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Experiences of African American Mothers Raising Gifted Children

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Abstract

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MA, Bethel College, 2002

BS, University of Central Oklahoma, 1999

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Equality in educational access has long been an area of concern for U.S. educators, policy makers, and advocates. Congress issued a mandate in 1969 to identify the needs of gifted students and to ensure that those needs were being met. However, the needs of gifted minority students were not specifically addressed. Little is known about how African American mothers are affected by the demands of raising and advocating for their gifted child. The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative inquiry was to explore the lived experiences of African American mothers raising gifted children. The theory of womanism was used to explore the experiential anecdotes offered by the participants and to guide in analysis of developing themes. In addition, critical race theory was used to further examine the narratives offered by the participant mothers. Nine African American mothers whose children were identified as academically and intellectually gifted participated in interviews; analysis of data included use of the hermeneutic circle and resulted in the identification of 4 essential themes and 8 subthemes. Subthemes, that seemed particularly meaningful to participants, included othermothering, exasperation, resilience, and the Black male experience. Findings highlight the mothers' resilience when dealing with instances of microaggressions and microinsults. Additionally, findings elucidated their desire to see every child succeed through othermothering behaviors. Implications for positive social change include contributing to the body of knowledge regarding the needs and challenges affecting African American mothers raising gifted children.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this body of work to my two girls: Kataya and Keira. Kataya, you were the inspiration for this study, you made me question everything and insist on nothing but the best for your educational journey. I love you beyond words.

Keira, you have always been a source of comic relief for me. You did not always know, but some days seemed so overwhelming until you came into the room with your brand of comedy that helped to ease the stress I was feeling in that moment. Your timing is impeccable. I love you beyond words.

You are both gifted girls, and it is because of your experiences in school and my secondary experiences of dealing with school administrators that made this body of work possible. It is so true, you are both capable of great things! I look forward to watching the rest of your journey.

Love,

Mom

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Dad, thank you for always being there for me in a pinch. Your support during this time has been invaluable. Mom, you did it! You finished “your” PhD. On a serious note, you held out hope even when I had given up. Thank you for always believing in me and being my biggest and best cheerleader! I love you with everything I am.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

In an effort to understand the experiences of African American mothers of gifted children, one must first understand the history of race relations between Blacks and their White counterparts. Such knowledge will provide a foundation for understanding the continued struggles and disparities in education for African American children. The Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution were ratified to begin movement toward equality in the treatment of African American citizens. The Fourteenth Amendment was passed by Congress in 1866 and ratified by the States in 1868. This Amendment was passed to ensure citizenship and to protect the civil liberties of recently freed slaves. This was the beginning of attempts by lawmakers and others to right the wrongs and injustices inflicted upon African Americans. Although some White citizens were supportive of Congress' efforts, other White citizens were not in favor of treating those citizens known as "Negroes" equally. Prejudices and injustices continued to affect Blacks making it difficult for them to achieve socioeconomic and educational equality with their White counterparts. It can be assumed that these continued injustices helped to usher in the Civil Rights Movement beginning in 1955.

On May 17, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously that racial segregation in schools was unconstitutional in the *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954) case. This decision indicated that separate educational facilities were by their very nature, unequal. The Supreme Court decision inevitably overturned the previous *Plessy vs. Ferguson* ruling of 1896 that suggested that separate but equal facilities did not violate the Constitution. Chief Justice Earl Warren remarked that using the law to validate the use of segregation of White and Black children suggests a federally sanctioned identification of Black children being subordinate to

their White counterparts. He wrote that fostering the belief by Black children of their being subordinate to their White counterparts could negatively affect their motivation to learn. In spite of this ruling, there remain inequalities as is relates to access to education for Black children in the United States.

It is interesting that the courts began to take up the issue of equality in education by 1954; it suggests that there was a national movement toward ensuring equality and equal opportunity for African Americans. The 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott, which was sparked by the arrest of Rosa Parks for refusing to yield her seat to a White passenger, followed as a milestone in the fight for civil equality (*Montgomery Bus Boycott, n.d.*). This arrest preceded a 13-month struggle to desegregate public transportation. Finally, in 1956 the federal district court ruled in *Browder v. Gayle* (1956) that bus segregation was unconstitutional; this ruling was followed by the striking down of laws that required segregated seating on public buses (*Montgomery Bus Boycott, n.d*).

Brown v. Board of Education (1954), *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), and the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955 all contributed to the progress that was being made in the demand for equality for African Americans in the United. However, based on information gathered from the Virginia Historical Society (2004), there is still one situation that deserves conversation; that is the "Massive Resistance" that was undertaken by the citizens and lawmakers of Prince Edward County in Virginia. In response to the 1959 federal mandate to begin to integrate their schools with children of color, the county instead decided to close down all public-school institutions (Virginia Historical Society, 2004). It was reported in this resource that the Prince Edward Foundation created private schools, funded by tuition grants, state and tax credits, to educate the county's White children. This resistance lasted 5 years forcing many African American youth in

the County to miss out on their education. In 1964, the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed the grants to Virginia that were funding these private schools; this move forced officials in Prince Edward County to reopen their schools and employ desegregation tactics to ensure that White and Black children were being served equally. Following this forced compliance, passive resistance was the next hurdle for Black children and their families to overcome. The Virginia Historical Society (2004) explained that in response to the U.S. Supreme Court's mandate that Virginia schools begin to integrate, few Black students were attending integrated schools because of the work of the Pupil Placement Board. This board had the responsibility of assigning students to specific schools based on an assortment of variables; however, officials later determined that race was one of the only criteria used to assign Black students to schools in the state (Virginia Historical Society, 2004). Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Elementary and Secondary Education of 1965 denied federal funds to schools found to be resisting integration.

White residents also began to move away from Prince Edward County. To illustrate this point, between 1960 and 1975, the percentage of White students dropped from 45 to 21% in Richmond, Virginia. This move made it difficult to offer truly integrated schools to Black children because they transitioned from being the minority to being the majority.

Background of the Study

In an effort to understand the unique experiences of African American mothers raising gifted children, I examined the evolution of the classification of gifted and talented. Additionally, I explored the educational experiences of African American students in the education system in relation to their identification as gifted, their access to differentiated education plans, and the impact these difficulties have on African American mothers. One aim of this research study was

to highlight the secondary impact experienced by African American mothers in their efforts to support their gifted student(s) through this process.

This research study begins with a detailed exploration of the definition of giftedness and the national mandates prescribed to attempt to provide equal educational opportunities to underrepresented groups of students. Because of the 1969 Congressional (Congress, 1970) mandate to more adequately identify and address the needs of gifted children, I sought to clarify the legal definition of the term *gifted children*. The advisory committee tasked with this responsibility was comprised of both federal and state agencies, members of which conducted a five-stage research effort (Congress, 1970). The advisory committee identified this working definition of gifted and talented:

> Qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or observed beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society (p. ix).

The advisory panel further specified the areas of high performance that would be used to identify those high performing students as (a) general intellectual ability, (b) specific academic aptitude, (c) creative or productive thinking, (d) leadership ability, (e) visual and performing arts, and, finally (f) psychomotor ability (Congress, 1970). The definition of gifted and talented, in conjunction with the identified areas of high performance, is estimated to encompass a population of 3 to 5% (roughly 1.5 to 2.5 million) of the elementary and secondary school population in the United States.

Upon completion of its study, the advisory committee identified that the services in place to meet the enhanced needs of gifted and talented students were not addressing educational

requirements unique to minority and disadvantaged students. Additionally, members identified that differentiated education for gifted children was not treated as a priority at the federal, state, or local government levels. Finally, the advisory committee indicated that failing to address the educational needs of gifted children can result in psychological damage and permanent impairments on their abilities to function; this deprivation is comparable to that suffered by other special needs populations.

The U.S. Department of Education (1993) released a report detailing continued strides being made in the effort to address the educational needs of gifted children. The report also identified areas of needed improvements to continue to advance the education of gifted students. The report indicated that although programs for gifted and talented students continue to be available throughout the county, the programs continue to be inconsistent and limited in the substance of what is emphasized in the curriculums.

Richard Riley, the Secretary of Education at the time that the 1993 report was released, summarized, in his writing, the continued failure to adequately address the needs of top students as a "quiet crisis" stating

> Youngsters with gifts and talents that range from mathematical to musical are still not challenged to work to their full potential. Our neglect of these students makes it impossible for Americans to compete in a global economy demanding their skills (p. 1).

The U.S. Department of Education's report (1993) asserted that, in order to improve the education of gifted and talented children in the school system, state and local government needed to expand the definition of gifted and talented to encompass a larger range of gifted children. The report additionally identified that there should be additional resources and opportunity provided to disadvantaged and minority student populations. The report included an updated working

definition of gifted and talented; this expanded characterization was based in part on the interpretation of gifted and talented developed in the 1971 Marland report to Congress and on the subsequent terminology described in the Javits Gifted and Talented Education Act of 1988. Following is the definition of gifted and talented included in the report

> Children and youth with outstanding talent perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. These children and youth exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor (p. 5).

Authors of the 1993 report found that although there has been attention paid to the area of gifted and talented students over the years, the attention given to this subject has been sporadic and the implementation of services for this population has been inconsistent across educational outlets. The information provided in the 1993 report and the Marland 1971 report outline areas of concern where educating gifted and talented students are concerned. Although administrators had access to these reports and federal lawmakers passed mandates to encourage states to address the needs of gifted and talented students in their school districts in 1990, there seems to have been inadequate progress in facilitating the kind of meaningful change needed to adequately address these students' education requirements. The U.S. Department of Education's report (1993) highlighted variances in the state policies for support of gifted programs. The report indicated that, in 1990, while 26 states and territories required that schools provide "specialized services"

for gifted and talented students, 27 states and territories only encouraged the provision of such programs while six states and territories had no related legislation.

Report authors (U.S. Department of Education's report, 1993) issued a challenge to ensure that specialized programming is made available and accessible for disadvantaged and minority populations within U.S. school system. However, even with legislation that requires equality in educational practices and endorses the provision of special attention to gifted and talented children of all races and socioeconomic backgrounds, there continues to be a disconnect between ideal and actual services in the U.S. public education system.

Equality in Education

To this point, there have been at least two federally mandated research studies into the education of gifted children that have identified that minority and disadvantaged youth are not being afforded the same opportunities as their White counterparts. However, further understanding of the research studies reveal that even though minority and disadvantaged gifted populations are not receiving the educational support they need the school systems, in general, do not provide as much support and emphasis on gifted programs in general (Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008; May, 2000).

Boozer, Krueger, and Wolkon (1992) identified that the disparities observed between Black students and their White counterparts can be attributed to expenditures per student, average class-size, and the length of school term (p. 1). The authors identified that the gap in knowledge of race and school quality is distressing because this gap can be linked to the earnings gap between Black and White workers.

Morris (2002) suggested that the selection and identification of gifted children is based and heavily rooted in enduring perceptions that "African American people might be intellectually

inferior to White people" (p. 59). The author outlined that not only are African American students overlooked for placement in academically challenging programs they are more likely to be placed in special education programs and lower level academic tracked courses. In 1950, the Educational Policies Commission noted in regards to the rate of identification of African American students as gifted:

> Lacking both incentive and opportunity, the probabilities are very great that, however, superior one's gift may be, he will rarely live a life of high achievement. Follow-up studies of highly gifted young Negroes, for instance, reveal a shocking waste of talent – a waste that adds an incalculable amount to the price of prejudice in this country. (p. 33).

Ford, Harris, Tyson and Trotman (2001) highlight that even after the 1954 ruling in Brown v. Board of Education that declared school segregation unconstitutional, at the time of their article in 2002, African American students were continuing to be underestimated, underrepresented, and underserved because gifted education remained racially segregated.

Problem Statement

Although the previously discussed legislation was enacted to eliminate the disparity between the quality of education available to Caucasian students and that of their minority counterparts, equality remains elusive. While an exhaustive literature search was undertaken, there were limited resources available specific to this topic and the resources found were dated, however, in an effort to include relevant research in this research study, older resources were included. Harmon (2008) discussed the need for parents of African American gifted students to understand their role in ensuring that their gifted child receives instruction that will foster learning in predominantly White classrooms that have not fully incorporated the needs of diverse students (p. 74). Parenting has long been established as an influential component in childhood

development and is also considered a significant factor that influences children's talent development in early childhood (Wu, 2008; Colangelo & Dettman, 1983). However, there is a great deal of misunderstanding with regard to the dynamics of gifted families. May (2000) highlighted the misconception that the gifted do not require any special attention or consideration to adequately meet their needs; in fact, the author identified five traits (divergent thinking ability, excitability, sensitivity, perceptiveness, and entelechy) that affect a gifted child's interaction and interpretation of their world. May (2000) further illuminated the struggles of parents of gifted children by discussing parents' feelings of being inadequately prepared to raise a gifted child. Parents of gifted children have their frustrations compounded by their gifted child's asynchronous cognitive, emotional, and social development. It is the child's intelligence that presents as both a gift and a challenge; gifted children are advanced beyond their years intellectually, but generally present age appropriate emotional and social skills. This asynchronism challenges feelings of preparedness and confidence to meet the needs of gifted children in both parents and teachers. Rotigel (2003) indicated that both teachers and parents have met the identification of giftedness with mixed reactions. The author also indicated that teachers have expressed feeling overwhelmed at the prospect of having to provide differentiated education plans for gifted children and as a result the needs of gifted children are not consistently met.

Ford, Harris, Tyson and Trotman (2001) suggested that identification standards used to identify gifted children is one aspect of the underlying cause for the inability of educators to identify and respond to the needs of gifted and talented African American students and their families. Morris (2002) identified that African American students are not only unfairly overlooked for involvement in academically gifted programming; they are increasingly identified

for inclusion in special education courses. Ford (1998) conducted a database search to identify articles and studies conducted to address the specific needs of gifted minority students. She found a total of 2,816 articles published on gifted students and of those articles only 36 (1.3%) were focused on African American students. She stated that the limited number of publications related to African American gifted students creates difficulty for educators and policymakers with understanding and addressing the unique needs of this population of student. Ford (1998) further discussed that minority parents face various barriers to school involvement; concerns related to stereotypes, affluence, and educational attainment perpetuate the feeling that African American parents have regarding their children being identified as gifted.

Although there were many published research articles addressing the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education classes (May, 2000; Henfield, Moore and Wood, 2008; Morris, 2002; Ford, Harris, Tyson, and Trotman, 2002; and Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfeld, and York, 1966), the vast majority of these research studies are dated and I was not able to find any research studies that look specifically at the experiences of the African American mother raising her gifted child. Morawska and Sanders (2008) identified that there was a lack of research focused on the unique challenges and experiences of gifted children and their parents; Huff, Houskamp, Watkins, Stanton, and Tavegia (2005) further indicated that family factors significantly impact the success of gifted African American children. The authors also identified that what is widely known about parents of gifted children is based on research conducted on Caucasian families. In addition to this observation, the authors noted that parents of African American gifted children felt as though the administrators and teachers were not adequately prepared to address the specific needs of their gifted children. The parents identified concerns regarding their children feeling isolated from

their gifted cohorts as well as their non-gifted African American counterparts; pressure from the African American community to be less smart; and continued institutional racism that seems to keep African American children at a disadvantage. I was not able to find research in understanding the experiences of the mother's in these families and it is this gap in the literature, specific to the difficulties and challenges African American mothers experience in providing support and advocacy for their gifted children that this study will seek to address.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to explore the lived experiences of African American mother's in their efforts to successfully parent and advocate for their gifted children, and in doing so: (a) make a significant contribution to the body of knowledge with respect to the various experiences African American mothers have advocating for their gifted children in school; (b) highlight the experiences of African American mother's raising gifted children; (c) examine these experiences through the context of critical race theory; and (d) precipitate social change with regard to how the needs of gifted minority children and their families are identified and addressed. The theoretical underpinnings of this study seek to elucidate the experiences, thoughts, and behaviors to contextualize the African American mothers' experience of parenting and advocating for their gifted children. Ultimately, it is hoped that the results of this phenomenological study will inform therapeutic and school interventions designed to more accurately identify and address the struggles unique to African American women raising gifted children.

Research Questions

Consistent with hermeneutic phenomenological research, I employed questions in this research study to understand the human experience as it pertains to African American mothers

raising gifted children. Researchers use phenomenological designs to understand and describe commonalities between participants and their experiences with the identified phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Furthermore, they use hermeneutic phenomenological designs to understand the subjective experiences of the identified group (Kafle, 2013). Phenomenological research is concerned with describing rather than explaining the phenomenon, which removes the need to quantify results. With this in mind, in formulating the research questions, I did not seek to definitively explain or quantify results with the intention of generalizing results to the broader population; I merely sought to uncover experiential truths as they pertained to each participant and, in doing so, identify themes across participants' responses.

Consistent with the constructs applicable to hermeneutic phenomenological research, the guiding research question was, What are the lived experiences of African American mothers raising gifted children? I also posed three additional sub-questions: (a) Describe the challenges you have faced, as an African American mother of a gifted child, in ensuring access to adequate education?, (b) What does it mean to be an African American woman raising a gifted child, and (c) What role do the experiences in the world as an African American woman play in the perception of ease of advocating for the gifted child? I hope that the resultant data may be useful to counselors in clarifying the counseling and support needed by parents of gifted children.

Conceptual Framework

This research illuminated the injustices as they appeared and were experienced in the education system for mothers raising gifted African American students (Mensah, 2010). I used critical race theory (CRT) to explore the identified gap in knowledge. However, womanism is a theory that also has some applicability. Although, I did not look as deeply in to the connection of womanism to my topic of research study, I did highlight some of the tenets of womanism that

may affect the lived experience of African American women raising gifted children. Womanism, a term coined by Alice Walker in 1983, is used to describe the experiences of African American women as separate and unique, not a derivative of, experiences of African American males or Caucasian females. Cooper (2009) discussed the uniqueness of African American women's caring as enveloping nurture, love, protection, political resistance, and public activism (p. 385). When discussing the role of the African American woman in the family, Collins (1996) discussed the "internal naturalized hierarchies" present in the African American communities as one of support, regardless of the situation or consequences, the African American woman is expected to support the needs of her family (p. 14). It is this expectation that, I feel, is engrained in the African American mother, so much so that her child's successes or failures in school are seen and experienced as her own. Cooper (2009) suggested that womanism is not just about Black women's desires to improve the station of Black men and boys but that of their communities and families as a whole (p. 385). The author further discussed the "potentially transformative nature of Black women's care", suggesting that this care is "inherently political" due to the Black woman's attempt to provide support and understanding while also combating those issues that might present problematic due to systems put in place by the majority and social injustices (p. 385).

Critical race theory focuses on the impact of systems affected by racism and subtle discrimination. Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, and Freeman (2010) identified that racism is a deep-rooted part of the socialized system (p. 442), in this case, the education system. Morris (2002) suggested that the selection and identification of gifted children is based and heavily rooted in the abiding assumption that African American people are subordinate in their intellectual ability when compared to their White counterparts (p. 59). The effects of racism can

be observed in disparities like those presented in an article by Boozer, Krueger, and Wolkon, (1992). Discussed as areas of concern in this research were the disparities observed between Black students and their White counterparts can be attributed to expenditures per student, average class-size, and the length of school term (p. 1). The authors identified that the gap in knowledge of race and school quality is distressing because this gap can be linked to the earnings gap between Black and White workers.

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) explained that although critical race theory (CRT) has its origins in law, as a theory it has found applicability in other disciplines. The authors discuss the application of CRT in the field of education as a method of understanding discrepancies over curriculum and Intelligence Quotient/Achievement testing, among other things. In addition to this, the authors described five basic tenets of CRT; these include counter-storytelling, permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, interest convergence, and critique of liberalism.

