AN INVESTIGATION OF THE FACTORS RELATED TO MAINTAINING HIGH ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS IN GIFTED AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALES

by

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(Under the direction of Thomas P. Hébert)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors that are associated with maintaining high levels of academic and extracurricular achievement among gifted African American females. Members of this group, as a result of their double-minority status, may be at increased risk for impaired performance due to a phenomenon known as "stereotype threat." This phenomenon has been shown to interfere with an individual's ability to perform in a situation when a related negative stigma about a group to which that person belongs is made salient. For this study, five high achieving, gifted African American females were recruited after participating in a residential summer program for gifted high school juniors and seniors. Participants were interviewed about their prior academic and educational experiences. Findings indicate that family support, independence from peers, teacher expectations, opportunity to display abilities, and positive racial identity are all factors associated with maintaining high achievement despite the potentially negative effects of stereotype threat.

INDEX WORDS: Achievement, African American, Double-Minority, Female, Gifted, Honors Programs, Prejudice, Stereotype Threat

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Educators face a variety of challenges as they attempt to meet the needs of their students. Each child has different strengths and weaknesses, and different needs as a result of those varying abilities. For classroom teachers, then, a constant struggle exists in attempting to balance the needs of the entire class with the needs of the individual pupil. Unfortunately, because of this struggle, students at extreme levels of the ability spectrum may find themselves in an environment where their needs are not being met in the curriculum (Tomlinson, 1999). This is certainly an issue for gifted children and their parents, as prior research has indicated that a regular classroom environment often fails to address the needs of bright students (Starko & Schack, 1989; Tomlinson, 1999).

The difficulty for educators is compounded when the backgrounds of their bright students present additional challenges. Current assessment procedures often fail even in the basic task of identifying gifted minority students (Maker, 1996; Worrell, Szarko, & Gabelko, 2001), and those students who are identified remain at risk for a number of problems when compared to their non-minority counterparts. Gifted African American students, for example, are at risk for a series of psychological problems related to their giftedness. These students may feel pressure to conceal their intelligence or “act white” in order to gain acceptance from their peers (Fordham, 1991). They may also experience difficulty in matching their own intelligence and ability with a sense of racial identity in a system where so many students from backgrounds similar to their own seem to perform

poorly (Ford, 2002). The problem is further complicated for gifted minority females, a group that may fall victim to the entire spectrum of negative stigmas in education. Gifted females often cope with perfectionism, isolation, or low self-confidence (Reis, 2002), and can also struggle with the issue of concealing intelligence. Teachers may also exacerbate these problems in the classroom, perhaps even without conscious knowledge of their actions. Research has shown that teachers may provide more attention and constructive feedback for their male students, and tend to call on them in class more than their female students (Sadker & Sadker, 1995).

Given the variety of potential risks associated with being a bright African American and with being a bright female, it is not surprising that membership in this group is associated with a number of potential negative outcomes. Many gifted females have low academic and career aspirations despite their level of ability (Kerr, 1983), and both gifted African Americans (Grantham & Ford, 1998; Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005) and gifted females (McCormick & Wold, 1993) are at significant risk for underachievement in the classroom. Despite these negative outcomes, issues associated with being a gifted African American female have not been adequately addressed in the literature. Research has addressed the association between achievement and being a gifted Black student, and also the association between achievement and being a gifted female; only recently, however, have researchers turned their attention to achievement in gifted Black females (Ford, 1995b; Ford & Harris, 1997; Grantham & Ford, 1998; Kitano, 1998a; Fries-Britt, 2004; Fries-Britt & Kelly, 2005).

A variety of explanations for underperformance in African American female students have been proposed in these studies. Low teacher expectations, poor racial self-

identification, and lack of role models from similar backgrounds are all issues that have been addressed, and each does seem to play a role in hindering academic success for gifted Black females.

An additional explanation that warrants consideration, however, is the idea of "stereotype threat," (Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Strong evidence has been presented that membership in a negatively stereotyped group can lead to a decline in performance related to that stereotype, especially when membership in the group is made salient to the individual. Stereotype threat can have an effect on any group that is associated with a negative stigma, but the majority of the research appears to be focused on females or disadvantaged minorities. A number of studies, for example, have looked at the low intelligence or achievement test performance of African American and Hispanic students (McKay, Bowen-Hilton, & Martin, 2002; Brown & Lee, 2005) and the low performance of females in math (Quinn & Spencer, 2001).

Given the potential for stereotype threat to interfere with the performance of individuals from a number of different backgrounds across a variety of situations, it becomes of extreme importance for researchers and educators to determine the factors that are associated with the reduction or elimination of stereotype threat. With that in mind, this study aims to examine the lives of five young, high-achieving African American female participants at the highly competitive Georgia Governor's Honors Program (GHP), in an attempt to determine how they have they have overcome the obstacles associated with their double-minority status. Each of these young women has demonstrated, through their accomplishments, an extraordinary ability to achieve at a high level across a variety of contexts. As a result, each is an outstanding candidate to

help in examining the research question which guides this study: *What factors are associated with the reduction or elimination of stereotype threat in gifted African American females?*

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The focus of the present study is on factors that may reduce any potential influence of stereotype threat on gifted African American females. As such, a detailed review of the literature was conducted in three areas: stereotype threat, gifted African Americans, and gifted females. A thorough understanding of each will be crucial in understanding the obstacles and challenges faced by bright African American females, as well as how stereotype threat may influence this group specifically.

Stereotype Threat

Overview. Research has consistently indicated that African American students perform poorly on standardized tests when compared to their peers, and that females tend to perform at a lower level in mathematics testing than their male counterparts (Ryan & Ryan, 2005). For many, the prevailing belief is quite simple: if minorities and females are not performing as well on tests of their ability, then they must have less natural ability as a group in these areas. While this belief is likely unfounded, it still maintains the potential to exert a powerful effect on groups that are subject to that stigma, a phenomenon which has come to be identified as “stereotype threat” (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Steele (1997) has defined stereotype threat as "the event of a negative stereotype about a group to which one belongs becoming self-relevant, usually as a plausible interpretation for something one is doing, for an experience one is having, or for a situation one is in, that has relevance to one's self-definition" (p. 616). Essentially, the fear of confirming the

belief about a negative stereotype of a group to which an individual belongs becomes a strong psychological burden, and can subsequently lead to a decline in performance on a measure of that ability. This fear has led some to contend that stereotype threat shows its effects by triggering a disruptive mental load that makes performance difficult.

Influence on Performance. In a study where one group of individuals was targeted as being intellectually inferior, researchers found that when the subjects believed the test would measure their cognitive ability, measures of their heart rates indicated a high level of mental load as compared to the control group (Croizet et al., 2004). This finding would seem to be consistent with a number of others on stereotype threat which indicate that normal thought processes and cognitions experience some sort of interference when threatened. Wheeler and Petty (2001), for example, found evidence that both motivational and cognitive factors can be influenced by threat, based on the situational factors involved. In a similar study, anxiety was shown to be related to stereotype threat and its negative outcome on test performance (Osborne, 2001). Finally, it has been hypothesized that there is a strong link between the need to gain or maintain status and stereotype threat (Josephs, Newman, Brown, & Beer, 2003). Here, researchers believed that situations which are valuable enough to an individual to produce an internal feeling of being threatened are also situations where status might be enhanced or lost. To test this idea, they took the positive relationship between level of testosterone and desire for status and used it to test both high testosterone males and females on a difficult math test. Findings were consistent with Steele and Aronson's notion of stereotype threat; women who were negatively primed performed poorly on the exam, while men who were positively primed performed quite well.

While all of these studies look at the idea of stereotype threat from a slightly different angle, their basic message is still the same. Whenever an individual is burdened with the knowledge of a belief that is common in society, something happens to their thought process which causes performance to decline. It is also interesting to note that the feeling of threat may also lead to feelings of homogeneity about individuals in a similar position, in addition to the poor performance on a particular task. In an experiment with Chinese students in America, researchers found that priming an individual about membership in their group led them to feel more strongly about the similarity of the group's members (Lee & Ottati, 1995). Moreover, when dealing with negative stereotypical thoughts which were inconsistent with the individual's view of the group, that person also tended to view the group as being made up of very similar members. Conversely, when negative stereotypical threats which were consistent with the belief about the nature of the group were present, the subject endorsed a more heterogeneous model of the group's members. This study would seem to be an ideal illustration of the potential for individuals to attempt to protect themselves from harmful stereotypes that may be consistent with their own views, while reassuring themselves that they need not worry about those beliefs that do not match with their view on the characteristics of whatever group is being considered.

Females. The idea of stereotype threat as it relates to individual groups within society has received a great deal of attention, with the most research having been dedicated to the performance of females in math and African Americans on measures of academic achievement. For females, a number of different explanations for poor performance on math assessments have been proposed. One such explanation is that

women tend to exhibit more negative thought than their male counterparts when dealing with math (Cadinu, Maass, Rosabianca, & Kiesner, 2005). Here, women in a stereotype threat condition and women in a control condition were asked to provide a listing of their thought processes while attempting to complete a series of math problems. Women in the stereotype threat condition were more likely to exhibit negative thoughts, which actually seemed to become more pervasive as the test continued. This notion was supported in the finding that women in the experimental condition also performed more poorly than the control group on the second half of the test. Similar studies have also found that women showed increased arousal relative to males (O'Brien & Crandall, 2003), and that women who exhibited a strong sense of gender identity performed worse than males and females who did not show a similar level of gender identity (Schmader, 2002).

It also appears that there are a number of environmental factors related to stereotype threat and its influence on females and math. For example, it has been found that the salience of the negative stereotype is directly related to the performance of the subject, and that extremely salient stereotype situations may lead to self-handicapping behavior in females (Keller, 2002). Similar research on the environment has yielded a similar result: Oswald and Harvey (2001) found that a hostile environment (created by using a cartoon mocking the performance of females in math) was able to induce an effect of stereotype threat and hindered performance on a subsequent exam of mathematics ability.

With all of the attention that has been given to the notion of stereotype threat and its detriment to female math performance, there has been some complementary research regarding factors and methods that seem to reduce or eliminate the effects of threat.

Perhaps the simplest intervention merely involves teaching women about the influence of stereotype threat before testing. Such an experiment was conducted (Johns, Schmader, & Martens, 2005), in which participants in the control group were provided standard instruction on a math test, and subjects in an experimental group were informed that stereotype threat has been known to interfere with performance. The researchers found that informing the women about stereotype threat brought their scores up to an equal level with the men in the study. This would seem to indicate, then, that just knowing about stereotype threat can be a powerful tool in combating its effects. Similar positive results were also found when making women aware of females who have been successful in traditionally male fields, such as math and science, before administering a measure of math ability (McIntyre, Paulson, & Lord, 2003). In this study, subjects were exposed to stories about four women who had achieved success across a variety of disciplines, such as architecture and medicine, before taking a difficult mathematics test. The researchers contended that the awareness of the achievements of other women instilled confidence and helped to alleviate the effects of stereotype threat. Much like knowledge of the phenomenon of stereotype threat itself may improve performance, studies like this one indicate that knowledge of members of your own group who do not fit with the preconceived notion can be beneficial as well.

Finally, it should be noted that some females may develop mechanisms to help combat the effects of threat. One such mechanism was tested by Pronin, Steele, and Ross (2004), who found that women who were experienced and successful in math were more likely to reject feminine characteristics that are associated with poor math performance, such as flirtatiousness, gossiping, or wearing makeup. At the same time, the women

tended to ignore stereotypical feminine characteristics like nurturance and empathy that are unrelated to mathematics, a process the authors referred to as “identity bifurcation.” This would seem to indicate that, as a way of coping with the stress of stereotype threat, some women choose to reject that which contributes to the stereotype. It is important to note, however, that Pronin, Steele, and Ross do not necessarily endorse this sort of technique as a strategy. They contended that women should not have to adapt in such a manner, but that it is a phenomenon which has been observed among some females who have experienced success in math.

While the bulk of research regarding females and stereotype threat has focused on math, there has also been limited research in other areas related to women. One such study examined the potential effect of stereotype threat on women’s leadership aspirations. With leadership being an aspiration that may be traditionally reserved for men, it is not unreasonable to assume that priming women to their gender may have a negative effect on desire to take on leadership roles. This was, indeed, exactly what the experimenters found (Davies, Spencer, & Steele, 2005). When women were shown negative television commercials and then asked to perform a subsequent leadership task, women who had been negatively primed did not perform as well as those in the control condition. It is important to note, however, that a follow-up study indicated that women who were in an experimental condition designed to promote identity safety were less likely to feel those same effects of stereotype threat. This finding may indicate that identity safety is a factor which can help to alleviate the effects of stereotype threat across a variety of situations.

