African American Male Collegians: Race, Class and Gender Revealed

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CHAPTER SEVEN

African American Male Collegians: Race, Class, and Gender Revealed

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Emphasis on the gifted poor is increasing in attention among researchers, scholars, policymakers and concerned education officials who study gifted groups. Although this high-achieving group is receiving attention, particular cohorts within this population are continuing to be overlooked. According to Slocumb and Payne (2000), "...in one typical urban school district, only 8 percent of students identified as gifted come from those classified as economically disadvantaged—mostly black and Hispanic—who make up 58 percent of the school population, compared to 81 percent of white students, who constitute little more than a third of the school population" (p. 1). Further problematizing this lack of focus on gifted poor populations of color is the paucity of literature that focuses on giftedness beyond the P-12 context; an even direr situation exists among the literature specifically highlighting postsecondary gifted students of color (Bonner, 2001; Ford, Grantham, & Bailey, 1999; Ford, 1995).

This chapter will focus on the gifted poor—particularly academically gifted African American male collegians who come from poverty. The authors will discuss topics associated with not only the unique adversities and challenges but also the accomplishments and milestones this population experiences in P-16 contexts. Topics of discussion will include critical issues ranging from family influence and identity development to environmental incongruence and culturally specific mentoring. In addition, the chapter will consider the relevance of intersectionality as a concept that offers promise in "theoriz-
ing the relationship between different social categories” (Valentine, 2007, p. 10); namely, the multiple and interlocking categories or statuses as they are referred to in this article (i.e., gifted, African American, male, and poor) and how these statuses work in tandem to influence these males’ experiences with academe.

**Definitions: Gifted and Giftedness**

A major drawback in the identification and subsequent inclusion of African American males in gifted programming is the problems associated with how giftedness is defined. Several scholars (Bonner, 2001; Ford, 1995; Hilliard, 1976; Gardner, 1983; Renzulli, 1981; Sternberg, 1985) have provided empirically grounded evidence reaffirming the need to embrace a more inclusive set of practices in the identification process. Narrow definitions of giftedness have tended to focus almost exclusively on academic ability. According to Matthews (2004).

Beginning with its origins in the early history of psychology, giftedness was defined primarily in terms of intellectual ability. By the 1950s, however, spurred by factors that included the multifaceted model of intelligence developed by J. P. Guilford and the elaboration by DeHann and Kough of 10 categories of gifts and talents, a variety of efforts began leading toward a broader conceptualization of giftedness (p. 77).

One of the first steps in seeking a means to expand the definition of giftedness was initiated by legislative mandate. Then Commissioner of Education Sydney Marland (1972) who published the first formal definition of giftedness reported that minority children were scarcely being served. Several modifications have been made to Marland’s original definition, and it was in the United States Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) 1993 report titled *National Excellence and Developing Talent* that the term gifted was dropped and outstanding talent was used in its place. Additionally, the 1993 definition included key terms such as potential and capacity as well as critical statements like outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata...this shift in language alone in many ways constituted a watershed in how giftedness was identified. According to the Report,

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Children and youth with outstanding talent perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. These children and youth exhibit high performance capacity in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, and unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor. (p. 19)

Still other definitions have been developed by the U.S. Department of Education through the Javits Act, the federally sponsored program fostering the development of talent in the nation’s schools, and the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC), the largest organization in the country aimed at supporting the needs of high-potential learners. Both of these entities serve as powerful forces in framing the extant definitions and discussions related to how giftedness is identified. Notwithstanding the current definitions, what is most encouraging about these successive and oftentimes competing codifications is the increasing recognition that giftedness as a concept is multifarious and multilayered with different views on how it is operationalized across as well as within different cultural groups. Sternberg (2007) reports, “Different cultures have different concepts of what it means to be gifted. But in identifying children as gifted, we often only use our own conception, ignoring the cultural context in which the children grew up” (p. 160). Fortunately contemporary definitions are utilizing more inclusive language and ecumenical phraseology that portends greater opportunities for people of color.

