions found within the context of the interview transcript concerning the studied phenomenon.

The fourth step in the phenomenological analysis was transforming the data into written expressions. I examined and re-described the determined meaning units in order to make them more explicit (Giorgi, 1997). During this process, free imaginative variation played a key role. I used free imaginative variation to discover the essence of the meaning units (Giorgi, 1997) and transformed the meaning units into written expressions. After the meaning units were described as written expressions, I again used free imaginative variation and transformed each meaning unit into an essential structure of the concrete lived experience regarding the phenomenon.

The responses and experiences by each participant varied in nature. Yet, a goal of the research was to discover the commonality among the participant's responses and experiences. As such, the fifth step in the phenomenological analysis was synthesizing the essential structures to express how the studied phenomenon coheres as well as synthesize a concise statement. The

essential structure of each participant's description was consolidated to create a final concise statement (see Appendix J).

**Coding.** For this study, another component of data analysis was coding. The process of coding consisted of taking the raw data and dividing it into codes (Wong, 2008). I applied open, axial, and selective coding to the data. According to Saldana (2013) coding is an analytical tool by which the researcher can construct rich meanings and themes from the data.

First, open coding was applied to the data. Based on the literature regarding phenomenological data analysis, I did an initial read through of each participant's data (Saldana, 2013 & Giorgi, 2012) in order to gain an impression. Next, I reread through the data and for each question answered by the participants used highlighters and sticky notes to color code the participant's responses. The codes were developed by conceptualizing the participant's responses and looking for interrelationships for each interview question. In addition, for each research question answered by each participant I compiled a summative statement of the participant's responses. If a summative statement was similar among the participants then it was only listed once. During open coding, patterns began to emerge. Multiple codes per participant per interview question were created during opening coding (see Appendix K) and they were recorded in Microsoft Word using various highlighters and font colors as suggested by (Turner et al., 2009).

After open coding, axial coding was applied to the data. For each interview question, I examined the multiple codes developed from open coding and grouped them according to similarity based on recurring words, ideas, and/or phrases and created subcategories (Creswell, 2007). Each subcategory created as well as interconnecting themes were developed and supported by specific evidence (Creswell, 2013) which consisted of isolated statements of the participants responses to the interview questions (see Appendix J). The themes were initially



color coded on sticky notes and I noted how many times each theme occurred. After, the themes were recorded in Microsoft Word and color coded using various highlighters and font colors. I used axial coding to organize and reassemble the multiple codes created from open coding (Creswell, 1998) and specify emerging themes and codes (Turner et al., 2009) that allowed for an increased explanation of the connections to the phenomenon.

Lastly, selective coding was applied to the data. In this phase of coding, I combined key codes and themes that had commonalities which coalesced into a final round of themes. A final theme was created based on the commonalities found among the selective codes. In addition, the data underwent numerous comparisons between information until data saturation was reached. Once the data did not reveal any new categories then I began a written interpretation of the data. I used a modified version of an interpretive outline tool by Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) as a guide to ask questions about the data such as what is happening here and how can what is happening be explained. Additionally, I also used the interpretive outline tool to probe for a deep understanding of the meaning of the data which is detailed in the following subsequent sections throughout Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

**Researcher journal.** For each participant, I documented observations of the interview in a research journal. Specifically, the research journal was used to note observations of each participant's interview such as the participant's behavior and nonverbal aspects including but not limited to facial expressions and body language. Also, as the researcher I documented my personal behavior and experiences regarding the context of the research. Furthermore, the research journal also contained information about the location where the interview took place as well as the date and time of the interview.

Each journal entry began at the time of each participant's interview. As a part of data analysis, the data from the research journal was used as supplemental data to the data collected from the interviews. I used the research journal to characterize the participant's as well as the researcher's emotion and tone throughout the interview, which allowed for an additional perspective concerning the context of the study.

### **Summary of Findings**

During the analysis of the interview data along with the documented observations from the research journal there were several themes that appeared. The themes were various experiences working with gifted minority students, gifted is associated with innate abilities, gifted students have a desire to learn, minimum representation of gifted African American students in the classroom, all student groups contain gifted students, effectiveness of GT training, oversight of gifted African American students, teacher perceptions are influential, teacher input is valuable, teacher referral of gifted African American students for gifted services is low, and the ideals of society influence underrepresentation. Each theme is a representation of the participant's views and perceptions regarding their responses to the study's interview questions (6–16). Furthermore, the themes also represent the findings for this research study, and are recorded in Table 2. Additional examples of the codes and development of themes can be seen in Appendix K.

Table 2

*Themes Generated from Data Analysis*

Theme	Description of Theme
Various Experiences Working with Gifted Minority Students.	What are your experiences as a teacher working with minority students?
Gifted is Associated with Innate Abilities.	Describe/Define your definition of the term gifted.
Gifted Students have a Desire to Learn.	How would you describe gifted students?
Minimum representation of Gifted African American Students in the Classroom.	Please describe to me your experiences as a teacher working with gifted African American children?
All Student Groups contain Gifted Students.	Please explain if you think gifted students equitably exists in all environments regardless of race, culture, or socioeconomic factors.
Effectiveness of Educational Training.	Describe the educational training you have had to identify and understand the needs of minority children.
Oversight of Gifted African American Students.	Describe your lived experiences and perceptions regarding the identification and referral of African American students to gifted education.
Teacher Perceptions are Influential.	From your perspective, how do teacher perceptions influence if African American students are identified and referred to gifted education programs?
Teacher Input is Valuable.	Explain your perspective on this statement: teacher input should be used in identifying and referring students to gifted education?
Teacher Referral of African American Students for Gifted Services is Low.	Reflect on a time when you have referred an African American student or a minority student to a gifted education program? What happened? What were your feelings?

(Continued)

Theme	Description of Theme
The Ideals of Society Influences Underrepresentation.	What are your thoughts as to why African American students are underrepresented in gifted education programs in the U.S.?

**Various experiences working with gifted minority students.** The information obtained from the participants showed that there were varying levels regarding the experience of teachers working with gifted minority students. The data revealed that some teachers could relate more with gifted minority students versus other groups of students. In addition, the data showed that teachers viewed African American students as low and challenging to work with in the classroom. Overall, all six participants shared good and bad experiences working with gifted minority students.

**Gifted is associated with innate abilities.** The participants were asked to describe/define the term gifted whereby many of the participants had different definitions but there were commonalities among those definitions. The data showed that all six participants associated the term gifted with an innate ability within a person. Each participant believed that gifted students possessed natural abilities. Even more so, the narrative from the participant interviews showed that participants thought on a higher level than average students.

**Gifted students have a desire to learn.** Each participant was asked to describe gifted students. Three participants thought that gifted students were intrinsically motivated to learn. Even more so, those three participants thought that gifted students did not struggle to complete work in the classroom. Thus, based on the descriptions that the participants provided I constructed the theme that gifted students have a desire to learn.

**Minimum representation of gifted African American students in the classroom.** All participants were asked to describe their experiences working with gifted African American

children. Two participants had no classroom experience working with gifted African American children. Also, two additional participants shared that they noticed a lack of representation of gifted African American students in the classroom. Even more so, two other participants stated that they had worked with some gifted African American students over the years and noticed that working with those students is different than working with other students. Based on this data, I concluded that there is a low representation of gifted African American students in the classroom as many teachers had little to no experience working with these students.

**All student groups contain gifted students.** According to the literature review there is a lack of representation of minority students in gifted education programs (Ford, 2014; Grissom & Redding, 2016). Yet, despite this lack of representation all six participants concurred with statement that gifted students exist equitably in all environments. However, each participant had his or her own reason for agreeing with the statement and these reasons were further explored in the presentation of data and results section. Overall, five of the six participants agreed that factors such as race, culture, or socioeconomic status were not factors that limited if a student from a particular group was defined as gifted.

**Effectiveness of educational training.** The participants discussed the educational training they had to identify and understand the needs of minority children. Five of the six participants had some type of educational training pertaining to identifying the needs of gifted children. However, those five out of six participants had no educational training specifically focused on identifying and understanding the needs of minority children. Only one of the six participants stated that he had no educational training on identifying the needs of gifted children.

**Oversight of gifted African American students.** Each participant was asked to describe his or her experiences and perceptions regarding the identification and referral of African

American students to gifted education. For this question, two of the six participants stated they had not seen many African American students referred to gifted education programs. One participant asserted that African American students do not want to be seen as gifted by their teachers or other students. Even more so, two participants had not worked with any gifted African American students in their teaching careers. Thus, I concluded from the data that there is an oversight of African American students being identified as gifted.

**Teacher perceptions are influential.** It was found that five of the six participants thought that teacher perceptions impacted if African American students were identified and referred to gifted education programs. However, of those five participants, three participants thought that teacher perceptions negatively influenced the identification and referral of African American students for gifted services, and the other two participants thought that the use of teacher perceptions did not negatively influence the identification and referral of African American students for gifted services.

**Teacher input is valuable.** I asked each participant to give his or her perspective on the statement: teacher input should be used in identifying and referring students to gifted education. The participants thoughts on this statement varied, but five of the six participants stated that teacher input should be used in identifying and referring students to gifted education programs. Three of the participants stated that teacher input was very valuable because teachers know their students and spend a lot of time in the classroom with their students. Only one participant believed that teacher input should not be used because some teachers tend to let the behavior of students dictate their decisions in whether or not they identify students for gifted services.