An additional study which merits consideration, given the nature of the present study, focuses on a population which may be especially susceptible to the effects of stereotype threat: women who are considered "double-minorities" due to their place as a female and in a minority group such as Latino or African American. These women are forced to contend with the negative beliefs associated with women, as well as those that are associated with their particular ethnic background. In attempting to determine if these women face twice the risk of other women, Gonzales, Blanton, and Williams (2002) found that their self-identification as a Latino led them to experience threat and both Latino men and women displayed a decline in performance when compared to their White counterparts. The Latino women also exhibited worse performance than White women on the test, though it is important to note that a stereotype threat effect was not shown at all for White females in the study, an indication that further research on this group needs to be conducted.

African Americans. Research on stereotype threat as it relates to African Americans has yielded similar results to those found for females: In the same manner that females are perceived to perform poorly in math, Black students face the stigma of low expectations on standardized testing and measures of achievement. A number of studies have shown this effect in one way or another. Brown and Lee (2005), for example, found that Black and Hispanic students who are highly conscious of their negative stigma are more likely to have lower grade point averages than other Black and Hispanic students who are low in their awareness of these stigmas. The researchers also found that Black and Hispanic students who were low in stigma consciousness had similar GPAs to students of White and Asian ethnic backgrounds. Again, it appears that being aware of

the negative bias against members of your group seems to threaten individuals in such a way that performance in that area is compromised.

A similar result was found when examining whether the belief that a test would be diagnostic of ability would affect performance of African American students when compared to Caucasian students (Steele & Aronson, 1995). The authors found that, regardless of whether the test was actually diagnostic, the mere presence of a salient stereotype was enough to impair the ability of the Black students to perform to their maximum potential on the test.

Finally, African Americans may be subject to other negative stereotypes beyond poor test performance. One study found that African Americans under stereotype threat are more likely to show increased blood pressure than Caucasian Americans or other African Americans who are not under stereotype threat (Blascovich, Spencer, Quinn, & Steele, 2001). Again, subjects in the threatened condition were more likely to conform to the behavior of a stereotype – in this case, the widely-held belief that African Americans are more likely to experience hypertension than other individuals, whereas performance was more normal if the negative belief was not made salient.

Other Groups. Whereas women and African Americans seem to be the primary focus of researchers in this area, it is theoretically possible that anyone could be influenced by stereotype threat, based on any negative belief held about a group to which that individual belongs. Men, for example, will show the effects of stereotype threat when primed to their gender and asked to perform a test which measures social sensitivity (Koenig & Eagly, 2005). Elderly individuals can be influenced by negative beliefs about the average elderly person's memory. The authors of a study on stereotype threat and

memory learned that age was positively correlated with feeling threatened, and also that feeling threatened was more likely to inhibit performance on a memory task (Chasteen, Bhattacharyya, Horhota, Tam, & Hasher, 2005). Members of lower SES groups may also be subject to some influence of stereotype threat, as members of these groups may fear confirming beliefs about having less intellectual ability than individuals from higher social classes (Croizet & Claire, 1998). Finally, there is evidence that athletes may also be subject to a similar effect. White athletes, for example, believing that they are less athletic than their Black counterparts and teammates, may be less psychologically engrossed in a test than others, when told that the test will measure their natural athletic ability. Moreover, they may also engage in self-handicapping behaviors, such as practicing less or skipping practice, when primed into a negative stereotype condition (Stone, 2002). Conversely, Black athletes are more likely to experience a detriment in athletic performance as compared to White athletes when they are told that a task will measure their "athletic intelligence" (Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling, & Darley, 1999).

Beyond the Classroom. There are some practical concerns that also must be addressed outside of the educational world when considering stereotype threat. Racism is one example of a behavior that can show an effect based on stereotype threat (Frantz, Cuddy, Burnett, Ray, & Hart, 2004). Another real-world example is behavior in the workplace. This is particularly true for "solo status" members of a particular place of business – that is, individuals who are a minority of one, whether the only female, the only African American, or the only Hispanic American among their group of co-workers. These individuals may ignore performance feedback that may be perceived as racist from supervisors, while choosing to use a very ineffective method of indirect feedback seeking

when trying to evaluate their own work (Roberson, Deitch, Brief, & Block, 2003). Solo status females, on the other hand, may also exhibit poor performance at work as a result of stereotype threat. In a study by Sekaquaptewa and Thompson (2003), results indicated that solo status women perform more poorly than non-solo women, and that performance was further impacted under the condition of stereotype threat.

Reducing Stereotype Threat. A great deal of research has also addressed the issue of factors which may be helpful in reducing or eliminating the effects of stereotype threat. A variety of possibilities have been proposed, including sense of humor and its ability to help women cope with stereotype threat (Ford, Ferguson, Brooks, & Hagadone, 2004), the guidance of a mentor (Good, Aronson, & Inzlicht, 2003), and even basic human contact and interaction aimed at educating members of other groups about false negative beliefs. (Dixon & Rosenbaum, 2004). Aronson, Fried, and Good (2002) found that educating African American college students about the flexibility of their intelligence allowed the students to become more active and involved in their classes, while earning better grades as a result. A case study of an African American high school teacher in a primarily white school has shown that a feeling of responsibility to educate others about minority differences and false negative beliefs can also help an individual cope with being in a situation where threat is a possibility (Milner & Hoy, 2003). These are all factors that seem to help when dealing with threat, but clearly there is more work to be done in this area.

Theoretical Concerns. Finally, it is necessary to discuss some of the problems that may be inherent in stereotype threat theory. One such problem is that stereotype threat may not be responsible for the large discrepancy between the scores of African

Americans and Caucasian Americans on standardized tests (Sackett, Hardison, & Cullen, 2004). These researchers argued that Steele and Aronson's (1995) methodology was flawed, and that controlling for prior SAT performance can explain a large amount of the discrepancy evidenced in the two sets of scores, rather than stereotype threat as Steele and Aronson contend. Other researchers have contended that stereotype threat does not generalize outside the lab on standardized tests (Stricker & Ward, 2004) or in a military setting (Cullen, Hardison, & Sackett, 2004). While there is certainly evidence on both sides of the issue, these objections will be important to keep in mind when considering the weight of the effect of stereotype threat in this study.

Gifted African American Students

Early Issues. There are a variety of issues associated with being both gifted and Black, and these issues have received a great deal of attention in educational literature. Even as early as the 1920s, researchers Horace Mann Bond, Lillian Steele Proctor, A. Janet Terwilliger, and others expressed concerns that gifted African American students face a number of challenges that may hinder them in reaching their full potential. In a review of the work by these early trailblazers in gifted education, Kearney and LeBlanc (1993) found that they had raised a number of questions which are still valid today. Bond (1927), for example, worried that IQ test scores would be used to classify African Americans as an inferior race and conducted experiments on environmental factors that may have interfered with the performance of Black children on those IQ tests. Proctor and Terwilliger (as cited in Kearney & LeBlanc, 1993) each conducted case study research on groups of bright African American children, and each found that issues such

as racism and segregation had consistently negative effects on the ability of these students to reach their full potential in their academic and professional careers.

Underrepresentation. Despite the focus of this early work in gifted education, bright African American students still face many of the same issues today. While there are many aspects to the problems involved, perhaps the most basic remains one of identification and assessment for gifted programs in the schools. Black students are underrepresented by as much as 50-70% in American classrooms (Grantham, 2004b), while they are grossly overrepresented in remedial and special education programs (Serwatka, Deering, & Grant, 1995). Besides the fact that underrepresentation means that a number of children are not having their needs as gifted students met, there are a number of other problems created by this imbalance in the classroom. Harris, Brown, Ford, and Richardson (2004) detail several of these potential problems. They contended that the disproportionate representation of Black students in special programs leads to a situation where more of the Black students will be placed in lower ability tracks and groups, which has an effect of de facto segregation in the class. Moreover, the authors argued that these students will have lower self-esteem and low aspirations, and that teachers will subsequently expect less from them. The result becomes an environment where expectations and performance are low for everyone involved.

Given that the issue of underrepresentation is a serious one, the question that logically follows is simple: Why is our current educational system failing to identify and serve gifted African American students at a widespread rate? The answer is not as simple as the question, unfortunately, as a number of potential explanations have been proposed. One prevailing theory is that a number of teachers and educational professionals believe

that there is some sort of basic deficit associated with being African American (Burstein & Cabello, 1989). Grantham and Ford (2003b) argued that this deficit model is applicable to a variety of areas related to gifted education for Black students, such as intelligence, testing, school policies, and teacher preparation. Each of these individual areas is related to the next, and the combined result is a system which makes it difficult for African Americans to gain entry into the gifted program. The authors argued that the reason for this is that schools tend to adhere to traditional definitions of intelligence that are more effectively measured by intelligence tests on which White students score higher. Many teachers are also unprepared to deal with the various needs of minority students (Banks 1999), and may have difficulty recognizing the different ways in which giftedness may manifest itself in diverse students (Frasier, 1987, 1997). As a result, school policies which rely on teacher nominations for gifted program referrals will result in fewer African American students being tested and fewer African American students entering into the program.

Beyond the deficit model, research has also indicated that identification and assessment procedures may be unfair to African American students (Ford & Harris, 1990). It appears that there are several reasons that current procedures appear to fail Black students. One such reason is a lack of flexibility in defining intelligence, and in adapting that definition to standards for entry into gifted and talented programs (Harris, Brown, Ford, & Richardson, 2004). As was previously mentioned, intelligence is often measured with standardized tests, tests on which African American students typically do not perform as well. Intelligence tests may be culture-biased (Johnson, 1988; Munford, Meyerowitz, & Munford, 1980), and may also lead educators to rely excessively on IQ

scores, failing to recognize that giftedness in minority students may manifest itself in different ways (Ford, 1995a). Refining gifted program eligibility criteria based on more modern theories, such as Sternberg's (1985, 1997) "Triarchic Theory of Human Intelligence" or Gardner's (1983, 2000) "Multiple Intelligences" could provide an opportunity for a more inclusive definition to be implemented.

Because African Americans are likely underrepresented in gifted programs, it becomes increasingly important for schools to improve their ability to recruit these bright students, and retain them once they have joined the program. Ford, Harris, and Tyson (2002) proposed several potential interventions for improving these conditions. They maintained that in addition to adopting contemporary theories of intelligence and giftedness, schools should strive to use assessment materials that are more culturally sensitive and fair to minority students. In addition, Ford, Harris, and Tyson recommended that gifted programs can be improved by creating better conditions for students who would be labeled as "gifted underachievers." These students may underachieve deliberately to avoid special attention or because the low expectations around them may lead them to lower their own expectations. In either case, these are students who would benefit from gifted services but who are also unlikely to be identified as such. Finally, the authors noted that building strong partnerships between schools and homes in the community would be vital for improving the conditions for Black students. Family involvement is crucial in ensuring that lessons learned at school can be reinforced at home, and also in establishing a sense of trust between parents, students, and educators. It has been proposed that African Americans are underrepresented in gifted programs because Black students (Grantham, 2004a) or their parents (Huff, Houskamp, & Watkins,

2005) may be against participation in gifted programs or concerned about their effectiveness, and establishing trust and communication may be able to help in solving this problem. Trust and communication may also be important for retaining Black students who do choose to participate in a gifted program, which Moore, Ford, and Milner (2005) noted would be just as important as recruiting for the long-term success of African American students in programs for the gifted and talented.

Obstacles and Challenges. For the African American students who are identified as gifted and who do choose to participate in special programs for the gifted and talented, a number of challenges are often present. At a basic level, gifted Black students are more likely than their White counterparts to come from a low SES background (Slocumb & Payne, 2000), which may exacerbate the problems they face which would be considered normal for any gifted student (Ford, 1994). There are also a number of challenges that appear to be unique to minority or African American students that may influence their academic success. Teachers, for example, may not be adequately equipped to recognize and serve the needs of minority learners (Banks, 1991, 1999), which can lead to the previously discussed issues of low self-esteem, low expectations, and low aspirations for minority learners in the classroom. Black students may also have different learning and cognitive styles that classroom teachers often fail to recognize or appreciate (Ford & Harris, 1993), potentially making it difficult to teach them in the most effective manner possible.