Those who apply CRT not only seek to understand the various discrepancies experienced in society between and among races, but it attempts to identify ways to improve those experiences along racial, economic, and educational lines. With transformation as a central tenet of CRT, it resonates with the social change component of this research study. It is my hope that the use of these two theories will have systematic and educational impact that will shift the way minorities are identified, educated, and subsequently treated when giftedness is a consideration. This research study will also find support in womanist theory. The womanist theory incorporates the complexity of life as an African American woman and attempts to adequately reflect the language and principles of the African American community (Taylor, 1998). Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) suggested that the African American woman's exposure to racism, sexism, and classism provides a unique perspective on their experiences in the world (p. 72). Taylor (1998)

emphasizes the viewpoint that Black feminist (womanism) perspectives not only values the unique experiences of African American women, but permits African American women to place their own value and understanding on their experiences. It does not seek to explain the struggles of African American women through the lens of the feminist perspective; which centers on the experiences of privileged White women, nor does it compare or try to normalize the African American woman's experience with that of the African American male. Boisnier (2003) posited that womanism encourages African American women to embrace their identity, without the rigid societal norms that have been placed on traditional gender roles, and value oneself wherever one might find themselves with respect to role and identity (p. 212).

As previously stated, womanist theory is concerned with understanding the experiences of African American women based on the values they place on those experiences. Womanist theory perspective does not seek to normalize the experiences of African American women to a preconceived accepted norm; in this way, the womanist theory perspective is an appropriate theory to use when attempting to understand the phenomenon that occurs for African American women raising gifted children.

Nature of the Study

Phenomenology is a method used to seek understanding of the lived experiences of a person or group of people that have a shared experience. Creswell (2009) suggested that the ability to understand lived experiences indicates that phenomenology is both a way of thinking about being and a way of understanding the principles of being. Edmund Husserl has been credited as beginning the phenomenological movement (Laverty, 2003). Although he began his work as a mathematician, it was his fundamental understanding of philosophy and his curiosity about understanding what is beyond the surface of a thing that birthed phenomenology. It was

his desire not only to understand that a thing happened, but why that thing happened. Laverty (2003) further explained that Husserl wanted to move exploration of experiences beyond what could be easily seen and documented to the meanings behind what could be seen. In effect, removing what people had begun to take for granted, while introducing the possibility that there is additional meaning and more to learn about people's experiences with the world.

Merleau-Ponty (1996) discussed phenomenology as a philosophy that focuses on reintroducing spirit back into being, understanding that there is no easy way to begin to understand human existence and experiences. The author suggested that phenomenology is a way of depicting an experience that does not attempt to quantify, summarize, generalize, or analyze. Researchers using phenomenology as a method of inquiry, are content to offer no definitive, generalizable explanation of a person's experience within the world. Furthermore, researchers using phenomenological approaches to data collection are without hypotheses, and are interested in where the research will lead, rather than what the research can prove (Converse, 2012).

The nature of this study is a hermeneutic phenomenology research study. Hermeneutics has at its core a focus on bringing to light the underlying meanings of a person's experience with a particular phenomenon (Dowling, 2004). The author further emphasized that Heidegger is credited with identifying hermeneutic phenomenology as a method of understanding how a person's experience with a phenomenon might clarify the way in which it should be interpreted based on their existence or being in the world. Although Heidegger did not believe that one's background could be definitively understood, he did believe that one's background encompassed what he or she learned in his or her experiences with their environment, culture, and what was handed down to them from birth, and that these things could be interpreted. Heidegger (1962)

discussed the difficulty related to trying to understand "Being" separate from "Being-in-the-world", he suggested that the two are indistinguishably linked (p. 250); with this in mind, Heidegger began to develop hermeneutic phenomenology as a basic way of understanding human existence (Laverty, 2003). While this is relevant to my study, it differs slightly because Heidegger based hermeneutic phenomenology on the premise that people and their experiences of the world were firmly rooted and related to their experiences in cultural, social and historical contexts rather than subjective based on their interpretation of their experiences. Womanist theory and critical race theory perspectives will explain the mothers' experiences of raising a gifted child with a focus on examining how the mothers perceive their experiences with their children and the educational system. This hermeneutic phenomenological research study should help elucidate African American mothers of gifted children experiences, including the various relationships they have with their children and the educational system in which they advocate for their children's education.

Definitions

Academically or intellectually gifted (AIG): As defined by North Carolina statute, students who excel in intellectual areas, academic areas, or both (North Carolina General Assembly, 1996). For the purposes of this research study, the terms *academically or intellectually gifted* and *gifted and talented* were used interchangeably.

African American/Black: While the origins of these terms can be traced back to the 1920s, they have been used to describe people of Sub-Saharan African decent residing in the United States of America. For the purposes of this research the terms are used interchangeably for simplicity. The references cited use both terms to describe the same group of people furthering the need to use these terms interchangeably for consistency.

Critical race theory (CRT): Delgado and Stefancic (2012) defined the term Critical Race Theory as a movement that seeks to understand and alter the relationship between race, racism, and power.

Equity index (EI) - Step 1: (Composition (%) of African American students in general education) × Threshold of 20% = A. This is abbreviated as C ×T = A.
Step 2: (Composition (%) of African American students in general education) − A = EI. This is abbreviated as C − A = EI. (Ford, 2014).

Parenting: Parenting was identified as an African American woman that has biological ties to (Hill, 1991) and is in physical custody of her gifted child.

Religion: Religion and spirituality was used interchangeably for the purposes on this study and was defined as a personal belief in God, a higher power, a personal relationship with God, and/or a spiritual walk (Hodge & McGrew, 2006).

Relative difference in composition index (RDCI) - [(Composition (%) of African American students in gifted education) − (Composition (%) of African American students in general education)] / (Composition (%) of African American students in general education)}∗100. (Ford, 2014).

Womanist: Alice Walker is credited with coining the term Womanist in 1983. For the purpose of this research study a womanist will be defined as an African American woman that grounds herself in religion/spirituality to effectively navigate struggles against racism, sexism, classism (Banks-Wallace, 2000).

Womanist theory: Mitchem (2014) defines womanist theory as a faith-based methodology of understanding and interpreting the varying experiences of African American women. Womanist theory asserts that African American women have the unique task of navigating

through both race and gender discrimination, with spirituality as a foundation for coping (Rousseau, 2013).

Assumptions

In this study, there were few assumptions made. The first of which was that those persons agreeing to participate in the study would respond to the interview questions openly and honestly. It was assumed that those persons agreeing to respond to this research study were willing to discuss their specific experiences without reservation. The participants were recruited from a Southern urban metropolitan area, and according to the 2013 Census, the African American population of the identified metropolitan area was 37.8% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013), which suggested that identifying African American mothers of gifted children in this metropolitan school system should not prove problematic. Furthermore, it was assumed that the methods used by the public-school system to identify academically and intellectually gifted students were reliable and have been validated against industry standards making them able to accurately classify students based on intellectual ability.

Scope and Delimitations

The hermeneutic phenomenological nature of this study is directed at understanding the experiences that African American women have parenting gifted children. This required that only African American women whose children have been officially designated as AIG be recruited to participate in this study. No distinction was made between children that were identified as AIG in both math and reading as opposed to being designated as AIG in only one subject area.

The primary focus of this research study was on the lived experiences of African American mothers raising gifted children; for this reason, African American fathers,

grandmothers, aunts, uncles, or sisters that may be raising a gifted child were excluded from inclusion in this study. In addition, African American children that have not been formally identified as gifted were not included in this study. Because of the nature of this study and the potential for heightened emotions associated with racially charged situations, a protocol was established to ensure that participants had additional support for unresolved concerns that arose during the interview if necessary. In conclusion, this research study provided thorough consideration for the experiences that these mothers have encountered as they have perceived them. In doing so, this research study remained true to the origins of hermeneutic phenomenology. There was no expectation that the results would be the same from participant to participant, further it would be erroneous to assume that personal opinions could be eliminated from the interpretation of data collected; though there were safeguards in place to reduce this in the interpretation of participant experiences (Kafle, 2013).

Limitations

When thinking of potential limitations for this particular study, several must be considered. A nonrandom, purposive sampling method was employed during this research study. The study required that participants were African American mothers parenting gifted children. This is a specific population and provides an inherent limitation because persons not meeting these criteria have been excluded from the research study. The purpose of this research study was not to apply themes and concepts identified to the community or society as a whole, but to understand the experiences of the respondents, as they perceived them. Although hermeneutic phenomenology allows for the consideration of researcher bias, it is worth mentioning as a limitation here. Because of my personal experience with this research topic, it is imperative that controls be put into place to minimize and reduce the potential for bias; of

significant concern was my ability to refrain from interpreting responses from participants based on my personal experience or understanding of the phenomenon. The safeguards employed will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Significance

It has been well established through research that African American students are underrepresented in the gifted and talented communities in their schools (Morris,2002; Ford, Harris, Tyson, and Trotman, 2002; Ford, 2014; and Zhang and Katsivannis, 2002). It has also been identified that additional research is needed in the area of understanding the unique needs of African American parents raising gifted children (Huff et al., 2005; Colangelo and Dettman, 1983; Snowden and Christian, 1999; Morawska and Sanders, 2008; and Wu, 2008). Due to this lack of information, counselor educators and supervisors are ill-equipped to recognize and attend to the unique needs identified for support of academically gifted African American students and the African American mothers experiencing this phenomenon. However, it is my hope that by conducting this research study, teachers and educators not only gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of African American mothers in their attempt to advocate for their gifted child's education and open up a dialogue on ways to be more inclusive and supportive of the needs of this population.

It is my hope that this research study will encourage teachers to educate themselves on the subtle differences that may signify giftedness between cultures, and that teachers would begin to be sensitive to those cultures that have a stigma attached to being labeled as gifted and recognize when this is happening in their classrooms. These concerns relate to the concepts evident in CRT that was previously discussed. Henfield, Moore, and Wood (2008) highlighted

in their study information that may assist educators with recruitment and retention of gifted African American students.

Summary

The underrepresentation of African American children in gifted programming is not a new phenomenon; in fact, there have been federal mandates dating back to 1971 that were a call to action for local governments to rectify this occurrence throughout the United States. However, to date, there continues to be discrepancies in the access that minority students have to gifted education when compared to their majority counterparts. Taking this a step further, I was not able to find research that investigated the experiences that African American mothers have with the education system when advocating for their gifted child's education, nor was I able to identify research that considered this struggle through the context of womanist theory or critical race theory. It is the intersectionality of these two theories that I explored when gathering data from participants.

The literature review is presented in Chapter 2; this literature review explored various research available on the topic of parenting gifted children, and African American students in gifted education. I was not able to locate recent articles addressing the phenomenon of African American mothers' experience of raising gifted children. Womanist theory was also explored through the research in an attempt to understand the participants experiences through this perspective. Finally, critical race theory was explored through the research as a way of beginning to understand the unique challenges facing the target population when either included in or excluded from gifted education programming. Chapter 3 outlines a detailed account of the methods used in obtaining the target data. Specific plans for data collection; management, analysis and ethical treatment of the data are outlined.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The importance of parental influence on the development of gifted children is well documented, though much of the research is dated (e.g., Colangelo & Dettmann, 1983; Morawska & Sanders, 2008; Snowden & Christian, 1999; Wu, 2008). Although attention has been paid to the role of the parent in the development of children, the specific challenges experienced by parents of gifted children are not well understood. Even less understood are the experiences of African American mothers raising gifted children. In examining the literature, I found few studies whose authors had explored African American mothers' experiences with raising and advocating for their gifted children in the school system.

In a study conducted by Huff, Houskamp, Watkins, Stanton, and Tavegia (2005), the authors considered the experiences of parents of gifted African American children; however, the research was not solely targeted toward African American mothers. The authors also noted the limited number of published articles on the experiences of African American parents of gifted children. Of particular interest are Huff et al.'s findings about the concerns of parents of gifted children regarding how they were treated by the administration of their children's schools. The participants reminisced about encounters with educators that left them feeling discriminated against, disenfranchised, and as if the needs of their gifted child remained unmet (Huff et al., 2005).

These sentiments and the lack of research on African American mothers' experiences in trying to obtain an education for their gifted children motivated me to undertake this research study. Such research may spur a conversation between parents and teachers to ensure that everyone's needs are being met appropriately (Henfield et al., 2008; May, 2000). Though I

focused specifically on the lived experiences of African American mothers, it is important to acknowledge and understand the experiences of the gifted child to fully comprehend disparities regarding access to education. The literature specifically examining the lived experiences of African American mothers raising gifted children is limited (e.g., Colangelo & Dettmann, 1983; Morawska & Sanders, 2008; Snowden & Christian, 1999; Wu, 2008; Huff et al., 2005). As a result of the limited resources, I emphasized identification of research whose authors had addressed the disparities in education and the marginalization of the gifted African American student when conducting the literature review.

Literature Search Strategy

In an effort to ensure that the information provided in this research study was accurate and exhaustive, I conducted an in-depth literature review. I searched several databases available from Walden University Library such as PsycInfo, PsycArticles. ERIC, ProQuest Central, and Google Scholar. In those instances where I was not able to locate full articles, I relied upon the assistance of the Walden librarians to locate requested literature. Key words and combined phrases used to identify and locate resources were *academic achievement*, *academic performance*, *achievement*, *African American adolescents*, *African American males*, *African Americans*, *African American student„ barriers to participation*, *behavior*, *Blacks*, *Caucasian students*, *childhood development*, *children*, *cognitive ability*, *cognitive functioning*, *confidence*, *creativity*, *creativity and intelligence*, *critical race theory*, *education*, *educational decision making*, *educational inequalities*, *educational programs*, *elementary school counselors*, *elementary schools*, *elementary school students*, *elementary school teachers*, *emotions*, *equal education*, *expectations*, *families*, *family characteristics and parental attitudes*, *gifted*, *gifted and talented*, *gifted and talented programs*, *gifted children*, *gifted education programming*, *African*

American mothers and gifted children, *parental attitudes*, *parental influence*, *parental support*, *parent child relations*, *parenting style and involvement and expectations*, *school engagement*, *racial and ethnic differences*, *school participation*, *school success*, *self-confidence*, *student engagement*, *student talent development*, *teacher attitudes*, *teacher recommendations*, and *teacher referral.* Although I found an abundance of information regarding gifted education, and gifted children much of this literature was dated. In my searches, I found few articles regarding African American mothers raising gifted children. As a result of the limited search results, I concluded my search when I began to notice that the articles being returned in the search were repeating and had as their source references to articles that I had already located.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Constructs

Gifted and Talented

Gifted and talented, as a construct used to characterize a person's academic potential and his or her aptitude for comprehending new ideas, has been widely accepted and established as a societal norm. However, the exact definition of gifted and talented has not been widely agreed upon and has undergone numerous refinements over the years. The Education Amendments of 1969 (U.S. Congress, 1970) addressed the concept of gifted and talented and provided one of the first definitions used by educational institutions. This definition focused on the intellectual ability or creative talent that students displayed requiring specialized activities and attention on the part of the educational institution.

S. P. Marland, the Commissioner of Education in 1971, worked with an advisory committee comprised of both federal and state level agencies to work to identify a universal definition of giftedness. The 1971 definition placed emphasis on the requirement that gifted and talented students displayed outstanding abilities and possessed the potential for high performance

requiring differentiated educational programs, one significant difference between this definition and the 1969 education amendment definition is that students needed to be identified by qualified professionals (Marland, 1971).

Continued attention and focus were needed to further define and address the needs of gifted and talented children; as a result, the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act was adopted by the U. S. Congress in 1988, as the August F. Hawkins-Robert T. Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Amendments of 1988. In this 1988 Act the term 'gifted and talented' was used to define students that displayed evidence of high-performance ability in intellectual, creative, artistic, leadership or other specific academic fields that require specialized education in the school system to foster their talent development.

In 1993 the US Department of Education released a report detailing the need to improve education for gifted and talented children in the school system; included in this report was an updated definition of 'gifted and talented' that encompassed the spirit of previous definitions. This definition also included the characteristic that these 'gifted and talented' students out performed their same age counterparts when age, experience, or environment were compared and that these children were representative of all cultural and economic groups. Although this more recent definition for 'gifted and talented' does address the various cultural and economic groups from which these children could originate, the method for identifying 'gifted and talented' students continues to rely heavily on traditional intelligence testing as discussed in an article detailing the method in which giftedness is assessed (Simpson et al., 2002).

Although the 1993 report on gifted and talented identification encouraged the use of non-traditional methods to identify underrepresented populations in the gifted and talented education programs; traditional identification methods continue to persist as the most widely used methods

to identify gifted students. Two popular tools used to identify intelligence in students are the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children – Third Edition (WISC-III) and the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale – Fourth Edition (SB-IV). Simpson et al. (2002) discussed the reliability and validity associated with the use of these tests. The authors were interested to determine whether the order in which the tests were given affected the results received and if there was a significant difference in scores obtained when both tests were administered to gifted children. The authors concluded that while the SB-IV composite score was significantly higher in both the gifted and non-gifted groups of children; it was only significant in the gifted children if the test was administered before the WISC-III. In their management of data, Simpson et al analyzed the data collected with a two-way ANOVA, with one between-groups and one within-groups factor. The results indicated a significant main effect for GROUP, $F(1,38) = 119.3$, $p < .01$, and for TYPE of IQ test, $F(1,38) = 29.8$, $p < .01$. The authors concluded that although there was some variability in the results obtained from both tests, both the WISC-III Full Scale IQ and the SB-IV Composite Score were similar although not identical. This suggests that tests used to identify giftedness in students must be chosen carefully, as the potential to yield varying results in high.

Taking this a step further, in an attempt to understand the differences in test results for African-American students and their Caucasian counterparts, a review of Fryer and Levitt's inquiry into test score gap in the first two years of school was conducted. Fryer and Levitt (2004) discussed the gap present in multiple studies between African-American and Caucasian student achievement on standardized tests. The authors indicated that a comparison of test scores obtained for African American students on standardized tests routinely produce results one standard deviation below their Caucasian counterparts. The authors utilized the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study kindergarten (ECLS-K) groups to attempt to better understand the

phenomenon occurring with regard to the gap in test scores. This group consisted of more than 20,000 students entering kindergarten in 1998 and included the collection of demographic information such as family background, school, neighborhood characteristics, teacher and parent assessments, and test scores (p. 447).

Fryer and Levitt (2004) reported their data yielded results that indicated a significant difference in test scores. In their data collection, they were able to conclude, "Black kindergartners score on average 0.64 standard deviations worse than Whites" (p. 447). However, the authors were interested in understanding the variance in scores if certain observable characteristics were controlled. The authors then controlled for children's age, birth weight, socioeconomic status, Women Infant and Children (WIC) program participation, mother's age at first birth, and number of children's books in the home; they suggested by simply controlling for these characteristics they were able to eliminate the test score gap in math and reading. Although these authors surmised that the reasons Black students are routinely scoring lower on standardized tests cannot be explained simply by the use of standardized test, teacher assessments, the race of the teacher (whether a Black teacher would be more beneficial to Black students), they did conclude that between kindergarten and first grade Black students lose 0.20 standard deviation when compared to their White cohorts. Finally, they concluded that if this loss of standard deviation remains stable throughout elementary school, by the time these students reach fifth grade, Black students would perform 0.50 standard deviations below their White counterparts.

Phillips, Crouse, and Ralph (1998) challenged the contention that the Black-White test score gap is easily explained by standardized test results in their research study into whether the gap widened after children entered school. The authors further surmised that the difference

could not easily be explained simply by the results obtained on a standardized test and the age of the student at the time of the test. The authors suggested that in an effort to report an accurate reflection of test difference, the right measure must be employed. They discourage the use of measuring progress in years or grade levels because students may not learn the exact same amount throughout the school year. As a result of the inability to concretely measure what is learned at any age, they use age-standardized measures to gain a clear, more consistent measure of student performance. Their research study concluded that when Black students and White students enter elementary school with the same scores in math, reading, and vocabulary; they tend to complete elementary with similar results with the exception of lower reading and vocabulary test scores for Black students (p.232). They further suggested that the same trend could be seen between Black and White students when entering high school with similar test scores. The difference here is that Black students complete high school with slightly lower reading scores. The authors concluded, based on the use of true test scores, Black students tend to complete high school with math scores 0.34 standard deviations and reading scores 0.39 standard deviations below the population mean. This brings about the question again, to what can these differences be attributed? Ford (2014) purported that to adopt an attitude of colorblindness is not an adequate solution to the problems faced in the schools. The author suggested that education strategies that treat culture and cultural differences as immaterial with regard to screening, testing and placement in gifted education programs perpetuates the cycle of underrepresentation of minority students.