**Teacher referral of African American students for gifted services is low.** Each participant was asked to reflect on a time when they had referred an African American student or

a minority student for gifted services. Of the total number of participants, four of the six participants had referred students for gifted services. However, of those four participants, three of the participants did not know if the student was accepted and the other participant's referral for a student was not accepted. In contrast, two of the six participants had never referred any student for gifted services. One of the teacher who has never referred students for gifted services has taught for over 16 years which further lends to the construction of the theme that teacher referral of students for gifted student is low if a veteran teacher with much classroom experience has never referred a student for gifted services.

**The ideals of society influences underrepresentation.** For the final question of the interview, the participants were asked to give their thoughts as to why African American students are underrepresented in gifted education programs in the U.S. It was stated by two of the six participants that African Americans students are underrepresented in gifted education programs in the U.S. because they do not want to be seen as gifted. Another participant stated the behavior issues of African American student diminishes their chances of being labeled as gifted because some teachers do not perceive students who are behavior problems as gifted. Lastly, three of the six participants thought that cultural ideals such as racism cause some teachers to let their personal biases and preconceived notions influence their decision of referring African American students for gifted services.

**Research journal.** The research journal (see Appendix L for template) for this study helped to facilitate the process of reflection to aid in new understanding of the information as it was first perceived then reflected upon in the writing process (Lamb, 2013). For this study, one purpose of the research journal was to document the behaviors and experiences of the researcher in note form. Another purpose of the research journal was to document observations of the

participants in the interviews. The journal entries encouraged critical analysis and critical thinking.

For each interview, I was comfortable in the setting with each interviewee. Also, I noticed that all of the participants used their hands when answering certain questions. The observations in the research journal revealed that many of the participants had commonalities regarding answers to certain interview questions. For example, the three participants who believed that the cultural ideals of society contributed to the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs in the U.S. displayed passionate emotions as they talked with their hands and the disposition of their bodies shifted as they spoke. Overall, I noticed that all participants seemed comfortable in expressing their thoughts when answering the interview questions.

### **Presentation of Data and Results**

The organization of the presentation was dependent upon the purpose and understandability of the data that was collected via semi-structured interviews and documented observations via the research journal. Three research questions guided this study. During the analysis of the data there were 11 themes that were constructed. In this section, I provide a narrative explanation of the data organized by research question, corresponding themes, and information produced from the data analysis.

### **Main Research Question**

The main research question was: How do teacher perceptions influence minority student representation in secondary gifted education programs, with a specific focus on African American students. Interview questions 6 -11 as well as 14 and 16 corresponded with this research question. The participants were encouraged to speak openly about their thoughts on: the



term gifted, description of gifted students, experience working with minority children in general as well as experience working with gifted African American students, educational training concerning the needs of minority children, the use of teacher input in gifted education, if they referred minority students for gifted services, and why are African American students underrepresented in gifted education programs. The themes for the main research question were various experiences working with minority students, gifted is associated with innate abilities, gifted students have a desire to learn, minimum representation of gifted African American students in the classroom, teacher input is valuable, and the ideals of society influence underrepresentation.

**Various experiences working with gifted minority students.** The theme, various experiences working with gifted minority students was seen throughout the interview data as participants shared their diverse experiences. Throughout the interview there was a pattern that could be seen regarding the experience of teachers with minority students. Of the six participants, two participants expressed that African American students were behind in the grade level. PIP 002 stated she found that “many of our minority students are behind grade level” and that they come to her that way. PIP 004 attested to the same sentiment as PIP 002 as PIP 004 stated that African American students are just like any other group of kids that “there are kids on the higher end and lower end” but that she really enjoys working with them.

PIP 005 noted that “working with minority students has gone I expected it to go ...the things I deal with do not surprise me . . . because he recognizes it as a part of the overall culture.” PIP 001 expressed that in her experience in working with minority students that “Whites do what they are told as African Americans they want your attention, they want you to pay attention to

them.” Overall, these two participants expressed that African American students are more challenging to work with versus other students, yet they enjoy working with minority students.

**Gifted is associated with innate abilities.** The literature has revealed that there is not a universal definition for the word gifted and as such this may be a contributing factor to the lack of representation of African American students in gifted education programs. The participants were asked to define the term gifted and each participant associated the term gifted with an innate ability that caused students to think on a higher level. PIP 002 stated that the term gifted is a child that is “educationally above his or her grade level.” PIP 004 expressed that “gifted students are kids that think outside the box.” PIP 006 also associated gifted what a student that “thinks outside the box.” PIP 001 stated that she sees “gifted as students that actually do not have to put in effort to problem solve. PIP 003 described the terms gifted as students whose “thinking process is above and beyond the normal regular adaptations in the classrooms.” PIP 005 asserted that gifted are people that “think differently than average people.” Overall, there was a commonality among the statements of the participants that led to development of the theme that gifted is an innate ability within students that causes them to think on a higher level.

**Gifted students have a desire to learn.** This study sought to understand the perceptions of teachers and its influence on the underrepresentation of African American students for gifted services. Thus, the participants were asked to discuss how they would describe gifted students. PIP 002 described gifted students as “self-motivated . . . they are academically there and so they want the knowledge.” PIP 001 described gifted students as being students who go above the limit to complete tasks. PIP 004 expressed that gifted students are students who have a passion to learn about things that matter to them. Consequently, these statements allowed for the forming of the theme that gifted students have a desire to learn.

**Minimum representation of gifted African American students in the classroom.** I

asked each participant to describe their experiences working with gifted African American children. PIP 003 stated “I’ve never worked with a gifted and talent African American student.” PIP 003 and PIP 006 had no formal classroom experience working with gifted African American students. In contrast to the statements of PIP 003 and PIP 006, PIP 001 and PIP 004 expressed that in their years of teaching they noticed a low representation of gifted African American students in the classroom. PIP 001 recalled the fact most of the gifted students she has worked with have not been African American whereby she has only worked with a handful of gifted African American students in her 14-year teaching career.

Even more so, PIP 002 and PIP 006 noted that working with gifted African American students was different versus working with other students who were not African American. PIP 002 expressed that “working with the gifted child as a teacher is difficult” because the gifted education programs are not specifically geared for them. Thus, each interview yielded information that showed that the participants had little to no experience working with gifted African Americans students which is attributed to a low representation of African American students in gifted education programs.

**All student groups contain gifted students.** Five of the six participants concurred with the statement that gifted students equitably exist in all environments regardless of race, culture, or socioeconomic factors. PIP 005 stated he read statistics that proposed that 10% of any population is considered to be talented and gifted. As a teacher, PIP 005 has encountered various students over the years and had seen gifted students from various ethnicities and backgrounds. Furthermore, PIP 005 also expressed that despite growing up in poverty he was labeled as gifted but growing up in poverty did not affect how his brain worked. Thus, lending further to the

development of the theme that factors such as race or socioeconomic status do not limit a person's ability to be gifted. PIP 003 stated that "yes, every race, every culture . . . has students who are gifted." Each participant who agreed with this statement were very certain that all students could be considered gifted apart from limit social and physical factors.

**Effectiveness of educational training.** I sought to ascertain if any of the participants had received any educational training that helped them to identify and understand the needs of minority children. There were five participants who had went through some educational training but stated they had not had any educational training specifically geared towards identifying and understanding the needs of minority children. PIP 004 stated that she had received educational training on identifying kids that are gifted but that she has not had any educational training specifically for identifying minority kids. PIP 006 expressed that she has "had classes on how to teach gifted children but not specifically geared towards minority children." PIP 005 was the only participant who had not received any educational training on identifying and understanding the needs of minority children.

**Teacher input is valuable.** Each participant gave his or her perspective on the following statement: teacher input should be used in identifying and referring students to gifted education. Although each participant's perspective was different, five of the six participants (PIP 002, PIP 003, PIP 004, PIP 005, and PIP 006) stated that teacher input was a useful resource in identifying and referring students for gifted services. These participants believed that teacher input should be used because teachers know students well because they spend a great amount of time with students in the classroom. PIP 004 stated that teachers can "give information that other people don't see" such as how students work and relate to others. PIP 003 believed that teacher input should be used but should not be a final decision.

PIP 001 believed that teacher input should not be used because “teachers don’t look at what they know, they look at how the kids act which influences their decisions in whether or not they identify and refer students for gifted services. From the information shared by the participants, I deduced that teacher input is valuable when identifying and referring students for gifted services dependent upon how it is utilized in the process.

**The ideals of society influences underrepresentation.** Each participant was asked to express his or her thoughts concerning why African American students are underrepresented in gifted education programs in the U.S. PIP 001 and PIP 002 asserted that African Americans students do not want to be seen as gifted. PIP 002 stated that African American students have a “perception that they can’t be gifted” because of their appearance and ethnicity but those factors are “not an indication of their intelligence.” On the other hand, PIP 006 asserted that African American students are underrepresented because they are behavior problems and “there is a cultural breakdown between students and teachers.”

Lastly, PIP 003, PIP 004, PIP 005 contributed the underrepresentation of African American students for gifted services to teacher’s stereotypical thoughts and preconceived notions influenced by American culture and society. PIP 005 stated that American culture has stereotyped African Americans as less intelligent and less able to be successful. PIP 005 further claimed that systemic racism still exists and “that just because they passed a couple of laws, the ideology hasn’t completely changed.” PIP 005 believed that teachers come with prejudices based off what they see and hear and that teachers also come with “preconceived notions of what we think the kids should be able to do and it keeps us from really being able to identify” African American students. As such, based off the narratives of the participant’s interviews it can be seen

that the cultural ideals of society influence the underrepresentation of African Americans students in gifted education programs.

