Definition, Identification, Identity, and Culture: A Unique Alchemy Impacting the Success of Gifted African American Millennial Males in School

Fred A. Bonner, II
Chance W. Lewis
Lisa Bowman-Perrott
Valerie Hill-Jackson
Texas A&M University

Marlon James
University of Connecticut

This article focuses on the underrepresentation of African American males in gifted and talented programs, and offers a number of key recommendations to practitioners and researchers who seek viable strategies to circumvent this problem. Beyond the focus on underrepresentation, several additional topics for discussion are excogitated to provide a clear perspective on the challenges these students experience in school; namely, (a) definitions of giftedness, (b) identity development, (c) student Millennial culture, and (d) how gifted African American Millennial males in school contexts are treated. Additionally, data collected from a recent study of a large Midwestern school district will be presented to further highlight the topics under investigation.

National efforts focused on enhancing American schooling have led to numerous initiatives, movements, and policies aimed at addressing questions related to improving the who, what, when, where, and how of educational attainment. Despite these efforts, one group in

Fred A. Bonner, II, is a professor of higher education administration in the Educational Administration and Human Resource Development department and Associate Dean of Faculties at Texas A&M University–College Station. Chance W. Lewis is an associate professor of urban education in the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Culture at Texas A&M University and the Deputy Director for Research at the Center for African American Research and Policy at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Lisa Bowman-Perrott is an assistant professor at Texas A&M University in the Department of Educational Psychology. Valerie Hill-Jackson is Clinical Assistant Professor at Texas A&M University in the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Culture. Marlon James is an assistant professor of urban education in the Neag School of Education at the University of Connecticut.

particular continues to fall beyond the veil of benefits accrued by those who have been the beneficiaries of this enhanced focus on educational achievement. Namely, extant research (Fashola, 2005; Ferguson, 2000; Kunjufu, 1985, 1989, 2005; Lee, 2005; Milner, 2007; Pitre, Lewis, & Hilton-Pitre, 2007; Polite & Davis, 1999; Taylor & Phillips, 2006; White & Cones, 1999) reveals that one population in particular, African American males, continues to suffer from underachievement and underrepresentation in our nation's schools. In part, this conundrum of underachievement can be attributed to the overinclusion of African American males in special education (Arnold & Lassmann, 2003; Fine, 2002; Kearns, Ford, & Linney, 2005; Shealey & Lue, 2006; Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, & Feggins-Azziz, 2006; Watkins & Kurtz, 2001) and their underrepresentation in gifted and talented programs (Bonner, 2000, 2001; Bonner & Jennings, 2007; Ford, Grantham, & Bailey, 1999; Ford, Harris, Tyson, Trotman, 2002; Grantham, 2004; Grantham & Ford, 2003; Morris, 2002; Shaunessy, Karnes, & Cobb, 2004). However, another set of critical issues further problematizes the state of African American male giftedness; the deleterious effects of definitions gone awry, identity development issues, and generational challenges experienced by this cohort all serve as contributing factors. When these key component issues are not addressed in classroom engagements or through extant policy, they combine in ways that often lead to the stagnation of achievement for gifted learners of color in general and gifted African American male learners in particular. Hence, the overarching emphasis of this article is on the underrepresentation of African American males in gifted and talented programs, and it offers a number of key recommendations to practitioners and researchers who seek viable strategies to address these issues. Beyond the main focus on underrepresentation, contributing topics for discussion include: (a) definitions of giftedness, (b) identity development, (c) student Millennial culture, and (d) gifted African American Millennial males in school contexts. Additionally, data collected from a recent study of a large Midwestern school district will be presented in an authentic case study format to further highlight the topics under investigation.

Underidentification and Underachievement

Underidentification and underachievement represent common themes found across the literature (Bonner, 2001; Ford, 1995; Ford et al., 1999; Grantham, Frasier, Roberts, & Bridges, 2005) on gifted African American males. Each topic alone could serve as fodder for article-length dialogue concerning the lack of representation of this cohort in gifted programs. Ford, Moore, and Milner (2005) asserted that for more than seven decades, African American students have been underidentified in gifted education. Additionally, Ford (1995) has ranked what she has identified as the three primary factors associated with the underidentification of gifted African American students; namely, (1) lack of teacher referral, (2) poor test performance, and (3) student choice. Hence, Ford's research implies that all too often it is the magnitude of these issues singly or in combination that leads to the absence of African American males in gifted programs.

