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Systemic Bias in Public Education: The Exception of African American Males Enrolled in Gifted and Advanced Placement Courses

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Introduction

African Americans comprise 13% of the U.S. population, yet 40% of the prison population. In addition, an African American male born in 2018 has a 33% chance of spending time in prison, in comparison to a White male who stands a 4% chance. Black youth were more than five-times as likely to be detained or incarcerated compared to White youth (NCES, 2017). Ironically, this same disparity plays out in our public schools. In comparison to their White student counterparts, African American males are overly represented in special education classes (Woodson & Harris, 2018), yet their presence in gifted and talented courses in American classrooms is uncommon (Ford, 2014). This blatant exclusion of Black boys in gifted and talented courses manifests beyond a mere fortuitousness. Moore (2002) denoted “not only are African American students disproportionately ignored for placement in higher academic tracked courses and gifted education, but they are also significantly more likely to be placed in special education programs and lower level academic tracked courses” (p. 60). While many may point to the overall lack of academic achievement by African American males, psychometric measures of student achievement do not support this substantive gap but furthers the historical disparity in student academic achievement (Erwin & Worrell, 2012). With over 50.6 million students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools in the nation, Blacks comprise 16%, or approximately 7.8 million students (NCES, 2017). Further analysis of the composition of the gifted and talented population indicates wide discrepancies as only 3.5% of the Black student population is in gifted education, as compared to the 7.6% White student population students enrolled in gifted courses (NCES, 2017), a rate over 50% higher than their African American counterparts. The College Board (2019) encouraged equity measures in AP courses and publicly

promotes actively breaking down barriers to these courses based upon students' indigenous backgrounds, origins, and socioeconomic group memberships that have been historically underserved (College Board, 2012). Despite this stance by the College Board (2019), White male students, (600,725) in Ohio schools are still over eight-times more likely to be placed in an AP class than their Black male counterparts (72,072) (College Board, 2019). This gap in Black students involved in gifted programs lends itself to further scrutiny as Erin and Worrell (2012) contended this lack of enrollment in gifted programming has more to do with the historical achievement gap as opposed to standardized tests, or other mitigating factors students bring to the classroom. In a recent longitudinal study, the overall participation of all ethnic groups studied – Whites, Hispanics, and Black - increased significantly (Kettler & Hurst, 2017). Yet further consideration of the data shows the disproportionality between the participation of Blacks and Whites had not been mitigated over the 11-year study, as all groups' participation increased concurrently for all 117 schools over this period (Kettler & Hurst, 2017). Though this increase has been across the board, gross inequities still exist, Ford (2014) contended “as historically and currently operationalized, gifted education represents such a program or vehicle for promoting inequities” (p. 143). Ford and Whiting (2007) purported while over 90% of teachers are White, their lack of recommending African American students is a reflection of their overall misperception of African American students' abilities and feel, as a populace, they lack the capacity to achieve at higher academic levels. A study by Fordham Institute revealed that although various levels of school personnel do not overtly serve as gatekeepers to gifted programming, by purposefully making the learning environment difficult, teachers successfully discourage participation from student populations they feel ill-prepared to succeed (Farkas &

Duffett, 2009). Ford (2014) contended this gate-keeping is propagated by “instruments (tests, checklists, and referral forms) aided by policies and procedures and guided by deficit thinking about African American and Hispanic students’ culture, intelligence, and academic potential contributing to underrepresentation” (p. 146). Hence, this underrepresentation of the African American male potentially has placed him in a deficit position by not being exposed to a higher curriculum. Although lack of exposure has led to diminished academic attainment, given [the] opportunity, African American students’ ability to achieve at higher levels will be realized (Jenkins, 1936). Glock and Klapproth (2017) contended “Teachers’ stereotypical expectations and attitudes are therefore believed to contribute greatly to the disadvantages suffered by ethnic minority students” (p. 77). Many teachers lack the ability to recognize attributes of gifted students, but if equipped with the skills to do so, they would more than likely advocate more Black students to gifted and talented programs (Aldridge, 2011).

Historical Context

While *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) successfully overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), historically, through attempts to reform education, cases such as *Murray v. Maryland* (1936)), *Missouri ex rel Gaines v. Canada* (1938)), *Sweat v. Painter* (1950)), and *McLaurin v. Oklahoma Board of Regents of Higher Education* (1950)) slowly whittled away legal segregation of public schools (*Murray v. Maryland* [Pearson], 169 MD. 478, 182A. 590 [1936]; *Missouri ex re Gaines v. Canada* 305 U.S. 337[1938]; *Sweat v. Painter*, 339 U.S.629 [1950]; *McLauren v. Oklahoma Board of Regents of Higher Education*339 U.S.637 [1950]).

In *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), it was ruled "... 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. . ."(*Brown v. Board of Education*,

347 U.S. 483 [1954]). However, due to the court failing to have a plan of desegregation, in actuality, the *Brown v. Board* ruling initiated a new system of vouchers and school selection, resulting in increased segregation of the public school system (McPherson, 2001). Therefore, instead of ending segregation with “all deliberate speed” as ordered by the *Brown v. Board* decision, school systems created a more hostile, segregated, and homogenous system unable to respond to the learning style of African American students (McPherson, 2001).