### **Research Subquestion One**

The first research subquestion addressed underrepresentation as to how African Americans students are identified and referred for gifted services. The subquestion was: How are African American students identified and referred for enrollment in gifted education programs, according to secondary school teachers? Interview questions 12 and 15 sought the description of the lived experiences and perceptions the participants had with identifying and referring African American students to GATE programs. The themes that developed to address this research question were: oversight of gifted African American students and teacher referral of African American students is low.

**Oversight of gifted African American students.** When asked to describe their experiences and perceptions regarding identifying and referring African American students for gifted services, PIP 002 and PIP 004 participants stated that over the span of their teaching careers they had not seen many African American students referred for gifted services. PIP 002 expressed that many African American children are not referred because of socioeconomic status and they are overlooked. On the other hand, PIP 001 asserted that she had referred some students over the years but it's hard to target gifted African American students because "African American boys and girls . . . don't want people to know so it's kind of hard to target them."

PIP 003 and PIP 006 had not worked with any gifted African American students in their teaching careers. PIP 006 stated she thought that African American students were not referred at the rate they should be and that she has worked with gifted and talented students but not any gifted and talented African American students. Based off the information yielded from the

interviews I concluded that African American students are being overlooked as gifted in the classrooms.

**Teacher referral of African American students for gifted services is low.** The theme that teacher referral of African American students for gifted services is low was formed after analyzing data whereby participants were asked to reflect on a time when they had referred an African American student or a minority student for gifted services. Of the total number of participants, only four participants (PIP 001, PIP 002, PIP 005, and PIP 006) had referred African American students for gifted services. PIP 001, PIP 005, and PIP 006 recounted in their experience that they did not know if students they referred were accepted or not. The student that PIP 001 referred was not accepted because he was deemed a behavior issue. In contrast, PIP 003 and PIP 004 had never referred any African American students nor minority students for gifted services.

### **Research Subquestion Two**

Lastly, the second research subquestion was: How do secondary school teacher perceptions of identifying and referring African American students to GATE programs influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education? Interview question 13 corresponded with this research question. The participants gave their perspective on the influence of teacher perception in regard to the underrepresentation of African American students for gifted services. The theme developed from this question was that teacher perceptions are influential.

**Teacher perceptions are influential.** The participants were asked to explain their perspective on how teacher perceptions influence if African American students are identified and referred for gifted services. Of the six participants, five participants believed that teacher

perceptions were an influential factor regarding the identification and referral of African Americans students for gifted education programs. Yet, of those five participants, three participants; PIP 001, PIP 003, PIP 005, believed teacher perceptions negatively influenced the identification and referral of African American students for gifted services. PIP 003 believed that the misconceptions of teachers regardless if they had been taught or learned stopped teachers from recognizing the abilities of African American students. PIP 005 stated that the personalities of African American students “overshadow their intelligence, because teachers are looking at them in a negative light compared to how they look at other students.” I asked PIP 005 to clarify which teachers he was referring too in which PIP 005 replied “White teachers and White administrators.”

PIP 002 and PIP 004 thought that the use of teacher perceptions did not necessarily negatively influence the identification and referral of African American students for gifted services but that teacher perceptions were an influential factor in the process nevertheless. PIP 002 asserted that teacher perceptions are a big factor in whether African American students are referred for gifted services. PIP 002 also claimed that teachers know the system and can be the first step to getting African American students in gifted education programs. Overall, the data revealed that the participants believed teacher perceptions were influential in the identification and referral of African American students to gifted education programs.

### **Research Journal**

In the researcher journal the location of the interview was documented. Each interview took place in a classroom at the research site that the principal designated for the researcher to utilize. Before the interviews I reflected on the experience she had working with gifted African American students. I noted throughout the years I had worked with several GT students as I was



a GT teacher who had received training to work with GT students. However, I had only worked with one gifted African American student despite teaching at schools where the majority of the student population was African American.

From the utilization of the journal I was able to capture the emotions and dispositions of the participants. All the participants spoke with ease when answering the interview questions and I was comfortable in the setting with all six participants. I used the research journal to recognize similarities among the characteristics of the participants such as each participant at some point in the interview used their hands to help express themselves. Each participant also used facial expressions when answering certain interview questions.

I noted that for some of the questions, participants needed time to think and answer the questions. For example, PIP 006 took five minutes to answer interview question number 13. PIP 006 asked the researcher if she could take her time to answer the question. She expressed that she needed time to think because she had never thought about how teacher perceptions influenced the identification and referral of any students for gifted services.

Even more so, PIP 001 debated on her answer for interview question number 14 for several minutes as she wanted to sort her thoughts concerning the use of teacher input in the gifted education program. Furthermore, after the interviews were complete there were participants who stated that the interview made them think and self-reflect on the study's phenomenon. PIP 004 stated that until asked, she had not even realized that in her 16-year teaching career that she had never referred a student for gifted services. She stated that she would now become more cognizant to recognize gifted students and refer them for gifted services. The instances that were noted in the research journal gave an additional perspective to the study as it added context and detail to the study.

## **Summary**

Chapter 4 began with a brief introduction that contained the purpose of the study and the role of the researcher. A description of the sample was provided as there were a total of six participants, five females and one male. The methodology and analysis was discussed. The study utilized a phenomenological analysis outline by Amedeo Giorgi (1997, 1999, 2012) and the data was coded. Next, a summary of the findings was presented and I noted patterns and the development of themes. A presentation of the data was provided whereby I organized the data by themes and presented rich and detailed descriptions of the findings of the data.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to gather an understanding of the perceptions and lived experiences of secondary school teachers regarding the phenomenon of the underrepresentation of African Americans students in GATE programs. The primary research question for this study was: how do teacher perceptions influence minority student representation in secondary gifted education programs, with a specific focus on African American students? The data analysis process for this research study was the focus for chapter 4. The data analysis revealed the essence of the studied phenomenon.

In chapter 5, a brief introduction as well as a summary and discussion of the results are presented. Additionally, a discussion of the study's results and how it relates to literature are also provided. Even more so, the research design problems and the implications of the study's results are fully discussed. Lastly, I provided recommendations for further research and a concise summary of the dissertation.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the conclusions of the study that were constructed on the review of the literature, data collection, and data analysis of the research study concerning the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs in the United States. I obtained data by conducting six face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The participants had varying years of teaching experience and contributed insightful information to the study. An analysis of the data revealed 11 themes. The 11 themes contributed to the main findings and an interpretation of the data which were used to draw conclusions for the research study.

This chapter fits into the overall dissertation as it provides a conclusion for the completion of the research study. In the chapter, the results are critically assessed and I provide a personal interpretation of the results. Furthermore, in the chapter I make connections between the study's results and how it contributes to the educational community. Lastly, patterns and themes are discussed and connected to the research questions relating to the review of the literature and conceptual framework. Overall, Chapter 5 provides a detailed account regarding the participant's experiences and perception of the studied phenomenon, the underrepresentation of African Americans in gifted education programs. The chapter also includes a summary and discussion of the results and how the study relates to the literature. Even more so, chapter 5 provides the research design limitations of the study, implication of the results for practice, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion to the study.

## Summary of Results

The inequity of student representation in GATE programs is a well-documented issue in education at the K-12 level (Peters & Engerrand, 2016). A literature review was conducted on the phenomenon of the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education. The majority of the articles found during the search of the literature focused on factors that contributed to the inequity of minority student representation where by one factor was teacher perceptions. However, the focus of this study was to examine teacher perspectives in regard to what effect it has on the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education. As such, a more in-depth search of the literature revealed that there was minimal information on how teacher perceptions influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore and understand how the perspectives of secondary school teachers influence the underrepresentation of African Americans in gifted education programs. One main research question guided this study which was: how do teacher perceptions influence minority student representation in secondary gifted education programs, with a specific focus on African American students? To address this question, the following subquestions were included: how are African American students identified and referred for enrollment in gifted education programs, according to secondary school teachers and how do secondary school teacher perceptions of identifying and referring African American students to GATE programs influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education?

**Theory and significance.** The theory of transformative leadership (Shields, 2011) was the foundation of the conceptual framework for this study. Transformative leadership is a theory that emphasizes the importance of academic achievement and social transformation (Shields,

2011). Additionally, the theoretical constructs of collective efficacy and deficit thinking (Bieneman, 2011) were also used as a part of the conceptual framework of this study. Collective efficacy refers to the notion that educational stakeholders function and collaborate with one another (Bieneman, 2011) while deficit thinking is rejecting adverse thinking about students based on factors such as race, ethnicity, and more (Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2014).

The theoretical constructs supported some of the participant views in which they believed that teacher perceptions negatively influenced the identification and referral of African American students for gifted services. The majority of the participating teachers believed that some teachers were adversely influenced by the ideals of society such as racism and cultural barriers, which correlates with the construct of deficit thinking. Therefore, the theoretical perspectives supported the findings from this study regarding the availability of limited educational opportunities for minority students. A transformative approach to this issue was appropriate because the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education is indicative of the minimal flexibility associated with the practices and protocol of gifted education programs with the U.S. public education system (Chadwell, 2010).