In an effort to understand the notable differences in the achievement of Black students as compared to their White counterparts, Fryer and Levitt (2004) identified that there were several contributing factors that could offer explanation of the differences in performance on these

standardized tests. One outcome measure used examined the teacher assessment of student performance. This was subjective in nature and allowed the teacher to rate the student on a scale based on their mastery of the information. These results displayed a similar pattern in that Black and Hispanic students were initially recorded to be well below their White counterparts in the areas assessed. This discrepancy remained stable over the first two years of school. What seems evident here is the long reaching impact that contextual factors, such as socioeconomic status, have for many African Americans due to historical racism and poverty.

Pfeiffer (2012) highlighted that recent scholars on the topic of gifted and talented believe that being gifted does not automatically translate to a person with a high intelligence. The author suggested that this erroneous link between high IQ and giftedness might account for the lack of designation of gifted students from various socioeconomic, racial, and linguistic backgrounds. Borland (2009) indicated in his article that linking IQ to giftedness with rigid application allows opportunity for educators to establish stringent thresholds for the identification of giftedness. He further suggested that these stringent guidelines could laughably identify someone obtaining a 130 on an IQ test as gifted while, someone obtaining a score of 129 on the same IQ test would not be classified as gifted (p.237). In an examination of the usefulness of the WISC-III Pfiffer, Reddy, Kletzel, Schmelzer, and Boyer (2000) found that while 70% of practitioners found the tool to be highly useful in general; in two categories, each rated by 18% of respondents, they indicated that the test was biased against minority and underrepresented groups (p. 382). Some of the respondents indicated that the test was "too verbally loaded, high language demands, and needs separate norms for bilingual kids" (p. 382).

Even more problematic is the inclusion of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002, this act introduced high-stakes testing in school. Its goal was to provide incentives and

consequences when a school did not produce testing results indicating improvements among the students. However, this attempt to close the achievement gap has not proved as fruitful as hoped. Wu (2008) discussed that although use of standardized testing has not served to close the achievement gap between minorities and their White counterparts, it is still being used as a method of identifying child aptitude. Wu further identified that dropout rates for African American students remain high, even with the advent of the NCLB act. He further elucidates the fact that although school systems such as in the state of Texas were reporting huge successes in their implementation of high stakes testing; touting that they were experiencing a 0% dropout rate. Further scrutiny of their findings revealed that low achieving minority students were conveniently left off the rosters as to not affect the schools average, and in reality, 50% of African American and Latino students did not successfully matriculate from 9th through 12th grade (p.11). Neal and Schanzenbach (2010) argue that incentive-based testing programs encourage teachers and principals to focus their efforts on children that are near proficiency levels, but suggest that the same incentives do little to encourage teachers and principals to spend extra time working with students who are already proficient or have little chance of becoming proficient in the tested area (p.2). At the end of their research study they surmised that while some school systems were reporting gains in test scores after the implementation of standardized testing, they maintain that the group of children that likely did not benefit from but were potentially harmed by the NCLB act were principally Black and Hispanic students (p.5).

African American Academic Performance in the Context of Historical and Continued Explicit and Implicit Racism

As outlined earlier, African American parents have, as a core concern, the explicit and implicit continued systematic racism their children may encounter. In an effort to understand the

foundation of these concerns, one must first understand the historical underpinnings of racial inequalities for minority students in the United States. In 1965, the Equality of Educational Opportunity (EEO) survey was conducted to measure the performance of students nationally but it also included a measure of race. This survey was the first of its kind that was used to measure students across the nation rather than a sample of convenience. Of specific significance are the survey results pertaining to minority student access to regionally accredited schools, college preparatory courses, and accelerated courses. Coleman et al. (1966) reported results of the 1965 EEO survey and highlighted some concerning differences in access to resources between Negro students and their Majority counterparts. While the results of the EEO survey reported on the access of Mexican-American (MA), Puerto Rican (PR), Indian American (IA), Negro (Neg), and Majority or White (Maj) students to each of the above listed items; for the sake of clarity I will discuss the differences in access of Neg and Maj students. The EEO survey reported the results of the Nation as a whole and, more specifically, nonmetropolitan, and metropolitan areas of the country. Some survey results indicated a significant disparity between Neg and Maj students attending schools in nonmetropolitan south and metropolitan south areas. In table 1 these differences are listed between Negro and Majority students. What can clearly be seen in these results are the consistent difference in access between Negro and Majority students during this period of data collection. What is of significant difference is the lack of access that Negro students have to accelerated curriculum compared to their Majority or White counterparts.

Table 1

EEO Survey Results Percent of students with access to characteristics

	Nationwide		Nonmetropolitan south		Metropolitan south	
	Neg	Maj	Neg	Maj	Neg	Maj
Regionally accredited schools	68	76	40	59	72	81
Accelerated curriculum	61	66	46	58	72	81
Low IQ classes	54	49	23	20	37	34
Use of intelligence testing	80	89	83	90	78	100

Note. Excerpt from "Equality of educational opportunity," by: Coleman, J. S., Campbell, E. Q., Hobson, C. J., McPartland, J., Mood, A. M., Weinfeld, F. D., & York, R. (1966) p. 126. *Washington,* DC, 1066-5684.

Ford (2014) further examined the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education; she described the use of the Relative Difference in Composition Index (RDCI) and the equity index (EI) to describe these statistical differences. If African American students comprise 17.3% of the general student population nationally, it stands that African American students should represent 15.2% of the gifted population; currently this number is closer to 10% (p.146). In an article by Ford (1998) she addressed the concern of underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education programs. She identified that despite continued attention and attempts to correct the disparities found in the student participation in gifted programming nationally, there has not be any significant gains in the area of increased minority student participation. In 1978, she identified, while African American students comprised 15.7% of the student population, participation in gifted education was at 10.3%. In 1992, African American

students numbered 21.1% of the total student population and saw a slight increase to 12% in their numbers participating in gifted programming.

Table 2

Total NC & AIG Students Enrolled Statewide 2011

	Female	Male	Total
NC Totals	683960	716167	1400127
Black	182890	188130	371020
White	361452	384921	746373
AIG Totals	87690	85257	172947
Black AIG Students	10570	8146	18716
White AIG Students	64717	64869	129586

Note. From *Child Count Data* [Data file]. North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. (2011). Retrieved from: http://www.ncpublicschools.org/academicservices/gifted/student-data/childcount/

The preceding table reflects the most recent data on the Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AIG) Child Count available from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI):

The data in this table are used to elucidate the discrepancies that continue to occur in the school systems. This particular data set was obtained from the NCDPI and for the purposes of this research study, only includes numbers related to Black and White students. One can glean from this information that although Black students comprise 26.5% of the total population for the state, they only account for 1.34% of the identified AIG student population. When one looks at the numbers specific to just AIG students it can be determined that Black students comprise 10.82% of the AIG population. Comparing this with their White counterparts it is clear that White students comprise 53.31% of the total student population and 74.93% of the AIG population for the state (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2011).

This issue of continued underrepresentation discussed by Morris (2002) and Ford, Harris, Tyson, and Trotman (2002) illuminated the issue of race and culture as it pertains to discrepancies identified in the delivery and accessibility of gifted educational programming in the school setting. Yoon and Gentry (2009) conducted a descriptive study in which they researched and analyzed statistical data regarding racial representation in gifted education programs across the country. Although they initially identified three sources of data, they determined that data from the Office for Civil Rights data collection was the only data source that was updated regularly and separated by gender, race and ethnicity (p. 124). The authors determined that 42 of 50 states reported statistics that suggested underrepresentation of African American students.

A Representation Index (RI) was used to interpret whether various groups were over or under represented. Yoon and Gentry (2009) defined the RI as the ratio of proportion of students identified to have a specific racial background in gifted programs to those students identified to have a specific racial background in schools with gifted education programs (p. 125). A RI above 1.0 suggests overrepresentation while a RI below 1.0 suggests underrepresentation. In this particular study, the authors determined that in 2006, 42 of the 50 states reporting held statistical certainties below 1.0 for African American students despite ongoing studies aimed at identifying and rectifying the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education. Morris (2002) illustrated the continued practice of educational systems disproportionately placing African American students in lower academic tracks; while Ford, Harris, Tyson and Trotman (2001) highlight this misclassification of African American intelligence as a function of the use of standardized tests that effectively identify and assess White students, but have been proven less effective with African American students. These tests can eliminate those students who do not

perform well on tests, do not respond well to culturally loaded tests, have low achievement motivation, and have learning styles that differ from their White counterparts. Zhang and Katsivannis (2002) discussed this misclassification in terms of percentages for African American student's assignment to lower educational tracks. The authors indicated that in 1992 African American students comprised 16% of the total student population nationally; however, they were 32% of students in programs for mild mental retardation, 29% of students in programs for moderate mental retardation, 24% of students in programs for serious emotional disturbance, and 18% of students with specific learning disabilities. Blanchett (2006) further explored the disproportionate representation of African American students in special education as a function of "White privilege." The author defined "White privilege" as any phenomena that provide an advantage to Whites while neglecting to afford those same advantages to people of color (p. 24). Blanchett argued that African American students are identified as having mental retardation at a rate of 2.41 more times than their White counterparts. In addition, African American students were labeled as learning disabled and emotionally/behaviorally disabled at a rate of 1.13 and 1.68 times their White counterparts, respectively (p. 24). This disproportionality can be attributed in part to numerous variables such as insufficient funding for schools primarily attended by African American students, use of inappropriate and culturally unresponsive curriculum and pedagogy, and inadequate teacher preparation (p. 25).

Ford (2014) discussed three models of prejudice with regard to minority underrepresentation in gifted education. Antilocution refers to the overt and covert use of behaviors to suggest an inferiority of another group. This includes the use of racial slurs or suggesting in no uncertain terms that a student does not belong in a particular group. Avoidance is noticed when a particular group does what it can to minimize their exposure to another group.

Minority students fall victim to avoidance as well when they do not want to participate in or associate with predominantly White programs. However, the most prominent example of this avoidance is White-flight. This can be seen when White homeowners sell their properties to move to other areas to avoid living in a neighborhood with other racial or cultural groups. This can also be seen when White parents move their children to schools where the likelihood that they would be in classes with culturally diverse students is slim. The last of these models discussed by Ford is discrimination. She suggested that underrepresentation could be explained by both avoidance and discrimination. In this way, discrimination can be identified when there are repeated incidences of teachers not referring African American students for gifted identification.

CRT Perspectives on Institutionalized Disparity in Education

Heinfield, Moore, and Wood (2008) used the critical race theory to focus on and interpret the experiences that African American students encounter while participating in the academically and intellectually gifted programming at their respective schools. The authors found that gifted African American students, participating in their study, were hesitant to accept their gifted identity because it was not accepted among their peers; they experienced ridicule from non-gifted African American students for having traits that were considered most closely aligned with "Whiteness." This view was held and perpetuated through the African American student culture outside of gifted education because they believed that to be intelligent was equivalent to being a traitor to one's own kind. They concluded that increased identification and inclusion of African American students in the academically and intellectually gifted programs might normalize involvement and address this phenomenon. Blanchett (2006) further examined the phenomenon of "Whiteness" from the perspective of the educators. She concluded that

educators see “Whiteness” as the norm, which results in the comparison of academic skills, behavior, and social skills of students from minority groups to those of their White peers (p. 27). Although discussions regarding racial inequality fail to adequately address the differences between the abilities of Whites and Non-Whites, there is no shortage of discussion on the inability of Black students to achieve “normal” social status and achievements (Ford, 2014, p. 149). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) discussed “Whiteness” as the “absolute right to exclude” (p.60). The authors highlighted advantages afforded to Whites as a condition of their race that excluded any person considered Black. They discussed how Blacks were initially excluded from access to education, then the institution of separate but equal in schools, followed by White flight and the “insistence on vouchers, public funding for private schools” (p. 60), and finally the resegregation of the schools by the use of categorizing and identification of “gifted” students which has a long history of inadequately identifying and including minority students.

Ford (2014) surmised that racial stratification effects quality and access to education. The effects of this division can be identified beyond the classroom; the author purports that the lack of access that minority students have to gifted education negatively impacts their development of ability, achievement, and social and economic progress (p. 149).

When one considers the implications that CRT has in the availability and access of equitable education across races, we must have a clear understanding of how CRT is understood in relation to the education system. Dolgado and Stefancic (2012) suggested that CRT is used to understand issues of school discipline and hierarchy, tracking, disagreements over curriculum and history, and IQ and achievement testing (p. 2). In addition to this, the authors described five basic tenets of CRT, though three will be discussed here; these include suppositions such as:

Permanence of racism suggests that the idea of racism is engrained in our society despite attempts to create equality among citizens. When discussing the issue of racism, author Toni Morrison (1992) stated, "[Racism] has a utility far beyond economy, beyond the sequestering of classes from one another, and has assumed a metaphorical life so completely embedded in daily discourse that it is perhaps more necessary and more on display than ever before" (p.63).

> The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples. The Negro thus educated is a hopeless liability of the race (Woodson, 1933/2006).

Interest convergence is a belief that because racism advances the interests of both White elites and working-class people, there is little desire to eliminate it.

Researchers using social construction propose that races are categories used by society to manipulate or retire when convenient. (Dolgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 3).
Ladson-Billings (1998) suggested that Whiteness is recognized as the norm and every other race is ranked according to this norm. She further indicated that although there is a "fixedness to the notion of these categories, the ways in which they actually operate are fluid and shifting" (p. 9).

Found within CRT are the concepts of microaggressions and microinsults that have found their place in institutionalized racism and the way in which the majority perceives and interacts with the minority. Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) discussed in their research the various experiences with microaggressions that African American students had on their college campuses. Microaggressions, as defined by Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso, are "subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or

unconsciously (p.60). The authors discussed that "racial microaggressions take various forms, including both verbal and nonverbal assumptions about, and lowered expectations for, African American students" (p. 65). The authors shared their participants experiences with both professors and fellow students inside and outside of the classroom. Of particular interest are the experiences where participants described feeling as though they were not expected to perform to the professor's expectations despite any evidence to the contrary. This suggests that opinions were formed about these students of color without basis and prior to any experience the professor might have had with them. One student noted that the professor accused them of cheating on a quiz because the student achieved a grade of 95, the student was made to retake the quiz at which time the student scored a 98 on the quiz.

African American Mothers Parenting

Hill and Bush (2001) suggested that while parenting practices differ across socioeconomic groups, "ethnic differences in parenting may be due to differences in values, goals, or the challenges and opportunities of specific ecological niches across groups" (p. 954). The authors further stated that "African American families often value interdependence and security, group effort for common interests, and perseverance in the context of adversity" (p. 956). The authors suggested that the more confident a parent was in their parenting abilities the less anxious the child would appear. Conversely, levels of anxiety were reported in lower instances in the African American communities despite what researchers considered "harsh" discipline and inconsistent routines; however, the authors briefly suggested that the importance of extended family could have affected this outcome, but did not explore this phenomenon in detail.

Rhodes, Ebert, and Fischer (1992) did explore the phenomenon of extended family and the perceived benefits of additional support when considering parental stress. The young African American mothers included in this study identified a mentor that, consistent with previous research studies, were older African American women in the community. These mentors are fondly referred to as "othermothers" or "playmothers". The inclusion of these "othermothers" was seen to have a positive impact on the young mother, the authors proposed that having a mentor "might somehow serve as catalysts for extracting helpful support and buffers against the more stressful aspect of young mothers' relationships" (p. 457). It is my thought that these mentor/support relationships are important to the African American gifted child's ability to excel in school and the African American mother's ability to adequately advocate for their children's needs.

Brody and Flor (1998) found that "greater maternal religiosity was directly linked with more maternal use of no-nonsense parenting, more harmonious mother-child relationship quality, and more maternal involvement in the child's school activities" (p. 811). The authors further stated that these findings were consistent with prevalent thoughts related to the belief that African Americans' religious involvement "promotes supportive and responsive family relationships" (p. 812). As previously discussed in Chapter 2, womanism has as a central tenet the importance of family in the African American community, what can be seen through these studies is that family does not always mean biological and the support felt from these mentors, religious organizations, etc., helps the African American mother feel more competent in her parenting abilities which in turns supports a strong relationship with her children. As discussed in Chapter 1, because of the close-knit nature of the African American family, the African American mother attaches her feelings of success or failure to that of her children.

African American Mothers' Support of Children's Education

Colangelo and Dettman (1983), Snowden and Christian (1999), Morawska and Sanders (2008) and Wu (2008) provided information on research that underscores the importance of attention being paid to the role the parents play in the development of their gifted child. The authors discussed parents of gifted children feeling unprepared for the responsibility of raising a gifted child, being unsure of their role with the school, and the impact of the home environment on the development of achievement and creativity.

May (2000) and Henfield, Moore and Wood (2008) elucidated the need for there to be conversations between teachers and parents of African American gifted children to ensure that the educational needs of this group of children are being met effectively. The authors discussed the feelings of inadequacy felt by parents of gifted children because of the advanced intellectual capabilities of their children. While public educators do tend to look toward parents for assistance in supporting educational goals set for their students by the school board or legislation, this goal is not likely to take the student's needs in to consideration nor is it likely to make room for the diverse needs of gifted students (Cooper, 2009, p. 380). Cooper further discussed the school systems tendency to lean toward exclusionary practices, Cooper posits that this could be a result of deficit thinking and these practices act as an effective tool to limit and structure the parental involvement of poor African American students (p. 380). Cooper discussed the expectations levied on mothers with regard to their participation in schools. The author explains that although the norms were first established based on an era that saw many middle-class White women as stay at home moms freely able to participate in school activities, these expectations persist despite the fact that many mothers work outside the home with limited availability to get involved with volunteerism in their child's school (p. 380).

If what is known about womanism rings true for most African American families, that the mother's feeling of success is directly tied to her children's success or failure, then we can safely assume that the inability to get actively involved with her child at school provides the mother with a difficult daily choice. Work to support the family and their needs or forego working to support my child's educational needs. This is an impossible decision to make, and as an African American mother, I am faced with this question often. Where do I place my priorities for today? Inevitably, the decision to provide for the whole family prevails, but it leaves me feeling as if I have somehow failed my children in my responsibilities as a mother. This feeling can be best described by Cooper (2009) when she discussed the norm for educators to find meaning in the presence or absence of parents in the school (p.381). However, this belief also takes its direction from a deficit thinking approach, suggesting that those parents that are able to be more present and engaged in the school care more for their children and the success of their children and those that are unable to be readily present in the school must not care or be concerned with the success or failure of the child. Cooper (2009) insists that the disconnect here is the lack of consideration given to "the complexity of parents' lives, demands, schedules, goals, values, and their relationships with their children" (p. 381).

The Gifted and Talented African American Child

Although research has been done regarding the need to address the identification and inclusion of minority and low-income students in gifted and talented programs, disparities persist. Yoon and Gentry (2009) discussed this continued underrepresentation in their research in to the racial and ethnic representations in gifted programs. They found that White students have been consistently over-represented across the country in most gifted and talented programs and in contrast, African American students continue to be underrepresented (p. 128). They used

a Representation Index (RI) to identify if the ratio of students involved in gifted and talented education was consistent to the proportion of students in that particular racial group; if that representation was close to 1.0% this would suggest a proportionate relationship to those racial groups and their representation in the gifted and talented programs. However, in their research, Yoon and Gentry (2009) found that White students had a RI of 1.2%, while African American students had a RI of about 0.4% (p. 126).