African Americans in gifted programs may also find that there are few other Black students in the program, which can create its own set of problems. Gifted Black children may choose to mask their abilities, conceal their intelligence, or feel that

achieving at a high level is similar to "acting white" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Fordham, 1991), potentially because they do not see high achieving peers from backgrounds similar to their own. Black students in gifted programs may also see themselves as the "token" minority student, which can lead them to believe that they may not actually belong in the program or that they are somehow less qualified than the other students present. Conversely, they may also place undue pressure on themselves to perform at a high level, because they feel that they must represent their entire group as one of the few Black students present (Milner, 2002).

Identity Development. Low representation and pressure on students may also contribute to difficulty for Black students in identity growth and development. Identity in African American children and adolescents is a topic that has received attention in psychology and educational literature for quite some time. One of the earliest investigations into this area was conducted by Clark and Clark (1947), who found that, given a choice, Black children preferred to play with White dolls rather than Black ones. For gifted children, the issue of identity development is often complicated by the fact that the students may be trying to fit into a number of different "worlds" successfully. Students may be forced, for example, to choose between adopting a stereotypic pro-White, pro-achievement philosophy or a pro-Black, anti-achievement philosophy (Rowley & Moore, 2002). Other students may be successful, Rowley and Moore suggested, in adopting a "bicultural view" where aspects of each perspective are valued. Conflicts in the literature do exist here; some would argue that the bicultural view indicates healthy development and an ability to balance opposite influences (Clark,

1991), while others would argue that attempting to maintain a balance in both can lead to confusion in identity development (Arroyo & Zigler, 1995).

Further exploring the conflict in identity development for African American students is the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). The MMRI posits that there are four distinct areas related to the development of identity in African Americans. The first, *salience*, relates to the degree to which an individual's race is part of the self-concept an any given time. Next, *centrality* is a measure of race as a part of one's definition of self. Sellers et al. note that centrality is a more stable factor than salience, and changes little from situation to situation. Third is *regard*, which is linked to one's view of his or her own race as being positive or negative. Finally, *ideology* refers to the way in which an individual believes members of that race should act in a given situation. The authors argued that the influence of race on behavior is fluid, changing based on racial perspectives in these four areas and on factors such as the individual, the setting, and the context. For students in a gifted classroom, an MMRI model would suggest that race may be an important factor or it may not be, depending on messages that student may have received at home, from the teacher, from peers, or from himself or herself. Consider the example of a student with several younger siblings, who may feel obligated to do well in a gifted class to serve as a strong Black role model for her brothers and sisters who will follow her in school. Her classmate in the gifted program, however, may be minimally influenced by race, but does well because it is the only time of the day when he is challenged by his intellectual peers, regardless of their race. Both students are performing well in the program, but, as the MMRI would suggest, race plays a very different role in motivation for each.

Finally, literature on the development of African Americans has indicated that there are a variety of stages involved in "becoming Black," a process which Cross outlines in Nigrescence theory (1971, 1994). Similar to other well-known theories of development such as Erikson's stages of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1982) and Marcia's stages of identity development (Marcia, 1980), Nigrescence theory posits that development for African Americans occurs in stages, beginning at the pre-encounter level where race is not a highly salient part of the individual's life. At some point in the individual's life, Cross expects he or she to experience some sort of event that will lead them to consider racial identity more important and incite a kind of internal racial metamorphosis. During this phase, the individual is likely to struggle with facets of their old identity and their new identity, and struggle with feelings of acting too Black or not Black enough. Subsequent stages entail arriving at a point of comfort with one's racial identity, and potentially even valuing experiences and interactions with people from other backgrounds as a way of furthering understanding of one's self. Cross notes that the process outlined by Nigrescence theory is a fluid one, and that it is certainly normal for individuals to move between stages or to become entrenched for extended periods of time in transitional phases. It is also expected, like Erikson's theory, that many individuals will never reach the highest stages of identity outlined by the theory.

Nigrescence theory has a number of important implications for gifted Black students. Many gifted children, for example, experience extreme sensitivity in psychomotor, imaginational, sensual, intellectual, or emotional areas, a phenomenon which Dabrowski and Piechowski (1977) have termed "overexcitabilities." For some African American students, then, intellectual and emotional overexcitabilities can lead to

extreme sensitivity towards situations which they may perceive as racial injustices (Grantham & Ford, 2003a). This phenomenon could be particularly relevant to a gifted African American child in one of the middle stages of Nigrescence, trying to determine exactly where he or she fits and exactly how important race is. These bright Black students may become isolated from their own group and from the majority group (Fries-Britt, 1998), and may also be at risk for behaviors related to underachievement while in search of their identity (Ford, 2002). Grantham and Ford (2003a) also proposed that there may be a curvilinear relationship between stages of Nigrescence theory and academic achievement. They argue that students in the early stages may be rejected by the African American community as a whole, leading their grades to suffer. Students actively involved in developing their identity, however, may be most likely to be succeeding at a high level while attempting to achieve a balance across multiple cultures. Finally, students who have already achieved a strong sense of racial identity may perceive academic success as less important to their overall growth as an individual.

Protective Factors. Whereas a number of studies have focused on the challenges faced by gifted African American students, there has also been a great deal of investigation into factors that are associated with successful outcomes for these students. Successful mentoring programs, for example, have been shown to fill a variety of needs for bright Black students. Grantham and Ford (2003a) found that a mentor can assist a student in identity development, which has already been mentioned as a crucial component in the life of African American students. Mentors have also been shown to increase and maintain high aspirations and expectations in gifted Black students, provide a source of trust and encouragement, and even act like a second mother or father

(Freeman, 1999). Mentors can also play an important role in recruiting bright students to programs for the gifted and talented, and can also help them to stay enrolled once they have decided to join the program (Grantham, 2004a).

In the classroom, there are a variety of interventions that seem to be effective for increasing the success of African American students. Banks (1999) provided a list of eight steps school administrators should implement in order to provide a culturally sensitive environment for their students, including changes to school policies and procedures, curriculum, teaching strategies, and encouragement of parental involvement. A great deal of support for these steps can be found in the literature on gifted education. Harmon (2002), for example, conducted an examination into the characteristics of teachers who had been successful in reaching their African American students. Her findings fit well with Banks' recommendations, as students consistently reported that teachers with high expectations, lessons that emphasized multiple perspectives, and those who accounted for individual differences in learning are the most successful in reaching Black students. An additional study into culturally responsive classrooms yielded similar findings, with the authors highlighting holistic teaching, a communal philosophy of education, strong student-teacher relationships, and a no-nonsense, "tough love" approach as common characteristics in culturally responsive classes (Ford, Howard, Harris, & Tyson, 2000). African American students in these classes can also benefit from being taught leadership skills (Patton & Townsend, 1997), lessons on multicultural literature (Ford, Tyson, Howard, & Harris 2000), or from teachers who nurture talent in school activities such as the visual arts (Hébert, 1998).

External support can also be important in promoting the success of gifted African American students. Support from family members and peers can be a powerful influence on academic success, and also offers a built-in network for the student to aid in coping with adversity (Bonner, 2001). Likewise, school counselors are a group that has the potential to offer assistance to gifted African American boys and girls, though many counselors have not received adequate training on serving the needs of diverse students (Evans, 1997). Instruction on simple techniques such as guided reading of literature and guided viewing of film (Freitag, Ottens, & Gross, 1999; Hébert & Sergent, 2005) can help counselors address the social and emotional needs of bright African Americans in a way that is both comfortable and effective.

Finally, investigations into the potential for improving conditions at an institution-wide level for African Americans have also been considered. Oliver and Etcheverry (1987) found that factors such as individual career objectives, availability of financial aid, availability of jobs, and peer influence were powerful predictors on a Black student's decision to attend college. Measures could be taken by colleges to address issues related to these findings in an attempt to improve recruitment of talented Black students. Other institutions have attempted to implement race-specific programs designed at improving conditions for minority students. One such example is the Meyerhoff Scholars Program, an all-Black scholarship program at the University of Maryland-Baltimore County. An investigation into this program found a series of advantages and disadvantages for the participants (Fries-Britt, 1997). Students benefited from increased resources, faculty mentors, a support network of high-achieving students from similar backgrounds, and higher expectations from faculty members. The students also found, however, that it was

difficult for them to deal with White students who may have felt that the program was unfair to them, and also that they were singled out and unable to blend in with students outside of the program. Students seemed to have a positive view of the program as a whole, but also felt that there was room for improvement.

At the K-12 level, investigations into examples and models of reforms for gifted programs have yielded promising results. One such example is found in the state of Kentucky, who reorganized their entire gifted education system in the 1990s based on contemporary theories and assessment tools (Ford & Harris, 1993). The result is a system that offers improved student services, more accurate identification of gifted students, and better communication between school and community. Continued hope for improvement can be seen in the Gifted Program Advocacy Model (Grantham, Frasier, Roberts, & Bridges, 2005), which outlines a four-step process to assist parents in advocating for the rights of their gifted children. This sort of knowledge becomes essential for parents of bright African American students who are trying to help their child overcome the obstacles that he or she may be facing.

Findings regarding gifted African American students have been fairly consistent across the literature. Primary concerns for these students have been identified, and include their increased risk for low achievement relative to ability, social and emotional problems related to their giftedness, and special needs related to identity development. Each of these factors will be important to consider in the discussion of the information provided by the five young women in this study.

Gifted Females

Overview. Gifted females have received more attention in the literature than gifted African Americans, though it does appear that the foci of these studies have been more limited. The majority of research on gifted females has focused on a few select topics, including barriers that gifted females face, classroom and counseling interventions, and case studies examining the traits of successful gifted women. Basic research on the benefits for females in gifted programs have yielded different results, with studies indicating that these girls have increased achievement motivation and higher career aspirations than other female students (Raffaele Mendez, 2000), as well as those that indicate that success in gifted programs may not reduce the effects of some psychological problems, such as fear of failure (Dai, 2000).

Obstacles and Challenges. Research on barriers for gifted females has focused on five primary categories of obstacles, including educational, social, psychological, parental, and cultural challenges (Randall, 1997). One of the primary sources of attention regarding educational challenges for gifted females is the widely held societal belief that female students are inferior in the areas of math and science. Indeed, a variety of studies have shown that females tend to believe that their natural abilities in math and science are weak, while they feel more comfortable with endeavors that utilize their verbal skills (Olszewski-Kubilius & Turner, 2002; Swiatek & Lupkowski-Shoplik, 2000). Standardized testing has also substantiated this belief, with female high school students consistently having lower average scores on the mathematics portion of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) than their male counterparts (Rebhorn & Miles, 1999).

Beyond math and science, a variety of concerns have been raised regarding gifted females in the classroom. One such concern is that general education coursework is uninteresting, unchallenging, and may lead to boredom or withdrawal (Callahan, Cunningham, & Plucker, 1994). Perhaps more important for gifted females is the finding that even gifted programs may fail in providing a challenge for gifted students or in meeting their different needs (Stanley & Baines, 2002). Teacher attitudes have been a source of concern as well, as teachers (intentionally or unintentionally) may behave in a manner that fosters lower expectations in girls (Sadker & Sadker, 1995).

Low teacher expectations would also seem to fit well with findings in the literature concerning the cultural barriers that gifted females face. These girls may receive mixed messages from the adults in their lives; they are praised for their superior ability and potential, yet they are also reminded that there are certain expectations for females in America (Reis, 2001). Indeed, gifted females are reminded of these limiting cultural expectations in a variety of contexts. In their gifted program classes, for example, they may realize that males and females are represented almost equally, yet females hold very few of the high status, high salary jobs in the corporate world (Nelson & Smith, 2001). Later in life, women must deal with balancing the demands of family with the demands of a career. In a longitudinal study of 81 high school valedictorians, Arnold (1993) found that a large number of the women profiled anticipated this conflict, and even expected that it would become a problem for them at some point in their lives.

Parents can also have a powerful influence on outcomes for their gifted daughters. This influence has the potential to be negative, as many parents of gifted females encourage their daughters to attend college, but do not encourage the pursuit of any

specific goals or career aspirations (Reis, 1995). Even at a very young age, parental messages can carry a lot of weight for gifted females. Johnson (1999), for example, found that bright girls in kindergarten who showed an interest in both physical and biological sciences received very little reinforcement for this interest in physical science at home. The author suggested that more exposure to these activities could lead more females to explore this interest and even choose a related career later in life. Parents, however, can also have a strong positive influence on bright girls. In addition to mothers serving as role models for their daughters, parents who offer support in the form of open discussion, cooperation, and collaboration can help their child to overcome many of these obstacles to success (Callahan, Cunningham, & Plucker, 1994).

