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Counseling Gifted African American Students: Promoting Achievement, Identity, and Social and Emotional Well-Being

Donna Y. Ford
The University of Virginia
Charlottesville, Virginia

March 1995
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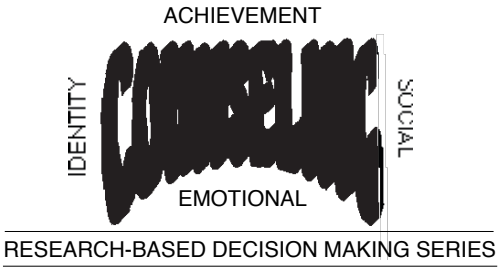

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Counseling Gifted African American Students: Promoting Achievement, Identity, and Social and Emotional Well-Being

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ABSTRACT

The educational and socioemotional status of African Americans is a major concern of educators, counselors, and reformers. Much of this concern stems from the unfortunate reality that African American students represent a significant portion of the educationally and socially disenfranchised. Educationally, African Americans have disproportionately high rates of dropout, high representation in special education, and high rates of poor academic achievement; vocationally, they have disproportionately high rates of unemployment and underemployment; and socially, African Americans have disproportionately high rates of incarceration and teen pregnancy.

If efforts to help African American students lead rewarding lives are to be effective, there must be a collaborative partnership among families, educators, and counselors. Too often, however, the crucial role of counselors in this partnership has been limited to providing academic assistance to teachers. This unidimensional focus ignores the many contributions counselors make to the overall well-being of students, particularly African American students.

Historically, counseling gifted students has not been an important part of educational and counseling discourse. Misperceptions and stereotypes of gifted students as being immune to social, emotional, and academic problems have contributed to the lack of counseling for these students. When counseling has been provided, it has been limited primarily to academic counseling, and assessment and placement issues. Because more children are entering school with serious personal and academic problems, the roles and responsibilities of counselors must change and expand to meet the needs of all children who seek their guidance and assistance.

The purpose of this monograph is to help bridge the fields of education and counseling, focusing in particular on the academic, social and emotional, and psychological concerns of gifted African American student relative to achievement issues, social and emotional issues, and psychological issues. Also discussed are gender issues between African American males and females relative to social and educational variables; barriers to counseling for African American students, including those identified as gifted; and recommendations for counselors who work with these students.

Counselors are in an ideal position to ensure that African American students remain in gifted programs once identified and placed. Counselors represent an important

component of both the recruitment and retention of students in gifted programs. Because a major goal of counseling is to promote healthy self-concepts and to ensure psychological growth, counselors must have an awareness and understanding of the many issues that hinder gifted African American students' psychological, as well as social and emotional well-being.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Historically, counseling gifted students has not been an integral part of the educational and counseling discourse. Misperceptions and stereotypes of gifted students as being immune to social, emotional, and academic problems have contributed to the lack of counseling for these students. The movement to provide counseling for gifted students has been attributed to Lewis Terman (1925) and Leta Hollingworth (1926). Yet, it was not until the 1950s that increased attention was devoted to counseling gifted students (Colangelo, 1991).

The history of counseling gifted students regarding their social and emotional concerns, while not new, remains in its infancy. In particular, few counselors have addressed the social and emotional needs of gifted students. The term "emotion" is conspicuously absent in the indexes of most books on the gifted and talented (Silverman, 1993), which reflects how little attention has addressed this important issue. Similarly, there are a limited number of books specifically on counseling gifted students and meeting their social and emotional needs.

In a similar way, the role of counselors has been limited to providing academic assistance to teachers. This focus ignores the many contributions counselors make to the needs of overall well-being of students, particularly African American students. Too little attention has been given to the role of counselors in ensuring the well-being of gifted students, which results in a gap in services provided to them. Because more students are entering school with serious personal and academic problems, the roles and responsibilities of counselors must change and expand to meet the needs of all children who seek their guidance and assistance.

The purpose of this monograph is to help bridge the fields of education and counseling, focusing in particular on the academic, social and emotional, and psychological concerns of gifted African American students. An underlying premise is that gifted African American students experience multifaceted barriers to their academic, psychological, and social and emotional well-being. As persons of color, they must contend with problems associated with being a member of an oppressed group—discrimination, racism, unequal power relations, and poverty. Similarly, they contend with issues specific to giftedness—such as heightened sensitivity, multipotentiality, difficulty finding true peers, concerns over adult issues and social injustices, and a shortage of programs and services to meet their academic needs. These two groups—

gifted students and African American students—are the recipients of social injustices that pose numerous obstacles to their potential. Both groups face social discrimination and misunderstanding; thus, gifted African American students may find themselves in a double bind.

School counselors must be aware of and sensitive to these issues, and to the unique and individual problems of gifted African American students. As reflected throughout this monograph, counselors are in an ideal position to ensure that African American students remain in gifted programs once identified and placed. Particular attention is given to: (1) examining the counseling issues of gifted African American students relative to achievement issues, social and emotional issues, and psychological issues; (2) describing gender issues between African American males and females relative to social and educational variables; (3) exploring barriers to counseling for African American students, including those identified as gifted; and (4) presenting recommendations for counselors who work with these students.

Academic Issues

Numerous issues contribute to poor academic achievement among African American students, in particular, learning style differences and a lack of multicultural education in gifted education. Because school achievement is influenced significantly by one's learning style (Griggs & Dunn, 1989; Shade & Edwards, 1987), part of what contributes to school failure is not what is taught, but how it is taught and learned. Failure may result when there is an incompatibility between African American students' learning styles and the instructional styles of schools, which generally favor field independent, abstract, and analytical styles of learning. Schools also favor students who have long attention spans, who can adhere to time constraints, who can spend extended periods of time doing seat work, and who learn individually (Hale-Benson, 1986).

Counselors can work with students to raise their awareness about their individual learning styles and provide them with ways to accommodate different teaching styles and situations. Once teachers and students understand learning styles, both can be taught to compensate for the differences. For instance, a visual learner may be allowed to use a tape recorder during lecture-based lessons or to borrow notes from a classmate. Counselors can also counsel students through their preferred learning styles by incorporating drama, music, art, poetry, play, role plays, and other techniques to build relations, to increase insight, and to facilitate the counseling process.

Adolescents and adults often seek relevance in their lives. This search for meaning can occur in schools where African American students search for personal and cultural relevance. Multicultural education represents one way to increase the self-concept, self-esteem, and racial identity of African American students. Kitano (1991) expressed serious reservations about the lack of a multicultural emphasis in gifted education. Banks (1994) and other educators have stressed that a philosophy of

multiculturalism must permeate educational programs so that all students gain increased sensitivity to, understanding of, and respect for individual and group differences.

Proponents of multicultural education contend that the inability or unwillingness of schools to promote pluralism promotes assimilationist ideologies, promotes low achievement morale, and fails to promote positive or strong self-concepts, racial identities, and self-esteem among children of color (Banks, 1994; Kitano, 1991). The result is culturally assaultive classrooms and learning environments that contribute to poor educational outcomes for minority students, even those identified as gifted.

Social and Emotional Issues

Children's social, emotional, and educational problems often relate to problems in fulfilling their basic needs (Maslow, 1954). The desire to belong and to feel loved is one of our basic needs. Perhaps the needs that our schools have the most trouble fulfilling for gifted African American students are the need for self-esteem and the need to belong. That is, although educators and counselors acknowledge the interrelation of the emotional, social, and cognitive domains of development, programs for gifted students appear to have largely neglected the emotional and social development areas (Barnette, 1989).

As a cultural group, African American students are socially oriented, as reflected in strong fictive kinship networks and large, extended families (McAdoo, 1988). They have a strong need to belong, for affiliation, and a need to bond with others who share similar concerns, interests, and experiences. Groups represent a mechanism for self-preservation—identity, feelings of connectedness, and belonging for people of color. This need for group affiliation and social support, however, can have unfortunate ramifications when an anti-achievement ethic is espoused by one's social group. Negative peer pressures and poor peer relations can increase the determination of African American students to camouflage their gifts and talents, and to avoid behaviors that might reveal or call attention to their true abilities.

Once identified and placed in gifted programs, African American students make numerous sacrifices and take many risks. They risk rejection from peers in their home, school, or community who may perceive gifted and achieving African American students as untrue to their cultural and racial group. They risk isolation and alienation from White teachers and classmates in the gifted program who do not understand African American students. These feelings of isolation and alienation may result in a forced-choice dilemma between friendships and school. In this emotional tug-of-war, African American gifted children too often lose, because they drop out, underachieve, and disengage academically from other African American students.

Psychological Issues

Self-perceptions, such as self-concept, self-esteem, and racial identity, play an important role in one's school achievement and behaviors. An accurate assessment of oneself is an essential component of successful counseling for African American students, particularly relative to racial identity. The research regarding gifted students' self-perceptions and the effects of labeling is inconclusive. For some students, labeling is a double-edged sword; for others, it is not. What are potentially negative consequences of labeling for African American students? In general, these students risk social rejection and isolation from both African American and White peers. For instance, African American peers may accuse gifted African American students of acting White or being raceless (Fordham, 1988). These students risk isolation from White classmates who do not understand students of color, and who hold negative stereotypes and perceptions of these students. African American students also risk low expectations from teachers who neither understand nor respect racial and cultural differences among students.

Being identified as gifted can wreak havoc on family relations and affects family dynamics (Cornell & Grossberg, 1987). These dynamics can be negative when parents and family members do not understand the nature and needs of gifted students, and when they lack the resources to meet children's academic, and social and emotional needs. This lack of understanding and resources can lead to parental frustration, anxiety, guilt, anger, feelings of inadequacy, or any number of responses that indicate a lack of empowerment.

A crucial variable related to self-concept among African American youth is racial identity. Racial identity represents one's self-conceptualization as a racial being, as well as one's beliefs, attitudes, and values relative to other racial groups. By age three or four, children know their race, and by the time they enter school, the implications of racial group membership and status have become salient (Helms, 1994). Gifted African American students may notice social injustices much earlier than other students. These social injustices can create or contribute to inadequate feelings of racial pride. African American students may project their anger or feelings of rejection onto teachers, classmates, and school personnel. Having no time out to cool down or to vent one's anger or rage, and having no one to talk to can exacerbate these feelings. Students who can not cope effectively with prejudice (of any kind) are unable to work effectively in school. Gifted African American students are not immune from such complexities, and persistent racism conquers the spirit of African American youth.

Gender Differences in Educational and Social Variables

African American males often have particular problems about which counselors must be aware. National statistics help explain what many are calling the "endangered African American male." Gallagher and Gallagher (1994) reported that African American females outnumber males by a 2 to 1 ratio in gifted programs. They attributed this finding less to test performance and more to teacher perceptions; teachers were more

willing to accept African American females as gifted due to their greater tendency toward conformity and greater responsibility for learning.

Ford (1993) examined gender differences in underachievement among gifted African American males and females in grades 5 and 6. Results indicated that males were more likely than females to be underachievers, they exerted considerably less effort in school, and held more negative attitudes about school than females. African American males found school less relevant and personally meaningful than their female counterparts. Further, they were more pessimistic about social factors than females. For example, several of the early adolescent African American males spoke with anger and disappointment about the injustices African Americans wrestle with daily. This confusion and disappointment can turn into helplessness and hopelessness.

Barriers to Effective Counseling

Racial minority groups underutilize counseling services and have higher attrition rates from counseling, especially after the first session (Sue & Sue, 1990). They found the counselor's race to be a significant factor in this underutilization. African American students may not believe that White counselors have the skills necessary to be culturally sensitive. The expectation is that the counseling experience will be negative or inappropriate because of lack of understanding, awareness, and empathy. They anticipate pity, apathy, distrust, and prejudices on the part of the counselor. Hence, African American students may seek social and emotional support from significant others, such as their family, friends, and religious leaders. Specifically, the availability of racially similar and culturally sensitive counselors is important to African Americans.