African American students are drastically underrepresented in gifted education programs (Ford & King, 2014). Therefore, the significance of this study sought to contribute to the literature by exploring and understanding the influence of teacher perceptions on the underrepresentation of African American students for gifted services. Even more so, the significance of this study was centered around the utilization and applicability the results of this study could provide to educational leaders and stakeholders as to how teachers perceive African American students as a component in the identification and referral of African American students to gifted education programs. Furthermore, the results of the study can be used to

increase awareness among educational leaders and stakeholders on the operational practices of gifted education programs, which could induce change and increase the equity in student representation with GATE programs.

**Review of seminal literature.** There are many African American students not being recognized as gifted and as such African American students are drastically underrepresented in gifted education programs (Ford & King, 2014). A review of the literature has showed that various factors influence the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education whereby one factor is teacher perceptions, a common tool used to identify and refer students for gifted services. The literature revealed that the negative mindsets and stereotypical viewpoints of minority students held by teachers influence whether teachers refer minority students for gifted services (Carman, 2011; Ford & King, 2014; Siegle, 2001). Additionally, the literature has also shown that teacher perceptions are a factor in the inequity of student representation in gifted education programs. Harradine et al., (2014) conducted a study in which they found that teacher perceptions of minority students created barriers that affected their ability to recognize gifted minority students. Even more so, Grissom and Redding (2016) conducted a study in which they found that the use of teacher input in gifted referrals effected the placement of gifted minority students, which caused minority students to be under referred for gifted services. Overall, teacher factors as well as the flawed identification practices for the admittance of students to gifted education programs contribute to the inequity of student representation in the gifted student population.

**Methodology and summary of findings.** The research design of phenomenology is inductive and descriptive (Creswell, 2005). In this study, the focus was on the attainment and collection of data to explain human experiences in regard to phenomenon of the

underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education. Thus, a phenomenological approach was the most appropriate research design because it allowed for the assessment of information based on the participant's understanding of the phenomenon, which in this study was underrepresented African Americans in gifted education (Creswell, 2005). For this qualitative phenomenological study, I used semi-structured interviews and a research journal to collect data. Yet, the main data collection was semi-structured interviews and as such the context of qualitative research along with the structure of phenomenology was an applicable research design as it allowed for the exploration of the lived experiences and the perceptions of the research participants.

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling and I used email to directly contact the participants. I employed ethical practices to maintain confidentiality of information by utilizing a special code for each participant. Additionally, I had each participant read and sign an informed consent form that outlined the purpose of the study and noted the right of the participant to withdraw from the study at any time. For each interview, the participants recounted their experiences and perceptions regarding the studied phenomenon, the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs. A phenomenological analysis outlined by Amedeo Giorgi (1997, 1999, 2012) along with the process of coding was used to discover the essence of the studied phenomenon.

There were 11 themes that emerged as a result of the data analysis which were: various experiences working with gifted minority students, gifted is associated with innate abilities, gifted students have a desire to learn, minimum representation of gifted African American students in the classroom, all student groups contain gifted students, effectiveness of GT training, oversight of gifted African American students, teacher perceptions are influential, teacher input

is valuable, teacher referral of gifted African American students for gifted services is low, and the ideals of society influence underrepresentation. Each theme represented the findings of the study. Overall, the methodology allowed for conclusions to be drawn about the studied phenomenon.

### **Discussion of the Results**

It is important to indicate that the research findings are discussed in regard to the context and sample size of the study. A small sample size comprised of mainly African American females was utilized. Therefore, the findings of this study are not generalizable to all GATE teachers. Each research question was designed to explore the phenomenon of the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs.

The main research question was used to see how teacher perceptions influence African American student representation in secondary gifted education programs. The findings from this study showed that 83% of the participants thought that teacher perceptions were influential in whether or not African American students were identified and referred for gifted services. In addition, 50% of the participating teachers stated that teacher perceptions negatively impacted African American student representation in the gifted population. The participants attributed the negative impact of teacher perceptions to the personal bias and misconceptions that teachers have about African American students. From the data, it appeared that teachers were cognizant of the notion that teacher perceptions influenced African American student representation in GATE programs. The participating teachers in this study have worked in diverse school settings, such as Title 1 schools, and displayed culturally sensitive attitudes toward minorities. However, the participants believed that the bias and preconceived notions among other teachers about African Americans were learned or existed because of a cultural breakdown between minority



students and teachers who did not have much experience working with minorities or teachers who were not a minority.

A cross check of the data revealed that teacher participants who were a minority had a higher affinity for working with minority students because they shared their students' cultural background or were familiar with their students' cultural background. Every participant attested to the idea that race was an issue among teachers, specifically among teachers who were not minorities in regard to how they perceive African American students. This information suggested that the teachers in this study believed students from diverse cultural backgrounds learned and thought differently because of their diverse cultural backgrounds. Thus, the information suggested that participants believed race played a role in teacher referral of minority students for gifted services as well as in a teacher's level of perception of a student's intelligence.

The first research subquestion was used to understand how African American students are identified and referred for enrollment in gifted education programs, according to secondary school teachers. The participants had differing views when asked to define the term gifted as well as when asked to characterize gifted students. A pattern was seen as teachers shared their experiences of gifted behavioral traits as well as working gifted minority students. None of the participants were trained on identifying and understanding the needs of minority children but some of the participants had limited educational training on teaching gifted students. Participants who received training in teaching gifted students had more knowledge about identifying gifted students as their identification was based on a student's intelligence and not culture or race. For example, PIP 002 and PIP 005 both asserted that a student's race is not indicative of that student's intelligence.

Analysis of this data suggested that teachers who did not have adequate training showed significant misconceptions of gifted and talented students. As such, I interpreted the data to mean that when teachers do not have the proper educational training to recognize the gifted and talented abilities of students, especially minorities, then those students are overlooked. Hence, the issue of the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education. It may be helpful if there was a universal definition of the term gifted as well as guidelines for the characteristics of gifted students that educators could utilize when identifying and referring students for gifted services. There may be teachers who are misguided in their thinking and equate culture and race with intelligence. Yet, the intelligence of an individual is independent of factors such as race, culture, and socioeconomic status.

The second research subquestion was used to understand how secondary school teacher perceptions of identifying and referring African American students to GATE programs influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education. Overall, the data showed that teacher perceptions play a role in the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs. Participants commented that students who had behavior issues, challenged teachers, exhibited off task behavior despite displaying gifted abilities were not readily referred for gifted services. Yet, even if they were referred those students were not likely to be accepted in gifted programs because of their disruptive behaviors. One participant specifically attested to the fact that she referred an African American male student for gifted services but because of the student's race coupled with his behavior issues he was not accepted into the program.

Overall, the findings from this study support that the participants showed grave concerns concerning how teacher perceptions impact the disparity of student representation regarding

culture and race in gifted education programs. Thus, these findings suggested that there was a disconnect somewhere regarding how teachers view minority students. Of the participants, 50% stated that Whites were the dominant demographic in the gifted population as most of the gifted and talented students they had worked with had been White. The data from this study supported previous findings in studies such as Ford et al., (2008) in which it was found that White students are identified and referred more to GATE programs.

In this study, one participant claimed that White students have better access to gifted services because they have a socioeconomic status that affords them additional educational opportunities such as extra programs that can help develop their talents. This suggests that White students have a lead on other students, specifically minority students, which gives White students an advantage as they have additional help to develop their talents. From the data, it could be seen that teachers did believe teacher bias affected the referral of students because teachers lacked adequate training to identify and understand the needs of minority children thus utilizing past experiences and culturally influenced stereotyped indicators of gifted students. The findings from the data can be interpreted as teacher perceptions negatively influence the identification and referral of African American students for gifted education.

**Practical implications.** The continuous utilization of professional development could induce change in the practices of gifted education programs in schools. Conducted studies have shown that training educational stakeholders can improve the referral of minority students for gifted services (Pransky & Bailey, 2002; Windschitl, 2002). As such, an increased understanding of gifted learners should cause teachers to recognize the gifted abilities of students. Ford et al., (2004), asserted that there are many teachers who have minimal to no multicultural training nor the background to be able to identify the abilities of all their students. As such, when teachers

have minimal to no training in gifted education and multicultural education, the likelihood of ethnic minority students having access to gifted education is small (Ford & Whiting, 2016).

Ford et al. (2005), asserted there is a need for culturally aware teachers and for professional development training that helps reduce deficit thinking among teachers. According to Mattai et al., (2010), “Professional development programs should include a sequence of gifted and talented issues beyond mere familiarity with the subjects because identification of potential students for such programs will require in-depth understanding of potential barriers” (p. 29). As such, professional development programs can help teachers become more aware of their own perceptions and outlooks that could decrease preconceived notions and debunk stereotyping. Even more so, the entire school community should collaborate to create a community conducive to cultural awareness that fosters the success of all students.

Ford and King (2014) believed that underrepresentation deters the progress of African American students. Inequitable access to gifted education services hinders the academic, economic, and social potential of African American students. Thus, when African American students are not given the opportunity to receive gifted services, their opportunities in life are stifled (Ford & King, 2014). It is important that all students are given equitable access to educational services and life opportunities. Haley (2000) stated that there are not enough teachers who have the knowledge or share the same cultural and/or linguistic backgrounds of their students. Schools should have a diverse teaching staff in order to support the diverse needs of all students. The results of this study led to this conclusion because it was stated by the participants that a cultural barrier exists between some teachers and students. As such, teachers who are not a minority may not be able to readily recognize the abilities of minority students because they do not have much experience working with minority students and/or are not familiar with the

different ethnic cultural backgrounds. Therefore, if schools had a staff that was trained in diversity then it may help meet the diverse educational needs of all students as well as help increase minority student access to gifted services.