Many of the negative influences that arise from the family context are similar to those that occur in a social context. In the same way that parents may fail to provide solid role models, maintain inappropriate expectations, or advocate stereotypical gender roles, peers can mold and shape a girl's worldview in a number of ways. One of the most well documented types of peer influence occurs when gifted females choose to conceal their intelligence or ability in an effort to gain social acceptance or "fit in" (Reis, 2002). Indeed, many bright girls, as a result of the stereotypical feelings on gender roles in society, feel that it is more important to be popular than it is to be smart. Kerr (1994) found that this issue is compounded in a phenomenon known as the "Horner Effect," (Horner, 1969) in which gifted girls are more likely than other girls to refrain from performing at their full potential. Kerr argued that this may occur because these girls are attempting to please others and be socially accepted instead of being competitive. Neither of these findings is particularly surprising, considering Bell's (1989) finding that gifted

females willingly sacrifice high levels of achievement in order to avoid isolation from peers.

While obstacles in the educational, cultural, parental, and social domains are certainly significant, internal challenges facing gifted females have also received a great deal of attention. Despite their intelligence, or perhaps because of it, bright girls are at risk for a number of psychological problems. Studies have shown, for example, that gifted females are more likely than their peers to show a marked decline in self-concept from elementary to middle school (Klein & Zehms, 1996), and that the problem may be especially pronounced in adolescence (Luscombe & Riley, 2001). Gifted females are also more likely than their non-gifted peers to have low self-esteem (Lea-Wood & Clunies-Ross, 1995), which is a likely contributor to the low level of performance which many exhibit. Also related is the finding of Ziegler, Finsterwald, and Grassinger (2005), who noted that bright girls in physics classes were more likely than their classmates to exhibit behaviors of "learned helplessness," in which a student attributes failures to a lack of ability while attributing successes to luck or chance.

Each of these findings would seem to contribute to the types of poor academic practices for which gifted girls are at risk. Specifically, many of these bright young women are at risk for becoming underachievers, performing at a level much lower than their abilities would suggest. Underachievement syndrome (Rimm, 1986) can be caused by a number of factors; for females, specifically, Rimm noted that society places a great deal of emphasis on appearance and popularity, and that girls may place their energy into popularity and social acceptance much more than they worry about their studies. Bright females may also tend to become perfectionistic as a result of high expectations they

place on themselves (Silverman, 1993) or fear of mistakes (Siegle & Schuler, 2000), either of which can lead to poor academic performance.

Interventions. Studies have shown that there are a variety of interventions available for parents, teachers, and counselors of struggling gifted girls. In the classroom, while females may still be behind in math and science, strategies do exist to help educators in closing that gap. Gavin and Reis (2003) found that teachers who have success with girls in math are those who created safe learning environments, provided female role models, offered curriculum which is more relevant to females, and who created possibilities for single-sex learning. Training gifted female students to make proper attributions has also been successful, improving the motivation, attitudes, and performance of gifted females in physics (Ziegler & Heller, 2000) and math and science (Heller & Ziegler, 1996). Finally, there is also evidence to indicate that bright girls in mathematics may benefit from a more competitive learning environment (Hernandez Garduno, 2001). Special enrichment programs based on these principles, such as the one discussed in this study, have yielded positive results for bright females who attend. Stake and Mares (2001) found that, in a program designed for talented students in science, girls actually gained more than boys by attending. Programs designed specifically for females also yielded positive results in attempting to combat the barriers that seem to deter women from pursuing interest and careers in science (Zanelli & Smith, 2000). Ultimately, it appears that interventions designed to improve the performance for intelligent females in math and science are working. The gap in these areas does appear to be shrinking, though a new gap in technology is emerging and will require attention in the future (Sadker, 1999).

Beyond the classroom, experts seem to agree that gifted females benefit from specialized counseling techniques directed to their specific career goals (Greene, 2003; Hollinger, 1991) or social and emotional needs (Ryan, 1999). Sands and Howard-Hamilton (1995) maintained that this "feminist therapy" could help bright adolescent girls cope with the issues they face, offered non-sexist viewpoints regarding career and family options, and was most effective when the therapist is a high achieving female who has already successfully dealt with the issues being discussed. Indeed, it appears that the presence of a powerful female role model who can act as a mentor and advisor to a bright young girl can help her to overcome pressures and risk factors related to being a bright female (Casey & Shore, 2000). Gifted girls can also be helpful to each other, as Frey (1998) detailed in a description of a program designed to encourage discussion among gifted girls in a safe environment away from teachers, parents, and classmates. Students in this program were able to talk about their own concerns in a place where they knew that their intelligence was be valued and where they could feel comfortable surrounded by peers of a similar ability level. Similar discussion groups based on biographies relevant to gifted females have also been successful in providing role models for bright females (Hébert, Long, & Speirs Neumeister, 2001). In one-on-one or group settings, counselors can facilitate discussions with students designed to help females identify with issues that they may share with a character in the story and ultimately experience some sort of personal growth a result (Hébert & Kent, 2000). Annotated bibliographies of appropriate literature or films are available for use by educators and counselors (e.g., Hébert & Hammond, in press; Reis & Dobyns, 1991).

Finally, an important source of information for educators has come from case studies of prominent gifted females who have overcome challenges and obstacles they have faced. These studies have been conducted in a variety of settings and with a variety of participants, and have been valuable in determining some of the resiliency factors that are associated with being a gifted female. Girls from diverse cultural backgrounds, for example, may benefit from the lessons of other high achieving women from a similar background. Many of these studies have been conducted, with groups such as Muslims (Al-Lawati & Hunsaker, 2002), Latinas (Kitano, 1998b), African Americans (Freeman & Walberg, 1999), and Asian Americans (Kitano, 1997). Results varied from group to group, though consistent themes such as sense of self, the presence of role models, and family support did seem to emerge as a whole.

Similar themes have appeared in other case studies of specific groups of gifted females. In an examination of five successful women with doctoral degrees, results indicated that support, flexibility, and balancing career and family needs were all vital factors for the success of the participants (Matkins & Miles, 2000). For bright females who chose to pursue a career in teaching, case study participants cited the ability to collaborate with students and parents, be a positive force in the lives of others, and express their creativity as reasons for their success as well as satisfaction with their performance (Whatley, 1998). Finally, perhaps the most compelling of these studies examined three generations of bright females in a single family (Bizzarri, 1998). Again, role models, especially within the family, served as a key protective factor for the women profiled. These women expressed a number of the same concerns as other gifted women concerning their potential, conflict between individual and family needs, and double

standards for women. It does appear, however, that their built-in support network was key in overcoming these obstacles.

A number of issues have appeared consistently in the literature on gifted females and are crucial to the analysis of the young women profiled in this study. These young women may have been subject to a number of the problems discussed, such as low self-esteem, concealing intelligence, underachievement, or low aspirations. In examining the data provided by the participants, it is important to consider issues like these and the factors related to how these young women chose to handle specific situations.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES

An in-depth interview design, in which a researcher explores both the life history of an individual as well as situational factors related to specific phenomena for that individual (Seidman, 1991, p. 9) was implemented for this study. The purpose of a research study employing this methodology is to gain insight into phenomena that may be occurring at a more widespread rate in the population through the specific experiences of one or more individuals. While an interview design which does not employ random selection of participants does not permit generalization to entire populations (Kvale, 1996), it is possible to generalize the results to provide support for existing theory (see theoretical generalization in Seale, 1999). This potential support is determined as researchers conduct an in-depth analysis of the particular experiences found in one case and subsequently make connections to similar experiences found across various contexts (Stake, 2000). For this study specifically, a close examination of the experiences of the five young women profiled can provide evidence that either supports or fails to support current educational theories regarding the reduction of stereotype threat in gifted minority students.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected in two distinct phases. An initial investigation into the program itself was conducted, allowing the researcher to gain a more complete understanding of several relevant factors, such as the history of the program, the

application and selection processes, and the goals set forth by the program's administration. Data was collected in these areas via a review of published material on this specific program and other honors programs and interviews with members of the program's staff.

The second phase of data collection entailed interviewing five alumni of recent sessions of the program. These interviews would serve as the primary source of data for this study, and were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix). This method ensured that each of the five participants would cover a similar series of topics, but that each interview would also be permitted to take its own course based on the content discussed. Use of the semi-structured format also helped to reduce effects of interviewer bias by detailing a predetermined list of issues to be addressed. Interviews were conducted in a single session, each of which lasted between sixty and ninety minutes. Interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Additional correspondence was conducted via electronic mail when clarification or further information was required from the participants.

Participant Selection

Participants in this study were selected based on the nomination of GHP staff members who had periodically worked with the young women throughout their time at the program. Patton (1990) indicates that this type of reputational case selection is appropriate when the goal of the researcher is to find extreme examples of a phenomenon that may be occurring. These staff members had worked with the students in a variety of capacities, and provided recommendations based on the following criteria: (1) minority status, (2) female, (3) previous identification as gifted during their K-12 experience and

participation in gifted education programs and classes, (4) demonstration of active involvement in program and related activities, (5) accessible for interview.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed and interpreted through the process of inductive analysis, a process in which categories of statements and themes "emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis" (Patton, p. 390). Per this method, transcripts of the interviews underwent an initial stage of analysis, and statements made by the participants were coded and placed into categories. Completion of this level of analysis allowed the researcher to examine the interviews across all participants in an effort to find patterns and recurring themes in the data. Next, the researcher prepared a diagram of the codes that had been identified within each subject's transcript, which allowed for effective comparisons of patterns across the group as a whole. The researcher then proposed potential explanations for patterns that had been found, and compared those explanations with the body of research that has been conducted in related areas. Finally, any significant statements made by the individual participants that did not fit into any of the patterns were analyzed to determine their significance beyond the themes discovered.

Researcher's Bias

The potential for bias is a concern for any researcher, and the current study is no exception. A number of factors may have influenced the outcome of this study, and thus merit a brief discussion. To begin, it should be noted that the researcher worked at the Governor's Honors Program as a resident advisor, and did have the opportunity to work with several of the young women in a limited capacity prior to the commencement of this study. While the researcher did not have an extensive personal relationship with any of the participants, it is likely that experience with the program and with the exceptional students who attend it led the program to be viewed in a very positive light. As such, the interview guide that was designed and the

interviews themselves tended to focus on the program's potential benefits much more than any potential detriments.

It should also be noted that, particularly in a qualitative study, prior knowledge of the researcher can potentially interfere with the data collection process. In this case, the combination of the researcher's background and theoretical orientations in developmental psychology and gifted education had an influence on questions that were asked and on interpretation of that data. Moreover, the researcher's own educational experiences may have affected his views of the educational experiences of the young women profiled. Aspects of the education of these young women were very different from each other, and also very different from that of the researcher. It is not unreasonable to conclude that the researcher may have had some degree of difficulty in interpreting relevant factors related to the stories of the young women, given that his educational experiences were likely very different.

Limitations of the Study

Like any other psychological investigation, there are a number of limitations which readers of this study should carefully consider. First, it should be noted that, given the small sample size and the nature of qualitative studies, any findings from this study should not be generalized to the population as a whole. Results should instead be used as a tool for expanding our understanding of current theories and providing in-depth, real life examples of phenomenon that have been detailed in research studies on African American females. The small scope of this study also provides information on African American females aged 17-19, but does not make conclusions about students who are younger, older, or members of different minority groups. Moreover, all participants in this study are residents of the state of Georgia and products of its educational system, and a similar study in a different part of the county may yield different conclusions. Finally, it is important to note that each of these participants were nominated by staff members of the program as candidates who would be articulate, well-spoken, and likely willing to contribute to this study. Random sampling from the entire Black female student population, or

even from Black females at GHP, would have potentially had an influence on the findings of this study.

Summary

The phenomenon of stereotype threat is one that has been replicated with a number of different groups across a variety of settings. The effect of this phenomenon is one that has very real and very practical implications for educators, who could benefit from practical instruction on how to reduce these effects for the students in their classroom. With the goal of delving deeper into the lives of specific students who have overcome the effects of stereotype threat, a qualitative methodology was chosen for this study. This design allowed the researcher to conduct a close examination of the experiences of five bright students, determine their perceptions about effective teachers and classrooms, and ultimately provide simple recommendations for educators to implement in their own professional careers.

CHAPTER IV

CONTEXT AND PARTICIPANTS

Description of the Context

Participants in this study were selected as a result of their participation in the Georgia Governor's Honors Program (GHP), a six week summer residential program for gifted and talented students held on the campus of Valdosta State University in Valdosta, Georgia. The program is open to rising juniors and seniors attending public or private high schools in the state of Georgia. Students are nominated by their classroom teachers based on demonstrated talent and ability in one of the program's academic areas. Approximately 700 students are chosen from across the state to participate each year, spanning a variety of academic areas including communicative arts, social studies, foreign language, math, science, visual arts, theater, music, agricultural science, technology, dance, design, and executive management. Students from a number of different backgrounds are represented; for this study, it is important to note that the student population is an approximate representation of the population of the state itself, ensuring that various groups at GHP are represented fairly.