Much like Ford's ranking of these primary factors, so too did the present study identify teacher referrals as perhaps the most noted reason for the underidentification of African American males for gifted programming. Teacher referrals were often riddled with subjective tendencies and preconceived notions of who and what the teacher perceived that the student brought to the classroom setting (Bonner, 2001; Grantham, 2004). A research investigation conducted by Elhoweris, Matua, Alsheikh, and Holloway (2005) investigated the effects of student ethnicity on teacher decision making regarding the inclusion of students in gifted education programs. These researchers stated:

> The results of this study indicated that the student's ethnicity does make a difference in teachers' referral decisions . . . The results of this investigation—that some students are referred to a gifted and talented program whereas others are not— may add to the reasons why children from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds are enrolled in gifted and talented programs in disproportionately low numbers . . . in addition to the modification of teacher education programs, the referral process to gifted and talented programs must be monitored for any evidence of potential bias. (p. 30)

As evidenced by this study, teacher nominations to gifted education often overlook students from diverse cultural backgrounds. For African American males, encountering teachers (primarily White) who not only attempt to understand their unique cultural styles but who are also able to discern and identify their giftedness within these cultural frames is rare (Landsman & Lewis, 2006). Cultural incongruities between African American males and White teachers often represent not just gaps but wide gulfs. According to Howard (2006), "The assumption of rightness, as related to the achievement gap, often leads teachers to assume that the problem of school failure lies in the students and their families and not in the structure or function of schooling" (p. 119). It was Grantham (2004) who deftly portrayed through Rocky, a case study of a high-achieving African American male, the complexities associated with being a gifted African American male in a predominantly White context. According to Grantham, research focusing specifically on teachers who serve as advocates for African American males is critical to more fully understand the strategies that can be implemented in an effort to retain Black males in gifted programs.

Just as underidentification is connected to an array of factors found deleterious to the progression of African American males in gifted education, so too is underachievement—the two serve as concomitants. Although Ford (1995) identified the three factors cited above to be associated with underidentification, often it is the combination of these factors along with several others that lead to underachievement. Whether it is the lack of a multicultural curriculum (Milner & Ford, 2005) reflective of the interests and motivations of African American males or classroom contexts that do not emphasize African American learning modalities and Afrocentric worldviews (Okara, 2007), underachievement will continue to serve as a formidable issue for this group. In their article, "Leaving Black Males Behind: Debunking the Myths of Meritocratic Education," Hughes and Bonner (2006) lamented the fact that current research has tended to focus on what schools have reported as the failure and underachievement among African American male populations but has not chosen to focus on how schools have contributed to this dilemma of underachievement. They stated, "Current research would have many of us believe that Black males are pathological and failing miserably in

our nation's schools, when in actuality our nation's schools seem to be the purveyors of pathology and are miserably failing Black males" (p. 77). For gifted African American male cohorts, stemming the tide of underachievement should involve a multifaceted approach—with the first step consisting of educators and education policymakers moving themselves beyond deficit thinking.

Perhaps one of the most frequent debilitating issues associated with underachievement among gifted African American male groups is the deficit model approach used by many who have influence over key educational decisions that subsequently impact this group. An a priori list of maladies, pathologies, and shortcomings is often constructed to define this group—a list that is at best composed of stereotypical constructions and at worst grossly false attributions. Ford and colleagues (2002) asserted that this approach exerts a profound influence, evidenced by the seven major symptoms of deficit thinking they identified:

(1) traditional IQ-based definitions, philosophies, and theories of giftedness;
(2) identification practices and policies that have a disproportionately negative impact on Black students (e.g., a reliance on teacher referral for initial screening);
(3) a lack of training aimed at helping educators in the area of gifted education;
(4) a lack of training aimed at helping teachers understand and interpret standardized test results;
(5) inadequate training of teachers and other school personnel in multicultural education;
(6) inadequate efforts to communicate with Black families and communities about gifted education; and
(7) Black students' decisions to avoid gifted education programs. (p. 54)

As previously stated, a multifaceted approach is required to address the problem of underachievement. The symptoms outlined here provide a coherent and structured framework to begin untangling this problem; however, just as Ford et. al (2002) stated, this list is by no means exhaustive. An authentic assessment of the policies, processes, procedures, and players in gifted education decision

making at the local level is required; or, as these researchers assert, the ultimate challenge is to develop operating paradigms that consider culture and context and use these entities to enhance possibilities for diverse student populations.