The following list represents other variables likely to contribute to the underutilization of African American students (and by implication, gifted African American students) in counseling (See Sue & Sue, 1990, for more detailed information):

(1) Counseling centers often consist of predominantly White staff, even in predominantly African American settings.
(2) Counselors often lack training in multicultural counseling.
(3) Counselors often lack training in gifted education.
(4) The services offered by counseling centers take place in the counselor's office rather than a neutral setting.
(5) The primary vehicle for communication in counseling is verbal rather than behavioral.
(6) Individual counseling is used more often than group counseling.
(7) Counseling is perceived by many minority groups as a sign of weakness; going to a counselor brings shame on the family.
(8) Self-disclosure by clients is considered essential to the counseling process, yet many minority groups may not trust counselors enough to reveal their innermost concerns.

(9) African American students may be suspicious about the purposes and goals of counseling; thus, going to counseling is likely to be involuntary.

Recommendations

Counselors must adopt many roles—advocate, mentor, role model, teacher, and collaborator with teachers and families—to meet the academic and non-academic needs of gifted African American students. The first step toward helping clients is to build a trusting relationship (Rogers, 1961). This trust and support may be especially important when counselors work with students from different racial and cultural groups than themselves. Care and empathy from a school counselor and/or teacher can help restore safety and trust in African American students, particularly those who feel disenfranchised from school and teachers. Hence, when working with African American students, counselors must draw upon Rogers' notion of unconditional positive regard, in which all students are looked upon as individuals with unique concerns.

A developmental approach is needed whereby counselors address the individuality of gifted African American students relative to their needs and concerns. This approach assumes that the needs of African American students are quantitatively and qualitatively different. Some issues are more germane to adolescent males, but irrelevant and inappropriate for younger children and females. Similarly, some issues are important to males, but may be more important or critical for females. Proactive efforts must seek prevention over intervention, and they must be holistic by addressing African American students' affective, psychological, and academic needs.

Counseling for affective development includes increasing African American students' intrapersonal skills and competencies, improving interpersonal and social skills, clarifying values and setting priorities, becoming bicultural, and coping effectively with negative feelings and discrimination. Psychological development for African American students includes increasing their self-esteem and racial identity, exploring their achievement orientation, and increasing their self-efficacy relative to achievement. Academic development promotes positive attitudes toward school and achievement; improves students' motivation, academic performance, and test performance; strengthens students' critical thinking and problem solving skills; improves understanding of their strengths and shortcomings; and resolves problems hindering achievement and motivation. Finally, vocational counseling and guidance must explore African American students' aspirations and expectations, and increase their understanding of vocational options and opportunities, and educational requirements for specific occupations.

Counseling Interventions: Techniques, Strategies, and Philosophies

Social competence is essential to every student's success in school and life. This social competence represents a survival strategy. Interventions relate specifically to: (a)

self-concept and racial identity; (b) underachievement; (c) peer relations; and (d) learning styles.

Self-Concept and Racial Identity Development

Gifted African American students share the concerns of gifted students in general as well as those of other minority students. African American students must have opportunities to explore their feelings about being gifted. What does being gifted mean? In what ways are they gifted? How do they feel about being labeled and identified as gifted? How do they feel about being in gifted program? What are the social ramifications of being identified and placed in gifted education programs? To overcome negative self-perceptions and misunderstandings, it is important that African American students interact with older African American males and females who are confident, personally secure, and academically and professionally successful. High school and college students, community leaders, and teachers can be recruited into schools to serve as mentors and role models.

Cinematherapy, bibliotherapy, journal writing, role models, and mentorships can promote increased self-awareness and strong racial identities. Counselors should adopt techniques and strategies that are unique to gifted African American students and their concerns. Books, movies, and other materials can be found at African American bookstores. Because they are often developed by African Americans themselves, these materials are not likely to be racially and culturally insensitive or biased.

Summary and Conclusions

The focus of this monograph was the primary issue facing gifted African American students, specifically underachievement, racial identity, and social and emotional issues. It was emphasized that counselors have many roles and responsibilities that call for increased attention to barriers that hinder gifted African American students' achievement and motivation. It was also stressed that learning styles, lack of motivation, poor peer relations, low self-concepts, weak racial identities, and environmental factors can work to the detriment of gifted African American students. Finally, it was emphasized that counselors should recognize both individual and group differences among *all* students. With an understanding of their needs, counselors can better serve this student population by celebrating diversity and advocating for the human rights of all students.

A central theme of this monograph is that gifted African American youth are first and foremost human beings in need of understanding, caring, respect, and empathy. With this basic awareness and appreciation, counselors can begin the process of effective counseling. It is incumbent upon school counselors to help gifted African American students manage and appreciate their gifts, to manage negative peer pressures, to make appropriate educational choices, to learn effective coping strategies, to understand failure, and to set realistic goals and expectations.

The strategies and philosophies espoused throughout this monograph center on the holistic development of students. This includes focusing on the needs and concerns of gifted students in general (such as, high anxiety and stress, low self-concept, poor peer relations) and African American and minority students (for example, racism, low teacher expectations, disproportionate dropout rates, learning style differences, racial identity). There are no easy solutions to the many and multifaceted issues facing gifted African American students. It is clear, however, that with counselors as advocates and mentors, gifted African American students will be better prepared to achieve in school and life.

Guidelines

The following guidelines are recommended for working with gifted African American students to promote healthier self-concepts and identities:

Guideline 1: Focus on and acknowledge the strengths of gifted African American students.

Research Support: All students have strengths, yet they may be manifested differently among minority students. For example, the sensitivity noted among gifted students may be most apparent among gifted African American students regarding social and racial injustices. Similarly, African American students who question social injustices and inconsistencies may be viewed as trouble makers rather than insightful and sensitive. And, gifted African American students who ask many questions may be perceived as aggressive. Other strengths include tactile and kinesthetic preferences that may be misinterpreted as hyperactivity, social preferences may be perceived as a lack of independence. The interpretations made of behaviors exhibited by African American students must not be myopic.

Guideline 2: Help gifted African American students to build positive social and peer relations.

Research Support: African American students are generally socially oriented and extraverted. Friendships, therefore, are important for identity and emotional well-being. Counselors can work with teachers to establish more opportunities for group interaction and cohesion between gifted African American and students from other racial and ethnic groups, and between gifted African American students and non-gifted African American students. With the help of counselors, African American students can increase their social competence and relationships.

Guideline 3: Promote social competence and encourage biculturality among African American students.

Research Support: An essential characteristic of intelligence is the ability to adapt to one's environment and to different contexts (Sternberg, 1985). For African American students, this means learning to be culturally flexible and adaptive, that is, understanding which behaviors are most appropriate for one situation, and least appropriate for another. Biculturalism is the antithesis of assimilation—students are not asked to give up their cultural values, beliefs, or behaviors, but to be familiar with the values, beliefs, and behaviors of the predominant culture.

Guideline 4: Teach African American students how to cope with social injustices.

Research Support: An additional feature of social competence is learning to cope effectively with social injustices. Gifted African American students are not immune to social injustices; in some ways, they may be more susceptible to them because of

heightened sensitivity and insight. Numerous books and materials are available to assist counselors with empowering African American students. Assertiveness training, conflict resolution training, and many other strategies can enable minority students not to internalize injustices and inequities.

Guideline 5: Adopt broader and more comprehensive definitions of underachievement.

Research Support: Traditionally, definitions of underachievement are based on discrepancies between achievement and intelligence test scores. This exclusive reliance on tests ignores the consistent finding that African American and other minority students do not perform well on standardized tests. Thus, they are less likely to be identified as gifted and/or underachieving. More promising definitions and measurements of underachievement must include attitudinal information, motivational information, learning style preferences, test anxiety, test taking and study skills, and assessment of students' self-concept and racial identity. Once students have been identified as underachievers, counselors must also assess the severity, duration, and intensity of underachievement.

Guideline 6: Involve families, African American professionals, and community leaders in the learning and counseling process.

Research Support: Families represent an essential component of students' achievement and social and emotional well-being. Along with community members, families can provide the emotional and social support African American students may need in school and counseling. Family involvement is, therefore, strongly recommended to enhance academic performance and social health.

Guideline 7: Explore the quality and quantity of support systems and resources available to African American students.

Research Support: Counseling can be difficult for African American students if they do not have adequate home and community support and resources. For example, are there community programs that provide academic and social support? Are parents and other family members aware of summer and enrichment activities and programs? Are they financially able to provide these activities? Do they have transportation? How far away is the library and what is the quality of the materials?

Guideline 8: Integrate multiculturalism throughout the learning and helping process.

Research Support: When a philosophy of multiculturalism permeates schools and counseling, all students benefit. Multicultural education and counseling can increase students' racial sensitivity, understanding, and acceptance. Equally important, multiculturalism avoids culturally assaultive classrooms and counseling settings. This

harmony increases racial pride within students of color, while also increasing the relevance of school (Banks, 1994) and counseling (Sue & Sue, 1990).

Guideline 9: Counsel African American students using their preferred learning styles.

Research Support: Most of the literature on learning styles has focused on educational settings. Just as the achievement of African American students increases when learning styles are addressed (Hale-Benson, 1986; Shade & Edwards, 1987), so may counseling outcomes. Dramatherapy, music therapy, art therapy, and other strategies represent promising practices for counseling gifted African American students, particularly those who are underachieving.

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Donna Y. Ford
The University of Virginia
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Introduction

When a king has good counselors, his reign is peaceful (African Proverb)

The educational and socioemotional status of African Americans is a major concern of educators, counselors, and reformers. Much of this concern stems from the unfortunate reality that African American students represent a significant portion of the educationally and socially disenfranchised. Educationally, African Americans have disproportionately high rates of dropout, high representation in special education, and high rates of poor academic achievement; vocationally, they have disproportionately high rates of unemployment and under-employment; and socially, African Americans have disproportionately high rates of incarceration and teen pregnancy.

If efforts to help African American students lead rewarding lives are to be effective, there must be a collaborative partnership among families, educators, and counselors. Too often, however, the crucial role of counselors in this partnership has been limited to providing academic assistance to teachers. This unidimensional focus ignores the many contributions counselors make to the overall well-being of students, particularly African American students. The little attention given to the role of counselors in ensuring the well-being of gifted students results in a gap in services provided to them.

Historically, counseling gifted students has not been an important part of educational and counseling discourse. Misperceptions and stereotypes of gifted students as being immune to social, emotional, and academic problems have contributed to lack of counseling services provided to students. The movement in counseling gifted students has been attributed to Lewis Terman (1925) and Leta Hollingworth (1926). Terman's longitudinal study of middle-class White children helped to dispel many myths and stereotypes about gifted students. One myth was that gifted children were inherently well adjusted and, consequently, did not need counseling services. Hollingworth also found that gifted students were not immune from psychological, and social and emotional difficulties. Perhaps her greatest contribution to counseling was calling attention to the discrepancy between a gifted child's intellectual and emotional development, often referred to as "old heads on young shoulders."

Colangelo (1991) noted that it was not until the 1950s that increased attention was devoted to counseling gifted students. Labs and guidance programs were established at several universities, with the leadership of John Rothney, Charles Pulvino, Nicholas

Colangelo, Philip Perrone, Barbara Kerr, John Gowan, and James Webb. These scholars highlighted the heretofore ignored issues related to suicide, depression, perfectionism, negative self-concept, poor self-esteem, high anxiety, and poor social relations among gifted students.