**Intersections: Gifted, African American, Male, and Poor**

Several factors contribute to the underidentification and lack of inclusion of African American males in gifted and talented programs, with how giftedness is defined representing one of the more formidable barriers. Ford, Harris, Tyson, and Trotman (2002) in their research uncovered three additional factors that too lend credence to this ongoing problem—namely, teacher referrals, low test scores, and student and family choice. This section is aptly titled intersections due to the tenuous borders that gifted African American males tend to navi-
gate within and outside of the school context. For many, the conjoining of the terms *African American* and *male* creates a sense of dissonance and in essence represents an oxymoron. In the opening of his book on gifted African American males in college, Bonner (2010) highlights a conversation that he engages in with a colleague, “You’re interested in studying whom?—academically gifted African American males—you know the greater academic community doesn’t believe this being exists!”

An even direr gap in the literature is assumed when socioeconomic status is taken in tandem with these above-mentioned terms. For the African American gifted male who comes from a background of meager economic resources, particularly those who come from impoverished upbringings, infiltrating and successfully functioning in P-16 educational enclaves can serve as a formidable challenge. These males are challenged to overcome both the lack and incongruence of the intellectual and social capital accrued during their formative years being ill suited for the education contexts in which they find themselves functioning. According to Noguera (as cited in Fashola, 2005), “The choices made by an individual may be shaped by both the available opportunities and the norms present within the cultural milieu in which they are situated” (p. 59). In addition Noguera goes on to state that, “The effects of poverty can be so debilitating that a child’s life chances can literally be determined by a number of environmental and cultural factors such as the quality of prenatal care, housing, and food available to their mothers...” (p. 59).

Given the impact that a trajectory of poverty exerts on any child, for the gifted African American male it becomes ever more important to focus on how their multiple statuses as gifted, African American, male and poor intersect to create a unique experience that defies being distilled or forced into existing frameworks that speak in generalities about gifted students of color, or models that overlook key cultural nuances that are endemic to African American male populations. At the intersection of African American and male statuses Mincy (1994) is very clear in his statement about how it is far from unusual for “…black males to reach adolescence with a basic mistrust of their environment, doubts about their abilities, and confusion about their place in the world.” (p. 36). At the intersection of African

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American and gifted statuses you find several researchers (Bonner, 2000; Bonner, 2001; Bonner, Jennings, Marbly, & Brown, 2008; Conchas, 2006; Ford & Harris, 1999; Ford, Harris, Tyson, Trotman; Hebert, 2002; Ogbu, 2003), who assert that African American males learn strategies to hide or cover their gifted identity through disassociating or developing oppositional frameworks that allow them to maintain their relative standing within their peer and home communities. The intersection of African American, male, and poverty statuses, also treated in a separate section, is worthy of note; Gordon (2002) purports.

We explain the overrepresentation of black males among the poor in the following way. First, we demonstrate that black males are more likely than white males to have no income at all. Further, those black males who do have income are likely to fall into the lower income categories for a variety of reasons. Also, and as important, a nontrivial percentage of black males who are employed work part-time rather than full-time. (p. 128).

What these different combinations and permutations reveal about the multiple statuses of these men is that while each singularly exerts an influence on their experiences and motivations—it is their intermingling that typically provides a more accurate focus on what it means to be gifted, African American, male, and poor in the education setting. This section underscores much of what is said about the research surrounding intersectionality, more pointedly it addresses how critical differences are not situated in spaces between identities but in spaces found to exist within identities (Fuss, 1989). It is in the nexus of these competing identities that community, schools, and peers must be negotiated and affixed in ways that are affirming and growth producing for the gifted African American male. Additionally, a focus on how these identities become functional within these different contexts is also critical. In speaking to how identities should be considered in varying settings, Valentine (2007) posited that the emphasis should be on how identities are operationalized in interactions within specific environments and not on how these identities function as static or given understandings of social difference.
African American Family: Influence, Extension, and Support

For more than a decade, the family has been depicted as a central focus in the success of African American students in general and gifted African American students in particular (Allen, 1992; Fleming, 1984; Ford & Harris, 1999; Hughes, 1987; Bonner, 2001; Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008; White & Cones, 1999). Fries-Britt (1998) asserts that the changing nature of the family unit, changes in socioeconomic status, and parent(s)' educational levels complicate the family dynamic. In addition, White and Cones state,

The family, the peer group, and the neighborhood influence the psychological perspectives of African American males as they struggle to cope with the issues involved in self-definition, attitudes toward women, coping with racism, discovering adaptive possibilities within the African American way of being, and integrating African American and Euro-American lifestyles. (p. 195)