Defining Giftedness

A good point of departure for a discussion about giftedness among African American populations, particularly among male cohorts, should begin with a definition of the term. This assertion is made primarily due to the strong influence on education policy and process decisions that are based on this codification. Essentially, who gets included in the discussions and who is left on the periphery is inextricably linked to how this term is defined. One of the earliest definitions of giftedness, recognized as the first federal definition of the term, was offered by then Commissioner of Education Sydney Marland (1972):

> Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons, who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society. Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas singly or in combination: (1) General Intellectual Ability; (2) Specific Academic Aptitude; (3) Creative or Productive Thinking; (4) Leadership Ability; (5) Visual and Performing Arts; and (6) Psychomotor Ability [This was dropped from the definition. It was thought that students with great athletic talent were being discovered.]. (para. 1)

Subsequent to its inception, several versions of the Marland definition have been developed. Perhaps what has been one of the more vigorous contemporary discussions on defining giftedness was

prompted by the United States Department of Education (USDOE, 1993) definition:

> 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 capacity in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, and unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor. (p. 19)

When compared to Marland (1972), the USDOE (1993) definition offers what many have referred to as a renewed sense of hope and promise, particularly for African American children. The inclusion of the statement, "Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from *all* [emphasis added] cultural groups . . ." alone portends a quantum progression in who educators and education policymakers include in discussions about giftedness. Much like Sternberg's (1985) statement made more than two decades ago,

> What constitutes an exceptionally intelligent act may differ from one person to another. Thus, the vehicles by which one might wish to measure intelligence (test contents, modes of presentation, formats for test items, etc.) will probably need to differ across sociocultural groups . . ." (p. 224)

For African American males, a definition that honors the nuances and unique cultural perspectives they bring to the education context is critical. According to Ford, Howard, Harris, and Tyson (2000), the more educators attempt to understand the complexities associated with student cultural background, the more gifted students of color will achieve in the classroom.

Identity and Identity Development

The literature includes a number of studies that have focused on African American (Black) racial and cultural identity development (Hughes & Bonner, 2006; Majors & Billson, 1992). Yet, when a sieve is applied and the descriptor gifted is added as a library database search term, the number of scholarly articles and publications is drastically reduced. According to Rowley and Moore (2002):

> The role of race in the lives of gifted African American students is an understudied phenomenon. The discourse in the literature regarding the influence of racial identity on academic achievement has been relatively narrow, often ignoring such important conceptual issues as the fact that racial identity is dynamic across situations; that race is not important to all African Americans; that the individual's assessment of what is African American is most important; and that racial identity cannot be understood without examining the social context. (p. 63)

Understanding the implications of racial identity development among gifted African American males is critically important in efforts to enhance how these students interface with schools and gifted education programming. As we look at some of the historical models of racial identity development, perhaps the more noted models have been Asante's (1988) Afrocentic Cultural Identity model and W. E. Cross's (1971) Negro to Black Conversion model. Both of these cultural identity typologies provide insight on how to engage with gifted African American males.

Asante's (1988) model focuses "more on a collective consciousness of Black student empowerment . . . developed in the mid-'80s, [this model] is based on the premise and ideology of Afrocentricity, conceptualized in the early '70s" (Bakari, 1997, para. 8–10). The purpose of Afrocentricity is to "recapture and reconstruct the cultural, social, economical, political and spiritual well-being of African Americans" (para. 10). The theory advanced by W. E. Cross (1971) was introduced to provide some means of framing the racial identity development process found to occur among African American populations. W. E. Cross referred to the four stages or themes as they are sometimes

referred to in his model—pre-encounter, encounter, immersion, and internalization—"each describes 'self-concept' issues concerning race and parallel attitudes that the individual holds about Black and White as a reference group" (p. 169). Without delving into an extensive discussion of W. E. Cross's theory, suffice it to say that what each theme is found to represent is an individual's ever-increasing sense of self as a racial being and an ever-deepening sense of understanding regarding the establishment of a healthy racial identity.