Historically, students who have come from dissimilar cultural backgrounds are blamed for their lack of academic achievement, as their deficiencies have been attributed to their inability to assimilate into societal norms (Ford, 2014). Brophy (1983) endorsed this claim by maintaining there is some credence to this perspective, as too much has been attributed to teacher expectations, and often these expectations intersect with actual teacher interfacing with minority students. However, Ford (2014) refuted this analysis by Brophy (1983), asserting, “Social inequity is at the heart of deficit-oriented paradigms” (p. 146). Deficit mindset of students can be attributed to stereotypical expectations held in the mind of the teacher as their misconception of cultures different from their own, as they interact with minority students. (Glock & Klapproth, 2017). A meta-analysis, regarding teachers’ perception of minority students, suggested there is a statistically notable difference in how African Americans are perceived in comparison to their Asian and White counterparts (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). This difference in perception thereby resulted in whether a referral to gifted and talented programming was made had regional implications for African American students, as those students living in the southern region of the United States were perceived less favorably than students in other parts of the country

(Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). Irizarry (2015) went further by purporting between-group comparisons further elucidates White teachers' perception of high performing African American students, as they are regarded as being less capable than their White peers, thereby reducing their chances of being recommended for scholarship or other academic opportunities furthering their academic development. With the ubiquitous nature of giftedness, researchers continue to find explanations as to why African American students are overlooked as being potentially gifted in comparison to other races (Serwatka, Deering, & Stoddard, 1989). Serwatka et al. (1989) contended test criteria, often based upon White suburban experience, continued to serve as the gatekeeper, effectively excluding African Americans as this experience is foreign to their life experience.

Teacher Perception

Underrepresentation of Black students in gifted and talented programs has been attributed to numerous factors; however, teacher perception is viewed as a leading factor as it establishes and maintains control by the majority (Bonner, Lewis, Bowman-Perrott, & Hill-Jackson, 2009; Adams, 1990). Ford, Grantham, and Milner (2004) maintained that teachers, due to their inadequate experiences with various cultures, are not equipped with contextual background to address intellectual, mental, emotional, and cultural assets and needs of their scholars. Traditionally, written assessments have been used to identify gifted students (Hopkins & Garrett, 2010). However, research indicates the tested material has little to do with the experience of African Americans and their culture, focusing instead on the Anglo-Saxon experience (Serwatka et al., 1989). Adams (1990) purported defining giftedness is not only subjective but is reminiscent of middle-class majority views and values. Hence, the lack of representation of

African American students identified as gifted students can be attributed to the monolithic use of written assessments as currently employed by public school districts (Serwatka et al., 1989).

Vetting students for gifted and talented programs based upon these assessments has shown that 25% is based upon their aptitude, meaning 75% is based upon factors outside of intelligence (Oakland & Rossen, 2005). Although these assessments may serve to reinforce decision-making, “without a clear definition, those who are asked to nominate students must rely on previous training and/or stereotypes they have developed” (Siegle, Moore, Mann, & Wilson, 2010, p. 352).

The College Board review of Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) data from 2012 and 2013 graduating classes revealed minorities, although scoring proficient, thereby suggesting their ability to be successful in AP math and AP science, were still not afforded the opportunity to participate in rigorous AP courses (College Board, 2013; College Board, 2012). The variance in gifted and talented programs is typically based upon local norms versus national norms, as teachers design instruction to meet the needs of students showing a propensity for learning at higher levels (Oakland & Rossen, 2005). Compounded with assessments is the notion of implicit biases, often unable to be ascertained through self-disclosure (Kumar et al., 2015), which leads to teachers failing to recommend African American students for admittance into courses shown to be instrumental in their academic achievement in and beyond post-secondary education (Kettler & Hurst, 2017). Kumar et al. (2015) underscored the lack of research in this area, while contending teachers, due to their human nature, harbor these implicit biases and feelings while purporting egalitarian views. Wood, Essien, and Blevins (2017) contended the suspicion, disparagement, and contempt of White teachers towards Black males has resulted in disparate treatment of these students, resulting in deleterious effects. The effects of teachers holding a

negative perception as far back as Kindergarten, the years where social networking and feelings of attachment are formed, unfairly affects African American males as teachers rate their level of closeness much lower than their White counterparts (Wood et al., 2017). Bryan (2017) referred to this attitude as promoting the school-to-prison pipeline present among White teachers, not as a castigation, but as a reality as the research supports intentional lack of relationship development in comparison to other groups (Bryan, 2017; Wood et al., 2017). Inequitable treatment towards African American males (Bryan, 2017) has led to a less favorable view, hence furthering Rubovits' and Maehr's (1973) findings as "Black students were given less attention, ignored more, praised less, and criticized more" (p. 217). Hence, African-American student misbehaviors are misconstrued as acting out (Bryan, 2017; Woods et al., 2017), and without a valid tool to accurately assess the behavior exhibited, may account for teachers not identifying Black males for gifted and talented opportunities (Besnoy, Dantzler, Besnoy, & Byrne, 2016). This lack of a uniformed system for collecting evidence to support nominations for students for gifted education opportunities has allowed teachers to indiscriminately select students often based upon their individual interactions with students (Besnoy et al., 2016), as demonstrated by research that showed White teachers having lower expectations of Black students (Brinkley et al., 2018; Rubovits & Maehr, 1973). Over the last decade, numerous studies have yielded similar findings of Black males underrepresented in constructive measures but represented in large numbers in destructive measures regarding scholastic achievement and outcomes (Brinkley et al., 2018). Consequently, Black males progress through elementary and high schools without realizing their full potential, as their academic potential is left untapped; educators have systemically failed to nominate non-White students for gifted and talented participation at proportionate rates in