Rotigel (2003) highlighted the need to ensure that individualized education plans are developed to address the specific needs of the gifted child. The author discussed this as a way to support the gifted learner and allow her or him to learn at her or his own pace. The author identified the need to respond to the unique needs of gifted children by encouraging involvement with intellectual and age mate peers, encourage hobbies and interests, and ensure that adults understand that emotional development may not develop at the same rate as their intellectual abilities. Of particular note, a study conducted by Henfield, Moore and Wood (2008) where they identified critical issues facing the African American Gifted student, these issues included "the way that students navigate the perils of gifted education, and the benefits of gifted education" (p. 444). One very interesting finding of the study indicated that while gifted students may be apprehensive about embracing their gifted educational identity, this apprehension becomes especially profound in African American gifted students. Henfield, Moore and Wood (2008) noted

"when the researchers asked Amanda the most difficult aspect of her identity, she stated that 'worst is probably my race, then my gender, then my giftedness. But the combo is positively deadly'" (p. 445). As previously stated, this is a hermeneutic phenomenological study because of

my own experiences with these issues, both as a gifted and talented African American student and as an African American mother of gifted students.

Henfield, Moore and Wood (2008) asserted, and I agree, that the potential social and psychological consequences for African American students engaging in gifted education is noteworthy enough that administrators need to acknowledge the issue and begin a specialized plan of action to address this concern. This is suggested because educators may notice "odd behavior, such as academic disengagement, inside the classroom" (p. 445) but because they are not considering the outside factors they do not have a clear understanding of why this is happening or how to effectively combat the problem. Since these issues are known, but educators are not addressing them, this research is timely in so much as it will begin a dialogue with African American mothers raising gifted children about their experiences with the phenomenon identified.

Parenting Gifted Children

As previously mentioned, Huff, Houskamp, Watkins, Stanton, and Tavegia (2005) conducted a research study that explored the experiences of parents of gifted African American students, these authors found that parent participants felt that the school system their children attended was not well equipped to address the unique needs of African American gifted students. They indicated that the school system "consistently overlook[s] bright, gifted, and creative African American students" (p. 220). The authors further indicated that parents participating in this study reported feeling as though their children were not considered and in fact, felt as though there was a palpable sense of "disrespect for their child's abilities, the feeling that children of color were not noticed in the school setting, and the need to be a strong advocate, as otherwise, their children would be left to coast through the school system" (p. 220). Furthermore, the

authors highlighted that these parents did not feel that educational options for gifted African American students were "adequate" and "neglected" as important areas of concern especially in public schools. Parents reported feeling as though the administrators and teachers were ill equipped to address the unique needs of gifted African American students, suggesting that they did not have culturally sensitive training that could support their attempts to educate this particular population of students. Finally, the parents indicated that they "experienced interpersonal and situational racism and perceived both as barriers to academic success for their children" (p. 220). The authors discussed this perceived racism as a function that affected the parent's ability to effectively advocate for the needs of their gifted African American child, suggesting that some parents were prepared for whatever challenge may arise while other parents preferred to move their children from the problematic situation. However, the latter may not be a viable option for some parents resulting in their child receiving subpar educational opportunities.

Summary

This chapter was structured with the intent to paint a clear picture of the challenges inherent for African American students in their efforts to obtain an education as a gifted student. Understanding these challenges is paramount in beginning a conversation between parents and teachers to ensure that student's needs are being met appropriately (Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008; May, 2000). The discussion began by laying a foundation of equality in education and the congressional mandates that set the stage for ensuring access to gifted education for all students. However, it was later discussed was that although these mandates came down, because of race relations in the United States and resistance to change experienced in some communities these changes were not easily adopted. Further, Ford (2014) helped us to understand that underrepresentation of the African American student in gifted education continues to be

problematic; if African American students comprise 17.3% of the general student population nationally, it stands that African American students should represent 15.2% of the gifted population; currently this number is closer to 10% (p.146). Although, Black students comprise 26.5% of the total population for the state, they only account for 1.34% of the identified AIG student population (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2011). Taking this one step further, is the need to understand the African American mother's experience of raising gifted children. Abernethy, Houston, Mimms, and Boyd-Franklin (2006) emphasized themes that further support the need for specialized and unique interventions for African American mothers and their children. They identified spiritual, communal, and internal dimensions as being necessary aspects of ensuring culturally competent and culturally sensitive interventions aimed at African American families (Abernethy et al., 2006). Cooper (2009) discussed womanism as a theory to help explain the Black woman's desire to not only advocate for the fair treatment and inclusion of Black men and boys but to also affect the Black family's experience in the world and how they and their communities are treated (p. 385). The importance of family, as a central tenet of womanism, directly links the mother's feelings of liberation to the success of her children (CITE). To elucidate this point, I considered the concept of womanist caring presented by Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002). Beauboeuf-Lafontant described teachers who displayed womanist caring as having three characteristics: "an embrace of the maternal, political clarity, and an ethic of risk" (p. 71). The author described the inclusion of these characteristics in the pedagogy of African American teachers as a long-standing tradition (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002).

Embracing the maternal means, for some teachers, educating and sheltering students from adversity. I proposed that it is this same attitude that African American mothers take with their

own children when it comes to advocating for their education. Bearing this in mind, I believe that the interventions used by teachers need to be informed by and make room for the importance African American women place on spirituality, religion, family, and culture. Ford (2014) highlighted that although advocates for gifted students are plentiful, and their focus remains on ensuring educational needs are met, this advocacy rarely takes in to consideration the needs of culturally diverse students that are also identified as gifted and talented (p. 144). The resultant contribution to the current body of knowledge may assist counselors, counselor educators, and school educators in recognizing and attending to the unique needs identified for support of academically gifted African American students and their families.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

As stated in Chapter 2, there is a copious amount of literature on the unique educational needs of gifted children. In reviewing these studies, I found that they mostly focused on ways to improve access to and quality of gifted educational instruction for students representing the majority student population (Morris, 2002; Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Trotman, 2002). Although this literature had a different focus than the current research, it was beneficial in understanding disparities in access to gifted education. Very little information detailing the experiences of African American mothers raising gifted children is available, based on my review of the literature. This lack of research makes it difficult to understand how these identified disparities affect African American mothers in their efforts to raise gifted children. As Ford (2014) stated, the efforts of advocates to ensure high quality gifted education are compromised when the needs of minority and culturally diverse students are not considered (p. 144).

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African American mothers raising gifted children. I used CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) as a primary theoretical tool to interpret the literature, develop the research questions, and interpret collected data. Although womanism (Taylor, 1998; Boisnier , 2003) was not used as a primary theoretical tool for this research study, it provided additional means to understand the particular experiences of the mothers in the study.

In Chapter 3, I provide an overview of how the data were collected and analyzed. This study was a hermeneutic phenomenological study, which suggests that I, as the researcher, have personal experience with the subject matter (Dowling, 2004). For this reason, I also address my role in the research process and the ethical procedures I used. In the chapter, I give special

consideration to the actions I took to minimize researcher bias. The chapter concludes with a summary of key points.

Research Design and Rationale

I based this research study on hermeneutic phenomenology principles. This particular method of research has as a primary focus ensuring an in-depth understanding of the experiences of participants with a particular phenomenon (Flood, 2010). Researchers conducting hermeneutic phenomenological studies seek to go beyond what people know about a situation to focus on their experiences with that situation (Flood, 2010). This method of inquiry has as a central tenet that people are inevitably influenced by the world in which they live and that their experiences are influenced and affected by those experiences (Heidegger, 1962)

I selected hermeneutic phenomenology because I wanted to elucidate the experiences of African American mothers of gifted children, including the various relationships they have with their children and the educational system in which they advocate for their children's education. According to Flood (2010), a researcher conducting a hermeneutic phenomenological study attempts to describe the meanings placed on a participant's life-world rather than to simply describe the phenomenon. I considered but opted against transcendental phenomenology because the central focus of this particular method of research study is on providing a single descriptive narrative of the identified phenomenon (Kafle, 2013). Conducting a transcendental phenomenology requires that researchers not take into account personal opinions when synthesizing the data to ensure clarity and confidence in the resultant findings. However, due to my own personal experience with being an African American mother of two gifted children, I was interested in understanding the participant's perspective on the phenomenon rather than

simply identifying that a phenomenon does exist. This is the reason why I chose hermeneutic phenomenology as my design.

Research and Interview Questions

An aim of qualitative researchers is to understand rather than to explain (see Morrow, 2005). As such, I sought to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of African American mothers raising gifted children. The overarching research question was, What are the lived experiences of African American mothers raising gifted children?

I formulated the interview questions to answer the research question. Each question concerns participants' experience as an African American mother raising a gifted child. The questions were designed to allow for additional questions to be asked based on participants' responses. Interview questions and sub-questions follow.

1. I understand that African American women have a very unique experience in the world. What does it mean to you to be an African American woman raising a gifted child?
    a. Describe one instance where you believe your child was treated differently/unfairly because they were a gifted AA child?
        i. How did you find out about the situation?
        ii. How did you feel in that situation?
        iii. How did you handle the situation?
    b. How have these experiences affected the way you parent?
2. In general, how do teachers/administrators treat your child? You? In light of your child being gifted?

   a. How would you describe your relationship with your child's teachers/administrators?
   b. Describe the challenges faced, as an African American mother of a gifted child, in ensuring access to adequate education?
3. What role do the experiences in the world as an African American woman play in the perception of ease of advocating for your gifted child?
   a. How have your experiences as an African American woman impacted your perception of your gifted child's treatment in school?
   b. How have your experiences as an African American woman affected your efforts to ensure that your child gets adequate attention from their teachers?
4. How do you cope with the discrepancies and how do you teach your child(ren) to cope?
   a. Given the current climate of society, have you noticed a change associated with communicating with teachers or administrators about your gifted child(ren)'s educational needs? Why or why not?
   b. Given that same climate of society, have you found it more or less difficult to ensure that your child(ren)'s educational needs are being met? Why or why not?
5. What is one word you would use to describe your experience as an AA mother raising a gifted child?
   a. Why did you choose this word? What does it mean to you?

Role of the Researcher

My interest in this topic began when I was faced with deciding about my older daughter's education when she was four years old. Her birthday is in October, which misses the deadline for entry into Kindergarten for most public institutions. Facing the upcoming 2008-2009 school year, my husband and I were confronted with the possibility that my daughter would be required to sit out another academic year of school, due to her age.

By 18 months of age she was recognizing all of the letters of the alphabet and was reading fluently by the age of three, therefore, the thought of putting her in to daycare or giving her one more year outside of a structured academic setting seemed as though it would be a failure on my part as a parent. In her fourth year of life, my husband and I decided that she needed to attend Kindergarten even though she was not old enough (her birthdate fell outside of the public-school Kindergarten cutoff for academic year 2008-2009). However, in North Carolina, parents have the option to pay privately to have their four-year-old children tested for Kindergarten readiness. Nonetheless, requirements for early academic admissions are many as the standards are set very high. When we inquired about the process, we were discouraged because our daughter would have had to score within the 99th percentile in all tested areas to qualify for early entry into Kindergarten. We did not know it then, but that discouragement was going to be the first in a long line of mini-struggles we would have advocating for our daughter's education. Despite discouragement from educators in our school district and doubt from licensed psychologists that she would be successful upon testing, we remained confident that she would easily meet every requirement. For this reason, we pressed on, we retained a psychologist to come to our home and administer the required intelligence quotient test. The results concluded that she had an IQ of 148 or better and the psychologist gave her a raving recommendation to

begin Kindergarten even though she would be the youngest child in the class. It was my thought that we had successfully advocated for our daughter's needs. However, there were many other incidents that occurred that made me feel especially frustrated with the services she was receiving in school as a gifted child, but for this research study I will share one particular incident that required my physical presence at her school.

Even though she had successfully navigated the rigorous prerequisites for beginning school early, we completed all of the necessary paperwork on time and submitted our request for her admission to the school board in a timely manner; it would be several weeks, many phone calls and frustrated voicemails later before her efforts were recognized and she was granted admission in to school. Once she began Kindergarten, it was clear that attending school would not be as challenging for her as we had hoped, with this observation, I contacted the teacher to ask about specialized services for her to challenge her and push her to excel. With some convincing, the school administrators agreed to allow her to go a first-grade class for the subjects of reading and math. We were elated! We thought, finally, she would get what she needed. Unfortunately, our satisfaction was short lived.

She had been assigned to a group that included a very intelligent five-year-old Caucasian male whom she seemed to work well with in some aspects. Each was able to effectively hold their own intellectual ground with the other. It seemed as though the logical thing to do would be to pair these two up and send them to the 1st grade class together. This made sense to me; she would be going into an unfamiliar class with someone with whom she was familiar; effectively easing the transition. Again, there was a struggle waiting just on the other side of this decision made by the educators at my daughter's school. As is often the case with gifted children, this young boy's emotional maturity did not match his intellectual ability (Rotigel, 2003) and his

transition to the first-grade class became problematic. As a result of his difficulty and the emotional meltdowns that ensued, both children were stopped from participation in the first-grade curriculum. When I found out about this administrative decision, I inquired as to my daughter's ability to make a smooth transition to the first-grade class to which they assured me that she had not struggled at all with managing the workload or interacting with the students in the first-grade class. All in all, she seemed to be adjusting and negotiating the workload with ease. Therefore, I pressed, why was she stopped from participation with this classroom? The answer that was given me by the administrators revealed nothing of my daughter's difficulties, but indicated that the decision was heavily rooted in this young boy's inability to appropriately manage the transition.

This is an example of the microaggressions that were discussed in Chapter 2. Recall that racial microaggressions are subtle infractions that on the surface might be overlooked if the recipient is unaware of the slight. In this case, assuming that my daughter would also not be able to appropriately handle the transition to the first-grade class, because her Caucasian male counterpart was struggling to do so, would be considered a microinsult. A microinsult is an action or communication that suggests that the person of color has less ability or is demeaned in some way (Sue & Constantine, 2007). In this way, if he cannot manage the transition, then surely, she should also struggle. As is usually the case with microaggressions, because of their subtle nature, the perpetrator may not even be aware of the infraction, and the victim may overlook the offense as harmless (Sue & Constantine, 2007). Again, microaggressions, by their nature are slight and can be easily missed. It would have been easy for me to simply accept the decision that was made without question, however, I did notice this affront which began the formulation of the current research question. I was so frustrated at the seemingly nonchalant

manner in which the teacher and administrators dismissed my daughter's capabilities and needs that I began to wonder if other African American mothers experienced this in the educational system and how they dealt with the denial of access for their children.

Bearing in mind that this is a hermeneutical phenomenological research study, I must be especially mindful that my own experiences and biases do not impact the research findings in such a way that the results could be questioned, and in doing so, I have included details of my own experiences to provide transparency during the research study. Kafle (2013) discussed analytical rigor as a way to ensure that the researcher gives equal attention to each participant's story whether is supports the central themes of the research or not (p.196). This is one way to ensure trustworthiness in the collection and interpretation of the data exists. Trustworthiness in a phenomenological research study suggests that the study has validity based on the premise that the collected data was obtained and interpreted in a way that reduces researcher bias. Berger (2015) discussed the researchers impact on the research in three ways, access to the field, researcher-researched relationship and worldview and background of the researcher (p. 2). Access to the field refers to the participants willingness to discuss the researched phenomenon with the researcher based on their perception of whether the researcher is relatable to their experience. Researcher-researched relationship, in this study, alludes to the participant's level of comfort sharing their experience with the researcher. Finally, worldview and background of the researcher "affects the way in which he or she constructs the world, uses language, poses questions, and chooses the lens for filtering the information gathered" (Berger, 2015, p. 2). It is for these reasons that member checking is one of the main methods that was used to ensure that collection and interpretation of collected data is credible.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

Participants in this study were recruited from a Southern urban metropolitan area, and according to the 2013 Census, the African American population of the identified metropolitan area is 37.8% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). This geographical area was selected as the research area because of convenience and my personal experience with this school district. As previously discussed, African American mothers are underrepresented in the research, and although research exists regarding the special challenges facing gifted students and their families, these research studies were not focused on the specific experiences of African American mothers.

The total number of participants ranged from between eight and ten participants. This number should serve to provide rich data regarding the subject matter; however, if new themes had continued to emerge more participants would have been added until saturation was reached. The nonrandom, purposive sampling recruitment efforts focused on African American women parenting gifted students. Permission was requested from the local churches/ youth groups to allow posting of flyers (see Appendix A) for the proposed study and I requested the opportunity to speak at various parent meetings to introduce the research study. In addition, *snowball* sampling was employed to invite participants who knew others that might be interested in participating in the research study.

The information on the flyer was a brief invitation for parents that fit the criteria to contact the researcher for more information about the research study.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Hermeneutic phenomenology requires that the researcher does not attempt to place their own understanding of the phenomenon being studied, but they seek to understand the

phenomenon as it is experienced by all of the interviewed participants. Bearing this in mind, participants were asked to participate in one primary in person interview lasting between 1 – 2 hours with an optional telephone follow up if data collected needs to be clarified or expounded upon. In addition, participants were asked if they prefer an in person or telephone meeting once their data has been transcribed to ensure accuracy. The initial and follow up interviews were audio recorded to ensure that all communication is accurately captured for inclusion in data analysis. Each participant was assigned a first name pseudonym for archival and inclusion in the final report to avoid using participant's real names. Field notes were taken to capture additional elements that may become meaningful upon interpretation of collected data, however, this method was used sparingly as I wanted to ensure the participants feel heard and validating while telling their stories.

The interviews were scheduled according to participant availability and participants were asked to meet with me at an office space in Durham, NC. This is a counseling office that is set up for privacy and comfort. As the owner of this agency, there were no conflicts that might affect my ability to complete these interviews in a timely and professional manner. While this location is centrally located, if there were problems with participants accessing this location I offered to meet at a local library that is convenient to the participant. It is my intent to remove as many barriers as possible in an effort to encourage participation in the study.

The interviews were transcribed by the student researcher. Participants were given contact information for the researcher if they need to make contact after their interview has been conducted.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is to provide oversight of all proposed research studies. This is done in an effort to ensure that all research conducted by Walden University

students and staff are done in an ethical manner and comply with all federal guidelines. Once the proposed research has been successfully presented to the committee members and formal notification of approval from the Office of Student Research Administration is received the IRB application can be submitted for further review. IRB approval ensures that concerns regarding the proposed research study have been adequately addressed and identifies potential risks to the participants of the research so that the investigator can develop a reasonable action plan to address these identified risks.

Data Analysis Plan

As previously stated, the student researcher personally transcribed interviews to ensure accuracy of data obtained during the interview phase of the research study. Once the data was transcribed hermeneutic interpretation techniques were utilized to ensure analysis of the data is consistent with the theoretical foundations of the study. Flood (2010) discussed various methods of hermeneutic interpretation of data; she indicated that naïve reading, structural analysis, and comprehensive understanding are beneficial methods of interpreting collected data.

Naïve reading suggests that the text be read multiple times with the researcher refraining from drawing conclusions about that data so that the data can be openly interpreted. I read the transcribed data multiple times to identify themes and phrases that need to be considered further in this study. This research study is a hermeneutic phenomenological study that is interested in exploring the lived experiences of African American women raising gifted children. Phenomenology has as its focus an attempt to identify and describe an experience and how people have responded, learned, and/or grown from that experience. Hermeneutics is focused on the interpretation of the experienced phenomenon and looks to explore the meanings surrounding the experience. Hermeneutic phenomenology enables "the exploration of participants'

experiences with further abstraction and interpretation by the researchers based on researchers' theoretical and personal knowledge" (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007, p. 616).

Van Manen (1997/2016) stated that hermeneutic phenomenology:

> Employs modes of discourse that try to merge cognitive and non-cognitive, gnostic and pathic ways of knowing. By these terms, we mean that not only do we understand things intellectually or conceptually, we also experience things in corporeal, relational, enactive, and situational modalities (p. xiv).