For gifted African American males, identity development, particularly racial identity development, has a significant impact on achievement, motivation, and attitudes toward school (Grantham & Ford, 2003). The gifted African American male is negotiating multiple and competing identity formations. This student finds himself at the intersection of racial, cultural, and academic identity development. As far as racial identity is concerned, negotiating what it means to be African American in the school context presents a unique set of challenges, while at the same time this very same school context can potentially provide a cultural setting that is diametrically opposed to the home or community cultures from which this student emerges. To further problematize this negotiation are the added complexities of trying to negotiate an academic identity; namely, a gifted identity that oftentimes completely removes the African American male from family, friends, and community. Thus, to isolate and focus solely on one aspect of the identity development process that these gifted African American male students are going through offers a severely limited view of how to best create educational programming and policy that will lead to the success of these students.

A prime example of how the intersection and overlap of academic, cultural, and racial identity can impact the development of gifted African American male students is seen in how they address perceptions about their achievement. For this cohort, achievement can be impacted by perceptions of being smart as somehow inferring that they are "acting White" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 2003); as a result many of these males opt to become class clowns (Ford et al., 2002). Although the concept of acting White is sometimes overextended in its application, it is important to look at how recent research has affirmed the relevance of this concept, particularly as it relates to high-achieving African American students. Recent research

(Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005) revealed that the concept of acting White is found to exist primarily in school settings where an overrepresentation of Whites students and a drastic underrepresentation of African American students in gifted and talented classes is found to exist. Hence, for African American males, the stigma associated with being gifted, especially in contexts where there are few African American peers who are also designated as gifted could potentially lead to this masking (i.e., becoming the class clown) of their abilities (Ford et al., 2002).

Millennial Student Culture

Discussions related to students and student culture should take into account generational cohort influences. The current populations of students in our nation's schools are referred to by Howe and Strauss (2000) as Millennials. In their book *Millennials Rising*, these authors describe Millennials as individuals who were born between 1982 and 2000. These authors claim that perhaps what makes this generation one of the most distinctive generations we have seen in history is their sheer size; namely, they represent the largest generational cohort ever experienced in history. Also, another major distinction is that this group is the most ethnically and culturally diverse group history has witnessed (Coomes & DeBard, 2004; DeBard, 2004; Howe & Strauss, 2000). When referring to Millennials, many use the seven descriptive terms that Howe and Strauss applied to describe this population: Special, Sheltered, Confident, Team-Oriented, Conventional, Pressured, and Achiever. Each one of these seven descriptors connects in complex ways to create a unique generational cohort experience.

In a recent segment of the popular news documentary *60 Minutes*, Morley Safer took on this new generation, reporting, "They think your business as usual ethic is for the birds. . . . The workplace has become a psychological battlefield and the Millennials have the upper hand." What this segment and others like it provides is some sense of understanding regarding the differences that generational variations in general and contemporary Millennial culture in particular are bringing to the workplace and the world. For educators and school officials it will be increasingly important to recognize that this

population of students brings a strikingly unique set of circumstances to the teaching and learning context. Most noted has been the technological facility they possess and in turn demand from the institutions with which they interface. When they were 12–17 years old, 94% of this population had "use[d] the [I]nternet for school research and 78% believe[d] the internet help[ed] them with schoolwork" (Oblinger, 2003, p. 39). Conventional classroom structures and delivery systems, if not updated to capitalize on the technological interests and skills of this generation, stand the potential of being rendered obsolete.

Although Howe and Strauss's (2000) work has served as the primary guide on Millennial student culture, these authors along with other scholars (Broido, 2004; Coomes & DeBard, 2004; Dilworth & Carter, 2007) have commented on the limitations of their work on this topic—mainly specifying that their research has tended to narrowly focus on majority populations. According to Bonner and Hughes (2007) in their call for manuscripts for a coedited compendium on issues impacting African American Millennials:

> Recent higher education literature highlighting this generational cohort has lacked a specific emphasis on critical issues such as culture, ethnicity, and race—leaving a number of questions unanswered. Namely, does the term "Millennial" apply to African American college students? What role does pop culture (e.g., hip hop) play in the development of identity for this population? Are our current development theories applicable to this group?