**Theoretical implications.** The data was analyzed to uncover if information collected from the interviews supported the conceptual framework of the study. Theories constructed by Shields (2011) and Bieneman (2011) suggested a confluence of factors that contribute to the studied phenomenon. The data revealed that participating teachers believed that the negative thoughts and views of teachers influenced the underrepresentation of African American students for gifted services. Even more so, the data revealed that there was bias toward certain cultures concerning referrals made by teachers as most participants stated that throughout their teaching careers they had taught few gifted minorities. Furthermore, 33% of the participants had never taught any gifted minorities. As such, deficit thinking among teachers could account for part of the inequity of minority representation in the gifted student population. Therefore, until teachers can suppress their deficit thoughts towards African American students then African American students may continue to be underrepresented in GATE programs. The results of this study support the need for a transformative change in the practices and protocol of gifted education programs in schools.

### **Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature.**

The problem statement was driven by the underrepresentation of minority students, specifically African American students, in gifted education programs (Bonner, 2003; Milner & Ford, 2007; Peters & Engerrand, 2016). The inequitable identification and referral of African American students for gifted services is attributed to many factors in which one factor is teacher perceptions. Yet, in the existing literature there was limited information regarding how teachers

perceive African American students and how teacher perceptions affect the identification and referral of African American students to gifted education programs.

In the literature, it has been documented that teacher perceptions play a role in the inequity of students in gifted education programs. Harradine et al., (2014) conducted a study and found that teacher perceptions of minority students hindered the ability of teachers to identify potential students of color as gifted. The findings in this study add to the existing literature whereby the data revealed that participants believed that teacher perceptions were influential regarding identifying and referring African American students for gifted education. In this study, the participants were asked to explain their perspective on how teacher perceptions influence if African American students are identified and referred to gifted education programs. Of the participating teachers, three of the six participants believed that teacher perceptions negatively impacted if African American students were identified and referred for gifted services. These teachers believed that teachers do not look for African American students to be gifted due to historical cultural influence whereby African Americans are not viewed as intelligent. PIP 001 stated that teachers readily refer African American students to At-Risk and special education programs rather than GATE programs.

The term gifted is filled with ambiguity. The current federal definition of giftedness includes all students who have exceptional talent or the potential to perform, independent of factors such as race, socioeconomic status, culture, etc. (U.S. Department of Education, 1993). All states do not utilize the federal definition of giftedness because states are not required to have gifted programs (Jordan et al., 2012). Gifted education programs are not federally mandated and as such the decisions concerning the programs are left up to the states who implement the

programs (Ford & King, 2014). Thus, a lack of a universal description of the term gifted could be aiding in the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education.

In this study, each teacher expressed their definition of the term gifted as well as described characteristics of gifted students, and although there were some similarities among their thoughts, none of the participant's definitions and descriptions were exactly the same. There were six participants in this study and each participant defined the term gifted and described the characteristics of gifted students in their own way. Over the years, there have been multiple definitions of the term gifted but there is no universal description of the term which may account for the varying definitions among the participants in this study as three of the six participants have taught in states outside of Texas.

Even more so, a search of the literature revealed that cultural barriers between teachers and students result in minimal teacher referrals of culturally and linguistically different students for gifted services, whereby this could also be attributed to teacher perceptions of gifted minority students (Mattai et al., 2010). Discrimination has been prevalent in the U.S. public school system. It is evident that bias exists on the part of teachers whereby the majority of the teacher workforce is white (Aud et al., 2013). Past studies have shown that teacher recognition of giftedness is very narrow and discriminatory to minority students, which leads to bias in the identification of gifted minority students. Grissom and Redding (2016) conducted a study in which they found that in the case where teachers were not African American, students of color were less referred as compared to students of no color for gifted services. The results of this study indicate the same findings as previous studies. Many participants expressed that there was a cultural barrier between teachers and African American students that caused them not to be identified and referred for gifted services. The participants stated that teachers of all races

perceive African American students differently based on reasons such as racism, academic achievement, socioeconomic status, and behavior; however, these factors should not overshadow a student's intelligence.

In this study, only five of the six participants had received some type of educational training regarding working with gifted students. Ford and Grantham (2003) attributed teachers' lack of educational training in identifying traits that do not align with their views and perceptions of giftedness to a drastic underrepresentation of some populations in gifted education programs. Researchers such as Moon and Brighton (2008) suggested that educational stakeholders undergo continuous educational training in identification practices in an effort to correct misconceptions and biases among teachers as well as antiquated identification practices. Doing so could help increase the equity of minority student representation in the gifted student population.

### **Limitations**

This study contained limitations as it was limited to six qualified participants. For phenomenological studies the recommended sample size is 6–10 participants (Creswell, 1998). However, a small sample size is adequate if data saturation for the study is reached; yet, it would benefit future studies to gather more participants to garner additional perspectives on the studied phenomenon. Another potential limitation was in regard to the phenomenological analysis and coding process as there are inevitable ambiguities in written and verbal communication. As such, this type of limit affects data analysis (Atieno, 2009) which influences the interpretation of the data. Therefore, to improve this study for future replication the researcher should reread and recode data multiple times and add a second coder in order to efficiently interpret the data and strengthen the qualitative analysis.



The data collection process was conducted in two months. Thus, I imposed time constraints which caused data to be collected in a short timeframe. For this study, the research was established on the willingness of the participants to candidly and genuinely disperse information based on experiences that may have recently occurred or happened over a long period of time. Future replications of this study should allot for an extended timeframe for the study. Furthermore, a limitation of the study was the geographic location whereby the study was restricted to the Central Texas area. Therefore, the findings of the study may not be representative of teachers outside of Central Texas which decreases the generalizability of the findings. Thus, researchers should replicate this study with teachers from other locations to consider their experiences to gain a comprehensive view of the studied phenomenon.

Lastly, the sampling method was a limitation of the study. A purposive sampling method was chosen so I could intentionally select participants who met a certain criterion (Creswell, 2005). However, for this study, purposive sampling caused a lack of diversity among the research participants. The data that was collected was mainly from the perspectives of participants who were African American and Hispanic. In addition, purposive sampling caused the participant pool for this study to be limited to five females and one male. As such, the findings of the study may be different if there was a variety of diversity among the participants regarding ethnicity and demographics.

### **Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory**

The theoretical perspectives of this study supported the findings through the notion that there may be a need for a change in the protocol and practices of gifted education programs as well as teachers should not let their personal views affect if they identify and refer African American students for gifted services. In this study, 83% of the teachers had educational training

regarding working with gifted students but none of the participants had any educational training specifically designed to focus on identifying and understanding the needs of minority children. Davis (2010) asserted that not providing pre-service and in-service training to teachers is a barrier to addressing the needs of gifted students. All students should be given access to educational services that can aid them in having a successful life. Therefore, educational stakeholders such as administrators should provide and encourage educational training that can lead to changes in the process of gifted education. Educational training should be provided in the area of recognizing potentially gifted minority students as to increase the equity among all student groups in the gifted population.

The diversity of the representation of student groups in schools is great (Peters & Engerrand, 2016) and there is an increase in diversity in the population of ethnic student groups. However, the teacher workforce does not reflect the diversity seen in schools as the majority of the teachers in the U.S. are White (Kena et al., 2015). The participating teachers in this study did acknowledge that cultural differences and/or barriers do exist and affect how teachers perceive African Americans thus affecting whether or not teachers identify and refer African American students for gifted services. Cultural differences exist in appearance, language, customs, behavior, and more. Teachers receive extensive schooling to prepare them for the profession of educating students, however one aspect that is missing from that preparation is teachers knowing how one's cultural experience can influence one's perspective to detect a student's giftedness which directly affects if students are identified for gifted services.

According to Davis (2010), a hindrance to addressing the needs of gifted students is due to a lack of understanding concerning the ways that giftedness can be displayed. All teachers should learn how to recognize giftedness in students, and as such teachers should have

multicultural educational training. Schools should incorporate professional development for teachers to learn how to identify and understand the needs of gifted students from all cultures. Professional development in this area would help teachers disregard their cultural backgrounds as to not hinder their perspectives when they are referring students for gifted services. Additionally, because there is so much diversity in the classroom and students display giftedness in multiple ways, schools should look at nontraditional ways to assess giftedness.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Listed below are the researcher's recommendations for future research:

- A study should be conducted with educational stakeholders such as administrators and policy makers to gain an understanding on the implementation of the school's policies and practices concerning the school's gifted education programs. Findings could provide insight on improving access to gifted services for historically underserved students.
- In subsequent studies, use a sampling method that allows for a larger population of participants as well as greater diversity among participants to gain additional perspectives on the studied phenomenon.
- Findings from this study suggest that bias and cultural misconceptions among teachers regarding African American students was a limiting factor that contributed to the underrepresentation of African American students in GATE programs. A future study should assess the rate of teacher referrals based on race to gifted education in an effort to identify factors and find a resolution to decrease underrepresented populations in gifted education.

- Researchers should assess teacher understanding of identifying gifted students through other avenues such as focus groups and surveys.
- Conduct a future study focused on examining if teachers recognize their perceptions and biases in regard to identifying and referring African American students for gifted services in order to decrease underserved groups in the gifted student population.
- For future research, replicate the current study with elementary school teachers.