comparison to their White counterparts (Hargrove & Seay, 2011). According to Hargrove and Seay (2011), this deficit-thinking mindset played directly into teachers who view Black students as incapable of academically achieving at similar rates than their White classmates. Properly trained and unbiased educators ideally select students based on individual talents (McBee, 2006; Ford, 1998). However, with deficit thinking, defined as “belief [that] one group is superior to another, both genetically and culturally” (Ford & Whiting, 2011, p. 29) further purported “...the deficit perspective about culturally diverse students, namely Black students, hinders educators from recognizing the gifts and talents, potential, and promise of African American children” (p. 29), causing them to be denied opportunities afforded to others. Copenhaver and McIntyre (1992) cited a lack of adequate teacher training in the identification of gifted students as reasoning for teacher misperception of gifted and talented students. Initial signs of giftedness demonstrated in elementary school are missed by many teachers untrained in identifying characteristics of gifted students, thereby viewing disruptions exhibited by African American students as reasons to recommend them for Special Education services, as opposed to gifted education (Copenhaver & McIntyre, 1992; Woodson & Harris, 2018). Bonner et al. (2009) contended this overidentification of Black males for special education services, combined with misaligned definition of giftedness, self-concept issues, and cyclical challenges across generations play a major role in Black males not being recommended for gifted courses. Bonner et al. (2009) further purported,

when these key components issues are not addressed in classroom engagements or through extant policy, they combine in ways that often lead to the stagnation of

achievement for gifted learners of color in general and gifted African Americans male learners in particular. (p. 177)

Student Perception

African American males feel as though they have few role models or supports to turn to when faced with dealing with life issues (Brinkley et al., 2018). Historically, media has negatively portrayed African males, setting the stage for these latent images to manifest into a negative view of the males, themselves (Henfield, 2012). Brinkley et al. (2018) further purported, “for AAMs, relationships and perceptions matter as much as pedagogy – perhaps far more than we ever imagined” (p. 20); therefore, one can conclude relations and self-perceptions are key to academic success of students, in particularly, African American male students.

Bonner et al. (2009) argued that the failure of schools to acknowledge the ethnological evolution of Black boys as they matriculate through school and that AP programming would be detrimental to their overall academic success. Brinkley et al. (2018, p. 20) contended many programs often seek to “fix” African American males without focusing on years of injustices experienced by this population. These inequities are played out daily as behavioral issues are dealt with more harshly for maladaptive behaviors and nonconforming as opposed to proactively seeking alternative approaches to involve this population through various modalities of instruction and behavioral modification practices (Brinkley et al., 2018). Hence, the African American male experience has been one perpetuated by the negative perception and beliefs furthered by teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities, where the tendency is to focus on shortcomings or deficits of Black males (Noguera, 2008). Roscoe and Atwater (2005) posited the significance of teachers’ understanding that Black males’ perception of their ability is

critical, as it can either foster an attitude of being able to achieve, or alternatively, lower their academic inclination, as they view their abilities to be lacking in comparison to their White peers. Self-awareness paradigms are tiered such that academic advancement is mirrored by discernment in regards to one's capabilities in a greater academic domain (Roscoe & Atwater, 2008; Lent, Brown, & Gore, 1997). Hence, Roscoe and Atwater (2008) contended that "student's self-perception of academic ability influences their academic performance" (p. 891). Without a positive self-perception and belief in their ability, African American males are less likely to enroll in AP or honors courses.

Consequently, Noguera (2003) offered that an analysis of the educational experiences of African American males must center on non-objective and objective measurements of self, in regard to ethnic identification and gender; hence, these self-concepts are formulated in the educational institution and their impact on scholastic attainment.

Hence, self-perception plays a tremendous role in the success of Black males, as their view of themselves is intricately tied to their overall attitude towards learning. Kenyatta (2012) posited,

Focusing on the relationship between African American males and their teachers and the extent to which perceptions shape interactions and guide practice, placement, and promotion are integral steps in creating reform that increases school achievement and mobility for African American males. (p. 37)

The disassociation of teacher preparation program with intense spotlight on African American male shortfalls, with a deficit mindset that has promulgated negative stereotypes, leads to how educators view and interface with their Black male students (Goings et al., 2015;

Noguera, 2008). Addressing the needs of African American males, Parson and Kritsonis (2006) cited six habits they contend are contributory factors to African American males success: utilizing hidden cultural rules, strong sense of self, sustained motivation for achievement, determination to succeed, aspiration to postsecondary, and significant relationships in family, community, and school (p. 6).