This mix of developmental processes is often hammered out on an anvil of family support; however, what has served as grist for the discussion mill regarding these support structures is how they are constituted and how they subsequently provide support. Roderick (as cited in Fashola, 2005) highlights research that points to the difficulties African American males in urban settings experience related to their transition to high school. One of the explanations she offers is that these males are less likely to be provided with the type of support that they need to facilitate successful transfer experiences. In offering an explanation of how family constitution plays a role, White and Cones offer a vigorous argument about the report submitted by U.S. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan in the 1960s. This report divorced the Black family and attributed much of its decline to single parent households—households typically run by women. White and Cones, quoting from Moynihan’s report, state that “...the Black family was a tangle of social pathology characterized by an unstable matriarchal structure” (p. 196). Yet, what Moynihan saw in the past, the Black family as a “tangle of pathology,” has been replaced by a more contemporary view of these structures as “tourniquets for hemorrhaging.” And, for the gifted African American male in poverty, the family provides an even more profound source of support.

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Support and support structures are critical for this population of men in that the higher education environments they face have been described as chilly and even hostile to their participation (Fries-Britt, 1998; Harper, 2003). Fries-Britt and Griffin (2007) contend that “facing a hostile campus racial climate can also adversely impact the achievement, integration, and retention of high-achieving Blacks” (p. 510). The family has served as a means for gifted African American males in poverty to transgress against hegemonic and racially charged higher education structures. Additionally the family unit for these males, despite its inability to provide economic resources, does provide needed emotional and psychological support that is tantamount in their retention. Although he references the relationships that African American males ideally should maintain with academic advisors, Strayhorn’s (2008) statement is also illustrative of the importance of familial relationships: “For some Black men, having strong support of an advisor (e.g., encouragement, advice) can offset the socioeconomic disadvantages (e.g., inadequate academic preparation for college, lack of rigorous courses in high school) that may threaten their odds for success in college” (p. 40).

Beyond handling the disadvantages and stressors associated with navigating the higher education terrain, family support structures are critical in the identity development process that gifted African American males undergo during their higher education experience. According to Bonner and Bailey (2006), “the establishment of a positive identity for the African American male student is significant in that it serves as the foundation upon which the student can develop some sense of agency and in turn determine where he ‘fits’ within the academy” (p. 28). Where identity development and family support intersect is a critical space where African American males are either supported and encouraged or not supported and left to fend for themselves. Noguera (as cited in Fashola, 2005) contends that there are a “number of important lessons about the intersection of identity, school practices, and academic performance” (p. 65) that should be investigated in an effort to ensure the schooling success of African American males. Thus, it is imperative to consider the unique role that the family plays in the lives of these men, and it is also important to determine how the interlocking structures of gifted status, gender,
race, and socioeconomic standing are also factors of influence in how family roles are engaged.

Identity Development: Frameworks and Challenges

The gifted African American male in poverty is in many ways much like a jigsaw puzzle with interlocking pieces. While each piece on its own does not provide enough vivid detail to capture the entire picture, each constitutes a necessary part of the whole. It is impossible to develop some form of understanding related to identity and identity development among this population without considering how each one of their statuses impacts how they construct a nuanced "sense of self." While the extant literature has been available in respect to African American (Black) racial and cultural identity development (Hughes & Bonner, 2006; Majors & Billson, 1992), applying the term gifted or gifted and poor as a filter drastically reduces the number of attendant publications. ROWLEY and Moore (2002) assert,

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

Thus, developing some sense of understanding regarding the role and purpose of racial identity development among gifted African American males in poverty becomes ever more important as we attempt to support these individuals as they interface with academe. Significant has been Asante’s (1988) Afrocentricity and Cross’ (1991) Negro to Black Conversion models. What these cultural typologies have provided is insight on ways to engage with African American males; however, it was William E. Cross, Jr. who first introduced his theory as a means to frame the racial identity development process found to occur among African American populations in 1971 that has held the most promise. A review of Cross’ (1971) model reveals four stages or themes he refers to as pre-encounter, encounter, immersion, and in-
ternalization—"each describes ‘self-concept’ issues concerning race and parallel attitudes that the individual holds about Black and White as a reference group" (p. 169). Without delving into an extensive discussion of Cross’ theory, suffice it to say that what each theme is found to represent is an individual’s ever-increasing sense of self as a racial being and an ever-deepening sense of understanding regarding the establishment of a healthy racial identity (Bonner, Lewis, Bowman-Perrott, Hill-Jackson, & James, in press).