Upon being nominated, each student undergoes a rigorous interview process in which a number of relevant factors are reviewed by a committee of experts in that student's particular academic area. Transcripts, standardized test scores, letters of recommendation, and other pertinent evidence of achievement are considered by the selection committee. Each student is expected to attend a personal interview, and students

in areas of fine arts or performance are required to display a product or attend an audition in that area. Finally, students are required to complete a written test on the day of their audition to provide a further gauge of their ability relative to other students that have been nominated in the same area. Due to the fact that school districts are limited in their allowed number of nominations based on their enrollment, the extremely rigorous nature of the application process, and because only a small percentage of the students who are nominated will be selected, it is not surprising that this program is considered to be one of the most prestigious of its kind.

Indeed, GHP has a long history of success in its 41 years of existence. The program has nearly doubled in size from its original 400 students in 1964, and has found a permanent home since 1980 at Valdosta State and consistent state funding as a result. The cost of the program is covered by the state's education budget, and students are not charged for participation. Funding has remained relatively stable over time, largely due to the numerous and widespread benefits of the program. Research has shown that programs like this one can provide a number of advantages for bright adolescents (Bean, 1991; Cross, 1991), and alumni of GHP are no different, consistently achieving at high levels in their discipline of choice. Much of the program's success can be attributed to the model of the program itself. Teachers and students enjoy a low teacher to student ratio (approximately 1:15), and both are given the opportunity to explore in ways that would not be possible in a traditional classroom, including unique field trips, classroom debates, and performances. Students are surrounded in the program by other intelligent, hard-working, motivated adolescents, and the result is an environment where expectations and productivity are high and respect flows freely both inside and outside the classroom.

Beyond their major areas, students also select an academic minor area of interest. Students have the option of choosing any of the subject areas that are offered as majors, and are thus given the opportunity to expand their knowledge in an area on which they may not traditionally focus. Students are also provided help and instruction in the program's four support areas: computers, counseling, library/media and physical fitness. Participants at GHP are also likely to find that their lives consist of much more than their daily coursework in major and minor classes. Each student resides on campus in a college dorm room with a roommate, hallmates, and a resident advisor. The resident advisors, typically students currently enrolled in college and alumni of the program, are also responsible for planning daily enrichment seminars when the students are not in class. These seminars could be as simple as a game of flag football or ultimate frisbee, or could be as intense and in-depth as a debate on public policy or world issues. In either case, students find that they have a number of options, whatever their particular interests may be. This variety ensures that the seminars, while completely voluntary, remain one of the most popular and well-attended aspects of the program.

Finally, one of the most vital aspects to the growth and development of participants in this program is the opportunity for social interactions with some of their most capable peers. Students selected for this program are typically the model student in their high school, and may not have the chance to interact regularly with other students on their level. At GHP, however, students are immersed in an environment where achievements, intelligence, and talent are valued, and the reaction to this environment is typically overwhelmingly positive. Students make friendships and connections in their classes, at seminars, on their hall, or at sponsored social events such as dances. It is not

uncommon for these friendships to be extremely meaningful and for them to continue well beyond the conclusion of the program.

Description of the Participants

Sydney – Vocal Music Major / Counseling Minor

While Sydney[1] may be gentle and soft-spoken in conversation, she transforms into something completely different on the stage. She is a gifted musician and performer who has mastered the piano and clarinet, as well as the ability to captivate an audience. Her true passion is this realm is vocal music, and was invited to participate in GHP as a voice major based on her exemplary skills as a singer. Sydney has been involved in some type of performance since a very young age, and has been attending a magnet high school for the arts in the suburbs of a major metropolitan area. She is actively involved in her school's drama club, and also enjoys performing and volunteering at a local community theater. She is an only child currently living at home with her mother, and hopes to attend a small college in the South where she plans to major in voice.

Brandi – Communicative Arts Major / Spanish Minor

When asked about her educational background, Brandi's response was simple: "I really like school. I would love to be a professor someday." Brandi's achievements certainly reflect her love for all aspects of school and her ability to fit into a number of different academic and social situations with ease. She has served as the president of her school's leadership and service club, is a member of the National Honor Society, Spanish Honor Society, yearbook staff, and is a co-captain on her high school's policy debate team. She currently resides with her parents in a predominantly White suburb south of a major metropolitan area. She will graduate in the spring with a nearly perfect grade point

[1] To ensure complete anonymity, names of the participants have been changed.

average, and hopes to study political science or foreign language when she begins college in the fall.

Haley – Communicative Arts Major / Technology Minor

Haley's small stature and soft voice belie her bold, assertive personality. As the daughter of a Kenyan father and a Vietnamese mother, she is the only biracial participant in this study. The oldest of five children, Haley knows what it is like to act as a role model, and embraces the opportunity to act in that capacity for other students from similar backgrounds. Haley described herself as a good student, involved in as many different activities as possible. While in high school, she was active in the poetry club, drama club, chorus, band, swim team, and also served as president of her school's student body and its chapter of National Honor Society. She is currently enrolled at a large state university in the Southeast where she majors in journalism with a concentration in print media.

Jasmine – Social Studies Major / Communicative Arts Minor

Jasmine, the older of two daughters of Jamaican immigrants, has known nothing but success in her academic career. She has participated in a highly competitive magnet program since the seventh grade, and prides herself on her ability to shine both inside and outside the classroom. She competes as a distance runner on the high school cross country and track teams, is a member of National Honor Society, and also enjoys participating in community outreach projects sponsored by the local chapter of a national service organization. After graduating in the spring, Jasmine plans to attend college in the Northeast and major in political science or international affairs.

Lakisha – Agricultural Science Major / Executive Management Minor

As a talented and confident young woman, Lakisha is not afraid of speaking her mind. "Don't worry…if I have an opinion, you're going to hear about it," she states at the beginning of her interview. Lakisha is the younger of two girls raised by her mother, and also formerly lived with her father, older brother, and two stepsisters until moving to a rural area in the southern part of the state at the beginning of high school. She considers herself to be an outstanding student, maintaining a perfect GPA through high school, and is also enrolled in numerous extracurricular activities. She serves at the editor-in-chief of her school newspaper, is a member of the Key Club service organization and Future Farmers of America (FFA), and also maintains a job at a local nursery. In her free time, Lakisha says that she especially enjoys learning about agriculture and horticulture. She is currently enrolled at a large state university where she hopes to continue pursuing a career in agriculture or agriculture education.

Name	GHP Major / Minor	Pertinent Demographic Information
Sydney	Vocal Music / Counseling	• Only child living in single parent household • Attending racially balanced high school for the arts
Brandi	Communicative Arts / Spanish	• Lives with parents and has an older brother • Attends a predominantly White high school in suburbs of a major metropolitan area
Haley	Communicative Arts / Technology	• Biracial • Grew up in a home with her parents and four younger siblings • Attended a predominantly Black high school in a major metropolitan area
Jasmine	Social Studies / Communicative Arts	• Lives with parents and younger sister • Attends a predominantly Black high school in a major metropolitan area
Lakisha	Agricultural Science / Executive Management	• Younger of two girls from a single parent household • Attended a racially balanced high school in a rural county

Figure 1. Summary of participant information.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

The goal of this study was to determine if there are any traits or factors common to the five participants in this study, each of whom has been successful in avoiding the effects of stereotype threat and maintaining a high level of achievement throughout their academic careers. Analysis of their interviews yielded five consistent themes that appeared to have an impact for these young women: family support, independence from peers, teacher expectations, opportunity to display abilities, and positive racial identity. Findings related to each are discussed below in further detail.

Family Support

One of the most consistent themes derived from analysis of the interviews in this study is the support that each of the young women received from family members. More specifically, messages from parents seemed to take on a nearly identical pattern across each of the participants in this study. They note that their parents made education an emphasis in life early, instilling it in their daughters as an important value at a very young age. Doing so seemed to eliminate the need to focus on it later, as it simply became expected that these girls would be focused, attentive, and thorough in their studies. These young women seemed to benefit immensely from this model, as all five have achieved at a very high and very consistent level throughout their academic careers.

Jasmine only needs to consider her parents when attempting to determine the value of a good education. Her mother, a librarian in a large metropolitan area, possesses

a bachelor's degree in library science. Her father has both bachelor's and post-graduate degrees in engineering. Jasmine's parents, married for over 20 years, immigrated to the United States from Jamaica before she was born, and use the lessons that they have learned as immigrants to illustrate the value of education and work ethic for their daughter: "Education is always the number one thing in our house. My parents, coming from Jamaica, always say that immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean need to go above and beyond. School always comes first, it's never even been a question." For Jasmine, then, it appears that the importance of classroom performance has been made clear. Her parents, using themselves as an example, have shown her that success at school can be a powerful tool in helping her to overcome some of the external challenges and obstacles that she may face as the daughter of American immigrants.

Sydney, the only child in a single parent household, describes her mother's influence on her education as a "laid-back pressure." Despite coming from a very different situation than that of Jasmine, it appears that each received a very similar message concerning education. Sydney was strongly influenced from these parental messages at an early age, and the main idea has stayed with her since: "If you don't do well, there will be consequences. If you do well, you'll get further in what you choose to do. You'll be able to go to the school you want to go to," said Sydney. "It was explained to me when I was younger, how much your work in school affects the rest of your life, and it really hasn't been an issue since." For both Sydney and Jasmine, academic success was not just encouraged; it was expected. The result has been a positive attitude toward school and exemplary performance in most of their endeavors.

Haley, like Jasmine, is the daughter of parents who immigrated to the United States before she was born. Her Vietnamese mother and Kenyan father took an active role in the schoolwork of Haley and her four younger siblings, setting an example that they could follow throughout their lives. Haley was asked about her role in the academic success of her younger sister and brothers: “I do feel like I had to set an example, but it was more instilled by my parents, that I had to do well. From the beginning, they would check over my homework, and they would make sure that I was doing my job,” she explained. “When I got to high school, they said ‘we’re going to let you go, we’re going to let you do your own thing now.’” Haley’s situation appeared to have a subtle difference when compared to the rest of the participants, yet that difference is certainly one that merits discussion. In having a conversation with Haley at the beginning of high school about “letting her go,” her parents were demonstrating a trust and a confidence in her based on prior accomplishments. While the other students acknowledged an implicit expectation to do well, Haley’s mother and father expressed pride in what she had done, and an expectation that it would continue.

For Brandi, support and encouragement from family have helped her to overcome the challenge of being a bright Black female in a predominantly White high school. When asked if she ever felt any kind of pressure to succeed or to act as a role model due to her minority status, her response echoed that of the other participants.

> “Education was definitely emphasized in my family, especially when I was young. As I’ve gotten older, I guess it’s just something they expect from me, to do well, For me, I guess it was probably family influence that sparked something internal, and now it’s something that I value for myself.”

For Brandi, an early emphasis on success appears to have instilled a desire to succeed for her own benefit, rather than to please parents, teachers, or some other external entity in her life. Her own emphasis on success, along with the continued perception of high expectations from her parents, has allowed her to reach a point where effort and performance come naturally.

Lakisha, like Haley, has a large family from which she can draw influence and inspiration in achieving her educational goals. During high school, she lived with her mother and older sister, who currently attends a state university in a major metropolitan city. She noted that she was also close with her father, older brother, and two stepsisters who lived outside the house. School is something that she has always considered important, and highlighted the competition between Lakisha and her sister, who is only one year ahead of her in school, as a perfect example. “She graduated seventh in her class, and it really pushed me to try to do better than that. Sure enough, I managed to graduate sixth.” This passage from Lakisha’s interview is a perfect illustration of the healthy competition from which both she and her sister would benefit in their efforts to reach a high level of academic success.

Lakisha was also able to benefit from her parents’ high expectations, though it appears that the expression of those expectations may have been more implicit than the messages that her peers in this study received. When asked about her parents’ influence on her education, she says that it was really something that was always present, even if it wasn’t made explicit. “We don’t really talk about it a lot. I know that they value education, but, ever since elementary school, I’ve always been a good student,” she said.

"My mom has always expected good things out of me, and I've always accomplished that goal. She's never really worried about it or had to address it."

For all five of these young women, it appears that the overarching theme in relation to their parents is one of high expectations. Those expectations may have been expressed in different ways; whether explicitly like Haley and Jasmine or implicitly like Lakisha, all five of these young women knew that their parents expected a certain level of effort and performance in the classroom, and each was apparently successful in meeting those expectations.