Implicit Bias

Although a multitude of studies have prescribed the need for a more holistic approach to education, including the *Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Education, 1983), which called for specific changes to the rigor of academics in our school curriculum, little has been done to address the plight of African American males (Goings et. al, 2015; Ndura et al., 2003). Morris (2002) contended the overall continued perception of African Americans who are incapable of academic achievement in comparison to their White counterparts, consciously or subconsciously, is pervasive in who is selected for gifted courses. Although an African American student may possess advanced talents, these gifts are not sufficient enough, or are questioned, when it comes to being selected for courses; White students do not share this similar experience (Morris, 2002). Looking at the experience of these minorities, regarding the implicit bias held by their teachers, often White and middle class, Kumar et al. (2015) purported, "... discrimination against such disadvantaged groups as minorities and immigrants persists in many spheres of social interchange, including education" (p. 534). Although outward discriminatory practices are frowned upon, and people may subscribe to equitable feelings and intent, implicit bias is perpetuated based on preconceived notions, and are triggered by the presence of minority individuals to whom a stereotype has been attributed (Kumar et al., 2015). Hence, the treatment

of individuals of minority groups, by members of the majority, can be attributed to stereotyped or preconceived notions, which, when activated whether consciously or subconsciously, Kumar et al. (2015) held, “behavior is a consequence of conscious and unconscious mental processes, and each is important in its own right” (p. 534). Therefore, measuring implicit bias is difficult. When qualitative measures or attitudinal scales are employed, Kumar et al. (2015) asserted, “these attitude scales measure explicit stereotypes and prejudice and do not capture teachers’ implicit attitudes and dispositions toward disadvantaged students” (p. 534). Teachers’ perpetuation of these stereotypes lends itself to a jaded perception of minorities, hence a devaluation of their ability to achieve (Glock & Klapproth, 2017). From practicing educators to preservice teachers, Glock and Klapproth (2017) contended educational outcomes by minority students became predictable based upon implicit attitudes of teachers, as the negative attitudes of teachers had a direct correlation to negative performance of minority students. Rosenthal’s and Jacobson’s (1968) Pygmalion Theory tied directly to this self-fulfilling prophecy of those teachers who consistently show a lower tolerance and expectations for African American male students than their male and female White counterparts. Hence, these implicit biases, often played out unaware due to their automaticity when interfacing with ethnic minorities, lend themselves to continued detrimental effects on African American males in education as well as society (Glock and Klapproth, 2017; Kumar et al., 2015). Failure to address these biases continue to have generational implications, as Bryan (2017) purported, “for these students, particularly Black males, the typical trajectory of the [School-to-Prison Pipeline] begins with disproportionate school suspensions, expulsions, assignments to special education classrooms, and the pushing and/or dropping out of school” (p. 331). While participation in AP courses has

been shown to offer hope in altering this current negative trajectory, further research has to look at the detrimental effects of the intersectionality of teacher perception, implicit bias, and interaction with minority students with or without advocates in this current educational landscape. As stated by Bryan (2017), “Given such regard, my rationale for the intentional focus on White teachers does not serve to blame them. However, it underscores the idea that they are least likely to have meaningful and positive cross-cultural interactions with Black boys” (p. 330). Hence, being intentional and purposeful in our relationships ascribes to African American males being successful. Goings et. al. (2015) postulated, “One common denominator I have discovered while working with Black boys and men is that those who receive substantial positive reinforcement from their communities, schools, and families develop the foundation to excel in their lives” (p. 59).

The current investigation as a causal-comparative, quasi-experimental study examining the factors that impact a student's entry into AP classes, across student groups. This research focused on whether the criteria and recommendations are consistently applied to Black male students relative to other student groups. This investigation utilized only pre-existing data from the large midwestern school district. Using the frameworks of Pygmalion Effect and Implicit Bias, this study sought to find if there is a perception, belief, or bias playing out in the selection process which hinders African American students, in particularly males, for participation in more rigorous courses in preparation for post-secondary or career-ready opportunities.

Methods

This investigation sought to address the following research questions:

1. What criteria/assessments were used in selecting students for placement in gifted and talented classes?
2. What role does previous academic achievement play in selecting students for placement in gifted/advanced placement classes?
3. What role does behavior, race, and gender play in selecting students for placement in gifted/advanced placement classes?

Having retrieved the responses of the above questions, the data showed there is an arbitrary method, at best, of selecting students for gifted and AP courses. The data showed a strong propensity of teachers using academic achievement as the only rationale for placement, forgoing talents of students demonstrated through avenues not captured by traditional assessments. Further, the research revealed a lack of training in the identification of gifted/AP students lends to the detriment of African American males, who early on in their academic careers have been identified as having special needs or tuned out of the educational process as a way to remain connected to peers (Parson & Kritsonis, 2006).

Participations

A large midwestern school district, with a student population of over 40,000 students was be the population of this study. With over 100 buildings in operation, the district is configured of elementary schools (PreK - 5, PreK- 6, and K-6), middle schools (6-8), and high schools (9-12; 7-12). This district currently has a D letter grade based on the State Report Card. As one of the largest urban school districts within this region of the U. S., this district has a diverse student population comprised of 53% African-American, 22% White, 5% Asian or Pacific Islander, 7%

Multiracial, and 14% Hispanic. Of this student population, 17.4% are special needs, 15.3% of the population is limited English proficient, and 8.5% are gifted and talented.