Gifted African American males find that their identity development, particularly their racial identity development subsequently influences their achievement, motivation, and attitudes toward school (Grantham & Ford, 2003). According to Bonner, Lewis, Bowman-Perrott, Hill-Jackson, & James (in press),

A prime example of how the intersection and overlap of academic, cultural, and racial identity can impact the development of gifted African American male students is seen in how they address perceptions about their achievement. For this cohort, achievement can be impacted by perceptions of being smart as somehow infering that they are “acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 2003); as a result many of these males opt to become class clowns (Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Trotman, 2002). Although the concept of acting White is sometimes overextended in its application (Tyson, Darity & Castellino, 2005), it is important to look at how recent research has affirmed the relevance of this concept, particularly as it relates to high achieving African American students.

Again, adding poverty as a dimension to the equation only creates more opportunities for misunderstandings and misinterpretations to develop. What these gifted African American males are many times forced to do is to establish their identities and sense of agency in an environment that at best tolerates and at worst objects to their presence. The fact that they come from backgrounds of poverty only reifies the sense of “otherness” that many feel about them as individuals. HERBERT’S research (2002), although referencing young children offers much regarding the ways in which gifted African American males in postsecondary settings also contend with attitudes and perceptions of their abilities based on their socioeconomic standing. According to Herbert, “With the understanding that gifted students are found in the culture of poverty, educators must not
overlook the fact that these young people have achievement needs that must be addressed...” (p. 128).

Demographics: Opportunities and Threats

African American males are educationally at-risk in the United States; they are especially at-risk in institutions of higher education. This at-risk status for this cohort is heightened when poverty is taken as a factor; their probability for success greatly diminishes. However, resilience is found to serve as one of the greatest sources of opportunity to reverse these negative effects (Judge, 2005) and usually results in some measure of success at the P-12 level and beyond. While the most persistent and resilient individuals, given proper exposure and support can enter and successfully navigate college, the quintessential issue for some who lack these resources becomes where to find these support structures if they have previously not been made available. For the gifted African American male in poverty, this resource identification process has even more salience if they are to successfully matriculate.

Developing some sense of understanding regarding the status of the gifted African American male in poverty is pivotal to any discourse pertaining to their academic pursuits. According to the Kaiser Foundation Report on Race, Ethnicity and Health Care (2006) there are 4.5 million African American men between the ages 15 to 29, making up approximately 14% of the U.S. male population. This group also represents 12% of the African American population. The report continues by stating, "...[the] high rates of death, incarceration, and unemployment, and relatively low levels of college graduation rates [of African American males] raise concerns for African American families and the nation’s economy” (Kaiser Foundation Report on Race, Ethnicity and Health Care, 2006, p. 1). While these numbers encompass all African American males in this age cohort, they do not distinguish between the various socio-economic levels these African American males occupy.

One must also understand the rarity that African American males who do make it to college represent. For the gifted African American male who is saddled with poverty, this individual represents an even greater anomaly in achieving both academic and personal success.

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However, it is important to note, success notwithstanding, that these individuals often experience many more barriers that may work against their matriculation in comparison to their peers. For example, gifted African American males in poverty who manage to successfully matriculate through the P-12 system are truly representative of less than 50% of the total African American male school population; that is, roughly 47% of all African American males graduate from high school in the U.S. as opposed to 75% of their White male counterparts (Schott Report, 2008). When it comes to college graduation, the outlook is even bleaker. Less than 8% of African American males have graduated from college compared to 17% of Whites and 35% of Asians (Kaiser Foundation Report on Race, Ethnicity and Health Care, 2006).

Maxwell (2004) cites the American Council on Education’s findings reporting that graduation rates for African American males are the lowest of any college-going population; 35% of the African American males who enrolled in NCAA Division I schools in 1996 graduated within six years. When compared to their White male peers, these statistics paint an even darker picture, with White males’ graduation rates being represented at 59%. While these numbers do not specifically focus on the experiences of gifted African American males in poverty, they do intimate the need for interventions that will assist this population to engage with higher education in meaningful ways. In essence, these numbers are indicative of the need for a deeper examination into the education ills that face gifted African Americans males in poverty.