Bearing this in mind, the hermeneutic phenomenological data analysis identified by Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) were used to interpret and analyze the data that is collected. The authors identified six stages of data analysis; those stages are immersion, understanding, abstraction, synthesis and theme development, illumination and illustration of phenomena, and integration and critique of findings within the research team and externally (p. 615). Immersion is the process of reading and re-reading the participant responses (Smith, 1997; Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). In this way, the interview transcripts, audio transcripts, and field notes were aggregated for each participant and kept in a separate file that can be read, re-read, and notated to ensure that immersion occurs and that the investigator is able to ascertain an introductory meaning of the participant's responses.

McManus Holroyd (2007) purported that in order to begin the process of understanding the researcher must "reflect on one's own fore-projections or pre-understandings and the meanings that exist within them" (p. 4). This must be done in an effort to minimize the impact that the researchers experience in and with the world have on the interpretation and understanding of the data being collected. Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) suggested utilizing member checking at this stage of the research study, discussing with the participants the data collected

and the constructs that are beginning to emerge, in an effort to ensure a more accurate and deeper understanding of the participants' experiences. In this way, the participants are able to respond to the data and the interpretation of the data to reduce researcher bias. Lindseth and Norberg (2004) discussed the next phase of data synthesis as a form of abstraction. They suggested that when constructs are sorted into comparable meanings, they can be "further condensed and sometimes even abstracted to form subthemes, which are assembled to themes, which are sometimes assembled into main themes" (p.150). This is the step at which the researchers theoretical and personal knowledge (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007, p. 624) assist with generating themes and subthemes related to the data gathered from the participants.

Flood (2010) indicated that structural analysis would allow the researcher to identify themes that permeate the data to allow for further analysis. This step in the data analysis process would incorporate the use of the NVivo software to ensure that all themes have been identified. In an effort to properly synthesize and develop themes, Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) suggested "continuously moving backwards and forwards between literature, the research texts and the earlier analysis, moving from parts to whole" (p. 625) this circular examination is called the hermeneutic circle. I utilized this cycle to begin to identify themes that emerge from the data collected. Bradley, Curry and Devers (2007) discussed the emersion of themes from conceptual codes, subcodes, and relationship codes. I used these ideas to not only connect data on several levels, in this way a more detailed and thorough evaluation of the data was conducted. This step in the data analysis process will incorporate the use of the NVivo software to ensure that all themes have been identified. This analysis allows for further understanding of the data from the participant's perspectives and prepares the research for the final stage of analysis, which would be comprehensive understanding.

The stage of illuminating and illustrating the phenomena began with a process by which the entirety of the data is reevaluated to present an accurate summation of the data collected from the participants. This step in data analysis ensures that the reporting of the data remains consistent with the accounts given by the participants. It is important to regularly examine the participant's stories and experiences to "ensure that the constructed stories where [sic] faithful to participants learning experiences" (Ajjawi & Higgs, p. 625).

Finally, I discussed with the committee the thematic developments and analysis of the data collected in an effort to refine the identified themes. The use of member checking, and auditing will assist me in solidifying themes that emerged from the data in a way that provides trustworthiness.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a main element of ensuring that the study has validity. In order to ensure that there is trustworthiness, I employed member-checking to ensure that the data was collected accurately and that the themes identified accurately reflect the intentions of the participant. I offered the participants the option to review their transcriptions in person or via telephone/email to ensure that their words were captured accurately. Morrow (2005) discussed parallels between qualitative and quantitative research in an effort to identify ways to ensure trustworthiness. The author suggested that "credibility in qualitative research is said to correspond to internal validity in quantitative approaches, transferability to external validity or generalizability, dependability to reliability, and confirmability to objectivity" (p. 251). The author further stated that although these are parallels that can be drawn between qualitative and quantitative research study methods, the parallels do not necessarily result in exactly the same

outcomes because qualitative research studies lead to a different kind of understanding than that of quantitative research.

Credibility

Graneheim and Lundman (2004) discussed credibility as a function of trustworthiness. The authors discussed credibility as a result of ensuring that the data collected and data analysis method employed accurately measure the intended focus of the study. They further discussed the function of credibility as the way categories and themes cover the data obtained ensuring that no relevant data is overlooked (p. 110). Other methods of ensuring credibility discussed by the authors include, include "representative quotations from the transcribed text; seek agreement among co-researchers, experts and participants" (p. 110). I supported the credibility of my research by providing my committee members with the data to review ensuring that the data was collected accurately. Having the participants review their transcripts also supports the credibility of the research because the participants themselves were able to identify problems with their data if identified.

Transferability

Shenton (2004) discussed the use of thick description as a way of providing adequate information for the reader to have a full understanding of the phenomenon being investigated and offering an opportunity for comparison of the "phenomenon described in the research report with those that they have seen emerge in their situations" (p. 70). Graneheim and Lundman (2004) agree that it is important to give a "clear and distinct description of culture and context, selection and characteristics of participants, data collection and process of analysis" (p. 110) in an effort to facilitate the readers understanding in an attempt to transfer results to another context. While it is not expected that the results of this research study would be generalized to the wider public,

the themes that emerge from the data are expected to provide insight into the lives of African American women raising gifted children and those themes should present a clear picture of what that experience is like for these participants in such a way that others with similar situations may find meaning in the experiences presented.

Dependability

Shenton (2004) examined the complexity of the concept of dependability in qualitative research. The interpretation of an identified phenomenon could be affected by the researcher's personal experience with the particular phenomenon and the changing nature of the phenomenon. Bearing this in mind, it becomes difficult to generalize a phenomenological research study to the larger population, however, Shenton (2004) suggested that the "processes within the study should be reported in detail, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same result" (p. 71). Merriam (1995) surmised that "replication of a qualitative research study will not yield the same results" (p. 56) as would be expected in the replication of a quantitative research study. Bearing this in mind, I sought to establish dependability in that the results of the study were supported by the data collected during the research study. I attempted to achieve this by employing the use of member checking, audio recording and field notes that were reviewed by my committee members.

Confirmability

"Auditing is also useful in establishing confirmability, a criterion designed to replace the conventional criterion of neutrality or objectivity" (Seale, 1999, p. 468). Auditing was used to ensure that interpretation of the data follows a clear and logical path. Shenton (2004) suggested the use of a diagram to depict the "audit trail" so that the reader has a clear understanding of how the analysis of the data developed and evolved over time. In this way, the researchers bias is

minimally problematic because the methods used to arrive at various conclusions about the data can be verified. I employed the use of my committee to ensure that the development of interpretations follow a logical format and can be retraced to their origin.

Of particular note is the subjectivity acknowledged in qualitative research methods. The theories and ideals that guide the research and the researcher will affect how the researcher's subjectivity is managed. In this particular research study, the researchers personal experience with the identified phenomenon is discussed in an attempt to begin to identify personal bias that might affect interpretation of data. In doing so, the impact that the researchers personal experiences will have on interpretation and analysis of the data can be reduced. To ensure trustworthiness of my research, following the completion of the data collection methods previously detailed (in person interviews, audio recordings, field notes, student researcher transcription, and member-checking) committee members will have access to the transcribed data and coding structure to verify trustworthiness in the data analysis. The committee methodologist will ensure that the methods used to collect and interpret the data are accurate and properly implemented. Finally, the committee content expert will ensure the process of identifying essential themes and applying them to collected data are performed accurately.

Ethical Procedures

Bearing in mind that a collaborative relationship needed to be established, I reached out to each potential participant to introduce the study and myself. In this introduction, I ensured that the potential participants identify as African American women, raising gifted children. Once that was established, I scheduled a time to meet with each participant at which time I had them read and sign a consent form. Each participant was provided detailed information on the confidential nature of their participation and were advised on any potential risk and benefits of

participating in the study. While there were no significant risks anticipated, each participant was advised of counseling and support services that might be beneficial to address concerns that arise during their participation in the study. Participants were advised of the purely voluntary nature of this study and that they had the right to refuse participation and to withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty.

In an effort to demonstrate research practices that aligned with the womanist perspective and to ensure that participants needs are met during their participation in this study; I worked with participants to address transportation issues, childcare needs, safety concerns, and scheduling concerns. Taking these additional steps assisted in establishing a trusting and cohesive working relationship with the participants.

While conducting this study, I ensured that all ethical guidelines set forth by Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) were adhered to as the ethical blueprint. In addition, I ensured that the study conformed to the ethical guidelines that are outlined in the 2015 American Counseling Associations (ACA, 2015) Ethical Code of Conduct. Section G of the ACA Code of Ethics lay out the researchers' responsibilities and ethical obligations to protect research participants in all aspects of the research, from conception to completion. The ACA (2015) Code of Ethics outlines the parameters used in research to respect the participants right to give informed consent, participate, and have their information held confidentially.

Participants were provided information on how their data would be managed and disposed of upon the completion of the study. Participants were informed that the student researcher would transcribe audio data obtained, and that once those transcriptions were completed a telephone or in person meeting was requested with the participant to ensure that the data recorded and reported accurately reflected their responses.

All research materials (i.e., interview transcripts, artwork, field notes, and audio recordings) were properly stored and secured in my home office. Participants were advised that apart from the researcher, their information was available to the dissertation committee to ensure oversight and ethical treatment during the study. In addition, the IRB requirement for maintaining and securing all raw data and products for a minimum of 5 years is being employed. No published report will include any personally identifiable information for any of the research participants.

Summary

This chapter was focused on the methodology that was used to conduct the proposed qualitative research study. I discussed the research design, methodology, data collection methods, and data analysis. In addition, issues related to how credibility and trustworthiness were addressed were discussed. My research will focus on the lived experiences of African American mothers raising gifted children and will employ a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, this will allow the opportunity to gain an understanding of the participants experience while acknowledging that I, too, have had a similar experience raising gifted children. The themes and results of the data collected will be presented in detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

I conducted this hermeneutic phenomenological study to explore the lived experiences of African American mothers in seeking to successfully parent and advocate for their gifted children. I collected data from nine African American mothers residing in a Southern U.S. urban community, whose children have been identified as AIG. By providing an opportunity for African American mothers to discuss their efforts to ensure that their gifted children received adequate attention and challenges appropriate to their capabilities, I sought to gather data that could be disseminated to the school systems to inform their AIG programming. I based the research on one primary research question and three subquestions. The primary research question was, What are the lived experiences of African American mothers raising gifted children? There were three additional subquestions, which follow:

1a. Describe the challenges faced, as an African American mother of a gifted child, in ensuring access to adequate education?

1b. What does it mean to be an African American woman raising a gifted child?

1c. What role do your experiences in the world as an African American woman play in the perception of ease of advocating for the gifted child?

I used these questions to provide direction for the research study and to guide the interviews. When the participants shared data that seemed relevant, I asked for clarification or for them to expound on that topic or idea. This was done to ensure that I was capturing the true essence of participants' experiences and that they had an opportunity to share what they believed to be important regarding their experiences as African American mothers raising gifted children. In this chapter, I will describe the strategies I used to recruit, collect, and analyze data. In

addition, the analysis of the data collected from completed interviews will be presented. I will conclude with a discussion of the issue of trustworthiness as it relates to this hermeneutic phenomenological research study.

Setting

There were no observable differences in the collection of data provided to create any cause for concern or alarm related to the quality of the data collected nor the manner in which the data was analyzed, nor that affected the role of the researcher or the well-being of the participants. Although there were times in which my own feelings seemed to be triggered when listening to the participants recount their experiences, I implemented strategies to minimize possible bias associated with me as the researcher (see Chapter 3). All interviews were conducted and proceeded as planned according to the description in the application approved by Walden's IRB on March 28, 2018, Walden University approval number 03-38-18-0312517.

Demographics

The research sample was comprised of nine women from an urban community located in the Southern part of the United states. Participants identified themselves as being in the range from 25-54 years of age. All participants had children who were identified as AIG, had full custody of their AIG-identified child, had some religious affiliation, and had completed some or all of a college education. Six participants were married, two were single, and one was divorced. One participant reported a household income of under $30,000, three reported household incomes of between $40,000-$49,999, one reported a household income of $60,000-$69,999, and four reported household incomes of over $80,000 annually. (See Table 3 for individual participant demographics with pseudonyms.)

Table 3

Participants' Demographic Data

Participant	Age range	Marital status	Number of children	Education	Occupation	Household income	Religious affiliation
Ms. Marjorie	35-44	Divorced	2	MA	Counselor	40–49k	Christian
Ms. Mary	25-34	Single	3	Some College	SA Paraprof.	Under 30k	Nondenominational
Mrs. Ruane	35-44	Married	4	BS	MH prof	40-49k	Catholic
Mrs. Alice	35-44	Married	2	BS	Accountant	60-69k	Christian
Mrs. Ellen	45-54	Married	2	College graduate	Full-time	Over 80k	Christian
Mrs. Ella	35-44	Married	2	BA	Sen. clin trainer	Over 80k	Christian
Ms. Hattie	35-44	Single	1	MA	Unemployed	40-49k	Christian
Dr. Ida	45-54	Married	2	MD	Oncologist	Over 80k	Christian
Dr. Shirley	45-54	Married	2	DDS	Dentist	Over 80k	Baptist

Note. Education: MA – Masters of Arts, BS – Bachelors of Science, MD – Medical Doctor, DDS – Doctor of Dental Surgery; Occupation: SA Paraprof. – Substance Abuse paraprofessional, MH Prof. – Mental Health professional, Sen. clin. trainer – Senior clinical trainer

Data Collection

I recruited the participants using a purposive, snowball sampling strategy. I asked the individuals to contact me either through e-mail, phone, or Facebook Messenger if they were interested in participating in the study. When the potential participant contacted me, I thanked her for their interest and asked if there was a time I could call her by phone to explain the research project and answer any questions. I scheduled each participant who agreed to be in the study for a face-to-face interview, during which I discussed the purpose of the research study and explained what would be asked of the individual should she decide to follow through with participation. Each participant was informed of the data collection method (semistructured

interviews) and was asked if she would be available to meet in person. After I confirmed their interest in participating, I scheduled the interviews around participants' work-life schedules as to minimize the impact participation would have on their daily activities. Interviews were conducted in person at a local counseling office that offered privacy and the use of an office space. Interviews ranged in length from 13 to 69 minutes. Most interviews seemed to last between 30-60 minutes in length.

I used a Phillips digital recorder during the interviews to accurately capture the participants' stories. I later transcribed each interview manually. During the transcription of the interviews, each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect her identity and confidentiality. All transcribed interviews were then saved in Microsoft Word format on my password-protected device. During the interviews, I was careful not to stray too far from the focus of research study. I did find it difficult at times to refrain from inquiring further, as I am a licensed counselor by trade and could sense the emotionally charged nature of participants' responses. However, I was able to stay focused on the primary goal of the research study by reminding myself that my role in this exchange was as researcher not counselor. I took minimal field notes in an effort to stay present with the participants and the recounting of their experiences. I paid particular attention to the emotionality, intonation, and any body language that would manifest.

When the participants arrived for their interviews, I met them and thanked them for their time. I walked them in to a private and quiet office space and utilized a noise machine on the outside of the closed door to ensure what was being said inside the room would not be overheard. Once in the room, each participant was thanked again for her time. I introduced myself as a doctoral student with Walden University, explained the interview process, and assured the participants that the data shared would be accessed by myself and potentially by Walden

University faculty or staff who were involved with the dissertation process. I explained that they would be assigned a pseudonym to protect their confidentiality, and that I would personally transcribe and analyze the data provided. Once the process had been explained and any questions answered, the participants were given the informed consent to review and ask questions if needed. Even though each participant was afforded the opportunity to review the informed consent on their own, there were key points, (confidentiality, voluntary, and no risk of repercussions) of which I wanted to ensure they were aware. I explained the voluntary nature of the process, highlighting that they were able to terminate the interview at any time for any reason. Once completed, each participant indicated her understanding and agreement to participate by signing the consent form.

Following the interviews, I asked participants if there was anything else they wanted to add that was not already addressed; this proved to be an important question in at least two instances. Two of the participants had additional anecdotes they wanted to share and on one occasion the participant became emotional, having to pause, dry tears, and breathe deep while she recounted the experience. Although she did become emotional, she declined the assistance of a counselor as indicated would be offered for an adverse reaction to the interview. When the interviews concluded, each participant completed a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B) and were given a debriefing handout that included a brief explanation of some of the adverse reactions they could experience as a result of recounting their experiences. The debriefing handout included a list of informal self-care practices that could prove beneficial should they experience any unwanted emotionality surrounding their participation in the research study. The handout also included more formal options that included the website and contact information for the local Managed Care Organization (MCO) for the area, if necessary, the participants could

contact the MCO explain their symptoms or concerns and be referred to a counseling professional that could provide assistance with addressing their concerns. Participants were advised of the need for a follow up meeting to ensure the accuracy of their interviews, to which each declined. However, five of the participants did request a copy of the dissertation once completed. Each participant was thanked for their willingness to share their experiences and participate in this research study.

Participants

Research study participants consisted of nine African American mothers raising children that had been identified as AIG. These mothers agreed to share the experiences of their gifted children and by extension their lived experiences navigating the school system to ensure their child's needs were being met. Although each participant was an African American woman, their backgrounds were varied, some were married, divorced or single. Some participants had multiple children that had been identified as AIG, some had girls identified and others had boys that had been identified. This is relevant because the sex of their gifted child seemed to play an important role in the way their experiences were being interpreted. Participants' were given pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality.

Ms. Marjorie. Ms. Marjorie is a divorced college graduate who is the mother of two children. She was initially reserved when she entered the room and looked visibly guarded, she was very stoic when she entered the room, as she looked around to take in the surroundings. She sat in the chair with her back straight up and her arms and legs crossed. She would only turn her head slightly toward me when she responded to my greetings. I introduced myself to her and explained the purpose of the research, the entire time she looked at me with what seemed to be a level of distrust, or perhaps caution, as she listened to my explanation. I felt as though I had to be

very intentional with the words that I chose and my body language to ensure that a safe and open environment was being conveyed. Ms. Marjorie seemed to relax once the purpose of the study was fully explained and she was reassured that her confidentiality would be respected. She seemed to open up and share more as the interview progressed. When asked what it means to her to be an African American woman raising a gifted child she stated "it means that I'm, you know, I'm raising my kid that really has the potential to be anything that he wants to be. He can do anything that he wants to do. I mean it's hard especially within the school system that we come from". When asked to give more detail about her statement "it's hard especially within the school system" she continued "it wasn't a whole lot of Black kids who were identified AIG. It was a lot of White kids. And so, the teachers sometimes tend to just look over you know Black kids". She expressed frustration at the fact that the teachers would not give her child work that was challenging enough to keep him engaged throughout the day, but then would get aggravated that he was talking and playing with the other students; effectively disrupting the class. She indicated that the teacher made statements suggesting that there were other students in the classroom that needed her attention and that she could not give more attention to one student over another student, which Ms. Marjorie expressed understanding about, but what she seemed most upset with was the lack of interest or effort the teacher was putting in to making sure her child was sufficiently challenged in school, which based on her description of the events, she felt "contributed to" her son getting in to trouble for being disruptive. When asked to use one word to describe her experience as an AA mother raising a gifted child, she stated that she was "blessed."