Instrumentation and Procedures

Data were accessed through publicly available data sets for this large midwestern school district after receiving approval from the Youngstown State University (YSU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the investigation. The data included enrollment data, district demographic data, AP and giftedness enrollment data, attendance data, academic achievement data, discipline data and zip code information.

Results

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the number of students in each data collection year ranging from 2017 through 2020.

Table 1

Demographic – Student Participation by Year

Year	Frequency	Percent
2017	602	28.8
2018	492	23.5
2019	535	25.6
2020	461	22.1

As indicated in Table 1, a total of ($N = 2090$) gifted/talented (GT) identified students were enrolled in AP courses. Table 3 provides a breakdown of GT identified students by race as according to the district data collection for collection years from 2017 through 2020.

Table 2

Demographic – Student Participation by Race

Race	Frequency	Percent
African American	643	30.8
Asian	91	4.4
Hispanic	118	5.6
Multi-racial	157	7.5
Native American	4	.2
White	1077	51.5

The students represented above included n = 1199 (57.4%) female students and n = 891 (42.6%) male students.

In order to gain insight as to why the underrepresentation of African Americans in relation to their composition of students in GT classes and AP courses, each of the research questions were addressed independently, and the results are presented below.

Research question one asked: *What criteria/assessments were used in selecting students for placement in gifted and talented classes?* Based on district guidelines, there are four ways to identify GT students: The first district identification process is done district-wide starting in Kindergarten through 8th grades, and additionally, in high schools, by monitoring students' potential based upon their performance on district assessments, Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) and iReady tests, administered three times a year. The second district form of identification is through alternative testing, where a request can be made for a child, grades K-12, to be assessed for excellent cognitive, specific scholastic, or originaive thinking abilities,

thus qualifying them to receive GT services; this referral can be done by anyone, including the student. The third district identification is through assessment for superior visual and performing arts ability by parents, teachers, or others, which is a multi-step process. A fourth identification is a reciprocation process, whereby transfer students who are identified as GT from another Ohio district, are recognized GT if the former district used approved assessment from the ODE, and testing results are not more than two years. If either criteria is not met, there is a 90-day window to refer a transferring student to be assessed for GT services. Identification of GT students based on race and level was computed.

To ensure these services are administered, a Written Educational Plan (WEP) is mandated, and funding through state, approximately \$3.9 million (ODE, n.d.) and local funding (90%) are set aside for adherence to documented plans.

Table 3 provides a breakdown of the race and grade level of students identified and receiving gifted services.

Table 3

Demographic - Grade Level and Race of Students Receiving GT Services

Grade Level	African American	Asian	Hispanic	Multi-racial	White
Elementary	458	66	126	164	1152
Middle	268	62	146	133	857
High	521	73	115	117	914
Other	549	54	99	131	1013

Note. As indicated by a total of ($N = 7018$) students identified as GT; 6 Native Americans and 1 Pacific Islander were not included in Table 3.

As indicated by the data, there is a difference regarding race when students are identified for GT services. A Pearson chi-squared was utilized to assess to see if there were differences across race and grade level regarding students identified as GT. The results indicate that there is a significant difference in the races of the students receiving gifted services, $\chi^2 = 108.5, p < .001$. Table 4 provides a breakdown of the student enrollment by race, providing a contrast in relation to the composition of those students receiving GT services.

Table 4

Demographic – District Enrollment by Race

Race	Frequency	Percent
African American	27,280	55.0
Asian	1,709	3.0
Hispanic	5,333	11.0
Multi-racial	3,157	6.0
Native American	101	.20
Pacific Islander	20	.04
White	12,001	24.0

Note. As of 06/26/2020, (N= 49,600), excluding .75 of those labeled non-respondents regarding race

Research Question 2

Research question 2 asked: *What role does previous academic achievement play in selecting students for placement in gifted/advanced placement classes?* Based on district guidelines, middle schools and high schools offer various opportunities for students to become involved in AP opportunities. Unlike GT, where a specific designation is used by ODE and

services are documented through WEP with specific monies set aside to incur these additional services, AP is open to all students who demonstrate a potential, or request to be enrolled in AP courses. While an instruction plan is not required, the governance of AP is managed through the Gifted and Talented Division to assure compliance with College Board guidelines are adhered to. Completion of required coursework can lead to an examination through College Board, leading to students receiving college credit upon successful completion of the national AP examination. Table 5 provides a breakdown of students by race and course taken by subject area.