## **Conclusion**

This qualitative phenomenological study revealed information regarding the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education. The main research question asked how do teacher perceptions influence minority student representation in secondary gifted education programs, with a specific focus on African American students. Based on the data, it was found that participants thought teacher perceptions played one of two roles in minority student representation in gifted education programs. Some of the study's participants believed that teacher perceptions caused African American students to be less likely referred for gifted services as compared to other student groups. On the other hand, other participants believed that teacher perceptions caused more students to be referred by teachers who spend an extensive amount of time with students and know their students well enough to assess their abilities.

The first research subquestion sought to understand how African American students are identified and referred for enrollment in gifted education programs, according to secondary school teachers. From the participant's perspectives, African American students are perceived negatively by teachers, due to reasons such as appearance, race, behavior, personal bias, and more. As such, this hinders teachers from identifying and referring African American students

for gifted services. The second research subquestion was posed to gain an understanding on how secondary school teacher perceptions of identifying and referring African American students to GATE programs influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education. Overall, the data revealed that the majority of the participating teachers in the study believed that teacher perceptions negatively influenced African American student representation in GATE programs because teachers let outside factors such as preconceived notions, cultural influence, socioeconomic status, and more overshadow their ability to recognize giftedness in students of color.

It is important to note that the sample size for this study was small and consisted mainly of African American females. As such the implications may be different if a larger more diverse sample size was used. Thus, based off the data obtained in this study, educational leadership should provide ongoing professional development for teachers to recognize the giftedness of students from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Alone, professional development will not solve the issue of the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education but can serve as a starting point to aid in alleviating and correcting the issue. The issue of the underrepresentation of certain minorities in GATE programs cannot be corrected until the reasons for the inequity are fully understood. Researchers should continue to explore and advance the study of the phenomenon of the underrepresentation of minority students in GATE programs.

Overall, this study adds to current literature because it contributes additional perspectives to the role teacher perceptions have on influencing the underrepresentation of historically underrepresented students in the gifted population. In the United States, all students should be afforded the opportunity to received educational services such as gifted services. The U.S. is a country that promotes fairness among its citizens. The drastic underrepresentation of African

American students in GATE programs is alarming and it is a known issue in public education (Ford & King, 2011; Peters & Engerrand, 2016; Siegle, 2016). Thus, educational stakeholders to include educational leadership must be willing to challenge and change current identification practices and policies to improve educational opportunities for underserved groups in the gifted student population.

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## **Appendix A: Site Authorization and Permission Letter**

I am a doctoral candidate at Concordia University under the supervision of Dr. Audrey Rabas. I am writing to ask for permission to collect data at your campus for my dissertation study that will involve 6–8th secondary school teachers in the district. The purpose of my research seeks to understand what perspectives secondary school teachers have regarding African American students as to how they identify and refer African American students for enrollment in gifted education programs and how teacher perceptions influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs.

There are no foreseeable risks to you or the district's employees. Participation in the study is voluntary. A participant may withdraw from the study without penalty. The teachers who agree to participate in the study will be interviewed at a scheduled date and time that is convenient for them. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study and the identity of the teachers will not be disclosed, as the teachers will be referred to by a numerical pseudonym throughout the study.

I am requesting permission to solicit prospective individuals, a request for the email address of educators, as well as a request to use the campus as a meeting place to conduct interviews. After the completion of the study, the results will be available to the school district and the participants.

If permission is granted, I would need it stated on the district's official letterhead for the purposes of seeking approval from the Concordia University Internal Review Board. I thank you for the attention to my request and I look forward to receiving your positive response. Please do not hesitate to contact me for any clarification or follow-up questions you may have concerning my request.

Sincerely,

Summer White

Doctoral Candidate

Concordia University

## Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Hi,

I am Summer White, a student at Concordia University working on a degree in Doctor of Transformational leadership. I will be conducting a research study entitled *Secondary School Teacher Perceptions and the role it plays in the underrepresentation of African American students in Gifted Education*. Numerous research studies indicate that there is an underrepresentation of African American students in gifted and talented education programs (GATE) in public education. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to examine how secondary school teacher perceptions impact the underrepresentation of African Americans in public education GATE programs. Although there are no direct benefits to you for your participation in the study, your responses along with other findings can help build a framework that can aid in developing teacher training programs and providing resources for teachers to increase gifted student recommendation for minority students.

Participation in this doctoral research will be based upon the following criteria: (a) at least 5 years teaching experience, (b) professional training related to working with the gifted and talented populations, and (c) experience working with diverse student populations. Based on your experiences, you will be interviewed and asked questions that will cause you to reflect and expound on those experiences void of bias or prejudice from the researcher. Although you will be asked multiple questions, there is not correct or incorrect answer due to the fact that you are being asked to describe your experiences. The interview will be a semi-structured, audio-recorded interview lasting less than 1.5 hours. Also, during the course of the interview I will be documenting observations of the interview in research journal. Please note that if at any time you wish to discontinue the interview or feel uncomfortable in responding to any questions or the overall process, the interview can be stopped and you may withdraw your participation without penalty or explanation.

After the interview, your responses will be transcribed and a transcript will be emailed to you to verify the accuracy of your responses. The transcript will be sent to you 48 hours after the interview and you will have 72 hours to return it to the researcher. If the transcript is not returned the researcher will assume that is verification of the transcript by the participant. Throughout the course of the study, your confidentiality will be maintained by assigning you a numerical pseudonym as to not disclose your personal information. All information gathered from this study such as consent forms and interview data will be: (a) secured, (b) stored, and then (c) destroyed by shredding three years after the study. Electronic files will be erased from the hard drive and audio recordings will be destroyed as soon as possible after being transcribed.

There are no risks associated with your participation in this study. If you choose to participate in this study, please email or call me using the given contact information. I also ask that you provide me with a contact phone number as well. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to utilize my contact information.

Sincerely,

Summer White

## **Appendix C: Consent Form**

### **CONSENT FORM**

Research Study Title: Secondary School Teacher Perceptions and the Role it plays in the Underrepresentation of African American students in Gifted Education.

Principal Investigator: Summer White

Research Institution: Concordia University

Faculty Advisor: Audrey Rabas

Purpose and what you will be doing:

The purpose of this survey is to understand what perspectives secondary school teachers have regarding African American students as to how they identify and refer African American students for enrollment in gifted education programs and how teacher perceptions influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs. We expect approximately 10 volunteers. No one will be paid to be in the study. We will begin enrollment on August 28, 2018 and end enrollment on September, 2018 and end enrollment on October, 2018. To be in the study, you will have to meet the following requirements: (a) at least 5 years teaching experience, (b) professional training related to working with the gifted and talented populations, and (c) experience working with diverse student populations. In addition, all participants will have to sign a consent form to participate in the study, to have behavior and other nonverbal aspects observed and noted in a research journal, and be audiotaped during the interview. After the interview participants will be emailed a password and access protected transcript of the interview using a shaded drive file, and asked to verify the transcript for editing purposes. Doing these things should take less than 1.5 hours of your time for the interview and less than 1 hour for the review of the transcript.

Risks:

There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your responses to the interview questions. However, we will protect your information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked inside a secured filing folder. When we or any of our investigators look at the data, none of the data will have your name or identifying information. We will only use a secret code to analyze the data. We will not identify you in any publication or report. Your information will be kept private at all times and then all study documents will be destroyed 3 years after we conclude this study.

Benefits:

Information you provide will help aid in developing teacher training programs and providing resources for teachers to increase gifted student recommendation for minority students. You could benefit this by becoming aware of the type of perceptions teachers have toward African American students in regards to how students are identified and referred to GATE programs which could cause the participants to become more cognizant of their perceptions and shift their perspectives of African American students.

**Confidentiality:**

This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

**Right to Withdraw:**

Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, we will stop asking you questions.

**Contact Information:**

You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Summer White. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email [obranch@cu-portland.edu](mailto:obranch@cu-portland.edu) or call 503-493-6390).

**Your Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



Investigator: Summer White; email: [summer\\_towns@yahoo.com](mailto:summer_towns@yahoo.com)  
c/o: Professor Audrey Rabas  
Concordia University – Portland  
2811 NE Holman Street  
Portland, Oregon 97221

## **Appendix D: Pilot Interview Questions**

1. How many years have you taught in public education?
2. What grades have you taught?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. What is your gender?
5. What is your age?
6. What are your experiences as a teacher working with minority students?
7. Describe/Define your definition of the term gifted.
8. How would you describe gifted students?
9. Please describe to me your experiences as a teacher working with gifted African American children?
10. Please explain if you think gifted students equitably exists in all environments regardless of race, culture, or socioeconomic factors.
11. Describe the educational training you have had to identify and understand the needs of minority children.
12. Describe your lived experiences and perceptions regarding the identification and referral of African American students to gifted education.
13. From your perspective, how do teacher perceptions influence if African American students are identified and referred to gifted education programs?
14. Explain your perspective on this statement: teacher input should be used in identifying and referring students to gifted education?
15. Reflect on a time when you have referred an African American student or a minority student to a gifted education program? What happened? What were your feelings?

16. What are your thoughts as to why African American students are underrepresented in gifted education programs in the U.S.?