Ms. Mary. Ms. Mary is a single mother of three that completed some of her college education. She presented as jovial when she entered the room and smiled throughout most of the interview. There were times during the interview that she became emotional, becoming teary

eyed while smiling and having to pause because her voice was noticeably shaking, discussing how proud she was of her gifted child. When asked what is means to her to be an African American woman raising a gifted child she stated “It means that I did something right. With so many things in the world that are... It just makes me proud. I'm proud of her.” When asked to describe an instance where she believed that her gifted child was treated unfairly, she described difficulties at home between her children, she indicated “she's treated unfairly at home, not by me, but by her siblings because she is the only one of my three children that is academically gifted. And for that reason, they treat her very badly”. When she began to describe the difference in treatment that her daughter received by her siblings, she became emotional, tearing up again but this time there seemed to be sadness in her tone of voice, when discussing the things her daughter was experiencing. I inquired about her gifted child’s treatment in school and she had nothing concerning to report. She indicated that since her daughter has been in middle school she has been treated very well, which was in stark contrast to her daughter’s experience in elementary school. She shared that her guidance counselor in middle school has worked to make sure her daughter is being included in as many activities as possible to ensure that her daughter stays challenged and engaged in school. In contrast, she indicated that the guidance counselor from her daughter’s elementary school did not take an interest in pushing her child to excel or making sure the teachers challenged her in any significant way. When asked to use one word to describe her experience as an AA mother raising a gifted child, she became emotional again and stated that it was “interesting”.

Mrs. Ruane. Mrs. Ruane is a married college graduate who is the mother of four. Mrs. Ruane was reserved when she initially entered the interview room but seemed to relax as the

process was explained and her confidentiality was assured. When asked what is means to her to be an African American woman raising a gifted child she stated:

> "Being African-American raising kids I've found that I've had to go into the school and advocate for my kids. I've found that I've had to go and be very assertive and very, very adamant about the track that I would like to see my children on or who it is that my children are because I tend to come across people that think they know my child better than me".

The fact that teachers attempted to treat her gifted son as if they knew his capabilities without getting to know him or his strengths seemed to be a touchy subject for this particular participant. She discussed an incident where her children were moved to a new school district, upon enrolling in the new school district her son that had been previously identified as AIG was not given the classification in the new district. She felt that the school staff could have done more to support her child's records being transferred appropriately so that he could be adequately identified and placed in the appropriate classes. Instead, his teacher called her with concerns that her son was at a deficit in math when he was previously identified as AIG in math. When she challenged the teacher's assessment, she was asked to have her son retested, she agreed to the request and he was not successful in securing his AIG designation in the new school district. Mrs. Ruane questioned whether the decision to retest her son was influenced by the fact that he is a young Black man, her frustration was exacerbated by the fact that the schools could have easily communicated with each other to get the previous records and designation to the new school. When asked to use one word to describe her experience as an AA mother raising a gifted child, she chose "challenging".

Mrs. Alice. Mrs. Alice is a married college graduate who is raising two children. Mrs. Alice presented as confident and eager to help with the research study. When asked what is means to her to be an African American woman raising a gifted child she stated "you have to be, I would say, vigilant to some degree. You have to make sure that you stay almost ahead of the game". She further stated "teachers and instructors are caught by surprise" at the fact that her son is intelligent because it seems as though they do not expect much from him. Even though this has happened, she continues to teach him how to advocate for himself in a respectful manner. Her concern was that when he does speak up about something he is seen as disruptive or "problematic" instead of being seen as inquisitive. She discussed a number of instances where she did not feel her son was treated fairly and was mislabeled as a troublemaker when he did not go along with what was being said or done. Mrs. Alice also expressed that her son has noticed the differences in the treatment between students of different races. She recounted when her son came home and expressed to her that he thought his teacher was racist. They called for a parent-teacher conference where they wanted to discuss what their son conveyed to them and were disappointed at the responses from the teacher. She indicated concern that it is clear that something going on in the classroom was giving her son the impression that one group of students was favored over another group. When asked to use one word to describe her experience as an AA mother raising a gifted child, she chose "inspirational".

Mrs. Ellen. Mrs. Ellen is a married college graduate who has two children. She also seemed a bit apprehensive when she first entered the room. She moved very slowly and deliberately to the chair in which she was directed to sit. She sat with her back straight with what appeared to be a nervous smile across her lips. I took some time to introduce myself and the purpose of the study and to thank her for taking time out of her day to help me with this research

investigation. I took an intentionally long amount of time explaining to her the purpose of the research study, what she could expect, and what she should not expect. I informed her of the voluntary nature of the study and my plan to anonymize her identity and any information that she might share that could indicate her identity. Upon learning of this confidentiality measure she was visibly relaxed and ready to begin.

When asked what is means to her to be an African American woman raising a gifted child she stated “It requires that I be an advocate for my child even though she's been identified as AIG. I still find myself trying to advocate to make sure that she's receiving the services that are her right.” She further reported that it seems to her that mothers of other nationalities do not share the same level of frustration when it comes to their children being afforded the rights of an AIG student. She recalled a time when there was a school wide policy change that made it a requirement that AIG students “test out” of the topics that were being taught in their primary classes. If they were unsuccessful in demonstrating mastery of the topic they would not be offered any supplemental education as is required due to their AIG designation. She reported that she only found out that this was happening because she inquired to her daughter about her day at school. When she found out that her daughter was no longer receiving enrichment she expressed that she was not at all pleased with this turn of events. She further indicated that she thought their decision was racially motivated, when she spoke to the mother of another African American AIG student she learned that the student was still receiving enrichment. However, the difference between her daughter and this other young lady was that her mother worked at the school and could readily stay apprised of what was happening on a day to day basis with her daughter’s education. She stated that when she talked to this mother about the new policy the mother stated that she “dared” the AIG team to try that with her daughter. Even though both girls had struggled

with the test that was allegedly needed to support the pull-out option of enrichment for AIG students, only one girl was being kept from accessing the additional instruction that is indicated for all AIG students. As she was recounting this situation, she still seemed to be bothered that they had that experience. She stated that she used this instance and instances like this as illustrations to her AIG daughter, that although she is a smart and she has already proven herself capable of high achievement, she is going to have to continue to work hard. She is going to have to continue to push herself because nothing would be handed to her and this fact of life will require her to remain vigilant. She discussed one other instance that she found disturbing, she was concerned when her daughter was in the 5th grade because a teacher informed her that they had been instructed by administration to spend as little time as possible trying to teach an identified group of children because administration felt that these kids would "never get it" and they wanted to make sure the kids that would "get it" were getting the attention needed. This particular anecdote was disconcerting for me as both an African American mother of gifted children, but also as a researcher. Although, this was second hand information, and the actual list of students that the teacher claimed administration had would likely never be seen. It makes me wonder about the teaching climate in the school and how that translates to the teachers that are already feeling overwhelmed. This story saddened me. It saddened me for those students, regardless of race, that would not be given a fair opportunity to learn, for those teachers that were being instructed to spend most of their instructional time on students that had the best chance to pass the End of Grade (EOG) exams, for the teachers being encouraged to teach toward the standardized tests, and moreover, for the administration that seemed to have lost touch with the purpose of becoming an educator, the love of teaching and children that led them

to the field in the first place. When asked to use one word to describe her experience as an AA mother raising a gifted child, she chose “tough”.

Mrs. Ella. Mrs. Ella is a married college graduate with two children. When she entered the room, she was smiling and seemed very interested in the subject matter. I did spend some time going over the research topic and expectations with Mrs. Ella, although she was already familiar with the research topic because she was the first participant to verbally agree to participate in the study and she connected me with other African American mother’s that fit the criteria for the participant group. Mrs. Ella seemed eager to share her experiences, having two children identified as AIG she described experiences that affected her son and daughter. When asked what is means to her to be an African American woman raising gifted children she stated “being an AA woman, raising a family... I just feel like there is a lot anyway on us.” She indicated that she feels an increased amount of pressure to be a mother, partner, wife, and to make sure that her children have what they need from her to succeed. She further stated “trying to make sure your children are ‘normal’ and ‘well-rounded’ and not overwhelmed hearing that label and thinking they should be something that they are not”. She made a distinction in her experience raising a gifted AA girl and raising a gifted AA boy. She revealed that while raising a gifted AA girl had not been that bad, she made clear that her experience raising her gifted AA boy had been “tough”. She identified some difficulty with balancing being his mom, his cheerleader, and keeping him focused on his school work. What struck me about this portion of her interview was the introspection that seemed to take place as she was speaking; she initially stated that it was difficult to balance all of the demands as an African American mother, but seemed to pause as she thought, then stated “maybe it’s not any different for any other mother”.

However, she went on to identify the need to ensure that her children understood that they could be “better than the things they see or just as good” as their non-African American counterparts.

Mrs. Ella recounted a couple of other situations where her children noticed differences that were made between them and the other kids in their class. She discussed times where she had to answer questions about why they were being treated differently from other kids. In one example, she shared that her son was told that the teacher expected him to be able to answer the questions so she would not call on him, which on its surface does not seem problematic, except that every time students gave a correct answer they earned a ticket to use for special privileges on Fridays. Her son began to notice that the teacher intentionally did not call on him, which bothered him because he would not be able to earn any tickets. She also talked about times when her daughter was not given equal praise for achievements in class, she indicated that her daughter noticed that when other kids answered questions correctly they were praised by the teacher saying things such as “Yay”, or “good job”, but when she answered a question correctly she was given a simple “ok”. Again, these slights seem small on their surface, but they were noticed by students that were elementary school aged and were significant enough to warrant recounting to their mother. When asked to use one word to describe her experience as an AA mother raising a gifted child, she chose “awesome”. Her explanation for why she chose this word was akin to *pride*; she indicated that based on the current social climate “our kids, as African American kids, are looked upon as thugs, and troublemakers, and focus only on athletics. So, when our kids can be everything... Our kids are the same as yours, just browner”.

Ms. Hattie. Ms. Hattie is single college graduate with one child who has been identified as AIG. As I was explaining the research topic to her and thanking her for her participation, she did have questions about my consent forms. She indicated that she had some experience working

with IRBs and was curious about the look of my forms, once I explained that the forms were approved through the university IRB and included my approval number she was ready to get started with the interview. Even though she did ask questions about my forms and my IRB approval, it did not feel problematic. It felt as if she was attempting to find commonality between us and wanted to share that she too had a good understanding of the research process and what she could expect.

When asked what it means to her to be an African American woman raising gifted children, Ms. Hattie stated "it means access... my knowledge gives access to other families who may not have access to resources that are generally for all kids". She further indicated that because her child has access to resources identified for AIG children, she is able to share that information to other families that may not be given those resources, though their children are also identified as AIG, she described feeling a "responsibility" to share whatever information she came across that could benefit students academically. Ms. Hattie discussed the identification process that her daughter completed to obtain her AIG identification, she stated that had it not been for her attending a Parent Advisory Committee meeting and learning about the different avenues through which children are identified for AIG identification, she would not have known that she could nominate her own child for retesting. She shared that, as part of the process, the child's teacher had to put together a composite of strengths, when she followed up with the teacher, the teacher stated "I would never have thought your child was gifted," she admitted that she was confused by the statement and asked the teacher to explain what she meant, nevertheless, she realized in that moment that her purpose, on the committee, in the schools, wherever, was to be an advocate. She stated that "if you don't advocate for your child, no one will". She further stated that at that time there were 30,000 students in her child's public-school

district, 5000 of those children were identified as AIG and of those 5000 only 1000 were African American students. This number was concerning for her as a parent advocate, because it suggested that of the 30,000 students in attendance only 3% of those students were African American AIG identified. Ms. Hattie expressed concern that if the main identification method is through teacher identification, and a teacher would tell her without hesitation that she did not think her child was gifted, it could indicate a flaw "on a racial component" in the system. She mentioned that not all smart kids wear glasses and appear "nerdy" or "geeky", some are "very social" which does not always suggest exceptionalism in the classroom. She indicated that, had she not known that she could ask for her child to be retested, the teachers may not have recognized the giftedness in her child, referring back to the need for advocacy as a parental responsibility. It is this role of advocacy that she has taken on that has commanded respect from the teachers and administrators over the years, she made the distinction that some parents are concerned about whether the teachers "like them" but it is not about being liked, it is about being "respected." She stated that she would rather be respected than be liked, suggesting that everyone that likes you does not always respect you. It is the respect that the professionals have for her and her role in her daughter's education that makes her feel confident that her daughter will get everything she deserves with regard to access to educational opportunities. Whether administrators and teachers want to give her daughter access to educational opportunities is irrelevant because she will receive everything she is due based on her advocacy and access to information. When asked to use one word to describe her experience as an AA mother raising a gifted child, she chose "insightful," stating that her daughters' identification has opened up opportunities of knowledge and resources.

Dr. Ida. Dr. Ida is a married medical school graduate with two children. Dr. Ida was reserved in her demeanor. She was very quiet and seemed to listen intently to the information that was presented about the research study. It was explained that her confidentiality would be maintained and she was reminded that participation was strictly voluntary. In addition, the research topic was explained and it was confirmed that she was, in fact, qualified to participate in the study. This particular interview was the shortest interview conducted, as she was very succinct in her answers and did not elaborate much on her specific experiences.

When asked what it means to her to be an African American woman raising gifted children she stated “I realized that I'll have many challenges, unfortunately people don't expect much from my children since they are African American”. She further stated “I have to make sure I encourage them, and let them know that they have to be the best... in order to make it”. She did indicate that she noticed a difference in the way her daughter was treated by teachers when she was in elementary school compared to how she is treated by her current middle school teachers. Her children were afforded the opportunity to attend a private school here in the area that has a very good reputation; however, she was not aware of a formal process for identification of gifted children at the school and indicated that the curriculum for the school was considered vigorous in and of itself. However, once her daughter left that school to attend a public middle school she experienced some behavioral problems in class. It was not until she was identified as AIG and placed in AIG classes that she was able to flourish in middle school. Nevertheless, when her daughter returned to her previous elementary school, her brother was still a student there, she had a conversation with her previous teacher and in that exchange, there were some comments made that did not sit well with neither the participant or her daughter. When her daughter saw this teacher, the teacher asked what school she was attending, after telling the

teacher the school she was attending the teacher responded “Yeah, you’ll fit in better there,” it is unclear what the teacher meant, but the difference between the private school and the public middle school is predominantly the race of the student population. Dr. Ida had concerns after being told about this exchange but she did not inquire further of the teacher, instead she mentioned her concerns to the head of the school. She did mention that there are things that go on that she is probably not aware of because her daughter does not talk much about it and she is not active in the school due to her work.

When asked to use one word to describe her experience as an AA mother raising a gifted child, she chose “challenging,” she chose this word because of the difficult adjustment her daughter had when she left private school and went to public school. She indicated that she thought her daughter felt pressure to appear “less smart” by her peers because she was not AIG identified yet, and she wanted to “fit in”. However, since she has been placed in AIG classes with students who seem to want to do well, she has seen less of the concerning behavior and more effort being given to doing well in school.

Dr. Shirley. Dr. Shirley is a married dental school graduate with two children. As she arrived for the interview she was smiling and seemed very eager to participate. She thanked me for doing this research study and stated she was eager to read the results. After explaining the purpose of the study and what she could expect during that interview and afterward, she was aggregable and ready to get started. When asked what is means to her to be an African American woman raising gifted children she stated, “It's rewarding and challenging all rolled into one. It's rewarding to see my son be able to be a critical thinker”. She discussed a situation when her son was in the 2nd grade that his teacher asked her “How is it that your son is so smart?”, her response was “why can’t he be smart?”. She stated that his 2nd grade year was the year she had to

explain her son's Blackness to him in a way that he could understand the differences that were being made between him and the other students in the class. She indicated that this same teacher that was resistant to having him tested for AIG because she held a Master's degree and felt that she would be able to provide him enough attention and challenge in his classroom. She stated that although they cautioned this teacher to ensure that she was keeping her son sufficiently challenged, she did not, and as she expected they started to receive letters home from the teacher regarding their son's behavior in class. Once the teacher relented and tested her son, he was reading on the 5th or 6th grade level and doing similarly in math. She indicated that they experienced some challenge every year of her son's elementary school career, except for his 3rd grade year when he was in the class with an African American male teacher.

Dr. Shirley indicated that she believes the young Black boys have a difficult time in the public-school system that her son is attending; she explained a situation where her son completed an advanced math test quickly, according to the teacher, and instead of being praised for his effort he was accused of cheating. The teacher went so far as to tell him that she would have to check the tests of the students around him to ensure that their answers were different. Her son would not admit to cheating, so the teacher decided to consequence him. She made him sit facing the wall, because he maintained his innocence. Dr. Shirley took issue with the teacher's behavior because she was making these accusations in front of the whole class and Dr. Shirley felt that her son was disrespected and embarrassed simply for being smart. Dr. Shirley talked about a couple of incidents that occurred, in which she felt her son was treated differently because he was African American that angered her. She discussed one instance in which a "little White girl" bumped in to him in class and when he asked if she was going to say excuse me, she put her hands around his neck. None of the teachers intervened even though they witnessed this event.

She believed very strongly that had the roles been reversed and he had put his "Black hands around her White neck", she would have had to go visit him in the police station. The other instance she discussed was when another young girl pulled the chair out from under him as he was trying to sit down and caused him to fall to the ground and bump his head. Again, there was no satisfactory response from his teachers or the administration. She stated that at this point she filed a lawsuit because she believed they were giving the students the impression that they could treat her son in whatever fashion they chose and there would be no consequences to their actions.

When asked to use one word to describe her experience as an AA mother raising a gifted child, she chose the word "blessing". She explained that she chose this word because her experiences raising her children, and advocating for her children and other children have put her closer to the "creator." She referenced her need to pray before addressing every situation that came up with her son in the schools and for that she felt grateful for those situations pushing her closer to the "creator" to keep her from handling those situations in a less desirable manner.

Data Analysis

After completing interviews with the participants and recording their experiences I proceeded with data analysis. I employed the use of naïve reading as discussed by Flood (2010), I went through the transcribed interviews four times, the first time I went through the transcribed interviews while listening to the interviews to capture the emotion that was communicated through inflection or outward expression of emotion during the interview. Following this examination of the data obtained, I employed the use of the six stages of hermeneutic phenomenological data analysis; immersion, understanding, abstraction, synthesis and theme development, illumination and illustration of phenomena, and integration and critique of findings within the research team and externally as described by Ajjawi and Higgs (2007).

Stage one of data analysis involved the processes of immersion and understanding. Immersion is the process of reading and rereading the data collected in an effort to understand the participants experience in a deeper, meaningful way that would be readily identified through a cursory glance. In this stage, I read the interviews, took notes on the themes that were starting to emerge and the emotions associated with the interviews. Significant phrases were highlighted and phrases that seemed to evoke emotions were circled. After completing this step, I went back through the interviews and reread the highlighted sections; while doing this, I contemplated the meaning of the phraseology used and any emotionality that was attached to the passage. Once the interviews were read thoroughly, I arranged them on a large poster board according to what seemed to be similar experiences. As I was reviewing the interviews, I made notes in the margins of the board, on colored sticky notes to indicate when themes seemed to be developing between the participants. I reviewed the highlighted text and compared each section to the highlighted section of the next participant and so on until each participant highlighted sections were thoroughly reviewed. Each time I read through the identified portions of the interviews, I read to identify themes being careful to avoid interpretation at this stage in an effort to preserve the integrity of the participants situational account. However, based on McManus Holroyd's (2007) assertion, in order to begin the process of understanding the researcher must "reflect on one's own fore-projections or pre-understandings and the meanings that exist within them" (p. 4). Bearing this in mind, I notated my own thoughts about the data as I was reading it through.

The second stage of data analysis involved abstraction, synthesis, and theme development. Abstraction, according to Lindseth and Norberg (2004) suggests the ability to condense comparable meanings into main themes and subthemes. As I read through the data, I continued to read, identify and categorize thematic data moving data to more homogeneous

groups of data. Utilizing the hermeneutic circle described in chapter 3, I was able to use this circular examination to reduce the themes to their simplest forms and identify one word to describe each theme and relationship in an effort to better understand the phenomenon of being an African American mother raising gifted children as seen through the eyes of the participants.