Table 5

Demographic – Advanced Placement Courses of Students Enrolled by Race

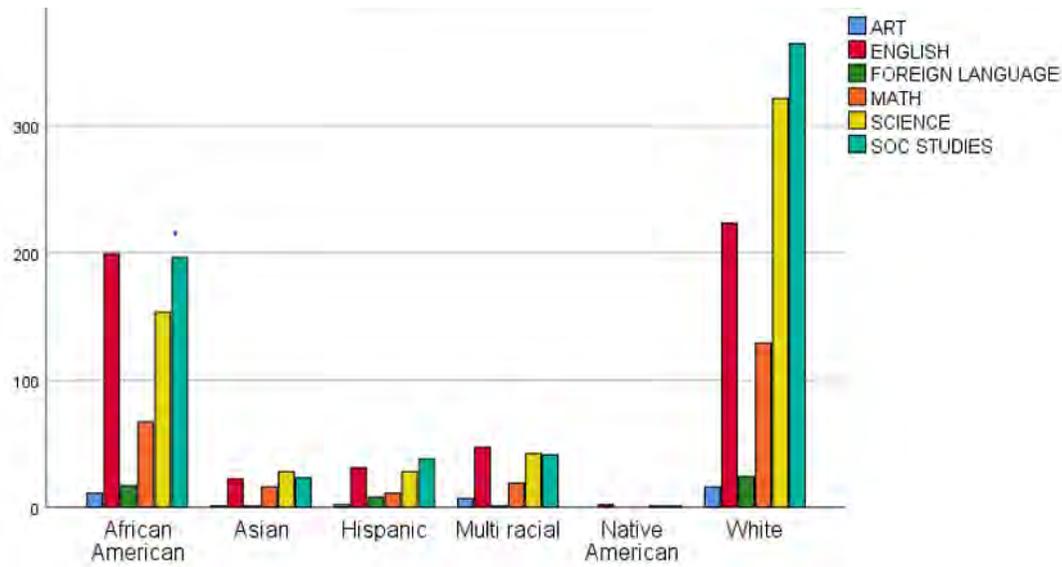
Race	Art	English	F. Language	Math	Science	SS
African American	11	199	17	67	153	196
Asian	1	22	1	16	28	23
Hispanic	2	31	8	11	28	38
Multi-racial	7	47	1	19	42	41
Native American	0	2	0	0	1	1
White	16	223	24	129	321	364

Note. “F. Language” indicates “foreign language”

As indicated in Table 5, a total of ($n = 2090$) students enrolled in AP courses. A Pearson chi-squared was conducted and revealed significant differences in the type of AP courses students are enrolled when examined by race, $\chi^2 = .756, p < .001$. Figure 1. Provides an illustration of these findings. Figure 1 provides a graphical illustration of student enrollment, by race, in AP courses.

Figure 1

Courses Students are Enrolled in by Race



As shown in Table 5 and Figure 1, there is a significant number of students taking Social Studies, as it is the highest number for each race, except for Asians and Multi-racial, who take more science courses compared to all other races. Additionally, the chart shows African American students are overwhelmingly placed in Social Studies and English courses in comparison to their peer groups of different races, minus Multi-racial, who also tend to take more English courses in comparison.

Research Question 3

What role does behavior, race, and gender play in selecting students for placement in gifted/advanced placement classes?

Table 6

Demographics – Number of Discipline Incidents by Race

Race	0	1	2	3	5	6
African American	604	32	4	3	0	0
Asian	90	1	0	0	0	0
Hispanic	113	4	0	1	0	0
Multi-racial	149	6	1	0	1	0
Native American	3	1	0	0	0	0
White	1052	22	1	0	0	2

Table 6 provides a breakdown of discipline based on race of students. The total of ($n=2090$) students enrolled in AP courses was broken out by number of disciplinary incidences. Disciplinary incidences from this group of students ranged from zero to six. A Chi-Square was utilized to look at observed frequency by each racial group in relation to expected. Results were statistically significant, $\chi^2 = 54.75, p < .001$. Discipline issues in AP settings are statistically significant by race of the student, with African American students having a greater number of reported incidence. Further examination reveals that there is a no statistical difference in the amount of discipline occurrences between gender. A Chi-squared examining Discipline Occurrences by Gender indicates that no significant differences exist, $\chi^2 = 9.018, p < .108$. A cross-tabulation was conducted to investigate the relationship between race and gender on

students enrolled in AP courses. Table 7 provides a breakdown of the data of race and gender of AP enrollment.

Table 7

Demographics – Advanced Placement Enrollment Based on Race and Gender

	Male	Female
African American	224	419
Asian	39	52
Hispanic	53	65
Multi-racial	72	85
Native American	0	4
White	503	574

A Chi-squared analysis based on race and gender of students enrolled in AP classes indicates that significant differences exist, $\chi^2 = 27.172, p < .001$. While African American students represent 55% of the student population, a meager 10% of the students in advance placement are African American males.