If the experiences of African American Millennials are disaggregated from the experiences of majority Millennial cohorts, it becomes readily apparent that the universal template used to describe this generation becomes less reliable in its heuristic abilities. For example, Dilworth and Carter (2007) in contrasting the experiences of White (majority) and African American Millennials, which they described as Generation M and Black Generation M respectively, reveal in Table 1 distinct social features found to exist between these two groups. It is important to note that this model does not completely capture the inherent diversity of the African American Millennial population—many who may have background experiences (i.e., cultural and social capital, educational preparation, socioeconomic status), that directly

Table 1

*Differing Social Experiences of White
and African American Millenials*

Generation M (McGlynn, 2005)	Black Generation M (Dilworth & Carter, 2007)
Grew up in economically stable conditions	Did not grow up in economically stable conditions
Felt protected by the government	Did not feel protected by the government
Have been indulged by their parents	Have not been indulged by their parents
Have been sheltered from the harsh realities of life	Have not been sheltered from the harsh realities of life

parallel their White counterparts. However, this model does provide an alternative view of what has often become the popular definition of the descriptors that identify the Millennial generation.

Scholarly works that connect the threads between what many would view as disparate strands are needed. Culture, giftedness, identity, and generational status should be woven on this same loom of critical educational consciousness. Additionally, practitioners need to understand that who these students are and how they conceptualize their worlds have profound implications for how schools should go about delivering education. Schools have consistently struggled to remain relevant to gifted students who often view these enclaves as restrictive and incongruent with their interests and intellectual abilities. Although considering generational status might add another layer of complexity, clearly it is an important component in the efforts to better address the unique needs of gifted African American males.

Gifted African American Millennial Males in School Contexts

As articulated in the previous section, focusing on differences found to exist across various generational cohorts is not a new concept; however, applying these generational foci to populations of color has been somewhat of a contemporary development (Bonner & Hughes, 2007).

For African Americans in general and African American gifted males in particular, utilizing the existing literature but in new and profound ways to better understand the various nuances that this cohort brings to the school context could provide some potentially ground-breaking information. One way of addressing how Millennial student culture could be understood through the lenses of gifted African American males is to present each of the seven descriptive factors rendered in the prevailing framework introduced by Howe and Strauss (2000) and to offer relevant counterpoints (Bonner & Hughes, 2007; Dilworth & Carter, 2007; Hughes & Bonner, 2006; Jennings, Bonner, Lewis, Nave, 2007; Marbley, Hull, Polydore, Bonner & Burley, 2007) for each to more aptly illustrate the realities experienced by these students.

According to Howe and Strauss (2000), the following monikers have been applied as descriptors for Millennials: Special, Sheltered, Confident, Team-Oriented, Conventional, Pressured, and Achiever. For gifted African American Millennial males, each one of these descriptive terms requires a close reexamination based on their unique characteristics and experiences in P–12 education contexts. For example, to use the term Special as a descriptor to describe the gifted African American male's experience would potentially be at best incongruent and at worst incorrect. According to the extant literature (Howe & Strauss, 2000), Generation M (i.e., White Millenials), have been told all of their lives that they are Special; they have occupied center stage in the lives of parents, society, and agents both internal and external to the school context (Lowery, 2004). However, for their peers of color, especially Black Generation M, less has been their designation and subsequent treatment as being Special. Monroe (2005) found that, "Although attempting to assert self-affirming identities in adverse environments, behaviors among African American youths often fuel pejorative stereotypes that distinguish black males as troublesome and threatening" (p. 46).

A second example of the lack of congruence with Howe and Strauss' (2000) template between Generation M and Black Generation M cohorts is also observed in profound ways though the use of the moniker Sheltered. Although gifted Generation M might have enjoyed the accoutrements of life in sheltered and safe surroundings, for gifted Black Generation M, life has not been quite as serene. According to Lowery (2004), society has attempted to shelter

Generation M from every imagined danger or threat. Yet, for Black Generation M particularly for African American males,

> A black man is more than six times as likely as a white man to be slain. The trend is most stark among black men 14 to 24 years old: They were implicated in a quarter of the nation's homicides and accounted for 15 percent of the homicide victims in 2002, although they were just 1.2 percent of the population. . . (Fletcher, 2006, para. 32)

Hence, for many gifted African American males who belong to Black Generation M, visions of being Sheltered are more fanciful than factual.