The history of counseling gifted students regarding their social and emotional concerns, while not new, remains in its infancy. In particular, few counselors have addressed the social and emotional needs of gifted students, and the term "emotion" is conspicuously absent in the indexes of most books on the gifted and talented, which the absence of this word reflects the fact that little attention has addressed this important issue (Silverman, 1993). A search of ERIC and PsychLit abstracts indicates a dismally small number of articles on counseling gifted students. Specifically, between 1966 and 1995, 64 articles appeared in ERIC; only four appeared in PsychLit between 1987 and 1994. This paucity of information is even greater relative to gifted African American students. To date, only three articles referenced in the above databases focused exclusively or specifically on counseling gifted African American students from a social and emotional perspective (see Ford & Harris, 1995; Ford, Harris, & Schuerger, 1993; Ford, Schuerger, & Harris, 1991). Similarly, there are a limited number of books specifically on counseling gifted students (such as, Kerr, 1991; Milgrim, 1993; Silverman, 1993), and meeting their social and emotional needs (such as, Delisle, 1992; Schmitz & Galbraith, 1985; Webb, Meckstroth, & Tolan, 1982). These books often contain a perfunctory chapter on special populations, a term that has become synonymous with minority (most often African American) children. It is unfortunate that the issues confronting gifted minority students are not interwoven throughout the texts, as such an approach would highlight the heterogeneity that exists within the gifted population.

A few studies have explored public school counselors' awareness of issues confronting gifted students, as well as their preparation to work with this student population. Findings indicate that few school counselors (and psychologists) are formally prepared to work with gifted students. For example, Klausmeier, Mishra, and Maker (1987) found that most school counselors considered their preparation in recognizing gifted students to be less than average, and their training with minorities and low socioeconomic (SES) groups to be below average or completely lacking. In their study of state certification endorsement for school counselors in special education, Frantz and Prillaman (1993) found that 11 states required at least one course in special education for certification as school counselors, 17 were in the process of changing certification requirements for counselors and considering including a course in special education, and another 17 states neither required any courses nor were they in the process of considering changes in certification. In those states where gifted education falls under the purview of special education, a few counselors may receive training to work with gifted students. In other states, however, the extent and nature of training may be minimal.

At the university level, Ford (1995, in press) found that only 10% of counselors surveyed reported training in working with gifted students, but the nature and extent of this training was not examined. The findings also indicated that the majority of the

counselors were unaware of, or indecisive about, the differential issues hindering the achievement of both gifted African American and gifted White students.

In essence, counselors have not been an integral part of gifted education. and their roles have been limited primarily to academic counseling, and assessment and placement issues (Ford & Harris, 1995). Unfortunately, as Gerler, Kinney, and Anderson (1985) noted, educators and policy makers frequently do not recognize the contributions of counselors to children's success in school. Because more children are entering school with serious personal and academic problems, the roles and responsibilities of counselors change and expand to meet the needs of all children who seek their guidance and assistance.

The purpose of this monograph is to help bridge the fields of education and counseling, focusing in particular on the academic, social and emotional, and psychological concerns of gifted African American students. An underlying premise is that gifted African American students experience multifaceted barriers to their academic, psychological, and social and emotional health. They must contend with problems associated with being a member of an oppressed group—discrimination, racism, unequal power relations, poverty, and so forth; similarly, they contend with issues specific to giftedness—such as anti-intellectualism and accusations of elitism, difficulty finding true peers, concerns over adult issues and social injustices, and a shortage of programs and services to meet their academic needs. These two groups—gifted students and African American students—are the recipients of social injustices that pose numerous obstacles to their potential. Both groups face social discrimination and misunderstanding; thus, gifted African American students may find themselves in a double bind.

It is also contended that many of the issues affecting the social and emotional well-being of gifted African American students relate primarily to their racial status (Ford, forthcoming). By virtue of being people of color, gifted African American students face racism and a welter of other social injustices and cultural conflicts. Thus, much of the discussion of this monograph centers on issues related to their status as a racial minority group member.

School counselors must be cognizant of and sensitive to these issues, and to the unique and individual problems that gifted African American students present to them. Counselors are in an ideal position to ensure that African American students remain in gifted programs once identified and placed. They represent an important component of both the recruitment and retention of students in gifted programs. Because a major goal of counseling is to promote healthy self-concepts and to ensure psychological growth, counselors must have an awareness and understanding of the many issues that hinder gifted African American students' psychological, as well as social and emotional well-being.

Much of the contact between school counselors and gifted students centers on academic and vocational or career issues. One reason may be that African American students are less likely than White students to seek the assistance of school counselors for

personal problems, and as many as 50% do not return for counseling after the first visit (Sue & Sue, 1990). According to Hutchinson and Reagan (1989), the more personal the problem, the less likely students are to seek out school counselors. In their study, approximately 40% would seek assistance with peer conflicts, 46% for assistance in exploring feelings and values, 37% on how to get along in life, and 27% for relieving tension. Yet, perhaps the most important component of students' success is meeting their psychological need for affective and substantive human contact—finding someone to care about them. Students may require the assistance of counselors to fulfill that important need.

African American students may be even less likely to seek guidance and counseling, particularly those who hold negative images of Whites in general (and by extension, White counselors) (Ford & Harris, 1995). The race of the counselor may be the only factor that causes some (or perhaps many) African American students to avoid counseling or to prematurely terminate counseling. However, race is often ignored in the helping process because few counselors are aware of how racial issues interfere with the process of growing, achieving, and living fully. These issues are discussed in the sections that follow. Particular attention is given to: (1) examining counseling issues of gifted African American students relative to achievement issues, social and emotional issues, and psychological issues. Also discussed are gender issues between African American males and females relative to social and educational variables; (2) exploring barriers to counseling for African American students, including those identified as gifted; and (3) presenting recommendations for counselors who work with these students.

Academic Issues

> On the fringe of most school environments gathers a shadow population of students whose motivation and achievement are stymied. . . . It is disturbing to realize that all students may be at risk of becoming at least temporarily disconnected from full and productive involvement in classrooms and schools. (Sinclair & Ghory, 1992, pp. 33, 35)

African American students are highly represented among the educationally disenfranchised. According to Renzulli, Reis, Hébert, and Diaz (1995), gifted African American students, especially males, are often victims of educational suicide. Their dropout rates are among the highest nationally, which are exacerbated by poor academic achievement, poor standardized test scores, overrepresentation in special education, and underrepresentation in gifted education. African American students, particularly males, are three times as likely as White males to be in a class for the educable mentally retarded, but only one-half as likely to be placed in a class for the gifted (Shapiro, Loeb, & Bowermaster, 1993). Not only are African American students under-enrolled in gifted education programs, they are underrepresented in high/academic tracks, high-ability groups, and academic programs at all educational levels—kindergarten through grade 12, baccalaureate degrees, and graduate degrees. Moreover, the higher the level of education, the greater the degree of underrepresentation and the lower the graduation rate

(Gay, 1993). In terms of academic courses, African American students are less likely than White students to be enrolled in math, physical sciences, and social studies; if enrolled in higher level classes such as calculus, algebra, trigonometry, and geometry, they are less likely to have the same number or years of such coursework as White students. Similarly, in terms of college studies, African American students are underrepresented in the *vast majority* of degree areas—math, business, engineering, biological science, the physical sciences, and other science-related areas (Gay, 1993).

African American students are overrepresented in special education, in the lowest ability groups and tracks, among high school and college dropouts, the under-employed and unemployed and, accordingly, the economically disadvantaged. In terms of college enrollment and degree areas, African American students are underrepresented in *all* fields of study *except* the social sciences and education (Gay, 1993).

In the case of low-track and low-ability classes, research has consistently found poor quality of curriculum and instruction, a negative classroom climate, as well as poor teacher interaction and low student expectations. Lower track classes foster lower self-esteem, lower educational aspirations, lower levels of cognition (such as higher order and critical thinking, information processing, making inferences, synthesizing material) and, ultimately, few opportunities for economic mobility. The collective results suggest that even gifted African American students are less likely to be educated for self-determination, independence, and social empowerment than are White students; relatedly, they are more likely to be prepared for vocations that promise a life of dependency in the economic and social underclass (Gay 1993). These outcomes can contribute to depression and hopelessness.

Learning style differences represent additional academic barriers for African American students, including those identified as gifted. All students are products of family and community settings that have predisposed them to patterns of behaviors that are more or less functional in school settings (Sinclair & Ghory, 1992). Dunn, Beaudry, and Klavas (1989) defined learning styles as a biologically and developmentally imposed set of personal characteristics that make the same teaching method effective for some students and ineffective for others. Dunn, DeBello, Brennan, Krimsky, and Murrain (1981) defined learning styles as the way individuals concentrate on, absorb, and retain new or difficult information or skills. They comprise a combination of environmental, emotional, sociological, physical, and psychological elements that permit individuals to receive, store, and use knowledge or abilities. Saracho (1989) described learning styles as a distinctive pattern of apprehending, storing, and employing information, or more simply, as individual variations in methods of perceiving, remembering, and thinking. All of these definitions suggest that learning is based on the way children manipulate and process information that is being taught. In essence, they reflect a learners' mode of selecting, encoding, organizing, storing, retrieving, decoding and generating information, which all influence learning and performance.

School achievement is influenced significantly by one's learning style (Griggs & Dunn, 1984, 1989; Shade & Edwards, 1987); hence, what contributes to school failure is

not what is taught, but how it is taught and learned. According to Saracho and Gerstl (1992), learning styles are significantly influenced by culturally induced cognitive styles related to communicating, interacting, perceiving, and acquiring knowledge. Failure may result when there is an incompatibility between African American students' learning styles and the instructional styles of schools, which generally favor field independent, abstract, and analytical styles of learning. Schools also favor students who have long attention spans, who can adhere to time constraints, who can spend extended periods of time doing seat work, and who learn individually (Gay, 1978; Hale-Benson, 1986).

Research suggests that the learning styles of underachieving students, gifted students, and African American students are rather diverse. Underachievers tend to be impulsive, low task-oriented, nonconforming, creative, visual, and tactile and kinesthetic learners. Gifted students often prefer formal learning classroom designs, less structure in learning materials, auditory modes of presentation, and they are frequently reflective, tactile, kinesthetic, and field-independent learners. They are responsible for their own learning, are persistent, motivated, and task-oriented. African American students, however, are likely to be field dependent, holistic, relational, and visual learners. They learn best in social and cooperative settings, are socially or other oriented; and they prefer tactile and kinesthetic learning/teaching experiences (Griggs & Dunn, 1989; Shade & Edwards, 1987; Saracho & Gerstl, 1992). Three African proverbs illustrate the significance of learning styles to African Americans: "*Seeing is better than hearing*"; "*Seeing is different from being told*"; and "*Sitting is being crippled.*" These proverbs reflect preferences for visual, tactile, and kinesthetic learning experiences among African American youth. In essence, the learning style preferences of gifted students and African American students appear oppositional, and the styles of African American students and underachievers appear more similar, all of which hinder the school performance of these students.

Adolescents and adults often seek relevance in their lives. This search for meaning can occur in schools when African American students search for personal and cultural relevance. Multicultural education represents one way to increase the self-concept, self-esteem, and racial identity of African American students. Kitano (1991) expressed serious concerns about the lack of a multicultural emphasis in gifted education. Banks (1994), Gollnick and Chinn (1994), and others have stressed that a philosophy of multiculturalism must permeate educational programs so that all students gain increased sensitivity, understanding, and respect of individual and group differences.