The third stage of data analysis involved illumination and illustration of phenomena, and integration and critique of findings. During this stage of data analysis, the entirety of the data was re-evaluated to ensure that the data was treated in a manner that was consistent with the way it was presented by the participants, according to Ajjawi and Higgs, this is done in an effort to "ensure that the constructed stories where [sic] faithful to participants learning experiences" (p. 625). I reviewed the data that was transcribed in its pure form, before the highlighting and sticky notes were employed to separate themes, then I read it again using the highlighted text and sticky notes to ensure that there were no concerns with how the themes were categorized and to confirm that all themes were identified. In addition, I spoke with my dissertation chair about the themes that were beginning to emerge and received feedback on ways to categorize the data in a meaningful way.

Finally, I organized the data into categories that were helpful in conveying the experiences of the participants. After reading and rereading the data and reducing main themes into subthemes, I created a table to represent the data. I initially thought that I would utilize the NVivo software to assist with data analysis; however, I found it easier to physically work with the data to move it around according to the progression of analysis and synthesis. After becoming familiar with the themes that were emerging, it began to seem more overwhelming to incorporate the use of NVivo software at this stage than would have been beneficial.

The research was conducted utilizing semi-structured interviews in an effort to invite the participants to discuss their lived experiences as African American mothers raising gifted children. At the conclusion of the data collection phase of the research project, there were a total of nine participants from varying backgrounds and experiences. These participants were encouraged to share their stories and experiences in a way that allowed for open communication. Once their stories were analyzed, four main themes and eight subthemes were identified. Listed below are the identified themes, however there is a detailed description of each theme and the subthemes that emerged to follow.

As I familiarized myself with Critical Race Theory and Womanist Theory during the literature review, and referencing my own experience with raising gifted children, I expected to find CRT more prevalent in the data than was reported by the participants. As expected, both theoretical orientations were applicable, however, as the themes began to emerge, most of what was described had its basis in Womanist theory.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

In Chapter 3, I discussed the issue of trustworthiness in qualitative research studies. Although parallels can be drawn between the way research integrity can be observed in qualitative and quantitative methods, Morrow (2005) highlighted the most significant difference is that qualitative research results in a different kind of understanding of the observed phenomenon than what quantitative research would reveal.

Credibility of my hermeneutic research investigation is evidenced through my maintaining consistency throughout the interview process and triangulation. Maintaining consistency throughout the interview process meant that each participant was given the same information regarding the study, such as the demographic questionnaire, debriefing handout, and

offered the opportunity to review their transcribed interviews once completed. The process remained consistent because each participant was assigned a pseudonym, each interview was digitally recorded and manually transcribed removing any personally identifiable information. Triangulation was achieved once the data was transcribed by discussing the data that was collected to confirm themes and subthemes that were beginning to emerge during the data analysis process.

Transferability was supported through thick description given by each participant. As previously stated in Chapter 3 the nature of qualitative research does not expect that results will be generalizable to the general public. Therefore, it is my contention that based on the similarity of experiences between the participants in this study, it would be presumable that those African American women most homogeneous to those participating in this study, based on culture and context would have experiences mirroring those described in this study.

Dependability was achieved through the use of multiple data checks to maintain the integrity of the data collected, and the use of audio recordings to check and recheck the interviews to ensure accurate transcription. In addition, my research chairman discussed the themes identified to analyze consistency across data collection to ensure that the research could be repeated in future investigations.

Confirmability of the research was achieved through a process of careful documentation, coding, and development of themes. Reading and rereading the data to ensure that the development of themes followed a logical pathway was also employed for confirmability. Shenton (2004) discussed the use of an “audit trail” so that there is a clear understanding of how the analysis of the data developed and evolved over time. The use of an “audit trail” ensures that

researcher bias is minimized because the methods used to arrive at different conclusions can be verified.

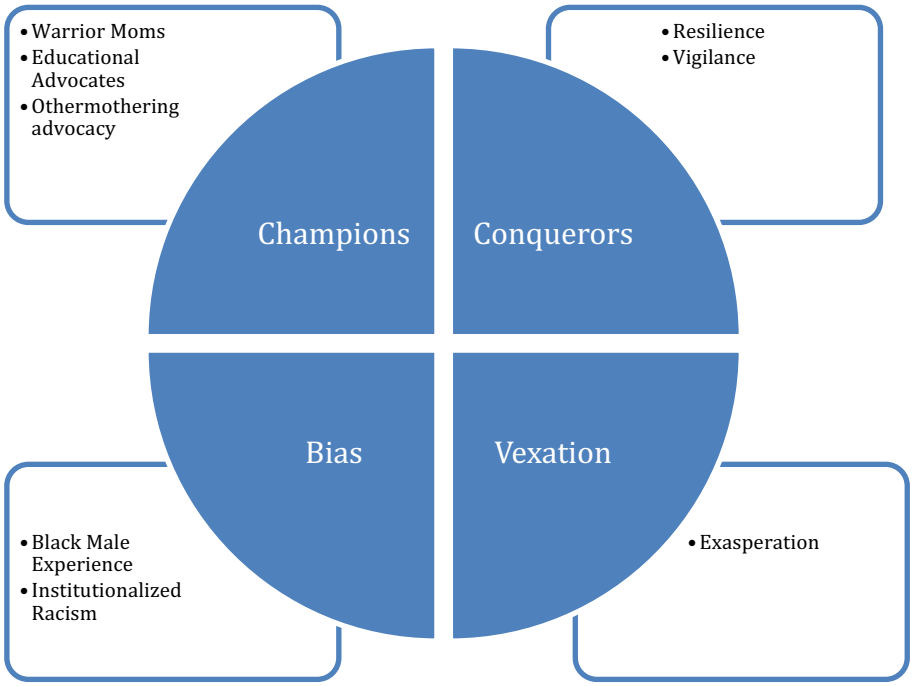
Results

As previously mentioned, once all the of the stories were analyzed four main themes and eight subthemes were identified. These themes were identified as: being a champion, being a conqueror, dealing with bias, and vexation. Once the main themes were identified, subthemes were highlighted that helped to convey the participants experience in a meaningful way. Quotes were selected to further elucidate the participants experience with the identified phenomenon.

As I was reading through the transcripts, I highlighted statements that seemed to carry significance for the participants and once those were identified I grouped the statements together un an effort to categorize those statements in a meaningful way. It was this procedure that allowed me to identify the main themes that were emerging in the data.

Table 4

Main Themes and Subthemes



Theme 1: Champions

The word *champion* was selected because it seemed to best describe the experiences the participants had regarding successfully advocating for their children's educational needs. The word champion was not chosen because these mothers defeated some unnamed opponent, but because they were defending and supporting a cause: their children. Although the mothers described feeling as though there would be resistance to their requests on some level, they persevered. Examples of statements and experiences that exemplified this will be discussed in each of the subthemes.

Warrior Moms. It seemed that all mothers described feeling as though they had to be prepared to "fight" for their children's needs in school. It was not a physical altercation they described expecting, but more like aggressive advocating for their children's needs. They described being prepared for whatever would be next in conversation with their child's teacher or administrator, not expecting a physical altercation, but most assuredly expecting resistance or pushback regarding their children receiving the attention they deserved and needed. Dr. Ida mentioned that "I think that probably African American women are not respected or really listened to, you have to kind of push your way in to advocating for your child. It's not as easy". Mrs. Ruane had similar thoughts when she stated:

> There have been some issues that have been identified in regards to race in education. And so being African-American raising gifted kids I've found that I've had to go into the school and advocate for my kids. I've found that I've had to go and be very assertive and very, umm very adamant about the track that I would like to see my children on or who it is that my children are because I tend to come across people that think they know my child better than me. And so, you know I've had to be very vocal when I've seen things

> come up. Where I feel like a school was maybe... I would have to say making assumptions about my child and me because I am African-American and I don't think that has anything to do with my child being gifted but my child is gifted. So, I advocate for them in regard to that.

Mrs. Ruane stated that she has had to go into the school and advocate for what she wanted to see happen for her children academically in opposition to what the administrators and teachers were attempting to do for them with regard to their educational track. As previously mentioned in this chapter, when her son was moved to a new school after the family moved from one city to another city in a different school district; she stated that approximately 10 days in to the school year her sons' teacher had concluded that he was struggling in math and should be considered for remedial education in that area. She expressed frustration at this assessment because he had previously been identified as AIG and this particular teacher had not had an adequate enough time, in her opinion, to assess her sons' proficiency or deficiency in any subject matter.

Ms. Marjorie mentioned concerns regarding the attention her gifted child was receiving, rather not receiving in school. She stated:

> I'm raising my kid that really has the potential to be anything that he wants to be. He can do anything that he wants to do. I mean it's hard especially within the school system that we come from because it wasn't a whole lot of Black kids who were identified AIG. It was a lot of White kids. And so, the teachers sometimes tended to just look over you know Black kids. Even though I would tell her you know he needs this, you need to give him more work, he's bored.

Ms. Marjorie went on to state that the lack of attention to her son's needs in the classroom would leave him without sufficient work to keep him busy so he would begin to distract other kids in

the class and end up getting in trouble for talking, moving, or generally being distracting to the teaching efforts of the teacher. So, when she would receive calls from the school requesting a conference either in person or on the phone regarding her son's behavior, she felt as though she had to be prepared to defend him. She stated that "if they would just give him challenging work, he wouldn't be talking to the other students during class."

Mrs. Ella explained a situation where she had to call a parent meeting with her daughters' middle school teachers to discuss grades and her daughters progress in her classes. She indicated that she had some concern because her daughter was making high marks in her high school level classes (Math, Spanish, and English) but she was barely passing her eighth grade Social Studies class. Mrs. Ella stated that she called a meeting with her daughters' teacher to try to figure out what was happening in the Social Studies class and how things could be improved. However, she was disappointed and what she described as more than a little aggravated to learn that the Social Studies teacher had no explanation for the grade her daughter was receiving in that course. Mrs. Ella confronted the teacher about a project, on which the teacher wrote that there was "very little effort" put into completing the assignment; however, Mrs. Ella took issue with that comment because she spent two hours helping her daughter meet all of the requirements as outlined in the rubric. When she confronted the teacher about the grade and the comment, the teacher responded that she did not remember writing that comment. Mrs. Ella expressed that she became impatient and angry with the teacher because she did not seem to have any reason for grading her daughter the way that she did and she did not seem concerned that the way she was grading her daughter's work was affecting her confidence. She recalled that she had to excuse herself at one point from the meeting and remembers her husband telling her that he thought she was going to get physical with the teacher. Mrs. Ella explained that it was her belief that this particular teacher was not

used to parental involvement and she suspected that this was why she did not have any rationale for the way she had been grading her daughter's work. She did report that the teacher adjusted her daughters' grades and later became very friendly with her daughter, inviting her to join various groups and hanging her work up in the hallways as an example for other students. Nonetheless, she never gave Mrs. Ella's daughter a grade higher than a 99 on any assignment she turned in and could not offer insight as to what her daughter could do to improve her work.

Educational/Othermothering advocacy. James (1993) defined othermothers as "those who assist blood mothers in the responsibilities of child care for short to long term periods, in informal or formal arrangements" (p. 45). Collins (1990) argued that "Black women's actions in the struggle for group survival suggest a vision of community that stands in opposition to that extant in the dominant culture... Afrocentric models of community stress connections, caring, and personal accountability" (p. 554). Mrs. Ella described her efforts to do her part in ensuring that all AIG children and their parents were made aware of the resources available to them regarding their education and enrichment opportunities in the community. She stated:

> As an African-American mother there is a group that me and some of the parents have put together and just say this is something that came out from a non-African-American parent to my email that we didn't know about that our children should know about and should participate in. So, we try to if something comes out for high school or elementary, or middle school whatever regardless of whether our kids are in that grade level or not we just shoot it out and say hey look at this, I found this or did y'all hear about this and most of the time it's no. We found that across our county, we were at different schools so this counselor might share this or this parent stumbled upon this or someone's cousin was in this and they're like oh well is your child doing this program or did you try you know the

> local law program you know this is free or they offer scholarships for this. And no. So, we just decided OK let's just put everything in this little e-mail group you know I going to shoot an e-mail out and it goes to everybody in your group. And so that's how I keep ahead of most things.

Ms. Hattie echoed this sentiment when she stated

> What I mean is, everything that my daughter has been privy to through her identification, this should be for every kid. So, with her access it gives me access to share that information that she has and share the opportunities that she has. So, it's like it's twofold, she gets access to resources but also a lot of these resources are for other kids as well that parents may not know.

Theme 2: Conquerors

The second main theme that seemed to emerge, was one that flowed logically from the Champion theme--*conquerors*. The mothers participating in this research study seemed to describe their ability to conquer adversity, not only for themselves but for their children.

Resilience. Ms. Mary discussed feeling proud that, although she is a single mother, she is able to raise her AIG child successfully and that her AIG child has the drive and determination to be successful despite her father's choices and the limited resources she has in the home. She asserted that raising a gifted child:

> Means that I did something right. With so many things in the world that are wrong and being you know their father is not a good person, isn't good and I feel like the fact that she is so smart and that she didn't do any of that. It just makes me proud. I'm proud of her. You know she just took all that negativity and turned it into positive and just she's

> really just does what she's supposed to do and makes good grades. And it's a good feeling.

Discussing some experiences Dr. Ida had, she mentioned that an old teacher of her daughters could have negatively affected her confidence level in school, she described an example of resilience that both she and her daughter displayed after the interaction. She stated:

> When she went back to her old school the teacher asked her what school she was going to she said (Named removed for privacy) and the teachers said Oh that's a good fit for you. Yeah, you'll fit in better there. I spoke to the Head of School and let her know, my daughter was no longer a student there, I just let her know that that teacher had said that, meanwhile, my daughter, you know, is in AIG classes in the National Honor Society she could have damaged her psyche if my daughter hadn't been aware of her own intelligence.

Vigilance. Pushing past the barriers that tended to emerge for these mothers and their gifted children seemed to be a theme that was interwoven in every participants description of their experience. Mrs. Ellen mentioned that even though her daughter is AIG identified, she tries to impress upon her that she still has to work hard and do her best because “they’re not going to give it to her... I’m just trying to prove to her that life is not going to be easy. She has got to do twice as much”. Mrs. Alice stated:

> You have to be, I would say vigilant to some degree. You have to make sure that you stay almost ahead of the game as far as you know the teachers that he interacts with his individual assignments. You have to make sure that you stay conscious and aware of any and every quote unquote issue that may come up during the course of his experiences in school we have to make sure that you don't let anything fall through the cracks.

Dr. Shirley discussed both rewards and challenges that accompany raising a gifted child. She recounted her experience as follows:

> It's rewarding and challenging all rolled into one. It's rewarding to see my son be able to be a critical thinker. Where at school, the schools that he's been involved in have not pushed for him to think for himself. And the challenge that we have faced, Lord knows it's been a challenge. It's quite interesting because in the second grade we had to explain to our son that he was Black not that he didn't know that his color was Black. But the reason that his White teachers were treating him the way that they were treating him were solely because he was Black.

Theme 3: Bias

The mothers that participated in this research study communicated their experiences of unspoken biases that their children had to endure. The experiences were described as hurtful and frustrating by these mothers, though they explained to their children what had happened and why.

Institutional racism. Dr. Shirley went on to share some biases that her son experienced and how that impacted the way she attempted to help him understand how society views him. Continuing from her quote above, she mentioned:

> Because one teacher in the second grade said I don't know how, how is it that your son is so smart? Why can't he be smart. And why. Well my husband and I were saying it's nothing that we have done. He's a gift from God. God has poured into him for him to be smart.

Ms. Hattie discussed what she believed was the teacher's inability to recognize giftedness in students that were of color. She indicated that her daughters fourth grade teacher said to her "I would have never thought your child was gifted".

Black male experience. Mrs. Ruane discussed an experience she had when she transferred her children from a predominantly Black school district to a predominantly White school district as a result of a move. She expressed her concerns with the way in which her son was misclassified in this new school even though he had already been AIG identified at his previous school. She stated:

> 10 days into my child's first week of school, the beginning of him starting school maybe there had been 10 days that had gone by, the teacher told me that my child was struggling in math and that struck me as odd. It was illogical because again 10 days into school how could you have made that assessment when everyone is still getting acclimated to the first weeks of school.

Mrs. Alice discussed an incident that happened with her son in school that was so emotionally charged she began to cry when discussing what happened. She explained that in the current climate of society, she did not want her son's first encounter with police to be in school and one that would have a lasting negative effect on him, however, that is exactly what happened. She could not help but wonder if the teacher would have handled things differently had the student in question been a White child. This is what she described:

> There was an incident at his... the school he's at now, where with this substitute, she sends him to in school suspension (ISS) again for something crazy. And so, when she calls up to the office to speak to an administrator to come to the to the classroom where he is. There are no administrators available. And so I don't, not sure quite who makes the

> decision to send the schools officer to the classroom to get my son. And so, the officer not an administrator, but the police officer comes to the classroom to get my son to escort him to ISS. And so, my son said when he saw him he immediately got scared because, it was funny, he said and 'mom he was White too'. So, he's like this might not go well, at 12 years old. He is processing this might go south if I don't say the right thing if I don't respond right this could go way left. And so it's kind of heartbreaking that a 12 year old is thinking about OK how do I conduct myself when a police officer is questioning me; when a police officer asked me something how do I respond so that I get the right response out of him. At 12 years old. So, it was a little disheartening.

Theme 4: Vexation

One of the most overwhelming themes that seemed to surface throughout the interviews was a feeling of aggravation or annoyance from the participant mothers at the fact that they were still having to deal with such events, and even beyond that, the fact that their children were often the target of these situations created more frustration and exasperation.

Exasperation. This subtheme surfaced as a response to both the mother's experiences and those of their children. Mrs. Ella shared of her own experiences:

> Being an African-American woman. Knowing that not only because I am African-American and a female that you have to prove that you're smarter, just as smart, just as deserving as anybody else that you're going up against. Not just because you're female for one. And then because you're African-American so you have two strikes or two things that you have to overcome to get people to appreciate you. There's a lot of times, I'm in meetings that work now and I'll say something and come up with an idea and my

> Caucasian female counterpart can say something, just turn two words around and "oh, that was a great idea Britany".

She further shared that you have to find a way to advocate for yourself and your children without being labeled as the "angry, attitudinal person" which, I believe was her way of addressing the "angry Black woman" stereotype that is often applied to women of color that are, in my opinion, passionate and outspoken about a particular topic.

Dr. Shirley discussed her frustration with having to explain to her son's teachers year after year that he is indeed a gifted child and if you do not challenge him, he will challenge you. She shared an experience when her son was in the second grade where she attempted to discuss the exceptional nature of her son and his ability to grasp concepts easily. She explained that she tried to impress upon the teacher that he was no average student and that she would need to ensure that he was properly challenged in class or he would become a challenge for her. To which she describes the teacher's response as being somewhat dismissive in that she informed them that she had a masters degree and would be able to handle students of different performance levels in her class with ease. It was not until later in the school year, toward the end of her son's second grade year, that the teacher relented and had Dr. Shirley's son tested for AIG classification and she ultimately apologized for not respecting and responding to their requests earlier in the school year. She went on to state that "every year it has been something and I literally mean every year that he has been in school we have had a challenge. The only year that we didn't have a challenge... he had a Black male teacher"

Summary

The snowball technique for participant recruitment was used to identify and engage potential subjects for this study. Data was gathered through the use of semi-structured interviews

of ten African American mothers from the Southeast region of the US whose child(ren) have been identified in school as AIG. All interviews were conducted face to face, digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim for accuracy. Through analysis of the research there were four main themes identified: being a champion, being a conqueror, dealing with bias, and vexation. Identifying these themes helped to understand the experiences the participants had as African American mothers raising gifted children.

While there was definitely a tone of frustration throughout the interviews, what seemed to permeate each story was that of resilience and determination. It seemed, through their stories and their experiences, that the participants often experienced some obstacle with regard to their children's education and ensuring they received the attention that they deserved, but they persisted. Whether that was through conversations they had with their children to help them understand the differences, however slight they might be, to conferences with administration that required them to cite local laws related to AIG education; they kept pushing forward and advocating for what their children needed.