To further problematize Howe and Strauss'(2000) descriptive factors, aggregating three of these terms yields yet another complex congeries of issues between Generation M and Black Generation M cohorts. Generation M descriptors have labeled this group as Confident, Pressured, and Achiever. The aggregation of these titles paint the picture of the student who is resolute in his or her own abilities and achievements due to a record of scholastic successes amassed during matriculation through elementary and secondary school. According to Elam, Stratton, and Gibson (2007), "Long pressured to excel, Millennial students will have high expectation for their own success" (p. 24). But, for the Black Generation M student, this combination of terms too often plays out in much different ways. More pointedly, what the gifted Black Generation M student experiences is being Pressured to fit into a prescribed mold of school culture that is based on Eurocentric cultural norms, especially if the student desires recognition as an Achiever. Subsequently, the gifted Black Generation M student may be left feeling less Confident and self-efficacious due to his or her perceived need to be "less Black" in order to be "more successful."

Finally, counterpoints to Howe and Strauss' (2000) factors can be observed through the application of the terms Team-Oriented and Conventional—another set of descriptors to codify the Generation M collective. Although Generation M has flourished under a Team-Oriented approach to their academic engagements as well as a Conventional "back-to-traditional" style of self-expression, their Black Generation M peers have often languished when these appellations

have been applied to them. For the gifted Black Generation M student, opportunities for Team-Oriented approaches with other gifted Black Generation M students represents more of the exception than the norm. Also, although the use of the Conventional moniker represents Generation M's return to a time of "age old tradition," for the gifted Black Generation M student, a return to tradition may represent a time of even more pointed oppression, racism, and marginalization in gifted and talented settings.

In summary, it is critical that those who seek to better comprehend the experiences of gifted African American males take a more informed look at the generational influences that impact this population. Employing a generational lens will allow administrators, teachers, parents, and policymakers to better attend to the unique circumstances that these learners bring to the school context. Conversely, it is also critical that the use of this generational lens take into account important cultural differences. To retrofit Howe and Strauss' (2000) model in toto without a serious investigation of the unique qualities that each gifted Black Generation M male brings to the school context will continue to yield many of the same results: nonidentification, underachievement, and underrepresentation.

A Case in Point: Gifted African American Males in One Midwestern School District

This groundbreaking study is part of a series of scholarly investigations focusing specifically on African American males in one Midwestern school district, referred to hereafter by the pseudonym Cascade Independent School District (CISD). This study was conducted during the 2005–2006 academic school year. The goal of this series of scholarly investigations is focused primarily on the status of African American males in CISD in an effort to improve the academic achievement of this population at all grade levels. Another major goal of this investigation is to improve the representation of African American males in the district's gifted education programs. This case, school district, and population of students serve as a cynosure for the complexities and problems associated with the underiden-

tification of the Millennial generation in general and gifted African American male Millennial generation in particular.

To inform this series of investigations, the second author on this study collaborated with the CISD Research Department on the dataset used to conduct a detailed analysis of the educational experiences of African American males within this district. Data reported in this study was taken from the official records of the CISD Research Department with all necessary research study approvals from CISD. As a result, this study focuses on a subset of the extensive database that examines African American males in gifted programs in CISD. To provide some additional background for the reader, during the 2005–2006 academic school year, CISD had a total student population of 33,213 students in this urban school district. Given that this study focuses on African American males, Table 2 lists the total number of males found in each ethnic group in CISD during the 2005–2006 academic school year.

African American Male Middle School Students in Gifted/Talented/Advanced Programs in CISD

During the 2005–2006 academic school year, CISD offered a variety of gifted, talented, and advanced education programs for student participants who were selected or referred by educators in the CISD. According to CISD rules, all gifted/talented/advanced programs started at the middle school levels (grades 6–8). CISD offered the following gifted/talented/advanced programs at the middle school level during the 2005–2006 academic school year: (a) AGATE (Advanced Gifted and Talented Education), (b) honors courses, and (c) IB (International Baccalaureate) programs. Table 2 details the number of students by ethnic group who participated in these gifted, talented, and advanced programs at the middle school level during the 2005–2006 academic year.