Proponents of multicultural and urban education contend that the inability or unwillingness of schools to promote pluralism promotes assimilationist ideologies, promotes low achievement morale, and does not promote positive or strong self-concepts, racial identities, and self-esteem among children of color (Banks, 1994; Gollnick & Chinn, 1994; Kitano, 1991). The result is that classrooms and learning environments are culturally assaultive, which contributes to poor educational outcomes for minority students.

When African American students experience academic problems, they may be referred to school counselors. Counselors who support and adopt a multicultural orientation can help reverse underachievement and decrease poor educational outcomes. Culturally competent counselors are aware of and sensitive to their own cultural issues, as well as how these issues and values affect minority students. They also have a good understanding of the sociopolitical systems that operate within the U.S. and carry over into counseling. Culturally competent counselors are comfortable with differences that minority clients bring into counseling relative to race and beliefs, and they have received specific training in working with minority students (APA Education and Training Committee of Division 17, 1980).

Social and Emotional Issues

Children's social, emotional, and educational problems often relate to problems in fulfilling their basic needs (Maslow, 1954). The desire to belong and to feel loved is one of our basic needs. Perhaps the needs that our schools have the most trouble fulfilling for gifted African American students are the need for self-esteem and the need to belong. Although educators and counselors acknowledge the interrelation of the emotional, social, and cognitive domains of development, programs for gifted students appear to have largely neglected the emotional and social development areas (Barnette, 1989, p. 525).

Social relations and perceptions of oneself as liked, respected, appreciated, and understood by others are important to all students. Janos and Robinson (1985) and Li (1988) have shown that many studies purporting gifted students to have higher self-concepts investigated only the general domain, rather than such specific domains as social self-concept in which gifted students frequently score poorly. Gifted children surveyed by Galbraith (1985) had numerous concerns. Two concerns were that they feel socially alienated, and that they are often teased by peers who do not understand or appreciate their abilities. These feelings can contribute to poor peer relations, feelings of rejection, and social insecurities among students.

As a cultural group, African American students are socially oriented, as reflected in strong fictive kinship networks and large, extended families (McAdoo, 1988). The result is a strong need to belong, for affiliation, for approval, and a need to bond with others who share similar concerns and interests. In many ways, groups represent a mechanism for self-preservation—identity, feelings of connectedness, and belonging. This need for group affiliation and social support, however, can have unfortunate ramifications when an anti-achievement ethic is espoused by one's social group. Negative peer pressures and poor peer relations can increase the determination of African American students to camouflage their gifts and talents (for instance, become class clowns) and to avoid behaviors that might reveal or call attention to their true abilities. According to an African proverb, "*If you are hiding, don't light a fire*." Once identified and placed in gifted programs, African American students make numerous sacrifices and take many risks. They risk, for example, rejection from peers in their home, school, or

community who may perceive gifted African American students as untrue to their cultural and racial group; they risk isolation and alienation from White peers in the gifted program who do not understand minority students. The feelings of isolation and alienation may result in a forced-choice dilemma between friendships and school. In this emotional tug-of-war, the gifted African American frequently loses, as reflected in his or her dropping out, underachieving, and by other indices of academic disengagement.

Racism and Discrimination

"*No medicine can cure hatred*" (African proverb). The influence of prejudice in the lives of African American and other minority students cannot be denied or ignored. It is a reality in America, including its schools and gifted programs. Too many African American youth experience racism on a daily basis, a problem that these students bring with them into the classroom. They may project this anger or rejection onto classmates, teachers, and other school personnel. Having no time out to cool down or to vent one's anger or rage, and having no one to talk to can exacerbate these feelings. Students who are unable to cope effectively with prejudice (of any kind) are unable to work effectively in school. Counselors and teachers must understand that gifted African American students are not immune from such complexities. Instead, because they are gifted, these students may be more aware of and sensitive to such inequities. Whether minority students are identified as gifted or not, persistent racism conquers the spirit of African American youth and forces them to question the integrity of the American dream, and the motives of White teachers and counselors.

Because self-concept is shaped largely through the societal messages one receives, such variables as teacher expectations, degree of harmony in the home, and the quality of peer relationships all have a significant and enduring influence on one's self-concept (Bayer, 1986). Too many African American students receive negative input about their ability to achieve academically from both African American and White cultures (Fordham, 1988). Such communication of low expectations may come directly from teachers, parents, peers, or from the larger society. All of these factors damage the self-concept and self-esteem of African American students. Counselors must, therefore, teach gifted African American students how to cope with negative peer pressures, feelings of isolation and alienation (for example, from non-gifted African American peers and gifted White peers), low teacher expectations, and other factors that hinder these students' achievement, motivation, and social and emotional well-being.

Psychological Issues

Tuma (1989) reported that from 15% to 19% of children and youth suffer from emotional or other problems that warrant mental health services. Self-perceptions play an important role in one's school achievement and behaviors. An accurate assessment of oneself is an essential component of successful counseling, particularly relative to racial identity.

The research regarding gifted students' self-concepts and the effects of labeling are inconclusive. For some students, labeling is a double-edged sword; for others, it is not. What are potentially negative consequences for African American students? These students risk social rejection and isolation from both African American and White peers. For instance, non-gifted African American students may accuse gifted African American students of acting White (Ford, 1992, 1993). These students risk isolation from White classmates who do not understand students of color, and who hold negative stereotypes and perceptions of these students. African American students also risk low expectations from teachers who neither understand nor respect racial and cultural differences among students.

Being identified as gifted can wreak havoc on family relations because such labeling affects family dynamics (Cornell & Grossberg, 1987). These dynamics can be negative when parents and family members do not understand the nature and needs of gifted students, and when they lack the resources to meet children's academic, and social and emotional needs. This lack of understanding and resources can lead to frustration, anxiety, guilt, anger, feelings of inadequacy, or any number of responses that indicate a lack of empowerment.

An often ignored but critically important variable related to self-concept among African American youth is racial identity. Racial identity represents a person's self-conceptualization as a racial being, as well as one's beliefs, attitudes, and values relative to other racial groups. By age three or four, children know their race, and by the time they enter school, the implications of racial group membership and status have become salient for them (Helms, 1994), and they understand the notion that race and ethnicity are unchangeable (Ponterotto & Pedersen, 1993). Gifted African American students may notice social injustices much earlier than non-gifted minority students, and they may be more deeply troubled by these inequities.

Racial identity plays an important role in the psychological adjustment, academic motivation, and achievement of African American students (Ford, Harris, & Schuerger, 1993; Ford, Harris, Webb, & Jones, 1994). Minority students may believe that racial and ethnic membership supersedes all other types of identity, yet, school curricula and counseling approaches rarely operate from a multicultural orientation. Thus, teachers and counselors cannot promote positive racial identities among minority students. Cross' (1971) five-stage theory illustrates the significance of racial identity for African American students. These stages are described below.

(1) **Pre-encounter:** African American youth in this stage deny the existence of such social injustices as racism; they believe that equity and equality are not just ideal but real tenets of American society. Viewing the world from a White frame of reference, they think and behave in ways that deny or minimize their blackness. For instance, African American youth who take pride in being accused of "acting White" because they speak standard English, are in gifted programs, perform at high levels academically, and/or support the achievement ideology might be in this stage. Because

of their unrelenting faith in the achievement ideology, these African American youth are more likely to achieve academically than those in other stages. Although they suffer from poor self-concept, confusion, self-deprecation, and detachment from the African American community, for these youth, academic self-concept takes precedence over social self-concept.

(2) **Encounter:** During the previous stage, African Americans want to be viewed as "human beings" rather than associated with any particular racial group. They enter the second stage upon experiencing an event that is inconsistent with their frames of reference. In the face of conflicting and startling information from an encounter, these African American youth re-evaluate their self-image, which makes them vulnerable and uncertain about their identity. For instance, an African American student in a predominantly White gifted program who is rejected by White peers because she or he is Black may enter the encounter stage. This rejection pushes them to become aware of their marginal status, to develop consciously a Black identity, and to resist conformity, specifically toward values and behaviors deemed "White." Out of confusion, guilt, anxiety, and betrayal, they develop a stronger sense of blackness and seek to emphasize their differences from White students. Speaking standard English, striving for the highest levels academically, and being in a gifted program may become less important than their identity as a minority individual and relations with other African American youth. Thus, in this stage, a conflict develops between their social and academic self-concepts.

(3) **Immersion-Emersion:** Through the guidance of mentors and role models, for example, African American students adopt a new frame of reference; they endeavor to rid themselves of an invisible identity by clinging to all elements of blackness. Gifted African American youth might wear all-black clothes and support all-black events to convince others of their racial and ethnic allegiance. In extreme cases, they become racists and support separatism; they seek to be "cool" or "macho," and do not mind living up to negative stereotypes. African American students may experience euphoria, rage, effrontery, high risk taking, and may become destructive. Thus, even the most capable African American youth may deliberately and consciously underachieve to avoid the perception of "selling out" to the White community. They may also withdraw from gifted programs or intentionally fail to meet criteria for staying identified as gifted. In essence, social self-concept takes precedence over academic self-concept.

(4) **Internalization:** As African American youth become more bicultural, pluralistic, and non-racist, the anxiety and anger described earlier are replaced by a calmer and more secure demeanor. Increased self-acceptance and a positive self-regard are the distinguishing characteristics

of this stage. Gifted African American students, therefore, seek to achieve academically, and they accept their gifts and talents. They worry less about peer pressures and do not perceive achievement as a prerogative of White students or characteristics of mainstream America. It is during this stage, then, that academic and social self-concepts are balanced, playing central and congruent roles in the lives of African American youth.

(5) **Internalization-Commitment:** In this final stage, gifted African American youth become more active politically to bring about equitable changes in society. They may create and join organizations that promote Black pride, a strong identity, and an achievement and a work ethic. These youth work with other organizations for the educational, academic, and social advancement of African Americans and other minority groups.

Cross' (1971) theory serves as a starting point from which counselors can understand the many social and psychological dilemmas confronting gifted, achieving, or underachieving African American students. It highlights what appears to be a curvilinear relationship between the stages of racial identity and achievement orientation, and racial identity and social orientation, with the earliest and latest stages more indicative of an achievement rather than social orientation. The theory also has important implications for counseling, as discussed later.

Gender Differences in Educational and Social Variables

A discussion of issues facing African American youth is incomplete without attention to gender issues. Males often have particular problems of which counselors must be aware. National statistics help explain what many are calling the "endangered African American male" (Kunjufu, 1993). The U.S. Department of Education (1993) reported that African American males continue to be referred and placed disproportionately more often in special education than any other ethnic or racial group of adolescents. Shapiro, Loeb, and Bowermaster (1993) acknowledged how such disproportionate placement in special education results in separate and unequal circumstances. This mislabeling of African American males as behavior disordered or seriously emotionally impaired increases the probability of school failure among this population. Although African American males comprise 6% of the total U.S. population, they are overrepresented among high school dropouts, school suspensions, the prison population, and students in special education classes; however, they are underrepresented in gifted programs (Ford, 1993; Kunjufu, 1993). Equally disturbing, African American males score lower than any other group on standardized tests (Governor's Commission, 1989). Although these data do not focus specifically on gifted African American males, one can reason by analogy that bright and highly capable African American males are represented in these alarming figures.

Jenkins (1936), who conducted the most extensive studies of intellectually gifted African American students, reported that African American females outnumber African

American males in gifted programs by a ratio of 2 to 1. Gallagher and Gallagher (1994) reported similar results, and attributed this finding less to test performance and more to teacher perceptions; teachers were more willing to accept African American females as gifted due to their greater tendency toward conformity and greater responsibility for learning.