Independence from Peers

Whereas each of the five participants cited parental influence as a powerful factor in their academic achievements, only Jasmine believed that her friends had a strong influence on her academic accomplishments. For the other participants in this study, however, friends do not seem to provide quite the same level of motivation. Haley, for example, recalls her wide circle of friends in high school.

> "I was such a public figure, being in student government, band, sports, and other activities, that I definitely had a lot of friends. My closest friends, however, that was different…I think I chose my friends, not necessarily because of academics, but because of the values they had, and because of the way they made decisions."

For Haley, a popular young woman who could have had her choice of any number of different social groups, the most important quality in a friend seemed to be his or her values or morality. Academics were much less important, Haley believes, "because I probably would have done well no matter who my friends were."

For Sydney and Lakisha, two young women in racially balanced high schools, friends also did not play a significant role in their academic achievement. Sydney, while attending a special school for the fine arts, has made a diverse group of friends who share a similar passion for the different aspects of performing. At the same time, however, it is that passion which may preclude her friends from having a significant influence on her academic success. “Because I am so focused on what I want to do, I don’t really spend that much time with my friends for them to be a huge influence on me, at least academically.” She continued, “Friends are more of something that I have time for outside of school.” Lakisha also notes that her internal drive is much more important to her than her friends, or any other sort of external influence for that matter. “I never really had to look outward for any kind of influence. I’ve just always felt like there was something special about myself,” she said. “I can do the bare minimum and still pass with higher grades than other people in the class. But the bare minimum isn’t good enough. I know that when I apply myself, I have the potential to do something special.” For both of these young women, then, it appears that achievement is something that comes from within much more than it may come from friends or peers.

Finally, Brandi presents an interesting example of potential peer influence for a gifted minority female at a predominantly White high school. Brandi notes that she is typically one of very few Black students in her gifted classes, and that most of her friends at school are Black. She rarely sees them in class, which makes their influence minimal at best: “I don’t think I’m influenced too much by my group of friends academically, basically because we’re really not interacting that much in class.” She also says that her friends have a wide variety of aspirations (“From ivy leagues to cosmetology school”),

and that academic drive is not necessarily what she seeks from the people with whom she will be hanging out beyond the school environment.

Jasmine, unlike the other four participants, cited the influence of her friends as a strong influence on her academic achievement. She began participating in her county's magnet program for bright students in the seventh grade, and said that the close-knit structure of the program has allowed her to make many friends through participation in a number of the same classes and same activities. She believes that being a part of that high achieving group, both inside and outside the classroom, has given her extra incentive to do well. "We're very competitive. It's definitely pushed me, because we encourage each other. We want each other to do well. It's a good environment when we're competing, but it's definitely supportive too." Jasmine's thoughts here seem to fit well with the belief that a student's friends can have a powerful, in this case positive, influence on academic outcomes.

While each of the five participants seemed to benefit from strong family influences, it is interesting to note that only one of the five cited peers as having a similar influence. Further discussion and implications regarding potential explanations related to peer and family influence across each individual situation, as well as gifted Black females as a whole, will be presented in the next chapter.

Teacher Expectations

In the same way that participants in this study have benefited from the support of their parents, teachers have played an instrumental role in ensuring that these bright young women perform at a level commensurate with their abilities. Each of these young women pointed to specific attributes of their teachers, counselors, and advisors in their

regular high schools, GHP, and other extracurricular activities in which they have participated as an important factor in their academic success.

For Sydney, high expectations from teachers have been normal for as long as she can remember. She serves as a student leader at her fine arts high school in four of her classes, making her a liaison between students and teachers and also the first point of contact for substitute teachers or visitors to her school. “Trust is definitely something that I have with my teachers. At school, I am a student leader in four of my classes, and that really shows that my teachers trust me. That’s a really important thing for me.” Sydney believes that there is an important link between trust and expectations, and also believes that the unique setup of her school offers the opportunity for teachers to have both trust and expectations. When she was asked about the small class sizes there, she spoke about the safety that environment provides.

> “It makes me feel comfortable, like the teachers are more on my level, and not on a higher level than me. It’s not like I can’t go to them if I have a problem that I can’t discuss with anybody else. It gives me more confidence to talk to them one on one, and to get the help that I need so that I can excel in whatever I’m doing.”

For Sydney, then, it appears that the combination of availability and trust in her teachers has been an important factor in her various achievements.

For Jasmine, the fact that she feels like her teachers genuinely care has been an important motivator for her to do well in school. As a student in the magnet program in high school, she feels that her teachers employ superior methods and effort as well. “They care. It’s a really nurturing environment. Other teachers, you can tell that it’s just a job for them,” explained Jasmine. “The magnet teachers, the AP teachers, they put in the

extra time. They go above and beyond, they have different ways to engage you in class…it really motivates you to want to work hard for them." Rather than a traditional lecture and reading followed by test model, she talked about the "debates, discussions, projects, and reports" that made up the bulk of the curriculum in her advanced placement and gifted level classes. According to Jasmine, these curricular modifications were "fun and educational at the same time."

For many young men and women, the presence of a powerful adult figure as a mentor or role model can also play an important role in their growth and development. For Jasmine, this mentor was her advanced placement U.S. History teacher, the same teacher who nominated her for consideration for GHP and other academic extracurricular activities. "I've always been one of the best students in his class, and I know that he's a really good teacher. We have lots of the same interests, and I can talk to him about anything." She continued to explain their relationship, "He's really like a teacher and a friend. He's written all of my recommendations. He's the one I talk to if something goes wrong." The close personal bond she shared with this teacher certainly served a dual purpose in her life: Not only did he motivate her to excel in his class and others, but he also served as a safety net if anything should ever go wrong. As Jasmine talked about, his presence as "a teacher and a friend" certainly had a calming influence for her.

Haley has a slightly different viewpoint on teacher influence for her. She was also a student in the magnet program while in high school and highlights that the teachers definitely cared about the success of their students. "All the teachers in the magnet program really prepared me. The fact that they care, the classes are smaller, they really knew us. The fact that we [her cohort in the magnet program] are a group, the teachers

really knew and respected us." While this seems to echo Jasmine's sentiments regarding her teachers, Haley also discussed her desire to seek out extracurricular programs for the support of their teachers and counselors. She specifically mentioned journalism camps, model city government, and GHP as places where teachers can take their instructional styles, methods, and effectiveness to a higher level.

> "In school, you're being taught. You're being spoken to, you're being fed information. You learn what everyone else learns. The people who already know more are getting the same information as the people on the lower end. But at GHP, they encouraged us to interact with each other…if one person in the room knew something, they would be encouraged to share. It was much more of a place where everyone could rise to the same level."

Haley further clarified her idea about having everyone in the class on the same level by indicating that it was equally important for classroom instructors to be willing to demonstrate respect for their students by speaking to them as equals. "[The teachers] put themselves on our level. In a regular classroom environment, the teacher is up here, and they are talking down to you," Haley said. "At GHP, they sat at the table with us. They had conversations with us, we called them by their first names. It was much more of an interactive thing."

In addition to some of the factors discussed by the other participants, Brandi and Lakisha each discussed the importance of teachers exhibiting both knowledge and determination in their particular subjects. Lakisha, one of only two African American students in the agricultural science major at GHP, said that her teachers' extensive knowledge earned the respect of the students almost instantly.

> "The teachers were so knowledgeable, my [agricultural science] and [executive management] teachers. They knew so much and shared it so well. You would look around the room and you could just tell that everyone knew that these people knew their stuff...I think that's one of the best honors that can be bestowed, to be a GHP teacher, because they love what they do so much."

Brandi also felt that it would be important for teachers to earn the respect of their students, and she seemed to synthesize the ideas of Lakisha and Haley in describing how the teachers were able to do so. "The teachers in my department were really dedicated and really interested in their subject. It was definitely great to have a lot of class interaction. There was a lot of what we thought, but a lot of what the teachers thought as well," said Brandi. "I felt it was a much more open environment than school, but that also made it a lot more productive." Brandi really seemed to respond to the combination of a knowledgeable teacher, like Lakisha, but also to a teacher who was willing to treat the students as equals in conversation, like Haley. The result for her was a place where she respected the teacher, but also felt respected in return.

Opportunity to Display Abilities

For these five young women, their talents have often been a source of pride, motivation, responsibility, and even escape. For them to be successful at school and, more importantly, to experience appropriate character development, each required the opportunity to display their talents in an appropriate forum. Four of the five participants in this study made statements that indicate that the opportunity to display their abilities was important in feeling confident, achieving inside and outside of school, and developing their identities. Appropriate classroom environments and extracurricular

activities served as the perfect places for the young women to act on their talents and develop their skills.

In introducing herself and talking about her major and minor at GHP, Lakisha anticipated the question she had probably heard a hundred times before. “I know what you’re thinking, right? A Black girl in agricultural science? This has got to be a joke.” It was no joke, however, as Lakisha explained how she discovered her passion for agriculture and horticulture by chance. She had just transferred to a new school in a rural part of the state, and the only elective classes left were ROTC, agriculture, and horticulture. Lakisha enrolled in the latter two, where she discovered both a gift for and a love of these two disciplines. She placed in the top three of her first agricultural competition shortly thereafter and became completely engrossed, learning as much as she possibly could. She joined the local Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapter in her town, and was elected secretary of the group one year later. She jumped at the opportunity to participate in the agricultural science program at GHP, where she would spend six weeks learning with some of the other brightest students in the state.

Upon arriving at the program, she found that the other students were welcoming, despite the fact that she was one of only two African American students in the group. For Lakisha, the appeal of this group was much like that of her FFA group at home. “They were both like families to me,” she explained. “At GHP, especially, I think everybody was pretty open, even though they probably didn’t believe this Black girl was in [agricultural science]. Once they figured out I knew what I was talking about, though, I definitely fit in.” The opportunity to join a group where everyone had similar interests, and then to prove to them that she belonged by displaying her knowledge and talent,

certainly paid dividends for Lakisha and for her self-confidence. This confidence grew as the program continued, as evidenced by Lakisha's recollection of her first experience with an unfamiliar procedure on a cow. "After that, it was like, 'I can do anything!' I love stuff like that, and the hands-on stuff at GHP was amazing. That's stuff you'd never get to do in a classroom."

Haley, currently a journalism major in college, has been involved in expressing herself with the written word for quite some time. In addition to majoring in communicative arts at GHP, she has also participated in journalism camps and wrote for a teen newspaper in a major metropolitan area. For Haley, having the opportunity to display her abilities in the form of an idea or a tangible product has always been an attractive endeavor. Her time at GHP provided her with a number of these opportunities, which she recalls fondly: "In high school, your abilities were displayed by grades. Maybe you got to answer a question that the teacher asked. But at GHP, it was less about grades and more about ideas, especially if you had a different idea." She found that ideas seemed to flow freely when surrounded by other bright students, and the result was a genuine sense of accomplishment when these ideas came to fruition. Haley spoke about one such example, a video produced in her technology minor class. Students enrolled in this minor used a variety of new technologies, including advanced video editing equipment. She found that in that very diverse group, people had a number of different talents which came together as a whole when the video was complete.

> "It was such an eclectic group, in my minor. We had a lot of math majors, but a lot of everyone else too…One person was talented at editing, one was good at art, the math majors did their thing. It all blended together into this awesome film."

Haley really seems to have gained an appreciation, not only for her own talents, but also for recognizing the talents of others. She also emphasized the importance of being appreciated when the students did have a chance to perform or to display their work. In another example, Haley spoke of the "coffee house" productions arranged by the communicative arts department. Students in the department would put on a variety show, covering everything from poetry to skits to music. Haley invited her entire technology minor class to come, and seemed especially influenced by the presence of her technology teacher at the show. "I performed at both of the coffee house, and I invited the entire tech minor class to come. I remember that my teacher came, and it was really nice to have him come and tell me what a good job I did." Clearly, having both an opportunity to display her talents as well as an audience to receive them was an important factor for Haley in her success at the program.

As a student in a high school for the arts, Sydney certainly knows the value of performance and its ability to help her express herself. She described her school as a place where academics and performance mix to create a solid balance. "It's like the school on the movie Fame," said Sydney. "You see dancers running around in tights, actors all over the place, practicing their monologues in mirrors, people going through the hallways singing random songs. It's really nice to have the great academics and the great performances all in one." The chance to participate in special programs like her unique high school, GHP, and community theater have all come from Sydney's talent for music and her willingness to work hard to develop that talent. For Sydney, the opportunity to display her musical abilities has had a profound impact on her confidence, and she believes that it can have a similar effect for others.