Table 2 depicts the underrepresentation of male students of color in the AGATE and honors courses; their White male counterparts are overrepresented based on their total representation in the district. For African American males, their underrepresentation in honors courses was the second largest for all ethnic groups (underrepresentation by

Table 2

CISD Gifted/Talented/Advanced Program Participation 2005–2006 Totals by Gender and Ethnicity

	American Indian			Asian			African American			Hispanic			White			Total
Total Males in CISD (% of total population N = 33,213)	n = 158 (< 1%)			n = 683 (2%)			n = 3,587 (10.8%)			n = 8,311 (25%)			n = 4,389 (13%)			n = 17,128 (52%)
	Gender		Male % of Total	Gender		Male % of Total	Gender		Male % of Total	Gender		Male % of Total	Gender		Male % of Total	Program Participation Total
	F	M		F	M		F	M		F	M		F	M		
Middle School G/T	1	1	**< 1%**	5	1	**< 1%**	13	8	**7%**	18	18	**16%**	25	25	22%	115
Middle School Honors	0	0	**0%**	4	2	2.3%	16	4	**4.5%**	9	12	**13.5%**	25	27	22%	89
Middle School IB	0	0	**0%**	0	0	**0%**	7	0	**0%**	3	0	**0%**	9	10	34%	29
High School AP	0	0	**0%**	31	6	**1.4%**	64	24	**5.6%**	47	14	**3.3%**	155	89	20.7%	430
High School Honors	11	15	**< 1%**	76	56	2.7%	267	137	**6.6%**	246	136	**6.6%**	667	459	23%	2,070
High School IB	6	0	**0%**	60	28	2.9%	124	56	**5.7%**	128	85	**8.7%**	297	194	19.8%	971

Note. Bolded percentages indicate underrepresentation of ethnic males in program (Total group male % of population – male % of participation; Source: CISD Research Department).

6.3%). This is a clear indication that African American males are not being referred to honors classes at the same rate as their White male counterparts at the middle school level in CISD.

According to Table 2, the only males who participated in the International Baccalaureate (IB) advanced program were White males. Unfortunately, African American males were not referred for this gifted/advanced program, which again depicts a major underrepresentation of African American males at the middle school level in CISD. Also, no other males in other ethnic groups were referred to the IB program.

African American Male High School Students in Gifted/Talented/Advanced Programs in CISD

During the 2005–2006 school year, CISD offered three gifted/ advanced programs at the high school level (grades 9–12): (a) Advanced Placement (AP) classes, (b) honors courses, and (c) International Baccalaureate (IB) programs. Table 2 includes figures of program participation at the high school level. A similar pattern exists of White males being overrepresented in high school AP, honors, and IB courses and male students of color, particularly African American males, being underrepresented in these courses. Although more students from all ethnic groups were enrolled in honors courses during the 2005–2006 academic school year, African American males and other male students of color remain underrepresented in these courses at the high school level. African American males' underrepresentation in honors courses at the high school level is -4.2 percentage points of their representation in the entire school district. African American males represented only 5.7% of the students who were selected to participate in the IB program at the high school level (underrepresentation by 5.1%).

Summary and Conclusion

For change to occur that stems the tide of underachievement and underidentification of African American males for gifted programming, a

radically different approach must be undertaken by administrators, teachers, parents, and policymakers. Too often the remedies offered have been developed to cure specific symptoms; however, what is needed is an elixir with the potency to address multiple and varying symptoms—many that defy simple responses. Based on the discussions outlined in this article, several recommendations are offered to practitioners and researchers to address the complexities associated with each one of the issues cited above.