In terms of teacher expectations, Irvine (1991) found that African American males at all educational levels are most likely to receive qualifying praise and controlling statements. African American males are most likely: (a) to be labeled deviant and described negatively; (b) to receive nonverbal criticism; (c) to be reprimanded and sent to the principal's office; and (d) to be judged inaccurately and negatively by teachers. On the other hand, they are least likely to receive positive teacher feedback and to interact with teachers. Relative to student relations and interactions, African American males are most likely to interact with other African American males and to be socially isolated from White students. When interactions occur, they are not likely to be academic.

Ford (1993) examined gender differences in underachievement among gifted African American males and females in grades 5 and 6. Results indicated that males were more likely than females to be underachievers, they exerted considerably less effort in school, and held more negative attitudes about school than females. African American males found school less relevant and personally meaningful than their female counterparts. Further, they were more pessimistic about social factors than females. For example, several of the early adolescent African American males spoke with anger and disappointment about the injustices African Americans wrestle with daily. These young African American males supported the notion that hard work, effort, and persistence are part of the success equation, but they believed the American dream benefitted White persons more than African American persons. The findings suggested that the African American males needed and desired more information about their racial heritage, more exposure to male and African American role models, increased affective educational experiences to feel connected to teachers, an increased sense of ownership of their schooling, and counseling experiences to cope more effectively with their anger and disappointment regarding social injustices.

Hébert (1993) focused exclusively on gifted minority males and underachievement issues. Hébert's ethnographic study used participant observations, ethnography, interviews, and document reviews to enter the lives of 12 inner city minority adolescents, half of whom were underachieving. A primary goal of the study was to explore the nature of resiliency among these males, and to examine why males in similar family and educational situations take (unconsciously or consciously) alternative paths to achievement and success.

Several factors distinguished resilient and achieving gifted African American males from nonresilient and underachieving gifted African American males. Achievers had a strong sense of self, they were sensitive and compassionate, and they had aspirations and an inner will to achieve. Further, successful minority males were nurtured by one or more adults, which often included a teacher or family member. Their

families were spiritual and optimistic, and they provided opportunities for their sons to develop and maintain their abilities. Conversely, underachieving males vacillated in their journey; they often became filled with despair, confusion, and eventually lost sight of their goals. These students also had negative curricular and counseling experiences. According to Hébert, they *learned* to dislike school and teachers who ignored their individual learning styles. Underachieving males also faced social difficulties such as problematic, complex family situations, and negative peer environments.

The previous sections presented some of the major obstacles blocking academic success and motivation for some gifted African American youth. Academic issues, social and emotional issues, and psychological issues were described, along with gender differences. The following sections present barriers to effective counseling with these students, recommendations for overcoming these obstacles, and theories and interventions for working effectively with gifted African American youth.

Barriers to Effective Counseling

African American and other racial minority groups underutilize counseling services and have higher attrition rates from counseling, especially after the first session (Sue & Sue, 1990). They have found the counselor's race to be a significant factor. Specifically, the availability of culturally similar and culturally competent counselors is an important determinant of counseling service utilization by African Americans. The issue of race may be particularly important for African Americans in the immersion-emersion stage of racial identity development, where they avoid interactions with White students and any behaviors associated with them.

A similar explanation for this underutilization is that African American students may not believe that White counselors have the skills necessary to be culturally sensitive. The expectation is that the counselor will pity, distrust, and be prejudiced against the counselee rather than understanding, aware, and empathetic. Hence, many African American students seek support from significant others, such as their family, friends, and religious leaders ("*Sorrow is like a precious treasure, shown only to friends*"). The following list represents other variables likely to contribute to the under-utilization of African American students (and, by implication, gifted African American students) in counseling (See Sue & Sue, 1990, for more detailed information):

(1) *Counseling centers often consist of predominantly White staff, even in predominantly African American settings.* This lack of diversity presents gifted African American youth with few mentors and role models, and few cultural translators, which makes it difficult to seek out counseling services.

(2) *Lack of training in multicultural counseling.* Most counselors lack substantive and ongoing training in multicultural counseling (Sue & Sue, 1990), primarily because universities and colleges do not offer graduate or

undergraduate degrees in this area. Instead, coursework often includes a course or two in this multicultural counseling.

(3) *The services offered by counseling centers are usually traditional and take place in the counselor's office*. This type of approach may be less appropriate than meeting African American students in a different context. African American students may find the one-to-one format too formal, removed, or alien. A nontraditional, multicultural approach would be to meet African American students in their environment (on their turf) or at a neutral setting, as well as in a group format. African American students share their concerns best in a safe, nonthreatening, and supportive environment. When attempting to build a trusting relationship, meet gifted African American students at a neutral setting—a library, restaurant, or park. Specifically, talking openly with students in school about school problems may be awkward for them. A supportive and nurturing environment is characterized by trust, understanding, mutual respect, and high expectations.

To facilitate positive social interactions, counselors can work with gifted African American students to understand the nature of trust, particularly the difference between naive trust and overgeneralized distrust. Naive trust leaves one vulnerable to hurt and betrayal; overgeneralized distrust leaves one cautious, guarded, self-protecting, lonely, needy, and depressed (Eisenberg & O'Dell, 1988, p. 267).

(4) *The primary vehicle for communication in counseling is verbal*. Students' ability to verbalize their concerns is a fundamental condition for counseling. Counselors (and teachers) want students to be articulate and clear in expressing their feelings and thoughts. When students do not, we may perceive them as inarticulate and less intelligent. A person who is relatively nonverbal, limited English proficient, speaks with an accent, or uses non-standard English may be placed at a disadvantage in counseling. Yet, much data indicate that African American youth: (a) prefer and are quite capable of expressing their ideas in nonverbal ways (with eyes, hands, posture, proximity), and (b) express ideas and feelings with fewer words than their White counterparts (Gay, 1978; Hale-Benson, 1986; Sue & Sue, 1990) ("*Actions speak louder than words*").

(5) *Characteristics of counseling can hinder working with gifted African American students*. As indicated below, many of the values and characteristics seen in both the goals and process of counseling are not always shared by African Americans and other minority groups:

(a) **Insight**—Most theories of counseling place a premium on the attainment of insight, which is usually the ultimate goal or the medium for "curing" clients. However, insight is not necessarily

valued in some minority cultures. In other words, insight assumes that one has time to sit back, to reflect, and to contemplate about motivations and behavior. To be able to sit back and reflect, and to relate to the future is a luxury of middle- and upper-SES groups who are less likely to be concerned about meeting basic needs.

(b) **Self-exploration**—African Americans, for instance, tend to believe that thinking too much about something can cause problems (According to two African proverbs: *The road to mental health is to avoid morbid thought; thought breaks the heart*). Focusing on one's own problems is, therefore, considered selfish and egocentric because one's family should be the center of attention.

(c) **Affect**—Some cultural groups refrain from expressing strong feelings; instead maturity is seen as the ability to control emotions and feelings. Counselors who are unfamiliar with these cultural values may perceive their clients negatively—perceive them as lacking in spontaneity, as depressed, and as repressed. Further, the willingness and ability to express emotions to counselors assumes that a certain level of trust exists between the counselor and student.

(d) **Self-disclosure**—Counseling theories often hold that the more one discloses, the healthier the individual. Yet, going to a counselor is a sign of weakness and a bad reflection on the family for some cultural groups, including African Americans. When clients are not open, counselors may erroneously conclude that they are shy, withdrawn, inhibited, repressed, or passive. Counselors must remember that self-disclosure implies that there is a trusting relationship between the counselor and client. As indicated earlier, African American students may not perceive (White) counselors as persons of goodwill, which virtually halts self-disclosure. A common African proverb states: "*If you speak, speak to him who understands you.*"

Rogers' (1961) client-centered theory proposed that effective counseling is virtually impossible unless a trusting relationship has been built. Successful counseling is mediated by a relationship between the counselor and African American students that is characterized by trust, warmth, empathic understanding, and acceptance. If counselors are to facilitate the academic, and social and emotional well-being of gifted students, they must be willing to enter their lives, to share their triumphs and successes, as well as their failures and disappointments, and hurt and pride (Wittmer & Myrick, 1989).

(e) **Individual versus group orientations**—Counseling is often a one-to-one activity that encourages students to discuss the most intimate aspect of their lives. This individual orientation is not necessarily valued by African American youth who are socially-oriented; as such, they may prefer group settings and situations to individual ones.

(f) **Extent of structure**—The counseling situation is often an ambiguous one, with clients discussing problems and counselors responding. This situation forces clients to be the primary and active agent. While an active stance to learning and communicating is preferred by African American students, they may be more passive if trust, empathy, and respect are not present in the counseling relationship.

(g) **Monolingual orientation**—Counselors may not be accustomed to the phrases and words used by many African Americans (Black English). Failure to understand imagery, analogies, nuances, and sayings may render the counselor ineffective in establishing relationships with African American clients, and in gaining some level of insight into their concerns. The counselor's perceptions of Black English can also affect the counseling relationship. Just as teachers may hold lower expectations of students who speak non-standard English, so too may counselors.

(h) **Long-range goals**—Short-term and immediate needs outweigh long-term needs or goals for some minority groups, especially low SES groups. Meeting basic needs may supersede those of insight, behavioral change, and increased achievement, for example. Individuals from low SES groups may consider insight as inappropriate for their life circumstances and situations. Their major concerns may be: How can I afford to take care of my sick mother, father, brother, or sister? How do I feed my family? Where do I find a job? This orientation toward insight in the counseling session may, therefore, prove counterproductive to the effectiveness of counseling.

(i) **Limited attention to nonverbal communication and behaviors**—Minority students, especially African American youth, often master the art of reading nonverbal cues/behaviors, such as reading when an individual says one thing but means another. This art or skill is a physical and psychological survival strategy (Sue & Sue, 1990). When African American youth note discrepancies ("*The teeth are smiling, but is the heart?*"), the counselor will have difficulty establishing a productive counseling relationship.

(j) **Understanding cause-effect relationships**—The lives of students in at-risk situations and environments are so complex as to make cause and effect conclusions (a logical interpretation of their issues) almost impossible. It is more practical and realistic to help gifted African American students isolate and examine one or two major issues in their overall situation. Priorities for some students may be test-taking skills, study skills, coping with peer relations, student-teacher relations, and so forth.

Essentially, Sue and Sue (1990) have maintained that counseling is culture-bound, class-bound, and language-bound: (a) culture-bound—individual centered in which verbal, emotional, and behavioral expressiveness and communication patterns are unidirectional, linear, verbal, and analytical; (b) class-bound—strict adherence to time schedules, ambiguous or unstructured approach to problems, and seeks long-range goals or solutions; and (c) language-bound—a heavy reliance (or overreliance) on using standard English; a strong emphasis on verbal communication.

Recommendations: Putting the Research to Use

Counselors must adopt many roles—advocate, mentor, role model, teacher, and collaborator with teachers and families—to meet the academic and nonacademic needs of gifted African American students. Few counselors would disagree with Rogers' (1961) sage advise that the first step toward helping clients is to build a trusting relationship. Erikson (1968) viewed trust versus mistrust as a critical issue of the first developmental stage, and Maslow (1954) maintained that children who do not feel safe cannot trust. A child who develops a stance of trust has developed a base for reaching out to the world and making contact (Eisenberg & O'Dell, 1988, pp. 264-265). This trust and support may be especially important when counselors work with students from different racial and cultural groups than themselves. Care and empathy from a school counselor and/or teacher can help restore safety and trust in gifted African American students, particularly those who feel disenfranchised from the educational system and school personnel. Hence, when working with gifted African American students, counselors must draw upon Rogers' (1961) notion of unconditional positive regard, in which all students are looked upon as individuals with unique concerns—irrespective of the color of their skin and abilities.