> "I think that performing really gives you a lot of confidence and self-esteem, things that will really help you on the stage, but will help you in other areas of your life as well. Being able to showcase your talents and being able to share that with other people gives you an outlet. Sometimes when you don't know how to express certain feelings, you can express them through your music or through your acting or through your art or through your dance. It gives people an outlet to express things that they couldn't normally express."

Given Sydney's gift for music, the ability to affiliate with other students with similar interests and ability levels has also been crucial in her development. She maintained that programs like GHP have been important for her because they provide the opportunity for all of the students involved to take their craft to another level. While her high school offers this sort of environment to some degree, the basic nature of GHP, being surrounded by her brightest peers, allowed her to develop further. She described this after being asked about the experience of spending time with those students. "It gave me a drive to want to do more. I got very excited, actually, because I knew that we were all at the same level of ability and we could go further and we could do greater things as a group," said Sydney. "We could go to higher heights because we didn't need to sit around and worry about things like learning parts or other things like that."

Brandi, a communicative arts major at GHP, appeared to be particularly impressed with the accomplishments of the students around her. "I definitely met a lot of people I was impressed with," Brandi explained. "I met someone who was an art major who was absolutely phenomenal. Valedictorian of her class with this incredible list of accomplishments, but she was one of the most humble people I've ever met…I was really

impressed with her." For Brandi, the opportunity to engage in healthy competition with the students around her has been an important factor in her ability to push herself to achieve great things. She pointed to her advanced placement classes and extracurricular activities like Young Democrats and debate as ways for her to stay motivated.

> "I've always really liked doing competitive things, it's such a great way to stay involved and to push yourself in what you're doing. Things like debate, where you get up there, you defend your ideas and make your arguments, and then afterwards you really respect what your team has done."

It is interesting to compare Brandi and Haley in this regard, as each pointed to the different areas in which they express themselves as being highly motivating. At the same time, however, Haley seemed to enjoy the cooperative aspects of producing a video or performing at the coffee house. Brandi, on the other hand, really uses the ability of her peers to push her as motivation. While these two young women take nearly opposite approaches in this regard, each appears to have found an approach that is effective in helping them to perform at a high level.

Positive Racial Identity

The final theme common to each of the five participants in this study is that each seemed to possess a very strong positive racial identity. While there are different factors that may have contributed for each young woman, the end result is that each demonstrates an awareness of their own situation, a strong sense of self, a goal of continued self-improvement, and a desire to serve as an example for other individuals from backgrounds similar to their own. The combination of these four contributes to a strong racial identity, and can be seen in the five young women in this study

Jasmine, perhaps more than most young women her age, shows a genuine desire to embrace diversity and learn from the different experiences of her peers. While attending GHP, she became part of a very close-knit group of friends consisting of two African American females, an Indian male, and a White male. She feels that the diversity of this group helped to expand her knowledge base and helped her to gain insight into the influence of a person's background on their behavior. "Hanging out with them was so important for me. A big part of life at GHP was learning from other people, learning about the little things that differ from race to race and from person to person." When asked if others shared her viewpoint regarding their fellow students from different backgrounds, Jasmine agreed that her peers may not all be quite as enlightened. "In the lunchroom, at the beginning, we'd see a whole group of Black kids sitting together, and we'd get mad," said Jasmine. "I mean, you are where you're at, you're all smart, why not get to know more people? We just hung out with whoever we clicked with." Her perspective on accepting others, learning from their backgrounds, and integrating that into her own knowledge suggests that Jasmine is secure enough in her identity as an individual to feel comfortable with a variety of other people. It also interesting to note, however, that she may feel a need to act as an example to show others that African American females can be just as talented and just as intelligent as individuals in any other group. Jasmine spoke about what it means to her to be a bright African American female.

> "It's a big part of who I am. When my friends and I go out, and we're in a competitive atmosphere with lots of different races, we do feel like we have to prove ourselves. I feel that if you go into an academic bowl or a competitive atmosphere like that, and one team is Black and one team is White, you're going

> to expect the White team to win. Going into situations like that, I like to show people that we can do what you can do."

Indeed, Jasmine realizes that there are a number of negative stigmas associated with being African American, and she also feels that members of that community must be held responsible for solving a number of those issues. "In the Black community, there are a lot of internal problems. I speak properly, does that make me an 'oreo?' What about if I like certain music?" she asked. "It's important to me to fit in, to be grounded with Black culture, but also to fit in with White people, Hispanic people, people from around the world." It appears that Jasmine realizes the importance of setting an example for her peers from similar backgrounds as well as those from completely different backgrounds. Her strong sense of her own identity has given her the ability to do both while allowing her to further her own development as well.

Sydney, like Jasmine, exhibits a desire to learn from others and also to act as a role model for other African American females. Her opportunities as a performer have given her the chance to work with individuals from a variety of backgrounds, which has almost certainly had an impact on her own sense of racial identity.

> "Everyone is not the same, and those differences need to be recognized. I think that we should all recognize that different people come from different places, and we should all join in and discuss each other and what makes us unique…As Americans we nit-pick at differences rather than celebrating them."

Here, Sydney made two very important points. She was willing to acknowledge that everyone is different, but she also contended that no one difference is really that important. The fact that she was able to make both of these points would indicate that she

has given thought to her place in society, as well as the role of race, ethnicity, or gender in society as a whole. Indeed, Sydney maintained that she can make a difference for other young women who may struggle with some of the issues that she has faced as a Black female. “I’d like to be a role model…I have role models in my life, and it’s really helped me decide exactly what I need to become and what I need to do to get to that spot,” explained Sydney. “I think that younger people need role models so they can become model citizens and good examples as well.”

Brandi seems to have reached a point where she is comfortable in combining her intelligence with her identity as an African American female. “Being smart doesn’t really bother me anymore. If anything, it makes me feel good to know that I’m doing well…sometimes there is pressure [being Black] to talk differently or do things differently, but I don’t let it get to me.” Here, Brandi exuded an admirable level of confidence in her own values and own beliefs. She was unwilling to compromise what she knows is right due to peer pressure, and feels, like Sydney, that she could act as an example for others in a similar situation. “I think that it’s important to set a good example for others, especially those that are coming from a tough situation or a tough background. Leading by example is important, even if I’m not trying to influence anyone on purpose.”

For Lakisha, racial identity has admittedly been a struggle. She attended an all-Black middle school before she moved to a new city at the beginning of her high school career, and the transition was not an easy one.

> “I never really felt scared to be smart [in middle school], because everyone else was like me. When I got to the new school, it was culture shock. I had never been around so many people of a different background. I don’t feel like I was

> comfortable, I don't feel like the people in my classes accepted me for who I was back then."

Lakisha was typically one of few Black students in the gifted classes, and often found herself unable to fit in with either group, her classmates in the gifted program or with the other Black students at the school. "The only people [Black students] who fit in were the ones who acted just like them [White students]," she explained. "Because I'm well spoken, I'm educated, and I don't like to act stupid, I end up in between. I was too proper for the Black kids and too ghetto for the White kids." Fortunately for Lakisha, participation in extracurricular activities such as FFA and GHP have allowed her to fit in with a more accepting group of friends. At GHP, especially, she was pleased to find an entire social network of people like herself. "One of the most amazing things about GHP is finding that there are other smart Black people there. And they weren't just there to be smart Black people, they were there to be smart people," said Lakisha. "To find people like that, people who weren't scared to be smart and weren't talking all ditzy or ghetto just to fit in, it was amazing." Meeting other bright African Americans and fitting into a network of her peers really seemed to have a positive impact on Lakisha's development of racial identity. Today, as a freshman in college, she describes her development and how she would like to be viewed.

> "As I saw the Black people that were acting White or trying to fit into the crowd, I felt like it was important to be me, to know who I am, and to keep some of the things that make Black people different. At the same time, I don't want anybody to judge me by my color. I'm just Lakisha…Once we [African Americans] come to the consensus that it's OK to be smart, it's OK to be this, it's OK to be that,

there will be less of a gap between Black people and White people. We can all just be people."

Finally, coming from the perspective of a biracial female, Haley provided an important example of racial identity development. There was certainly potential for Haley to struggle with her identity, being unlike almost any of her peers that she would meet. She said, however, that identity is not something she has ever really had a problem with, attributing her success there to the lessons from her parents and family. Haley spoke about a particular quotation that really resonated with her as a biracial female.

> "In my media ethics class, my teacher read us a quote. He said 'We are the sum total of our life experiences.' I know that this is true for me because I draw from my parents, from my family, from my school, from my friends. Everything that has happened to me makes me what I am."

It appears that Haley has adopted a very integrative approach to her own identity, taking pieces from all of the different areas of her life and ultimately molding them into her own definition of self. She said that she is often asked if she identifies more with being Kenyan or Vietnamese, and her answer indicates that she has a solid grasp of where both fit into her life. "I associate myself with whatever fits. I'm very proud of my heritage, I'm proud of my parents and their background. I try to embrace my background to the fullest," she said. "I went to Kenya, I want to go to Vietnam. I eat the food, I'm trying to learn the languages. Whatever I can do to learn more, it's important. At the same time, my parents remind us that we're all Americans too, and I'm proud of that as well." Ultimately, it appears that Haley, like the other young women in the study, has a solid understanding of her background and its influence on her development. Each of the

young women has used a solid sense of identity to their advantage, feeling confident in new and unfamiliar situations, and providing an example for others so that they may do the same.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that are associated with maintaining a high level of achievement among gifted African American females. Due to their double-minority status, members of this group are at high risk to feel the effects of the phenomenon known as "stereotype threat," in which members of a stigmatized group exhibit reduced performance on a measure of ability in the area that is associated with that negative stigma. African Americans, for example, may perform poorly on standardized tests such as the SAT, due to a widely held belief that Black students do not perform as well as their peers on this type of test. It is important to note that research on stereotype threat is most often applied to a specific situation; examples in the literature include students taking a test (Steele & Aronson, 1995), an athlete engaging in a competition (Stone, 2002), and elderly adults' performance on a memory task (Chasteen et al., 2005). For this study, however, the five participants were not asked about specific testing instances, or even the specific phenomenon of stereotype threat. Instead, the researcher contends that the themes identified in the previous chapter, themes that have contributed to an overall pattern of academic success, have served as protective factors for these five young women in situations where stereotype threat would be a concern. In the ensuing discussion of implications for teachers, counselors, and parents, it will be important to note that the recommendations provided can serve to contribute to a

student's overall pattern of success, but may also be helpful in creating a safer environment in specific situations where stereotype threat may be a concern.

Discussion of the Findings

A supportive home environment has consistently been shown to be a solid protective factor for a number of potential academic or psychological problems (Buysse, 1997; Luster & McAdoo, 1994; Reis, Colbert, & Hébert, 2005). The five students profiled in this study, though coming from different cities and a variety of different socioeconomic backgrounds and family structures, each grew up in a supportive home environment where education was valued and expectations were high. For these young women, academic success came naturally because their parents placed an early emphasis on effort and discipline. The end result as the students progressed through school was a culture within the household where high grades and a positive attitude toward school did not need to be emphasized, they were simply expected. As Jasmine said in describing her parents' influences on her views about her education, "School always comes first, it's never even been a question for me."

Indeed, it appears that the young women in this study and their parents seemed to follow a very similar pattern: Education was emphasized early in life, whether that meant explaining the value of a good education or checking over a child's homework each night. Once it appeared that the child was capable of handling her own academics, parents withdrew from the situation, having already created the culture in the household where high expectations were salient. The only exception to this pattern was Haley, whose parents did choose to place a very early emphasis on school just like the others. Haley's parents, however, decided to have a discussion with their daughter at the

beginning of high school. In this discussion, they told Haley that they were proud of her, that she had always done a good job, and that they were going to take a more passive role in her education from that point forward. The result for Haley was the same as the other four girls; she still knew that education was important and that her parents valued it. They simply chose to handle giving her more responsibility in a more active fashion than the other parents, who chose to let their daughters handle things on their own once it became clear that they were capable of doing so.

One of the more interesting findings in this study was that peers really did not seem to play a strong role in the academic motivation of the five participants. Previous findings in this area have been mixed; Fordham and Ogbu (1986) contend that African American females may achieve at low level as a result of peer pressure and a fear of "acting White." Others have argued that academically successful Black students can successfully manage or conceal achievements in order to fit into a peer group (Horvat & Lewis, 2003). Mounts and Steinberg (1995) found that a student's grade point average is likely to be influenced by the averages of friends. It appears, then, that there is some amount of disagreement as to the positive or negative influence, if any, that peers have on each other's academic achievement.