Discussion

Research question one asked: *What criteria/assessments were used in selecting students for placement in gifted and talented classes?* Based on district policy, all students within the school district are tested in second grade, and in subsequent district testing at all grade levels beyond second grade; this allows for additional avenues for students, not identified in second grade, to be identified and receive gifted services. Ironically, although the district is comprised of

53% African-American, 5% Asian or Pacific Islander, 14% Hispanic, 7% Multiracial, and 22% White, the percentage of students identified and receiving gifted services, 8.5% of students, are disproportionately represented based upon the above demographics. White students comprise 22% of the student population, yet they constitute approximately 52% of students identified and receiving gifted services. African Americans, although comprising 53% of student population, represent only 31% of students receiving gifted services. Hispanic students, while representing 14% of the student population, comprise a mere 6% of students receiving services. Ford (2014) contended, “as historically and currently operationalized, gifted education represents such a program or vehicle for promoting inequities” (p. 143). Based upon the data, these inequities clearly exist and continue to be promoted as African American students are not being identified, hence, not receiving gifted services at the level they are represented demographically in the district. Although there are additional internal measures designed to continually identify students, beyond formal process of testing all students in the second grade MAP testing scores and recommendations from teachers, parents, administrators, or student self-referral, the disproportionate number of White students compared to Black students is troubling considering the dire effects it can have on the lives of these students.

Research question two asked: *What role does previous academic achievement play in selecting students for placement in advanced placement classes?* Based on district policy, all students have access to AP courses without prerequisite if they show potential of success, or request to be enrolled. However, an investigation of the data indicate, except for Asians and Multi-racials, who take more science courses compared to all other races, African American students are disproportionately enrolled in Social Studies and English courses in comparison to

their peer groups of different races. A meta-analysis, regarding teachers' perceptions of minority students suggested there is a statistically notable difference in how African Americans are perceived in comparison to their Asian and White counterparts (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). Enrollment in courses is proportional across all races, except for African Americans. This blatant absence of African American students from these more rigorous courses causes one to question the rationale behind the decision to enroll, or not enroll African American students in certain classes. Glock and Klapproth (2017) purported a deficit mindset of students can be attributed to stereotypical expectations held in the mind of the teacher as their misconception of cultures different from their own. Although district policy allows for students to enroll absent of prerequisites, a Pygmalion Effect thus attributes to the overall lack of self-efficacy of African American students who, without the support and belief from those charged to instruct them, will not succeed, or attempt these more rigorous courses. In fact, Ogbu (1986) argued it will cause students to rebel (i.e., Low Effort Syndrome) against a system they view with contempt and distrust based upon a history of racial actions still prevalent today through institutional racism, social injustices, and microaggressions (Ford, 2014).

Research question three asked: *What role does behavior, race, and gender play in selecting students for placement in gifted/advanced placement classes?* Based on the data, there are very few behavioral issues with students in GT/AP placement courses, therefore, behavior cannot be used as an exclusion of African American males from these more rigorous courses. However, an investigation into the race and gender of students highlight a significant issue regarding African Americans, in particularly African American males. Data show, despite comprising 53% of district student population, African Americans only account for 30.8% of the

population receiving GT and AP services. Compared to other ethnic groups, only Hispanics (14% of the district student population), as a group, share a similar disproportionate underrepresentation of students receiving services (5.6%). Whites students, comprising 22% of the district student population, are overwhelmingly represented as recipients of GT and AP services, accounting for over half (51.5%) of all receiving services. Asian/P. Islander students, 5% of the student population, and Multi-racial students, 7% of the student population, are represented at expected levels based on their demographics, 4.4% and 7.5%, respectively. However, when race and gender are considered altogether, African American males are disproportionately underrepresented, and a clear pattern of systemic underserving of this student population is seen. Overall, females, comprising 48.4% of students by gender, make up 57.4% of those receiving AP or GT services, compared to 42.6% of males, although males comprise 51.6% of the district's student population. Of greater concern is the disaggregation of African American students receiving GT or AP services, as males represent only 34.8% of students, while African American females represent 65.2% of all African American students receiving GT or AP services: a 20.4% difference. In comparison to other races, Asians (only 91 students enrolled, difference of 14.1%, Hispanic and Multi-racial, both having differences of 10.2%, and Whites, difference of 6.6%), there is a clear underrepresentation of African American males receiving, recommended, or placed in rigorous courses in this midwestern district.

Implications

Based on previous research, African American males continue to be underrepresented in GT and AP courses in schools throughout the U.S. (Ford, 2014). This narrative remains consistent in this research as this same phenomena plays out in this midwestern district where

nearly 55% of the population is comprised of African Americans, yet only makes up approximately 30% of the students receiving gifted services; the number for African American males enrolled is even more dismal (see Table 7). Educational sociologists seek to explain this process of social differentiation, especially since, as deMarrais and LeCompte (1999) contended, “children who start out there with ostensibly equal capabilities end up sorted into groups whose achievement is markedly different” (p. 212). Therefore, failure to acknowledge the problem, and seek solutions to counter this narrative through policy, professional development, parental involvement, and concerted efforts to actively identify and support African American males in these GT and AP courses, we stand to lose an entire populace.

Identification

This study demonstrated the various methods employed to identify students as early as kindergarten, all the way through high school, however, the pivotal identification at the end of the second grade could signal the beginning of the end of an African American male. The Council of Great City Schools (2017) study found 4.7% African American males were prepared for AP courses, compared to 30% of their White peers, with even less than that enrolled in AP courses. Failure to create programming early on in the lives of these African American males will be to the detriment of the system. As the district has plans to repurpose 88% of its GT staffing to address a more inclusive service model, more intentionality must be placed on providing additional supports to ensure success of African American males identified as GT. Kenyata (2012) argued that, without these supports, African American males will find it difficult to succeed in these courses, especially considering these students will more than likely encounter teachers who do share same ethnic background or experiences (Goings et al., 2015; Noguera,

2008). Without reviewing and assessing proper identification methods, Ford, Grantham, and Whiting (2008) warned school selections of GT/AP students “include a heavy reliance on tests with little consideration of biases, low referral rates of culturally and linguistically diverse students for gifted education services, and the adoption of policies and procedures that have a disparate impact on diverse students” (p. 293).