As Figure 1 indicates, a developmental approach to counseling is needed whereby counselors address the individuality of gifted African American students relative to their needs and concerns. The developmental approach assumes that the needs of elementary, middle, and high school students are quantitatively and qualitatively different. These issues can be categorized as affective (social and emotional), psychological, and academic, and they represent the primary means for prevention and intervention. Further, some issues are most germane to adolescent males, but irrelevant and inappropriate for younger children and females. Similarly, some issues are important to males, but may be more important or critical for females. However, if the issues are addressed early (during

preschool and elementary school), they may not be present later. Proactive efforts, therefore, seek prevention over intervention, and they are holistic because they address affective, psychological, and academic needs. The focus on prevention and affective development is important for all students, particularly for African American males.

Affective development includes increasing students' intrapersonal skills and competencies, improving interpersonal and social skills, clarifying values and setting priorities, becoming bicultural, and coping effectively with various feelings and discrimination. Psychological development for African American students includes increasing their self-esteem and racial identity, exploring their achievement orientation, and increasing their self-efficacy relative to achievement. Academic development must focus on promoting positive attitudes toward school and achievement, improving academic and test performance, strengthening critical thinking and problem solving skills, understanding strengths and shortcomings, and resolving particular problems hindering their achievement. Finally, vocational counseling and guidance must explore students' aspirations and expectations, increase their understanding of options, exploring educational requirements, and visiting universities and colleges.

AFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT (Social and Emotional)
GOALS: To increase intrapersonal skills and competencies (including self-understanding, self-awareness, self-respect, and confidence), particularly healthy self-concepts and self-esteem [Eb, Mb, Hb] To improve interpersonal skills (social relations with peers, parents, teachers, and authority figures) [Eb, Mm, Hm] To appreciate similarities and differences between self and others [Eb, Mb, Hb] To understand and handle physical [Mb, Hb] and socioemotional [Eb, Mb, Hb] development associated with adolescence To accept self as an emotional being; to view compassion and empathy as humane rather than feminine [Em, Hb, Mb] To clarify values, set priorities, and resolve inner conflicts, particularly regarding school, achievement, and social relationships [Em, Mb, Hb] To promote biculturality and enhance social competence [Em, Mb, Hb] To use abilities proactively and prosocially [Mm, Hm] To understand and cope effectively with frustration and anger, especially feelings of injustice regarding racial discrimination [Em, Mb, Hb] and sexual discrimination (Mf, Hf]
PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT
GOALS: To increase understanding of racial identity and its relationship to academic achievement, self-concept, and racism (Mb, Hb] To explore fears, anxieties, and stressors associated with success and achievement [Eb, Mb, Hb] To increase internal locus of control and self-efficacy [Mb, Hb]

Note: The suggestions are directed at students in all school levels (E = elementary students; M = middle school/junior high school students; H = high school students; m = males; f = females; b = both males and females). The model does not assume that the issues listed are *equally* important for males and females or for students at the three school levels.

Ford (forthcoming)

Figure 1. A developmental intervention model for African American males and females.

ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT
GOALS: To develop positive attitudes toward school and achievement [Mb, Hb] To improve academic and test performance [Eb, Mb, Hb] To improve basic skills, including test taking and study skills [Eb, Mb, Hb] To strengthen critical thinking and problem solving skills [Eb, Mb, Hb] To understand academic strengths and shortcomings, including learning style preferences and strategies for accommodating teaching styles [Eb, Mb, Hb] To explore options/experiences that nurture one's abilities [Eb, Mb, Hb] To set realistic and appropriate goals [Eb, Mb, Hb] To select challenging academic courses [Mb, Hb] To understand and resolve problems that inhibit school performance (perfectionism, procrastination, fear of failure or success, test anxiety, poor motivation, negative peer pressures, etc.) [Eb, Mb, Hb]
VOCATIONAL/CAREER DEVELOPMENT
GOALS: To explore aspirations and expectations [Eb, Mb, Hb] To develop an understanding of vocational options based on personal strengths and shortcomings [Mb, Hb] To explore (extensively) careers relative to educational requirements, salary, job requirements, and future demand/need [Eb, Mb, Hb] To visit postsecondary institutions and programs related to current career interests [Eb, Mb, Hb]

Note: The suggestions are directed at students in all school levels (E = elementary students; M = middle school/junior high school students; H = high school students; m = males; f = females; b = both males and females). The model does not assume that the issues listed are *equally* important for males and females or for students at the three school levels.

Ford (forthcoming)

Figure 1. A developmental intervention model for African American males and females. (continued)

Counseling Interventions: Techniques, Strategies, and Philosophies

Counseling interventions must help African American students cope with the following difficulties inherent in being part of gifted programs: identity as being both gifted and African American, peer pressures and relations, feelings of isolation from both classmates and teachers, and sensitivity about feeling different as one of few African American students in the gifted program. This social competence represents a survival strategy. The interventions discussed in the following paragraphs relate to: (a) self-concept and racial identity; (b) underachievement; (c) peer relations; and (d) learning styles.

Self-Concept and Racial Identity Development

Students' negative feelings about themselves are formed from evaluations placed on them by others; these evaluations promote the belief that they are worthless, stupid, and unlovable persons. Once formed, negative self-concepts and low self-esteem are difficult to reverse. A positive self-concept and racial identity can help gifted African American students deal more effectively with barriers to school achievement, and social and emotional well-being.

Gifted African American students share the concerns of gifted students in general as well as those of minority students. Thus, students must have opportunities to explore their feelings about being gifted. What does being gifted mean? In what ways are they gifted? How do they feel about being labeled and identified as gifted? How do they feel about being in gifted program? What are the social ramifications of being identified and placed in gifted education programs? To overcome negative perceptions and misunderstandings, it is important that African American students interact with older African American males and females who are confident, and academically and professionally successful. High school and college students, community leaders, and teachers can be recruited into schools to serve as mentors and role models.

Cinematherapy (Newton, 1994), bibliotherapy, journal writing, visualizations, self-affirmations, and mentorships can promote self-awareness and racial identity. Rather than have a grab bag or hodgepodge of interventions, counselors should adopt techniques and strategies that are unique to gifted African American students and their concerns. Books, movies, and other materials can be found at African American bookstores. Because they are often developed by African Americans themselves, these materials are not likely to be racially and culturally insensitive or biased. In addition to the techniques and strategies adopted by counselors, the following set of guidelines are recommended for working with gifted African American students to promote healthier self-concepts and identities:

(1) *Focus on the strengths of gifted African American students.* Figures 2 and 3 present common characteristics and strengths of African American students, including verbal abilities, tactile and kinesthetic abilities, leadership skills, and so forth. Counselors and teachers must use activities

and exercises based on these strengths. Assessments of learning style preferences (visual, social, tactile, kinesthetic, relational, etc.) and area(s) of giftedness (creativity, specific academic, leadership, music, spatial, etc.) can provide valuable information for counseling gifted African American students. For instance, role playing and other tactile and kinesthetic experiences capitalize on learning style preferences through active involvement. Music therapy, art therapy, and drama therapy also tap into learning style preferences, as discussed later.

(2) *Provide opportunities for success by using praise and reinforcing positive behaviors*. Because both gifted and African American youth are adept at reading nonverbal behaviors (and seeing discrepancies between verbal and nonverbal cues), counselors must be genuine in their praise and positive feedback. Praise that lacks authenticity and genuineness falls on deaf ears; it also raises barriers to trust and self-disclosure from African American youth. Praise and reward are not designed to decrease intrinsic motivation, but to enhance the student-counselor relationship. Students need to know that positive behaviors are noticed and appreciated.

(3) *Work with gifted African American students to develop realistic, attainable, and relevant goals*. Gifted African American students may need assistance understanding the differences between short-term and long-term goals, including the importance of delayed gratification. For instance, what are the benefits of remaining in a gifted program versus dropping out? How will early and consistently high academic performance increase one's opportunities for post-secondary schooling, admittance to a prestigious college or university, or receiving a scholarship? How are short-term goals related to long-term goals?

(4) *Establish more opportunities for group interaction*. Gifted African American students who have poor, negative, or unrealistic self-concepts should be involved in more group activities (tutoring, mentorships, group counseling, etc.) and cooperative activities. Working with other students is likely to help gifted African American students to feel better about themselves. Group affiliations can promote a sense of identification, a sense of belonging, pride, respect, and recognition. They provide opportunities for students to learn from other youth, which is often less threatening than learning from adults.

Gifted Students in General	Gifted African American Students
Retain an extraordinary quantity of information; excellent memory	Alertness, curiosity, remember events well, especially those perceived as unjust, unfair.
Varied interests and curiosity, questioning, skeptical	Learn quickly through experience and concrete activities; explore, question, and do not accept things at face value. May be discouraged from asking too many questions.
Accelerated pace of thought processes	Retain and use ideas and information well and quickly. Able to apply new/novel information to different situations and contexts.
Early ability to delay closure	Generalize learning to other areas and show relationships/connections among apparently unrelated ideas and events.
Creative, innovative	Resourceful; able to solve problems using ingenious and resourceful methods; risk takers; nonconforming; independent. Make up games and activities; express ideas in diverse and unusual ways.
Insightful; keen observation	Pick up injustices, especially on racist attitudes and inequitable practices; read nonverbal behaviors well (may feel alienated by school personnel and students whose nonverbal cues do not match verbal cues).
Verbal proficiency, large vocabulary, facility of expression	Have a large, expressive vocabulary, which may be inappropriate for school setting; standard English may be the second language.
Multipotentiality	Frequently artistic, musical, creative, psychomotor, and social/leaders; may neglect school work due to other interests and priorities.
Social competence; experiential intelligence	Have practical intelligence or social competence; a strong, persuasive leader. May use leadership skills/abilities in nonproductive or socially unacceptable ways. Able to adapt to different contexts; bicultural.

Figure 2. Characteristics of giftedness associated with gifted African American students.

Affective—Express feelings and emotions

Creative—Original ideas; inventive; improvise with common materials

Social—Enjoy small-group and cooperative learning and problem solving

Socially competent—Survivors, practical intelligence, tacit knowledge

Visual and Performing Arts—Articulate in role playing and storytelling

Psychomotor ability—Creative movement, dance, and dramatics

Verbal—Expressive and colorful speech; informal language rich in imagery

Kinesthetic—Expressiveness through movement, body language, gestures

Tactile—Expressiveness through touching, experiencing, active involvement

Sense of Humor—Clever, sarcastic

Concrete, relational, holistic thinkers—See connections and relations between events; see the big picture first

Insightful—Notice discrepancies, particularly discrimination, injustices and inequities

Figure 3. Strengths of African American students.

(5) *Encourage and support positive moral values and behaviors.* Gifted students are often concerned about world and community issues such as death, crime, poverty, famine, and war. Capitalize on these positive moral values by helping gifted African American students to reframe negative thoughts into positive ones. Encourage African American students to become involved in social and human services organizations such as nursing homes, hospitals, recycling centers, and food drives, for example.

(6) *Promote social competence and encourage biculturalism.* African American students must learn to survive in their community, school, and society at large. Biculturality falls under the umbrella of social competence. They must not be asked (or expected) to give up their cultural styles of communicating, behaving, and learning; but rather, they must understand which behaviors may be inappropriate in certain contexts (such as during a job interview, during work, in school, and so forth). Biculturalism is the antithesis of assimilation, where students are required

and expected to enter the melting pot, to rid themselves of their cultural orientations and heritage, and their values and beliefs.