In this particular study, only Jasmine cited her friends as having a strong influence on her desire to perform well at school, while the others felt that friends and peers do not really play a large role in their success. A number of potential explanations exist for this particular finding. It is possible, for example, that gifted, double-minority students develop a strong, independent sense of self to combat the challenges and obstacles that may hinder their success. The autonomy that this sort of thinking would provide may

allow these students to adopt an attitude where their success is based almost completely on their own abilities, their own effort, and their own resilience. It is also possible that, as a result of their double-minority status, these young women deflect peer influence as a way to combat the previously discussed phenomena of concealing intelligence or "acting White." In any case, further research in the form of a study directed towards the influence (or lack of influence) of the peers of gifted African American females would be warranted.

Ford (1996) noted that a crucial issue for African American students who do not live up to their potential is a classroom environment where expectations are low. High expectations, however, can be important for improving confidence, self-esteem, and performance. Indeed, the young women in this study echoed that finding as they discussed their lives in the classroom and their participation in extracurricular activities. An outstanding example of the powerful influence that teacher expectations can have is Sydney, who served as a student leader in four different classes. This opportunity showed Sydney that her teachers trust her, that they expect her to perform well in a variety of situations, and that she is someone to whom the other students may look for an example. Findings in this study would also suggest that high expectations are not sufficient without a sense of trust and caring between teacher and student. Trust is certainly present for Sydney in her position as a student leader, as she is the first point of contact for substitute teachers and school visitors. Jasmine pointed to her teachers putting in extra time, really trying to engage the students, and their willingness to design creative lessons as evidence that her most successful teachers are the ones who really care. For Lakisha and Haley, a teacher's willingness to engage in discussions with students and to speak "on their level"

demonstrates caring, trust, and a desire to form a bond with each student in the room. It would appear, then, that the common formula for success among the teachers of these bright African American females is a combination of caring and trust with high expectations. Environments where these three were present seemed to create the best possible opportunity for learning, discussion, and success among these students and their classmates.

The participants in this study also point to the opportunities that they have had to display their abilities as being important for developing their self-confidence and for finding ways to enhance their experiences and knowledge in areas they enjoy. This finding is consistent with other work in this area; Participation in performance-based extracurricular activities, for example, such as sports, music, or dance have been shown to have a significant positive influence on academic achievement (Broh, 2002; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1977). For participants in this study, opportunities to display their abilities came both inside and outside of the classroom, and each type of opportunity was important for these young women in its own way. For the students who were deeply involved in areas such as debate, social studies, or communicative arts, classroom discussion provided an appropriate forum to share their own ideas and learn from the ideas of others. This benefit is further enhanced in advanced placement courses, where students are able to exchange ideas with their brightest peers, while presumably receiving instruction from a school's better teachers.

As Haley noted, however, sometimes it is more important for students to get involved outside the classroom. She talks about the example of a lack of a grading system at GHP and its ability to allow the students to feel free to express themselves without

having to worry about the stress brought on by grades. “At GHP, it was less about grades and more about ideas, especially if you had a different idea.” Indeed, some of the other participants also mentioned that, perhaps somewhat paradoxically, the lack of grades at this summer program actually allowed the students to become more productive. The students seemed to feel that the reduced stress in combination with the bright students allowed for the most possible creativity and the fewest possible obstacles to that creativity.

Finally, a number of these young women participated in extracurricular activities that allowed them to compete. Jasmine, for example, highlighted her first agricultural competition as being a powerful motivator for her in choosing to continue with agricultural science. The benefits of competition for bright females, whether it is a sport, debate, math competitions, or some other form of competition can be numerous. Students who are given the opportunity to compete have the chance to develop an area of special talent or interest, gain self-confidence as they prepare for and participate in competitions, and meet peers who share similar goals in that area. For these young women, the opportunity to compete certainly allowed them to experience these benefits in an environment that was fun, interesting, and educational for them.

The final theme identified in this study is that each of the participants seemed to have a very strong positive racial identity. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) have contended that academically successful Black students often distance themselves from their own race, perhaps as a way to encourage continued achievement in a society which does not have high expectations for them. Fordham and Ogbu referred to this phenomenon as “racelessness,” and subsequent studies have supported the idea that Black students who

are high achievers are more likely to adopt a “raceless” perspective (Arroyo & Zigler, 1995; Fordham, 1998). Results of studies such as these would indicate that African American students must choose between being high achievers or being Black, and that these two options may be incompatible or mutually exclusive. Moreover, while adopting a raceless perspective is often associated with high achievement, Arroyo & Zigler (1995) found a positive correlation between racelessness and anxiety and depression.

In this study, the five young women each appeared to have a solid understanding of their backgrounds, and all appear to have made a genuine attempt to integrate their experiences with their background and their personality to compose a more complete picture of their own sense of identity. Haley’s example about being “the sum total of her life experiences” fits perfectly with this idea. It is almost as though she is putting together a puzzle, of which all of her background, her personality, and all of her different experiences are a part.

Each of the five participants was asked about their racial identity, and it is important to recognize that, like Haley, the other participants detailed an identity with multiple layers. Jasmine, for example, acknowledges that being Black is an important part of her identity. At the same time, however, she wants to be known as a smart person, rather than as a smart female, a smart Black person, or a smart Black female. She wants to be recognized for her achievements, but not given special treatment because she achieved them while being a minority. Like the other young women in this study, Jasmine has achieved a very healthy balance in her self-concept. This balance is also of extreme importance for the participants in this study, as it may help them to avoid negative consequences detailed by Arroyo and Zigler (1995), such as anxiety or

depression. A number of factors were likely contributors to the ability to achieve this balance, including external influences such as parents, family members, teachers, and friends and more internal influences like personality, motivation, work ethic, and accomplishments.

Implications for Educators

Teachers currently working in the classroom can learn a number of lessons from the information provided by these five young women. A variety of simple modifications can be made in the classroom, modifications which have the potential to benefit gifted Black females in a very real way. To begin, teachers should note that one of the most powerful findings in this study was the high expectations maintained by the participants' teachers in a number of different contexts. No matter what the task, these young women felt that their teachers expected them to perform at a high level, and the students' own expectations and aspirations remained high as a result. Teachers should consider this result when assessing their own behavior in the classroom, and attempt to maintain high expectations for all their students in any given environment.

It will also be crucial for educators to infuse multicultural aspects into their curriculum wherever possible. Such modifications might include highlighting the accomplishments of women and minorities in the field currently being studied, as well as taking into account learning differences across cultures when planning lessons. This modification would serve a dual purpose; a multicultural curriculum is likely to instill a sense of safety and belonging in diverse students, while those same students would be able to see other people from similar backgrounds who have accomplished great things in the area currently being studied.

Finally, teachers should carefully consider the interests and talents of their students, and encourage them to pursue appropriate extracurricular activities. The young women in this study felt that the opportunity to display their abilities enhanced their self-esteem and their enjoyment of learning in areas of interest. For educators, the challenge is to find the appropriate outlets for their students and help them to get involved. Class leaders, for example, may find that student government is a good way to express their interests and develop confidence. Other students may prefer dramatic performance, visual arts, music, or athletic events. Research on extracurricular activities has consistently shown that, no matter what the area, involvement can have positive effects on a student's academic achievement.

Implications for Counselors

There are a number of ways in which school counselors can support and reinforce the messages the modifications that classroom teachers can make to accommodate a diverse student population. To begin, counselors should take an active role in engaging parents and in encouraging communication between home and school. Parents of the participants in this study all took an active role in their daughters' educations, and the result was a culture where hard work and effort were expected.

School counselors may also find a number of potential benefits in organizing workshops for parents based on some of the themes from this study. Teaching parents about encouraging extracurricular activities, for example, could be beneficial for the young women in a school who may be too afraid to consider traditionally male activities like sports. Young women who are encouraged to pursue such endeavors at home and at school may be more likely to get involved. Similar themes for a workshop might include

encouraging the development of role models at home, finding mentors for gifted girls, or discussing the benefits of infusing high achieving minorities into conversations at home as well as at school. Each of these could have a positive impact for a bright female struggling with low self-esteem, low aspirations, or a lack of role models.

Finally, for a young woman who is not performing at a level commensurate with her abilities, school counselors may find value in some of the intervention programs discussed in chapter II. Guided reading and guided viewing, for example, offer counselors a method for encouraging a safe activity for students to learn from an appropriate character in literature or film. Moreover, students can then discuss the implications of that character's actions and how it may relate to their own lives in a non-threatening environment. A number of interventions like this for gifted females and gifted minority students are available to counselors, and can be effective tools for working with these students.

Implications for Parents

Parents of gifted African American females should seek to reinforce the messages presented by educators and school counselors. As was previously discussed, effective communication between school and home can be important in ensuring that students receive consistent, healthy messages about their potential. Students can benefit from a supportive home environment where high expectations are present and achievement is encouraged. At the same time, parents should also attempt to become involved in the lives of their daughters outside the home as well. This sort of activity can take a number of forms, including coaching a sports team, volunteering for school activities, and even simple things like attending a daughter's dance recital, concert, or softball game.

Parents can also help their daughters to develop a strong positive racial identity in a number of ways. Encouraging discussion about successful individuals from similar backgrounds, maintaining high expectations, and helping with a child's extracurricular activities are all ways in which parents can help to improve self-esteem in their children. Self-esteem appears to be an important factor for these young women in finding a balance between being a successful student and a being a successful African American. The participants in this study realized that their backgrounds made them different, but also realized that their backgrounds are only one part of their entire personality. As Haley said, "We are the sum total of our life experiences." For parents, encouraging young women to develop as a person, as a student, and as an African American will be crucial for encouraging the development of a healthy, positive racial identity.

Directions for Future Research

The nature of the qualitative design of this study precludes the results from being generalized to gifted African American females as a whole. This study's findings, however, can point to new directions for future research. Further interview or case study research could be implemented with participants of different age groups and from different geographic locations to determine if similar results would be found in African American females from different backgrounds. Quantitative research studies could also be designed to support the findings in this study, addressing such issues as identity development, family support, and participation in extracurricular activities for gifted Black women.

Conclusion

Findings in this study seemed to support the existing research on gifted females and gifted African American students. Factors that have been shown to influence achievement in either of these groups, such as high expectations and family support, were echoed by the participants in this study. There has been a notable lack of research studies, however, on gifted African American females specifically. This study has helped to synthesize some of the findings on gifted Black students and gifted females, and will hopefully be a part of a growing body of literature concerning the needs of this particular group.

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APPENDIX

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

- Background Information
  - Tell me about yourself…What are your interests and hobbies? What is your major/what do you hope to study in school?
  - Tell me about your family.
  - Tell me about your school.
    - What sort of grades do you get?
    - Are you involved in any extracurricular activities at school?
    - Has your achievement pattern remained stable? Have there been any big changes throughout your academic career?
      - Does your achievement pattern reflect your interests?
  - What is your attitude toward school?
  - What is (was) the overall ethnic/economic/social makeup of your high school? What sort of influence does this have on you?
  - Talk about your group of friends. What influence do they have on each other? What about you personally?
  - Are your friends primarily black/primarily white?
    - Does mixing occur at your school (your group or others)? If so, why do you think it is the case?
  - Family Influences
    - Parents
      - Are your parents married/divorced/separated?
      - Did they attend college?
      - What are their attitudes about education? What do they value?
    - Siblings
      - Do you have any siblings? Are they older? Younger?
      - Talk about their school histories.
      - Do you feel that they have an influence on your education?
- GHP
  - Talk about your GHP experience/initial impressions of the program.
  - What about your roommate? Dorm life?
  - Did you make any close friends at GHP? How did that influence/change you, if at all?
  - What about the support staff? (RAs/Counselors/etc.)
  - Tell me about your classmates. What was a typical day like in class for your major?
  - How do GHP classrooms differ from your regular classrooms? How are they similar?
- Life in the Classroom (Regular school & GHP)
  - Is perspective taking encouraged?
  - Do you feel that you get enough time with teachers? How much is the size of your classes related?

- Is there ever conflict in your classrooms? What about debates? How do your teachers handle them?
- Regular School:
    - Are classes tracked? If so, do you feel minorities are treated fairly in the process?
    - Do you participate in gifted classes? How does that environment differ?
- Is there pressure to “act white” or conceal intelligence?
- What is the racial climate at GHP compared to regular school?
    - Are people respectful? Do they tell jokes?
- Do you feel teachers really care?
- Are there any significant role models or mentors in your life?
- Tell me about your own sense of ethnic identity.