## Appendix E: Pilot Interview Verbal Script

Good morning/afternoon/evening

First, I would like to start off by thanking you again for your willingness to participate in this pilot interview regarding secondary school teachers' perceptions as related to the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted and talented education (GATE) programs. Before we begin the interview, I would like to take the time to review the consent form. *[The researcher will review the consent form with the participant]*. Are there are any questions or concerns about the consent form? You may now sign the consent form.

As noted in the consent form, your participation in this interview is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without penalty or explanation. The purpose of this pilot interview is to ensure that the interview questions are feasible and appropriate. Thus, the overall reason for the pilot study is for participants to provide feedback on the instrument created by the researcher to answer the research questions for the study. At the end of the interview I will give you a pilot interview question review form so you can provide me with feedback about the interview questions. In addition, if you feel as if additional interview questions are needed or have any other suggestions then please feel free to note those as well.

On the review form, there is a place for a numerical pseudonym that has been assigned to you for confidentiality purposes. I will keep a record of your name and numerical pseudonym in the event I need to contact you for any clarification. Only two people will have access to this information, the researcher and the researcher's faculty advisor. As a reminder, all information gathered from this study such as consent forms and pilot interview data will be: (a) secured, (b) stored, and then (c) destroyed by shredding three years after the study. Electronic files will be erased from the hard drive and audio recordings will be destroyed as soon as possible after being transcribed. This interview will take no longer than 1.5 hours. I will now hand you a hard copy of the interview questions and once the interview is completed I will hand you the pilot interview question review form to complete. During the interview, if you have any questions or need clarification on the interview questions please feel free to ask. If you need a break throughout the interview please let me know. Do you have any questions or concerns? *[Wait for participant's response]*. If there are no questions or concerns, we will now begin the interview.

## Appendix F: Pilot Interview Questions Review Form

Pilot Interviewee #1 (PI1): \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Write Y for yes or N for no in the column for the appropriateness of the interview question. If there are suggestions or concerns about an interview question please write them in complete sentences in the suggestions column.

Question:	Appropriate (Y or N)	Suggestions: (Please Print)
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Additional Suggestions:

## Appendix G: Interview Verbal Script

Good morning/afternoon/evening

First, I would like to start off by thanking you again for your willingness to participate in this interview regarding secondary school teachers' perceptions as related to the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted and talented education (GATE) programs. Before we begin the interview, I would like to take the time to review the consent form I sent you through email after our initial phone call [*The researcher will review the consent form with the participant*]. As noted in the consent form, your participation in this interview is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without penalty or explanation. Are there any questions or concerns about the consent form? You may now sign the consent form.

You will be assigned a numerical pseudonym for coding and confidentiality purposes. The numerical pseudonym will be published in the document of the study. I will maintain a separate record to match you, the participant, to your assigned numerical pseudonym. Only two people will have access to this information, myself as the researcher and my faculty advisor. As a reminder, all information gathered from this study such as consent forms and interview data will be: (a) secured, (b) stored, and then (c) destroyed by shredding three years after the study. Electronic files will be erased from the hard drive and audio recordings will be destroyed as soon as possible after being transcribed.

This interview will take no longer than 1.5 hours. During the course of the interview you will be asked questions concerning the phenomenon of the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education. The interview questions are specifically designed for you to verbally express your thoughts as well as provide a platform to expand on those questions. I will be recording this interview session, is that a problem? [*Wait for participant's response*]. After the session, I will manually transcribe your responses. I will email you a copy of the transcript 48 hours after the interview for verification purposes and you will have 72 hours to return it to me. If the transcript is not returned I will assume that as verification of the transcript by you. During the interview, if you have any questions or need clarification on the interview questions please feel free to ask. If you need a break throughout the interview please let me know. Do you have any questions or concerns? [*Wait for participant's response*]. If there are no questions or concerns, we will now begin the interview.

## **Appendix H: Interview Questions**

1. How many years have you taught in public education?
2. What grades have you taught?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. What is your gender?
5. What is your age?
6. What are your experiences as a teacher working with minority students?
7. Describe/Define your definition of the term gifted.
8. How would you describe gifted students?
9. Please describe to me your experiences as a teacher working with gifted African American children?
10. Please explain if you think gifted students equitably exists in all environments regardless of race, culture, or socioeconomic factors.
11. Describe the educational training you have had to identify and understand the needs of minority children.
12. Describes types of services that can be offered to help teachers work through barriers that could prevent them from recognizing the high academic potential in students of color?
13. Describe your lived experiences and perceptions regarding the identification and referral of African American students to gifted education.
14. From your perspective, how do teacher perceptions influence if African American students are identified and referred to gifted education programs?
15. Explain your perspective on this statement: teacher input should be used in identifying and referring students to gifted education?

16. Reflect on a time when you have referred an African American student or a minority student to a gifted education program? What happened? What were your feelings?
17. What are your thoughts as to why African American students are underrepresented in gifted education programs in the U.S.?

## **Appendix I: Member Checking Email**

Dear Participant,

I hope that this email finds you well. First, I would like to thank you again for taking the time to participate in an interview for this study. This email contains an attachment of the transcript of your interview. Please verify that the transcripts accurately reflect your thoughts. If they do not accurately reflect your thoughts please review the document, track the changes, and email me the changes so that I may modify the document. When you email the document please entitle the subject heading as modification so that I may know the document needs to be modified. Once I have received the modified document from you I will correct it and send it to you within 48 hours for you to verify again. On the other hand, if the transcript is correct then please send me an email with a subject heading entitled, verified. In each case, whether you need to make changes or do not need to make changes to the transcript you will have 72 hours to contact me through email stating your position. If I do not receive an email within 72 hours of this email then I will assume that as your verification of the transcript. Thank you in advance for your response.

Summer White

Doctoral Candidate

## Appendix J: Phenomenological Analysis Outline by Main Research Question

Main Research Question: How do teacher perceptions influence minority student representation in secondary gifted education programs, with a specific focus on African American students?

PIP	Meaning Unit	Essential Structure
1	African American kids are not looked at by teachers to be gifted.	Teachers don't target African American Kids regarding their gifted abilities.
2	Teacher perceptions are a factor in whether minority students are referred to gifted programs.	Teacher know the students they teach and should know how to identify gifted children thus teachers can influence if a student is recommended for gifted services.
3	Teacher perceptions coupled with personal perceptions interfere with teachers identifying minority students as gifted.	The misconceptions of teachers thinking regarding minority students are influencing identifying minority students with gifted abilities.
4	Teacher perceptions influence the referral of minority students for gifted services.	Teachers should be able to identify students and recommend them for referral to gifted programs.
5	Teacher perceptions negatively influence the referral of minority students.	Due to society's cultural standards, teachers look at African American students in a negative light as compared to other students.
6	Teachers let outside nuances influence their recommendations of students for gifted services.	Teachers let the behavior of students influence if teachers refer them for gifted services.

### Synthesized Concise Statement:

As seen in the table it is evident that all 6 teachers believed that teacher perceptions do influence the representation of minority students in gifted education. The overall meaning regarding minority student representation is that teachers perceive African American students in a negative manner for a variety of reasons which influences the teacher referrals of African American students for gifted services.

## **Appendix K: Participants Interviews: Open, Axial, and Selective Codebook**

### **Participants Interviews: Open, Axial, and Selective Coding Table**

#### **Open Coding**

- 6a: Teacher can relate more with African American students
- 6b: African American students are low
- 6c: Has worked with African American students
- 6d: Students level of ability varies
- 6e: Working with African American students is what the teacher expected it would be
- 6f: Has had good and bad experiences
  
- 7a: Do not have to put in much effort to do work
- 7b: Educationally above grade level
- 7c: Thinking is on a higher level
- 7d: Think outside the box
- 7e: Think differently than average people
  
- 8a: Students who think outside the box
- 8b: Students are self-motivated
- 8c: Students who are always thinking
- 8d: Students who want to learn
- 8e: Students that are naturally creative
- 8f: Students who do things differently
  
- 9a: Have not worked with many African American students
- 9b: It is different working with gifted students
- 9c: No experience working with gifted African American students
- 9d: Has noticed a lack of representation of gifted African American students in the classroom
- 9e: African American students are sarcastic
  
- 10a: Yes, gifted students exist equitably in all environments
  
- 11a: Has had some GT training
- 11b: Has had no GT training
  
- 12a: It's hard to target African American students as gifted
- 12b: Has not seen many African American children referred for gifted services
- 12c: No experience working with gifted African American students
- 12d: See more African Americans students referred for special education services
- 12e: Has referred some students (other than minority too) over the years for gifted services

- 13a: Negatively, teachers don't refer African American students often
- 13b: Teacher perceptions play a role if African American students are referred for gifted services
- 13c: Negatively, teacher perceptions interfere in referring African American students for gifted services
- 13d: Yes, teacher perceptions influence the referral of African American students for gifted services
- 13e: Negatively, teachers do not look at African Americans in a positive light
- 13f: No, teacher perceptions do not influence the referral of African American students for gifted services
  
- 14a: Yes, teacher input should be used to refer students for gifted services
- 14b: No, teacher input should not be used to refer students for gifted services
  
- 15a: Yes, has referred one student for gifted services
- 15b: Yes, has referred one student for gifted services
- 15c: Has never referred a minority student for gifted services
  
- 16a: African American students do not want the label
- 16b: African American students are not seen as gifted
- 16c: Teachers personal bias gets in the way of referring African American students for gifted services
- 16d: Teachers have preconceived prejudices about African American students
- 16e: African American students are perceived as unintelligent
- 16: African Students have behavior issues