Underachievement

> Youth who fail on the margins are as deserving as those who thrive in the mainstream. Too many students have become separated from constructive learning. (Sinclair & Ghory, 1992, pp. 33-34)

A common recommendation for improving students' achievement is to enhance their learning skills—study habits, listening skills, time management, stress reduction, as well as goal setting and self-concept enhancement. The following principles are also recommended, regardless of the particular technique or strategy counselors choose to adopt:

(1) *Adopt broader and more comprehensive definitions of underachievement.* Underachievement is often defined as a discrepancy between the child's ability and expected or predicted achievement. This definition relies heavily on standardized tests which often fail to capture the strengths of African American and other minority students. Use observations and formal and informal assessment strategies to understand the individual nature of underachievement for each student. The discrepancy definition must not be the *sine qua non* definition of underachievement; it ignores/overlooks many students who do not test well due to test anxiety, lack of task commitment, disinterest in the test, bias within the test, and a host of other issues.

(2) *Determine the nature, scope, intensity, and duration of underachievement.* Is underachievement mild, severe, or chronic? Is it subject specific? teacher specific? (Do gifted African American students seem to have similar concerns relative to one teacher? difficulties with certain teaching styles?) Is there a learning disability? Physical disability or problem (including poor eye-hand coordination, needs eyeglasses)? Learning style differences? A lack of intrinsic motivation? A lack of effort? Test anxiety? Poor study skills? Poor test taking skills? Poor testing conditions (test directions poorly explained, too many distractions, too noisy, too quiet, poor lighting, uncomfortable chairs, small print, too much or too little structure, other preoccupations, etc.)? Poor timing (headache, sleepy, hungry, forgot eyeglasses, needs eyeglasses, uncooperative mood)?

(3) *Involve families in the learning and counseling process.* Talk with parents and family members about their perceptions of students' abilities, special needs, and resources in the home and community. Extended family members—grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other relatives—are able to provide additional insights into the lives of gifted African American

students. Without their input, counselors cannot gather a complete perspective of African Americans. What is the child like when not in school? What does the child like or dislike about school? How does he/she feel about being in the gifted program? How are the relationships with classmates and teachers? Use this information in prescriptive ways, to develop a holistic perspective of underachievement.

(4) *Explore the quality and quantity of support systems and resources*. Who can African American students turn to for emotional support and educational assistance? for guidance? nurturing? mentoring? Are family members, peers, and teachers supportive of African American students in gifted programs, or do they support an anti-achievement ethic? With this information, counselors can help African American families and their children gain missing support and access to resources. Information on summer and enrichment programs, programs at libraries and other public institutions, information on scholarships and mentorships, and so forth can be provided by counselors.

(5) *Involve African American professionals and community leaders in the learning process*. Peers (same age or older) can serve as tutors, role models and mentors. Recruit college students, particularly those from African American service organizations (such as fraternities and sororities) and sports teams, to support African American youth by serving as big brothers and sisters. Establish internships with Black business organizations or companies, and Black colleges and universities. These opportunities represent one means of increasing students' vocational aspirations and knowledge, and for increasing their ultimate success in the world of work.

(6) *Integrate multiculturalism throughout the learning and helping process*. Whereas gifted underachievers may be bored and disinterested in school because it is unchallenging, gifted African American underachievers may also be disinterested because the curriculum is irrelevant and lacks purpose and meaning. We must bring African American students' reality into the classroom and counseling process, which means promoting multicultural, pluralistic practices. Multicultural education and counseling must permeate schools. This focus must be substantive and ongoing; it must be integrated throughout the curriculum, instruction, and counseling.

Social Competence: Coping With Social Injustices and Social Relations

Anger, Frustration, and Anxiety

Students are frequently punished for exhibiting aggressive or destructive behaviors; yet they are seldom taught how to cope with anger. On a daily basis, many students deal with the realities and ramifications of stress, anxiety, frustration, and anger

that interrupt the learning process. For gifted African American youth, prejudice may be a daily reality, a persistent reminder of their marginal status. Consequently, they may come to school angry, enraged, and/or estranged. When students cannot cope with their angry feelings, the result may be violence, crime, substance abuse, depression, suicide, and self-destructive behaviors (Omizo, Hershberger, & Omizo, 1988). Thus, students may choose their teachers and classmates as targets for venting their emotions. Problematic behaviors, however, are not a student's total personality and behavioral repertoire; they are responses to how a student perceives his or her environment and responses to how he or she is being treated (Sinclair & Ghory, 1992).

Relaxation training, stress management, and conflict resolution are recommended for helping gifted African American students cope with their feelings. Teach them to understand stress and anger, how the body responds to stress and anger, and that both are inevitable or unavoidable. Helping strategies include breathing techniques, muscular relaxation, mental imagery, and biofeedback. For some students, journal writing, exercising, reading, or talking with someone about their concerns can be cathartic. Encouraging gifted African American students to ask for time out, and providing a safe environment where they can go to vent their frustrations are also important. Other outlets include group counseling where students can discuss their concerns and experiences with relevant others, as well as share effective coping behaviors. For example, Peterson (1990) developed a noon-hour discussion group for gifted students to share their concerns. Topics included stress, personality styles, testing, recognizing strengths and weaknesses, family conflicts, career concerns, and social relationships. Conflict resolution, in particular, is effective for placing antagonists in a win-win situation; the art of compromise can carry students far in school and life. Ponterotto and Pedersen (1993) describe strategies for decreasing racism and promoting racial harmony within schools. Two of these exercises are presented in Appendix A.

Social and Peer Relations

One in six Americans does not have a friend with whom he or she can confide (Matter & Matter, 1985). Byrnes (1984) reported that 19% of school children may be considered social isolates—no true peers, poor peer relations, or poor relations with adults. Loneliness and isolation are of special concern to counselors for various reasons. Specifically, good interpersonal relationships, and feelings of relatedness and belonging are considered essential to mental health (Maslow, 1954). Persistent feelings of isolation make students vulnerable to depression, juvenile delinquency, physical illness, and suicide (Matter & Matter, 1985).

The need to belong and to have friends is important for all students; it may be especially important for African American students as they are severely underrepresented in gifted programs. As one of few minority students in the program, it is likely that they will experience feelings of alienation and isolation. Imagine the damaging impact of eating lunch alone, of having no date for parties or the prom, of being the last to be chosen for a team, of being ignored and consistently overlooked. Counselors, in collaboration with teachers, can positively influence the classroom dynamics and increase

its sense of community such that schools truly become sanctuaries for learning—a welcoming rather than alienating place for gifted African American students.

Groups have a powerful emotional influence on their members. Classrooms, as the longest lasting academic groups, represent an important arena for fostering cohesion and belonging (Wynne & Walberg, 1994). Group work, particularly cooperative activities, is essential in promoting social contact among gifted African American and gifted White students. Competition tends to bring out the best in products and the worst in people (Wittmer & Myrick, 1989). That is, the amount of time spent in shared and noncompetitive activities can encourage friendships and decrease feelings of social isolation, as well as fears and stereotypes. Counselors can help gifted African American students discover interests similar to other students; they can encourage them to develop and/or join organizations based on these interests.

Counselors can also work with teachers to design more opportunities for interaction and to build positive and trusting relationships. For instance, peer tutoring can maximize positive classroom interactions, friendships, prosocial behaviors, as well as self-esteem and achievement among economically disadvantaged students considered at risk for academic failure. Structured academic support groups can improve underachieving students' achievement and academic self-concept. Students must learn how to set academic goals and commitments, time management and study skills, test anxiety management, stress reduction, and career and life planning. The best way to prepare students for a satisfying life is to give them a wide repertoire of techniques for lifelong learning (Walker de Felix, 1992, p. 64). The following recommendations may help counselors to promote social and emotional well-being among gifted African American youth and their peers:

(1) *Determine the causes underlying poor or negative peer relations.* Use writing exercises (diaries, journals), incomplete sentence exercises, sociograms, and other techniques to gain a comprehensive assessment. Talk with parents and other family members for additional feedback.
(2) *Advocate for cooperative rather than competitive group activities.* Build a sense of cohesion and community among students and teachers. All students want to feel a sense of belonging and connection.
(3) *Teach gifted African American students how to cope with rejection.* If appropriate, discussions about prejudice should be addressed, particularly as African American students learn early that racial prejudice is a reality. Bibliotherapy and cinematherapy, for instance, can provide gifted African American students with effective strategies to handle adverse situations.

Counseling Through Learning Styles

Using learning styles in counseling lets African American students use their strengths and preferences to grow, and to gain increased self-awareness and acceptance. This section offers recommendations for why and how counselors can effectively use learning styles in working with gifted African American students. Emphasis is placed on

counseling through the expressive arts (drama, dance, music, writing, and art, including computer art), and kinesthetic and tactile experiences (such as magic). Counseling through gifted African American students' preferred learning styles nurtures their soul as well as their intellect.

The Expressive Arts

African American students have unique perceptual patterns, including verbal and communication styles that use dramatic talking, speaking with rhythm, and nonverbal mannerisms (Gilbert & Gay, 1985; Saracho & Gerstl, 1992; Shade & Edwards, 1987) that make counseling through the dramatic arts an ideal approach. Researchers and practitioners have noted the benefits of art in counseling students (Schaefer & Reid, 1986). Counselors have used art with angry and aggressive students (including middle school students), with distrustful and defiant students, and with students who have poor peer relations, feel helpless, and have excessive parental expectations (Krottman, 1990). Art helps expand and sharpen students' level of awareness; art expression allows the unconscious to speak through symbols, images, and fantasies (Betensky, 1973). It is a safe way to practice social skills, to express emotions, to put thoughts and images into concrete forms, and art bridges the gap between the conscious and unconscious, and the verbal and nonverbal. Counseling gifted African American students through dance, music, art, drama, and writing offers an effective means of communicating their creative productivity and imaginative thinking. The expressive arts: (a) provide authentic learning that changes behavior and stimulates reflection (b) enhance students' ability to interpret symbols; (c) are associated with growth in all areas of development, including academics; (d) motivate students more effectively than current devices (such as tests, grades, privileges, the promise of a future); and (e) involve students as active participants, as meaning-makers and constructors of knowledge such that gifted African American students are better able to discover rather than be passive recipients of someone else's ready-made answers.

Adults (counselors, teachers, parents) have the responsibility of affirming and nurturing every talent in every child. The expressive arts give gifted African American students a reason to learn, as one Javits grant (ArtsConnection) has revealed (Callahan, Tomlinson, & Pizzat, 1993).

Poetry and Music

Gladding (1987) utilized poetic expressions to counsel students. Poetry, he argued, comes naturally to students; it helps one to express emotions, to remember, to identify hidden aspects of the self, and to communicate across cultures (for better understanding of oneself in relation to others). In either individual or group settings, gifted African American students can use metaphors, similes, and imagery to express their wishes, perceptions, expectations, fears, concerns, and to gain a sense of control.

Poems and songs also help students to understand the crises responsible for their problems, and to recognize their limitations and strengths. Poetry and songs are also

helpful in dealing with social issues, crises, family issues, and in promoting group cohesion. Poetry by past and current poets such as Maya Angelou, Langston Hughes, Nikki Giovanni, and others who describe the real life experiences of minority groups, are especially recommended.

Music

Music represents an additional technique for counseling gifted African American students through their learning styles preferences. Music elicits long forgotten memories, communicates feelings, creates and intensifies moods, and increases group cohesion (Bowman, 1987). Music is a powerful tool for reducing anxiety and anger, providing positive reinforcement, decreasing disruptive behaviors, calming students, increasing self-esteem, and increasing motivation. It is also a way to establish rapport with counselors, an especially important goal when counseling African American students. Background music can facilitate guided fantasy, and counselors can use culturally relevant songs to explore students' issues.