Parental and student awareness.

The less disadvantaged parents and students are, indeed, educated on the options available for students regarding GT services. Parental insistence of their children being afforded these services is a key factor in identifying students for GT services (Card & Giulano, 2016). Many African American parents may not be aware of the process or level of advocacy necessary for testing their child, or, as McBee (2006) purported "the low rate of parent nomination could indicate that these students' parents are alienated from and distrustful of school culture" (p. 109). Therefore, concerted efforts to inform less advantaged parents of GT services available through the district by involving stakeholders, community partners, advocacy agencies, and others, must be implemented to increase the chances for parent advocacy of GT disadvantaged youths. Ford and Moore (2013) contended, “It is important to stress here that African American families are usually concerned about their sons’ education, but they sometimes have little social, cultural, educational and fiscal capital to assist them” (p. 403). Accordingly, the proper support systems must be put in place to ensure these African American males, and their families, have guidance to navigate this complex institution.

Policy. Finally, policy regarding GT and AP services must be created and reviewed annually to ensure fidelity of proportional representation. According to Ecker-Lyster, &

Niileksela, (2017), “Donovan and Cross (2002) examined nationally representative data from the 1998 Office for Civil Rights (OCR) survey and found that 6.2% of all public school children were placed into gifted education programs” (p. 80), which creates pause as to the reason for this over identification, as this large, urban midwestern has identified over 14% of its students eligible for GT services. Policies outlining identification strategies must be put in place to assure students have access to GT services; however, this access must be equitable across all schools and neighborhoods, regardless of zip codes, race, and gender.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is the focus on African American males in an urban midwestern setting. The data obtained would not allow a generalization across all school districts, as each is unique in their approach and attitude, whether progressive or conservative, in dealing with the African American male student population.

Recommendations for Further Study

Further investigation should focus on the interpersonal relationships Kumar et al. (2014) contended that teachers, while publicly purporting an egalitarian approach, harbor implicit biases and feelings towards minority students. Therefore, information gleaned from data did not represent actual responses from teachers, but an overall pattern must be determined by the researcher based upon interpretive analysis. Further studies regarding this topic should consider current policy and how it has aided or been detrimental to ensuring a more balanced demographic representation of students in GT services. Although egalitarian efforts by key central office personnel may work while monitored and attended to, lack of a policy to guide recruitment, retention, and equity in GT will not last without their presence. Finally, additional

studies regarding early identification of students for GT services, and how to measure giftedness early on in a child's educational journey, will be key in identifying and replicating successful educational models.

Conclusion

The absence of African American males in GT and AP courses is concerning, to say the least, but is also cause for reflection for those who profess equity and inclusion for all. Their obvious absence from these more challenging courses is a rallying cry for those charged with educating all students to their highest potential. Notwithstanding, the paucity of research in this area, data sets from previous research at local, state, and federal levels all concur, African American males are disproportionately underrepresented from GT services in comparison to all other groups, in particular those less disadvantaged. Activist and playwright James Baldwin is quoted as saying “not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced” (2017, from unfinished book manuscript). The research here has revealed the unfairness and inequities that have existed historically through the inception of GT. Although this study set forth some possible reasons for this phenomena, the focus must not be on blame, but on correction – doing what is right for African American males. As an educator for over 28 years, this researcher is guilty of not advocating enough, and challenging the status quo. Although not silent, this researcher's advocacy must be more policy-driven, as opposed to particular students- or school-driven. Systemic problems, must be addressed through systemic change, and now, faced with these daunting numbers, we must take a critical look at who we are as educators, parents, policymakers, stakeholder, but above all, human beings.

It is unconscionable in 2020 we are still addressing segregation issues reminiscent of 1896. With movements such as Black Lives Matter addressing police brutality and inequities in society, the educational landscape must also self-reflect to see how Black males are dealt with on a daily basis in classrooms throughout this country. Failure to educate this populace to their fullest potential, in essence, denies them their rights to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. This denial is not some innate or inherent flaw of these African American boys, but solely based upon their being born male and Black. Their birth has inextricably tied each of them to a system which has historically viewed African American males as some deviant, social misfits. Conforming to stereotypes and unfounded beliefs put forth by society perpetuate the current systemic denial of equal access to opportunities afforded to those less advantaged. However, assimilation breeds contempt from other African American males and those within the race who seek to make one feel as they have sold out their African American brothers and sisters. Disrupting the intersectionality of what appears to be contempt from those White teachers and lack of engagement of obstinate African American males must be the cornerstone of any reform efforts. Failure to act otherwise is dereliction of duty and makes us all in educational leadership complicit to educational malpractice.

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