In this chapter, I described the data collection and analysis procedures used in the research. Chapter 5 will include a discussion of the research and recommendations for future research based on the conclusions outlined in this chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

I used a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of African American mothers raising gifted children. This particular method of investigating the identified phenomena was chosen because of my own personal experience as an African American mother raising two gifted children. In this chapter, I discuss the findings of this investigation in relation to the current body of literature covering similar topics. This chapter includes a discussion of the results, including my interpretations of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, potential implications of the study, and a conclusion to the study.

The participants in this study discussed their experiences as African American mothers raising gifted children. They discussed their experiences in the school system that their children attended and their efforts to ensure that their children have access to the education they are entitled to by law. This resulted in four major themes being identified based on the information and experiences the participants, they are discussed later in this chapter. In this chapter, I examine study findings in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Although there was no previous research that I could find specific to the experiences of African American mothers raising gifted children, I use the information available to further analyze and discuss the findings of this investigation.

Interpretation of the Findings

Theme 1: Champions

Participants described several experiences in which they had to *champion* their child's needs related to education. This particular theme kept emerging as advocacy; whether that was

for their own child or for another child, participants seemed to believe that it was not only their responsibility to their own children but to the community as a whole. Recall, in Chapter 2, Cooper (2009) suggested that womanism is not just about Black women's desires to improve the station of Black men and boys but that of their communities and families as a whole (p. 385). Othermothering advocacy was a subtheme that emerged under the theme of Champions. The spirit underlying othermothering can be traced back to slavery, according to James (1993), who stated that the concept grew out of an increased need to share the responsibility for child nurturance (p. 45).

This othermothering advocacy also encompasses the idea of "it takes a village." Dubey (1995) explained, for instance, that "because of their legal exclusion from literate culture, slave children had to depend on their mothers and other kin as their primary sources of education and cultural transmission" (p. 247). It seemed as though it was almost second nature for mothers in the study to consider the implications for other African American students when they were advocating for their own children. A few of the participants even joined a group that was focused on ensuring that information relevant to gifted African American students was dispersed appropriately. Othermothering as a concept is familiar to the African American community (James, 1993) and is embedded in my own experiences. For example, I have intervened on behalf of African American children when I have seen them acting out or being treated inappropriately. In these instances, I step in to ensure that they are appropriately chastened or protected.

This reaction by participants, which mirrored my own behavior, is consistent with the research addressing the issue of othermothering. Collins (2002) discussed othermothering advocacy in this way:

> Community othermothers' participation in activist mothering demonstrates a clear rejection of separateness and individual interest as the basis of either community organization or individual self-actualization. Instead, the connectedness with others and common interest expressed by community othermothers model a very different value system, one whereby ethics of caring and personal accountability move communities forward. (p. 192)

When discussing their advocacy of other children, it became clear that the desire was for every African American child to be successful and to break free of whatever assumptions were being made about their ability to matriculate successfully through these opportunities or their perceived deservedness of involvement in enrichment activities for gifted students. This idea further demonstrates the explanation of womanism put forth by Cooper (2009) as stated in Chapter 2. Because the desire for Black women to champion the fair treatment of the Black community is so engrained in the community as a whole, the participants in this investigation reported these acts as an obligation rather than a choice. The participants discussed their "responsibility" and their "obligation" to ensure that every African American child had access to opportunities that were made available to their gifted counterparts.

In that same vein, listening to the participant mothers recount their experiences gave me the sense that they were constantly prepared for battle. Not necessarily physical, although I got the feeling that a couple of incidents could have gone to that extreme, but emotional battle. The emotional battle was both theirs and their children's. When Mrs. Ella discussed the discrepancy that her daughter was receiving in her grades from one out of her seven teachers, her aggravation was palpable. The teachers' perceived disregard for her daughter's efforts and her attempt to understand her daughter's academic oversights made for a potentially volatile situation. The

same can be said for Dr. Shirley in her effort to ensure that her son received the attention he needed in school. Ms. Marjorie's aggravation was also notable because, even though she asked for additional work for her son, her requests were not heeded, and she had to go back and forth with the teachers to ensure her son got what he needed. So, although these women did not get in to any physical altercations, listening to their stories both when they were telling them to me for the first time and when I listened again to identify themes, I could imagine them preparing for an emotional battle. I could almost hear them saying "here we go again," as if the confrontation was both expected and resented at the same time.

Theme 2: Conquerors

This theme emerged as a result of the participants' experiences with repeated challenges affecting themselves and their children. As previously stated in this section, I had the distinct feeling that mothers in the study felt they would have to "get through" whatever incident had occurred. The feeling of "here we go again" suggested to me that these were minibattles that would have to be fought over and over and that participants expected them even though they resented them. I discussed the concept of microaggressions in Chapter 2, explaining briefly that these acts can be verbal, nonverbal, or visual in nature (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). In Chapter 3, I shared a personal example of experiencing microaggressions and how benign they can seem. I discussed the teacher assuming that my daughter, a kindergartner at the time, could not handle the transition from her kindergarten math class to the first-grade math class because her White male counterpart was having a difficult time making the adjustment. Were it not for my insistence and my vigilance to ensure that my daughter was receiving what she needed in school, she would have lost access to instruction that would challenge her more than the kindergarten curriculum she was being given at the time.

This theme, which encompasses being vigilant and resilient and overcoming barriers and adversity on behalf of the children, was resonant in multiple participants' responses. Allen, Scott, and Lewis (2013) discussed teachers' perceptions stating the following: "that which a teacher believes about his/her students in regards to their abilities, capabilities, expectations, and likely outcomes can lead to a manifestation of microaggressions against their students" (p. 121). Dr. Shirley discussed an incident where her son was accused of cheating on a math test because he finished the test quickly. When the teacher asked him about the test, the son explained that the information was not new to him and that he just knew how to complete the questions. It is important to note that a teacher's perceptions can affect the teacher's ability to recognize and acknowledge a student's potential (Ford, Harris, Tyson & Trotman, 2001). Dr. Shirley went on to explain that the teacher did not accept this explanation and said to the student that she would have to "check the students around him to make sure they did not have the same answers", once the teacher was confronted about her bias, the explanation she offered was that the math was advanced math, this suggested that she did not believe he was capable of performing at an advanced level. Accepting this microaggression as just par for the course would have been an easy thing to do; based on her report this was not the first time she had experienced adversity and resistance with regard to her sons' educational needs and the disconnect between what he was capable of and what the teachers expected of him. However, she took her concerns to the teacher to ensure that they set the expectations straight.

One example of microaggression that was shared in Chapter 4 is worth mentioning here as well, Dr. Ida discussed an incident when her daughter returned to the predominantly White private elementary school she attended and was told that she would "fit in better" at the more diverse public middles school she was attending at that time. It was clear by the level of comfort

displayed in her ease of making the comment to a middle school aged child that she did not see how harmful her statement could be, however, it made such an impression on the student that she mentioned it to her mother. This in turn created a situation where Dr. Ida felt she needed to undo whatever damage had been done by this quick exchange between her daughter and the teacher.

Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) concluded in their study that African American students did not feel the educational playing field was level (p.72) and discussed several students personal experiences with microaggressions that made them feel a range of emotions from exasperation to withdrawal from the school to attend a school that was more culturally sensitive to their needs. However, as was shown by the participants of this study, despite the difficulties experienced, they persisted and they persisted on behalf of their children's needs so that the children would continue to have access to quality and challenging education.

Theme 3: Bias

Bias as a theme emerged, not surprisingly, in one form or another for the participants. The Black male experience and institutionalized racism were the subthemes that emerged from this theme. Ford, Harris, Tyson and Trotman (2001) discuss the issue of deficit thinking as it pertains to teacher preparation and their understanding of varying multicultural needs of their students. The authors stated "at institutions of higher education, most students graduate with a monocultural or ethnocentric curriculum that ill prepares them to work with culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students" (p. 55). This seemed to be relevant, especially when considering the experiences of the Black male student. As mentioned in chapter 1, one of the tenets central CRT is Whiteness as property, Allen (2013) discusses this phenomenon in his examination of microaggressions affecting African American boys in school. He concluded that

"White male behavior is normalized, giving White male students the right of use and enjoyment of school spaces and the ability to perform masculinities in ways that are unchallenged, deracialized, and with assumed innocence" (p. 187). Conversely, he surmised that:

> Those Black male students who do not perform "normal" school behavior are feared and, thus, deserving of punishment. In this sense, to succeed in school Black male students must prove they are normal by self-consciously regulating their every action in ways that prove adaptation to institutionally generated norms. (p. 187).

It was important to speak specifically to the Black male experience because although each of the gifted African American students had their own experiences, it seemed as though the experiences shared by the participants with gifted African American sons carried a different intensity. Ford, Harris, Tyson and Trotman (2001) discussed the differences in learning styles that may be misinterpreted by teachers that are well intentioned but uninformed about the diversity of learning styles of the students in their classrooms. The authors purported:

> Teachers should be aware that Black students tend to be concrete learners, social learners, field-dependent learners, and learners who value constructive responses to their work. These differences hold numerous implications for the identification of gifted Black students. Namely, the extent to which Black students are global versus analytical learners, visual versus auditory, highly mobile versus static, and less peer-oriented versus more peer-oriented affects their learning, achievement, motivation, and school performance. (p. 55)

Mrs. Ella discussed the differences in levels of expectations between her gifted daughter and her gifted son. Differences made, not by herself or her husband but differences made by teachers in the schools. She discussed the differences in the way her daughter was treated,

although she was treated differently from her White counterparts, her son was treated different greater still. Things teachers exposed her daughter to and allowed her to opportunity to experience, when her son came through the next year they did not even consider him. She discussed instances where her son was deliberately overlooked when the teacher was calling on students to answer questions, going so far as to tell him to put his hand down during a game that rewarded correct answers with tickets that could be used for prizes and additional privileges approved by the teacher. The teacher's explanation was that "he can't get all of the tickets". This made her son feel as though the teacher unfairly favored the girls in the classroom.

The most poignant example of this was discussed by Mrs. Alice when she discussed her sons first experience with the police (resource officer) in his school. She became emotional as she was recounting her experience and the feeling of helplessness she had when discussing with her son the complexities of being a Black male in America. She discussed the fear her son described when he saw the police officer come to the classroom to get him. Her frustration seemed to be fueled by the tensions going on outside of the school setting between Black men and police officers. For her, this exchange was a very real-world life or death interaction for her son. She cried.

Theme 4: Vexation

Vexation as a theme emerged because of the exasperation that seemed to permeate the experiences recounted by the participants. This theme is a thread that seems to go through each participant experience in one way or another. Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) concluded "the sense of discouragement, frustration, and exhaustion resulting from racial microaggressions left some African American students in our study despondent and made them feel that they could not perform well academically" (p. 69). This feeling of frustration and exhaustion seemed to be

echoed in the experiences of the participants. As I previously stated, it seemed as if each of the participants were prepared for an invisible battle, unsure of where the attack would originate, resentful that it would occur, but prepared for battle nonetheless. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) stated "womanists understand that oppression is an interlocking system, providing all people with varying degrees of penalty and privilege" (p. 280). Each participant discussed their experience with conveying the needs of their child in a meaningful way to the teachers and describes feeling as though their concerns were dismissed or minimized.

Detailing the experiences of the participants, the frustration that seems to accompany many of the instances they discussed, they seemed to be channeling the strength and resilience that is often described when defining and understanding womanism. It is interesting that although vexation was identified as a separate theme, it seems to be the one theme that can be evidenced in each of the other themes and subthemes. As stated in chapter 2, Cooper (2009) discusses womanism as a theory to help explain the Black woman's desire to not only advocate for the fair treatment and inclusion of Black men and boys but to also affect the Black family's experience in the world and how they and their communities are treated (p. 385), this desire to advocate for fair treatment of their families helps us to begin to understand the frustration and exacerbation felt when experiences like the ones discussed in this research are encountered.

Limitations of the Study

This study provided a candid look into the lived experiences of African American mothers raising gifted children; however, this study does have its limitations. The research study included only those African American mothers whose children had at the time of their involvement been officially classified as AIG. I was not confident that I would be able to recruit enough participation to reach saturation, however, the use of snowball sampling was effective in

identifying willing participants. The participants children were all a part of the same public-school system, which could suggest a problem within this particular institution. This was not intentional, but was due to the limited sampling size.

At the time that these questions were created the tensions between African American people and the police did not seem to be as prevalent in the news and media, nevertheless, racism is not a new concept and Allen (2013) describes it through the lens of CRT like this:

> Though overt racism is still very much prevalent in American society, it is often recognized through public discourse as socially unacceptable. It is the covert or subtle racism that often goes unnoticed but quietly demeans and denigrates people of color (p.174).

However, during the time that the participants were interviewed several incidents occurred and had been reported in the media. These incidents were brought up during the interviews of participants with male children. It is unclear if these instances magnified for these participants interactions that would have otherwise seemed benign. In addition, the rampant nature of microaggressions has made experiencing them commonplace, when asked *Given the current climate of society, have you noticed a change associated with communicating with teachers or administrators about your gifted child(ren)'s educational needs?* The participants almost always said "no". However, they went on to discuss their concerns for their young Black boys or the emboldened behavior that seemed to occur from the teachers toward their gifted child. Perhaps, I was expecting to hear a different response, but the consensus seemed to be that the current climate did not change anything. To them, it is and has always been the way in which they described. Based on the findings from the study, I have a number of recommendations for future research.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the research, I recommend that future research be focused on elementary, middle and high school African American mothers' experiences of the same phenomenon. I did not make this distinction, but what seemed to surface was that the elementary school experience was where most of the frustration and aggravation occurred for these mothers. Secondly, an honest and perhaps anonymous review of teacher attitudes and beliefs of the capabilities of African American students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels may offer additional insight into what is happening and why.

Furthermore, I did not explore the relevance of religion/spirituality beyond asking the participants preference. However, womanism as discussed in chapter 1 suggests that African American women have the unique task of navigating through both race and gender discrimination, with spirituality as a foundation for coping (Rousseau, 2013). It would be useful to understand what, if any role spirituality plays in effectively managing their experiences in the world. Finally, an examination of the lived experiences of African American parents, both male and female, in their efforts to ensure adequate education for their children might shed light on an ongoing concern regarding funding for schools. Eliminating the qualifier of the child being AIG, this might help to begin a dialogue between what these parents' value and need for their children versus what administration feels is necessary. As indicated by Ford (2014) ...advocacy rarely takes in to consideration the needs of culturally diverse students that are also identified as gifted and talented (p.144). That being said, I believe it is the responsibility of counselors and counselor educators to raise awareness of the need for multicultural training and exposure. It is this exposure that highlights the unique characteristics of minority students and their learning strengths that could move affect how students are evaluated and placed academically. "The

potential of too many Black and Hispanic students remains untapped because they are denied access to gifted classes supported and protected by ignorance on the one hand, and indifference on the other hand" (Wright, Ford & Young, 2017, p. 55). It is our obligation to move the narrative from one of a deficit perspective to that of a strengths perspective, as counselors and counselor educators we have the responsibility and the obligation to ensure that training is ongoing and relevant to illuminate the needs of minority students so that gifted education is more accessible and inclusive.

Implications

This study adds to the breadth of knowledge of qualitative research concerning the lived experiences of African American mothers raising gifted children. This hermeneutic phenomenological investigation was conducted in part because of my personal experience with the phenomenon and the gap in literature related to the experience. While there is much awareness of the need for equitable education and access to challenging education for all students, it is my hope that this investigation raises awareness of the need for improved and meaningful cultural sensitivity training in schools. These findings can also serve as a way to specifically identify and address areas of concerns from the parent's perspective and assist with implementation of targeted strategies to address institutionalized racism, microaggressions, and negative beliefs about minority student's ability to perform. Wright, Ford and Young (2017) stated "Professional development activities should include defining and understanding culture and cultural differences without a deficit orientation, recognizing how culture impacts teaching and learning, testing and assessment, and classroom environment" (p. 57). It is my belief that this investigation speaks to the need for additional emphasis to be placed on this need. Teachers,

counselors, and administrators need to have the capability of looking at each students' strengths rather than their perceived deficits.

There are studies that discuss the gifted African American students experience at the collegiate level, it may be beneficial to use this study coupled with what we know of the African American college students experience in efforts to address the needs of African American students in primary and secondary schools. This study has potentially broad implications for social change, beginning with an awareness of the everyday experience of microaggressions experienced by students. Most readily the field of school counseling could benefit from this research. If what was true for Ms. Marjorie's son holds true for other unidentified gifted children, the behavior problems that are observed in the classroom could be better handled with the use of more vigorous and challenging academics rather than a trip to the principal's office or ISS for being disruptive.

This research could shift the conversation from a deficit perspective, in assuming the problem in the classroom is because the child does not understand or is not capable of performing to a perspective that considers cultural differences in learning styles, values, and skills that could be used to include and not exclude minority students.

Conclusion

I employed a womanist and CRT perspective to analyze this hermeneutic phenomenological investigation. Because of the difficulty I had in locating research that addressed this topic specifically and my own experience with this phenomenon, I sought to find my understanding of what was going on around me. There is a plethora of research that address educational needs of students, educational needs of gifted students, the disconnect between what is identified and being necessary and what is actually given, and although these things are widely

known, I could not find research that could help elucidate the experiences of African American mothers in their quest for quality education for their gifted student. Wright, Ford and Young (2017) stated and I concur "attitudes (ignorance, prejudice, deficit thinking, indifference and racism) and inequitable policies and practices must be recognized, scrutinized, investigated, confronted, and interrupted to address the indifference surrounding the recruitment and retention of under-represented students of color in gifted education" (p. 56), however, I would expand that to include the treatment and inclusion of minorities in all aspects of society

There have been times during my efforts to complete this research that I was moved to tears. Not necessarily because of what was specifically happening with the participants of this investigation, and not necessarily because of the state of the school systems in the country, but because of the state of interracial tension that seem to permeate every aspect of my personal experience. White privilege is real, this study exposes that with regard to the expectations levied on minorities, but on a broader spectrum it is something that affects interactions on a day to day basis. The news is filled with stories of African American people being targeted for one reason or another, if we began a conversation in the schools about the prevalence of microaggressions and if we addressed it as it happened in the classroom could we produce a future of citizens that were more sensitive to the plight of their counterparts? I understand the feeling of vexation, I understand the impulse to just give up and go along to get along. However, that is not and will never be an option, so it is my hope that this research can be used to challenge the status quo with regard to how we view and treat each other and that those of you in the majority begin to understand those of us in the minority.

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Appendix A: Flyers Used for Recruiting Participants

Are you an African American mother of a gifted child?

You are invited to participate in an academic research study focused on your experience as a mother of a gifted child.

If you are interested in participating in this no-cost, confidential research study please contact Keisha McGill today to obtain information.

****This research is being conducted in partial fulfillment of my dissertation requirements for Walden University****

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Appendix B: Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic Questionnaire

Thank you again for your participation in the interview. Your responses are valuable to the study in that they will help counselors and educators understand the unique needs of African American mothers in their efforts to support the educational needs of their gifted child. In addition to the interview, please take 5 minutes to complete the demographic questionnaire below. Once you have completed this questionnaire, please return it to Keisha McGill prior to leaving today.

Please respond to the questions below:

Has your child been officially designated Academically/Intellectually Gifted by their school system? **YES / NO**

If you do not have full custody of your AIG identified child, do you at least have 50% custody? **Yes / NO**

Age:

18-24 years old
25-34 years old
35-44 years old
45-54 years old
55-64 years old
65-74 years old

Marital Status:

Single, never married
Married or domestic partnership
Widowed
Divorced
Separated

Number of children:

_____

Highest Level of Education:

_____

Occupation/Emp. Status

_____

Religious Affiliation:

_____

Household Income:
Under $30,000
$30,000 to $39,999
$40,000 to $49,999
$50,000 to $59,999
$60,000 to $69,999
$70,000 to $79,999
Over $80,000