Obstacles and Marginalization: Seeking Viable Solutions

Obstacles facing gifted African American males in poverty extend beyond socioeconomic status and represent a core issue that impacts the matriculation experiences among this cohort. Many of their attendant problems begin well before their admission to college and are found to be deeply entrenched and connected to enclaves in which these males instinctively seek support: Family structures, school systems and peer enclaves represent but a few of these structures. As an example, a common problem for many gifted African American males in poverty is that their families harbor expectations that these males
will become the breadwinners for the family, in some instances even before the age of 10 (Hunter, 2001). Generally it is not the case that these families do not value education and the intellectual capital that the male embodies; however, survival becomes the main focus and education, particularly higher education, is relegated to take a distant second place role (Cuyjet, 1997). Additionally the research has been very pointed in underscoring the conflicting feelings that many gifted African American males experience related to their success—success they often perceive that is achieved at the expense of their family and peers. The more successful they become, the more removed they find themselves from the people who serve as their confidants, friends, and mentors—a situation that has been described as “survival conflict” (Whitten, 1992).

Also, realizing that navigational hardships that gifted African American males in poverty endure can at times impact academic productivity and ultimately result in probation or dismissal from the institution. Consequently, the social implications associated with these sanctions lead to social isolation and frustration. Therefore, providing necessary scaffolding experiences through programming and policy initiatives becomes critical; one such set of experiences is achieved through mentoring (Brown, Davis & McClendon, 1999; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007).

Marginalization is also one of the core issues that tend to influence the poor gifted African American college students’ experience. Marginalization is particularly significant among this cohort within Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). According to the extant literature, African American students report that they feel unwelcome on college campuses, specifically due to their ethnic and socioeconomic status (Johnson, 1993; Malaney & Shively, 1995; Gossett, Cuyjet & Cockriel, 1998). These higher education environments in which the student finds himself do not promote a sense of worth, belonging, connectivity or comfort; all attributes of settings that promote intellectually engaging education experiences. Thus, it is imperative that environments are created that nullify marginalization and encourage inclusiveness—a process that should involve every constituent of the higher education community. Gossett, Cuyjet and Cockriel (1996) state that colleges and universities must ascertain why campus per-

ceptions are different among ethnic groups, mainly because these varying perceptions are what create alternate and sometimes negative realities for some student populations. Not only must institutions determine the genesis of these differences, but they also must seek ways to resolve discord among communities who are being disparately impacted.

In speaking to the role that college and university administrators should play, Cuyjet (1997) states:

[University] administrators concerned about this issue are presented with a twofold agenda: first, the need to provide a nonthreatening environment for African American men where their higher expectations of success can be nurtured and reinforced; and second, the task of reeducating the majority of the community about the inaccuracy of generally held perceptions about black men. (p. 7)

Therefore it is imperative that intentional interventions and interactions with gifted African American males in poverty become a top priority for institutions of higher education; creating avenues for this population of students to consistently engage with members of the campus community should not be left to chance.

Mentoring: Achieving Success and Balance

Many African American males represent the first generation of members from their respective families to attend college. Often parents, peers, and relatives—the usual suspects in the college-going process—are willing but not capable of providing needed information and support for them to be successful in their higher education endeavors. The support that they are able to offer is at best superficial and at worst non-beneficial. While the typical mantras, “Keep it up” or “It’ll get better” are gestures designed to assist the gifted African American male to feel better in the short-run, these gestures lack permanence in the long haul to sustain academic success. Therefore, the support from home these students typically receive, though well intentioned and certainly appreciated, may be of little value to the student.

Specifically, many gifted African American males in poverty have never been afforded the opportunity to interact with individuals who pursued or earned college degrees; hence, they do not possess a vi
able template from which they can mold their higher education experiences. Patitu and Terrell (1997), report that minority students without role models have a substantially more difficult time succeeding in college than their White counterparts. Therefore, creating more opportunities for gifted African American males in poverty to receive mentoring and guidance from aspirant peers and role models is warranted. The opportunities should translate into connections that create opportunities for role models and mentees to engage in sustained and meaningful liaisons.