#### Axial Coding

- 6a: Teacher can relate more with African American students
- 6e: Working with African American students is what the teacher expected it would be
- 6c: Has worked with African American students
- 6f: Has had good and bad experiences
  - Subcategory 1: Seen as "Mother Figure" by African American Students who want attention (PIP 1)
  - Subcategory 2: "Whites do what they are told" in the classroom but "it's not a real bond there." (PIP 1)
  - Subcategory 3: "Working with minority students has gone how I expected it to go...what some people may see as a bad attitude, I recognize as part of their overall culture" (PIP 5)
- Theme: Different experiences working with African American students versus working with other students
  
- 6b: African American students are low
- 6d: Students level of ability varies
  - Subcategory 1: "Minority Students are behind grade level"
  - Subcategory 2: African American kids are "like any other group of kids, there are kids who are at the higher end and lower end." (PIP 4)



Theme: Minority students are behind in the classroom

7a: Do not have to put in much effort to do work

7b: Educationally above grade level

7c: Thinking is on a higher level

7d: Think outside the box

7e: Think differently than average people

Subcategory 1: “Do not have to put in much effort to problem solve” (PIP 1), “Don’t have to work hard to learn” (PIP 2)

Subcategory 2: “Thinking process is above and beyond the normal regular adaptations in the classroom” (PIP 3)

Theme: Gifted- defined as exercising higher order thinking

8b: Students are self-motivated

8d: Students who want to learn

Subcategory 1: “They know their talents so they hone in on them” (PIP 2)

Subcategory 2: “Kids that want to know more about a subject matter they are passionate about” (PIP 3)

Themes: Gifted students want knowledge

8e: Students that are naturally creative

8f: Students who do things differently

8a: Students who think outside the box

8c: Students who are always thinking

Subcategory 1: “Go above and beyond what they have to do.” (PIP 1)

Subcategory 2: Are “naturally creative in how they problem solve” (PIP 5)

Subcategory 3: Students whose brains are “expanding on what they’re wanting to do” (PIP

3)

Theme: Gifted students think differently than regular students

9a: Have not worked with many African American students

9c: No experience working with gifted African American students

9d: Has noticed a lack of representation of gifted African American students in the classroom

Subcategory 1: “People don’t put them in gifted like they should” (PIP 1)

Subcategory 2: “The majority of the gifted kids I’ve taught have been white” (PIP 4)

Theme: Limited experience working with gifted African American students.

9b: It is different working with gifted students

9e: African American students are sarcastic

Subcategory 1: “Working with the gifted children has been challenging”...many African American kids have “behavior issues.”

Subcategory 2: Gifted African American use sarcasm as a “defensive mechanism” as to not get picked on by other kids.

Theme: It is difficult working with gifted students

10a: Yes, gifted students exist equitably in all environments

Subcategory 1: “Any student can be gifted independent of factors such as race, cultures, etc.” (PIP 6), “Read statistics stating that 10% of any given population is going to be gifted and talented”

Theme: Gifted students equitably exists in all student groups

11a: Has had some GT training

Subcategory 1: Has had GT training has not taken any GT training specifically focused on “ethnic groups” (PIP 1), Has had training to identify students but has not training specifically for that “particular group” (PIP 4)

Subcategory 2: Completed training that was “designed to help us pick out gifted kids from behavior problems” (PIP 2)

Theme: Has completed GT training for various reasons

11b: Has had no GT training

12a: It’s hard to target African American students as gifted

Subcategory 1: African American students “don’t want to be smart and they don’t want people to know they are smart.” (PIP 1)

Theme: African American students avoid being label as gifted.

12b: Has not seen many African American children referred for gifted services

12c: No experience working with gifted African American students

12d: See more African Americans students referred for special education services

12e: Has referred some students (other than minority too) over the years for gifted services

Subcategory 1: They are overlooked because of socioeconomic status, lack of parental involvement, limited educational options (PIP 2)

Subcategory 2: Minority students have “educational gaps” (PIP 5)

Theme: African American students are overlooked in schools.

13a: Negatively, teachers don’t refer African American students often

13c: Negatively, teacher perceptions interfere in referring African American students for gifted services

13e: Negatively, teachers do not look at African Americans in a positive light

Subcategory 1: “I don’t think they look for them to be gifted...they look for Whites.” (PIP 1), “Misconceptions whether they have been taught or learned are getting in the way of recognizing students with gifted abilities.

Theme: Teachers don’t view African American students as smart

13b: Teacher perceptions play a role if African American students are referred for gifted services

13d: Yes, teacher perceptions influence the referral of African American students for gifted services

Subcategory 1: “As teachers...we can be the first step; to get them in the programs” (PIP 2)

Subcategory 2: “We are not referring them...we have to be able to identify the kids and recommend them for referral” (PIP 4)

Theme: Teacher play a role regarding the identification and referral of African American students for gifted services.

13f: No, teacher perceptions do not influence the referral of African American students for gifted services

Subcategory 1: African American kids “have behavior issues that gets in the way of them being identified.” (PIP 6)

Theme: Teacher perceptions do not play a role in the referral of African American students for gifted services.

14a: Yes, teacher input should be used to refer students for gifted services

Subcategory 1: “Teacher input should be used because we deal with them often.” (PIP 6), “It should be used but shouldn’t carry much weight” (PIP 5), “Yes, we spend a lot of time with the students” (PIP 4), “Yes, it should be used but not the final decision.” (PIP 3)

Theme: Teacher input is valuable in referring students for gifted services.

14b. No, teacher input should not be used to refer students for gifted service.

Subcategory 1: “Teachers don’t look at what they know, they look at how the kids act (PIP 1)

Theme: Teacher input is not valuable in referring students for gifted services.

15a: Yes, has referred one student for gifted services

Subcategory 1: Student was accepted in gifted education program (PIP 1)

Subcategory 2: Student was not accepted into the gifted education program. (PIP 2)

Theme: Teachers are referring students for gifted services.

15c: Has never referred a minority student for gifted services

Subcategory 1: “I’ve never referred any student to a gifted program.” (PIP 4)

Theme: Teachers has not referred students for gifted services.

16a: African American students do not want the label

Subcategory 1: “I don’t think they want the label...they will play stupid.” (PIP 1)

Theme: African American students do not want to be seen as smart.

16b: African American students are not seen as gifted

16c: Teachers personal bias gets in the way of referring African American students for gifted services

16d: Teachers have preconceived prejudices about African American students

16e: African American students are perceived as unintelligent

16f: African Students have behavior issues

Subcategory 1: Teachers come with preconceived notions of what we the kids should be able to do and it keeps us from really being able to identify them.” (PIP 4). “American culture has stereotyped us...we don’t fit the profile...we get overlooked” (PIP 5).

Theme: Teachers stereotype African American kids.

Selective Coding

6a: Other students (Ex: Whites) are less challenging to work with in the classrooms than African American students.

6b: The academic achievement of minority students varies from high to low in the classroom.

Theme: Various experiences working with gifted minority students

7a: Gifted is defined as thinking at elevated cognitive levels without having to put much effort into the work.

Theme: Gifted is associated with innate abilities.

8a: Gifted students are intrinsically motivated to pursue knowledge.

8b: Gifted students have the natural ability to think outside the box.

Theme: Gifted students have a desire to learn.

9a: A lack of representation of gifted African American students in gifted education programs.

9b: Working with gifted African American students is challenging

Theme: Minimum representation of African American students in the classroom.

10a: Gifted students equitably exists in all populations independent of outside factors such as race, socioeconomic status, etc.

Theme: All student groups contain gifted students.

11a: Has completed no GT training in identifying and understanding the needs of minority groups

11b: Has completed no GT training in identifying and understanding the needs of minority groups.

Theme: Effectiveness of educational training

12a. African American students view being labeled gifted as a stigma in school.

12b. Due to cultural barriers and the standards of society, African American are not viewed as being smart enough to enter gifted education programs.

Theme: Oversight of gifted African American students

13a. The personal bias of teachers influences how they view African American students which affects if they identify or refer them for gifted services.

13b. Teacher perceptions are a factor regarding if African American students are identified and referred for gifted services.

13c. The behavior of African American students causes them not to be identified as gifted.

Theme: Teacher perceptions are influential.

14a. Teacher input should be used in referring students for gifted services because teachers are with students the most and come to know them well.

14b. Teacher input should not be used because teachers let the behavior of the kids influence their referral of students for gifted services.

Theme: Teacher input is valuable.

15a. Teachers refer students for gifted services but certain factors influence if they are accepted or not accepted into gifted education programs.

15b. Teachers had not encountered students that they could refer for gifted services.

Theme: Teacher referral of gifted African American students for gifted services is low.

16a. African American students hide their gifted abilities to avoid being labeled as gifted.

16b. Cultural influences and teacher's personal perceptions influence the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs in the U.S.

Theme: The ideals of society influences underrepresentation.

## **Appendix L: Research Journal Template**

Participant Code

Date

Location

Time

Physical Setting of Environment:

Participant's Behavior/Non-Verbal Aspects:

Researcher's Behaviors and Experiences:

## **Appendix M: Statement of Original Work**

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously- researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

### **Statement of academic integrity.**

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

### **Explanations:**

#### ***What does “fraudulent” mean?***

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

#### ***What is “unauthorized” assistance?***

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

## Statement of Original Work

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University-Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*

Summer White

Digital Signature

Summer White

May 29, 2018

Date