1. *Seek definitions for giftedness that are more encompassing or representative of the nuances found to exist within African American male cohorts.* Current definitions of giftedness are at best slightly representative and at worst nonrepresentative of the cultural mores and traditions found to exist among African American male cohorts. According to Sternberg (2007), "Different cultures have different conceptions of what it means to be gifted. But in identifying children as gifted, we often use only our own conception, ignoring the cultural context in which the children grew up" (p. 160). Therefore, it is critical to recognize that definitions of giftedness should seek to be more inclusive. This approach to inclusion should start with an emphasis on ability areas beyond a sole focus on academic ability. Researchers (Bonner & Jennings, 2007; Bonner, Jennings, Marbley, & Brown, 2008; Matthews, 2004; Roach, Adelma, & Wyman, 1999) have recently highlighted leadership potential as one of the untapped areas of focus that offers a viable alternative when seeking to identify gifted African American males.

2. *Identify key constraints and gate-keeping functions that lead to the underidentification of African American males for gifted programming.* Issues ranging from teacher nominations to standardized testing have been viewed as contributing factors to the underidentification of African American males for gifted programming (Ford et al., 2002). These factors need to be identified and subsequently addressed as they materialize across the P–12 continuum; while some factors are more acute at early stages in schooling, others become more pervasive in later contexts. A concerted effort among administrators, parents, teachers, and gifted educators should be undertaken

to not only highlight but also seek viable solutions that are cohort- and context-specific. Additionally, a body of literature is beginning to emerge that focuses on gifted minority populations and poverty (T. L. Cross, 2003; T. L. Cross & Burney, 2005; Swanson, 2006)—the intersection of these two areas is necessary in understanding the educational experiences for many gifted African American males.

3. *Recognize the importance of identity development among gifted African American male students.* Gifted African American males are negotiating the development of their multiple identities. Not only are they tasked with facing their identity as gifted but they are also challenged by integrating their identities as both African American and male. Each identity strand presents a unique set of issues. As an African American student who is also male, school settings are often incongruent with home settings or cultures. As a gifted student, issues associated with establishing a scholar-oriented identity (Whiting, 2006) or an identity based on academic prowess could potentially initiate challenges. Thus, it is important to deal with all facets of the identity development process to promote their success. Schools could also partner with groups or organizations that are aware of valid measures to encourage the success of high-achieving African American males. According to Whiting, "Such organizations as fraternities, the Boys and Girls Clubs, 100 Black Men, National Urban League, YMCA, and others recognize that one person can make a difference in a child's life" (p. 226).

4. *Recognize the impact of the generational influence, particularly the Millennial student culture, on student behavior and performance.* Certain characteristics and traits that gifted African American male students bring to the educational setting are strongly associated with their connections to their generational cohort—the Millennial generation (Coomes & DeBard, 2004). Understanding how these students learn and process information, having a clearer perspective on the major influence that technology has made on their lives, developing a better sense of their work ethic and how they approach various tasks is critical. Scant literature is available (Bonner &

Hughes, 2007) that focuses specifically on African American Millennial students; however, more information is needed, particularly from a P–12 perspective.

This article has focused on several complex issues that continue to impede the progress of African American male populations, particularly as they seek entrance into P–12 education's inner sanctum— programs designed for the gifted and talented. What the authors attempted to uncover were a number of the issues that have been recapitulated over the years, such as widespread underidentification and extant definitions of giftedness; however, the focus was also on more contemporary barriers of success like identity development and student generational influence. To truly seek viable outcomes and solutions to these issues, it is readily apparent that remedies cannot serve a singular focus. Current approaches reveal the importance of intersectionality (Collins, 1998; Crenshaw, 1994; Davis, 1983; Pastrana, 2004) and the critical need to look at how these issues converge to produce intended outcomes for these students. At no one time are these students solely gifted, African American, and male, but they are collectively all of these identities at the same time. Thus, to bifurcate or artificially separate out their various identities is at best shortsighted and at worst woefully inappropriate. Despite its focus on a single school district, the case study provided at the end of the article serves as but one glaring example of this need to develop complex solutions to this complex problem of underidentification. Are the numbers of African American students in gifted and talented programs at Cascade reflective of a lack of understanding of African American male identity development? Could it be associated with their connections to their Millennial generational cohort? Is the problem attributable to how the school district defines giftedness (i.e., does the definition overlook cultural mores and traditions)? These are but a few of the questions that must be answered in tandem, not in isolation; then perhaps we can better understand why gifted African American males have been so misunderstood.

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