These mentoring programs can serve as the mirrors in which gifted African American male students in poverty can see themselves as successes and not the tragic figures that many see them as representing due to their poverty status. Hebert (2002) asserts that, “Holding lower expectations for high-ability students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds threatens their growth intellectually and socially. Educators can no longer underestimate what students from impoverished backgrounds are capable of achieving and postpone more challenging and personally relevant work” (p.135). Both Carter (1994) and Patitu and Terrell (1997) assert that the value of mentoring programs as tools to assist college students in their adjustment to higher education and as reinforcement to persistence is key. Mentoring programs and models in essence are support structures designed to serve as a bridge for students to move past failures and to discover contemporary successes.

Mentoring models can range from target groups to peer-mentoring to faculty-student mentoring (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). What is important to remember is that the development of mentorship models must be based on clear and concise goals. For example, in a study conducted by Strayhorn and Terrell (2007), they report, “Establishing a research-focused relationship with a faculty mentor has a positive effect on Black students’ satisfaction with college while establishing a personal relationship does not” (p. 77). The gifted African American male student in poverty in particular needs a meaningful relationship in which his intellectual acumen, desires, career aspirations and an outlet for understanding the world can meld.

Healy (1997) states in Frierson’s Diversity in Higher Education text that mentoring should be both dynamic and reciprocal; therefore, not only does the student/mentee find the value in the relationship, but the mentor also finds inherent value in the exchange. Having mentors who understand the significance of the relationship to the overall success of the mentee is vital. That is, the knowledge that the mentors possess can assist these males in acclimatizing to college life (Cawyer, Simonds & Davis, 2002; Carter, 1994). For the gifted African American male in poverty, this constant involvement with the mentor builds connections that allow him to foster his self-worth and develop both personally and professionally. This symbiotic mentoring relationship also is then subsequently reflected in positive and successful higher education community engagements (Gossett, Cuyjet & Cockriel, 1998). African American male students are then validated by their accomplishments and by the feedback they receive from their mentors as well as those occupying the academic context who see this relationship taking form and producing positive results. These relationships also help quell many misconceptions and negative stereotypes that individuals may possess as they relate to his gifted cohort.

What these mentoring programs help to do is not only assist African American males in their adjustment to higher education but also counteract the effects that the poverty may have exacted beforehand. Negative sentiments expressed about higher education environments, the lack of value perceived to be associated with completing a degree, peer detractors and even the unsupportive family members who serve as albatrosses around the neck of these males can all be countered by successful mentoring relationships. In commenting on the importance of mentoring relationships, Jones, Bibbins and Henderson (1994) state:

Growing up in a hostile world and bombarded with negative images and stereotypes of self, many young African American males find themselves trapped in a cycle of despair.... Internally, many experience low self-esteem, lacking vision for a hopeful future. (p.1)

Through these mentoring programs gifted African American males in poverty can seek ways to redefine themselves and find new paths toward success. The opportunity for growth that these mentoring programs provide these men is invaluable and has the potential change the course of their lives forever.
Conclusion

Meeting the needs of gifted African American males in poverty should begin from a place of awareness. Who are these men and what do they bring to the higher education context? The literature has been quite clear in underscoring the lack of focus, deficit-modeling, and underidentification associated with this population; ailments, many of which are associated with a lack of knowledge of who these men are. Beyond a clarion call that needs to go out to scholars and researchers who devote much of their publication capital to gifted learners of color, a fine-grained focus on gifted African American learners who are both male and poor needs to be aggressively undertaken. Subsequent to initiatives aimed at awareness, it will become ever more important for those who are invested in the gifted identification process, to focus on how giftedness is defined. If we are to remain true to the definition provided by the U.S. Department of Education (1993), then it is incumbent that we do not cherry-pick the parts of the definition that do not defy our practices or challenge our sensibilities. Said differently, part of the definition states, “Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor” (p. 19) and it is imperative that we uphold this tenet.

Additionally, for the gifted African American male in poverty who interfaces with academe, creating “safe spaces” in which they can fully function and meet their academic goals is a process that should involve the entire campus community. Both academic as well as student affairs units must work holistically to engage and support these men in their learning, growth, and development. This chapter attempted to provide a clear roadmap via discussions related to the importance of critical nuanced components in their college matriculation process. Hence, family support, identity development, and mentoring are topics that all swirl about creating opportunities and possibilities to provide these men with a college-going experience that ultimately leads to their success.

References


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