Drama

Irwin (1987) recommended poetry and drama (psychodrama) for promoting self-awareness and learning, while Moreno (1946), founder of psychodrama, recognized its power to move people from the "couch to the circle." Perhaps the most significant contribution is its ability to let individuals express their emotions and impulses, and to encourage introspection. Drama therapy lets counselors gain insight into other dimensions of the child's personality; it helps counselors recognize feelings of guilt, shame, and anxiety in students; it allows counselors to evaluate a students' developmental levels and cognitive abilities.

The experiential nature of drama allows students to externalize their learning from imagined to real experiences. Similarly, it allows tactile and kinesthetic learners to be active and involved. Drama presents a safe environment for expressing negative and positive feelings. Finally, it respects both verbal and nonverbal modes of expression, providing gifted African American students the opportunity to learn through image and language.

Puppetry

Puppets are a safe way for young children to express or communicate very deep, sensitive, and private feelings. Schmidt and Biles (1983) also found puppets to be appropriate and effective for middle school students. Puppetry can be used for many reasons; it is effective for problem solving, blending fantasy and reality, for promoting dialogues, and it helps students form and anchor reality (James & Myer, 1987). Puppets also serve as role models for good attending and classroom behavior, and positive attitudes toward school tasks (Davis, 1985). As with the other techniques described, puppetry offers much promise for increasing self-awareness in gifted African American

students, as well as awareness and understanding in counselors about the concerns and needs of these students.

Writing

For many students, writing represents an important medium for personal growth because it is psychologically liberating. It permits students to express their thoughts and feelings in both academic and counseling settings. As an awareness tool, writing can help gifted African American students organize and exercise their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors; it can also provide an emotional outlet for catharsis. Writing exercises include correspondence, journal writing, creative writing, poetry, and structured writing. When using writing as a technique, however, counselors should consider individual and cultural expressive styles, as well as the fact that some students find little pleasure in writing. Such disinterest can halt social and emotional growth rather than stimulate self-awareness.

Drawing

Computer art has been used in counseling students (Dinkemeyer & Carlson, 1983; Johnson, 1983). Not only is this a timely use of technology, but also an important medium for helping students discuss feelings, to gain self-confidence, and become less anxious. Johnson (1987) used computer art to build relationships with students experiencing crises that were accompanied by anger, sadness, and fear. Computer art permitted students to express their feelings, and it opened channels of communication that conventional counseling may not have allowed.

Magic Tricks

A sense of humor and tactile and kinesthetic learning preferences have been recognized as a characteristic of gifted African American students. Many students express these preferences in academically destructive manners, such as becoming class clowns. This also is an effective means of camouflaging or detracting attention from their gifts and talents (Ford, 1992, 1993). Bowman (1986) noted that magic tricks capture the natural curiosity of gifted youth of all ages, particularly because they are highly motivating and attention-getting. For instance, McCormack (1985) used magic to increase science students' creative thinking, observation skills, and healthy skepticism; used magic to teach perceptual psychology to college students. Magic can also be used to increase students' self-esteem, self-concept, eye-hand coordination, patience, attending behavior, curiosity, motivation, and interpersonal skills (Frith & Walker, 1983). Goodman and Furman (1981) utilized magic tricks to improve students' problem solving and analytical skills, attention to details, deductive reasoning, and communication skills.

For optimal effectiveness, gifted African American students must be aware of and appreciate their strengths, understand that one learning style is not better than another, and learn to adapt their styles to different teachers and situations.

Recommendations for Continued Professional and Personal Growth for Counselors

It is the role of educators (and by extension, counselors) to change conditions until opportunities for action and reflection are created that promote student learning and growth (Dewey, 1963). The following recommendations are offered for helping to ensure that counselors are better prepared to meet the needs of gifted African American students who seek their guidance and assistance.

(1) *Counselors must take part in continuing professional education and development in working with gifted students* ("*He who learns, teaches*"). School counselors should seek extensive and substantive training in working with gifted students to understand and appreciate the heterogeneous nature of this group. Suggested courses include those related to identification, underachievement, counseling, and affective development. Ideally, more counselors will pursue specializations such as certification, endorsements, minors, undergraduate, or graduate degrees in counseling gifted students.

(2) *Counselors must seek substantive multicultural counseling preparation*. School counselors are also encouraged to seek extensive and substantive multicultural training to understand better the differential needs of gifted minority students. Because counselors traditionally lack professional preparation in multicultural counseling, they may be unable to recognize that African American and other minority students encounter distinctive barriers to achievement. This poor knowledge base may hinder the ability of counselors to respond effectively to their needs.

Casas, Ponterotto, and Gutierrez (1986) asserted that the counseling of culturally different persons by those untrained to work with such clients should be regarded as unethical. Gifted African American students need a place to turn emotionally in order to express their concerns, fears, and difficulties. This support is especially meaningful and effective if imparted by a professional (teacher or school counselor) who is trained to work with both gifted students and culturally diverse students. Such preparation can be acquired from educational institutions, human service organizations, and professional associations.

Counselors must work with teachers to provide supportive rather than culturally assaultive classrooms, conduct activities that develop awareness, acceptance, and appreciation for themselves and other racial groups, foster an interest in minority students to seek careers that have been traditionally closed to minority groups, and keep up-to-date regarding research, literature, and practices related to minority and gifted students. Locke (1989) recommended several strategies to enhance counselors' multicultural competence:

(a) Be open to the existence of culturally sensitive values and attitudes among students; be honest in relationships with minority students.
(b) Avoid stereotyping racial minority groups (retain the uniqueness of each student); strive to keep a reasonable balance between your views of students as human beings and cultural group members; teach students how to recognize stereotypes and how to challenge biases.
(c) Ask questions about culturally and racially diverse students. Encourage gifted African American students to discuss and be open about their concerns, beliefs, and cultural values; talk positively with students about their physical and cultural heritage; make sure that students understand that one's race and ethnicity are never acceptable reasons for being rejected.
(d) Hold high expectations for all students, and encourage school personnel to do likewise.
(e) Participate in the communities of culturally and racially diverse students; learn their customs and values; share this information with students, teachers, and other colleagues.
(f) Encourage school personnel to acknowledge the strengths and contributions of racial and ethnic groups.
(g) Learn about one's own culture and cultural values; appreciation of others begins with appreciation of self.
(h) Keep in mind that minority students are both members of a racial and cultural group, and unique individuals; strive to keep a balance between students as a cultural group member and a unique human being.

With these guidelines, tolerance and acceptance for differences can become commonplace in schools. The initiatives used by counselors to promote intragroup cohesion and support should be multifaceted (eclectic, with varied activities and services); inclusionary (engages teachers, students, family members, administrators, and other school staff and personnel); developmental (holistic and proactive rather than reactive; prevention- and intervention-oriented); continuous; and substantive.

To work effectively with African American students, counselors must enhance their knowledge, awareness, and skills. By increasing their knowledge of other cultures, broadening their perspectives of personal values, and learning new skills, counselors will be better prepared to work with racially and culturally diverse students. Gaining an awareness of cultures empowers counselors with more appropriate counseling skills and increased respect for individual and group differences. The challenge before counselors is to become sensitive to cultural pluralism and to become aware of how their values can hinder the counseling relationship. This introspection requires courage and time, especially when one risks looking inward at how his/her *own* behavior can be unhealthy. Once

knowledge, skills, and awareness are enhanced, counseling issues can be addressed and intervention can begin. As an African proverb goes, "*Before healing others, heal thyself.*"

(3) *There must be increased information gathering by counselors.* School counselors are urged to gather more demographic data on their students. Cumulative records or transcripts (grades, test scores, and anecdotal information) should be requested from all students seeking (or being referred for) assistance, so that school counselors can understand the past school experiences of gifted African American students relative to achievement and underachievement and to their academic strengths and shortcomings. This information gathering requires increased communication and sharing among counselors at the K-12 and postsecondary levels.

(4) *There must be increased and consistent contact among counselors at all educational levels.* The line of demarcation between high school and college counselors may itself contribute to negative educational outcomes for students (Grites, 1979). Therefore, counselors at all school levels are urged to work collaboratively and consistently to ensure gifted students a smooth transition from one school level to the next. Counselors at all educational levels must share relevant information among each other to help ensure a positive educational experience for gifted students. Counselors must also work with teachers to find meaningful ways to serve gifted African American students who have not found sufficient reason or means for achieving academic and/or personal success. This collaboration promises to ensure that gifted African American students have as many support mechanisms as possible to learn and achieve. The problems confronting African American students are so complex and diverse that simple approaches and program efforts, as well as isolated efforts, will have little success.

(5) *There must be increased attention to the social and psychological needs of gifted African American students.* For increased understanding, insight, and awareness, counselors should explore both social issues and psychological concerns with gifted African American students. Hence, counselors must focus on the importance of understanding: (a) such social and affective needs as the desire to belong or not to feel different; (b) such social needs as peer friendships; and (c) such psychological needs as identity, self-esteem, and self-concept. Moreover, such cultural needs as the ability to live in two different societies are special concerns for some gifted African American students. Ideally, counselors will be empathetic with, sensitive to, and knowledgeable of the realities that attend being gifted, and be cognizant of the reality that being a gifted African American student compounds the aforementioned difficulties. With this knowledge

base, counselors can help assure that gifted African American students do not become marginalized.

(6) *Efforts must be directed at the recruitment of racially and culturally diverse counseling personnel*. Given the changing demographics nationally, it seems only logical and natural that counseling centers reflect this diversity. Culturally and racially diverse counseling personnel represent important mentors and role models for gifted African American students. These counselors can also serve as cultural translators who are likely to understand the needs and concerns of African American students.

(7) *Efforts must be directed at the retention of African American students in gifted programs*. As asserted earlier, the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted programs may be, in part, a function of their decision to leave the program. For instance, feelings of isolation and alienation among gifted African American students, and lack of multicultural sensitivity and awareness by staff and students may contribute to this attrition.

Counselors are in an ideal position to serve as catalysts for change; they must attempt to integrate, collaborate, and implement change. To the extent possible, counselors can serve as advocates for African American students by training all school personnel (teachers, staff, administrators, and students) in multicultural awareness. Counselors can also work with teachers to involve more African American families in the educational process. Equally important, counselors can help initiate a systematic and comprehensive needs assessment to understand the unique culture of their particular school or district. What are the multicultural needs of students and the school? In what ways do course schedules and grouping practices contribute to (or reinforce) gifted African American students' isolation and separation? To what extent do minorities participate in school activities? How positive are interactions or interpersonal relationships among students, as well as teachers and African American (and other minority) students? In what ways do curriculum, pedagogy, and counseling promote or reinforce biases and stereotypes? How much are African American families involved in schools? Is this participation substantive (such as teaching, planning, decision making, site-based management) or superficial (for example, fundraising, bake sales)? How comfortable are African American students in gifted program? How do teachers and classmates feel about racially and culturally diverse students? Is there racial tension in the school and/or gifted program?

Ultimately, counselors can work collaboratively with teachers to establish human relations opportunities for all students. Promoting understanding and awareness within all students requires interactions that are egalitarian, culturally sensitive, systematic, and comprehensive. A human relations group or committee, for instance, could be developed and meet consistently to discuss issues and instances of oppression, inclusion, exclusion, and separatism in the gifted program and school. Similarly, the group could develop a conflict resolution program in which problems are discussed and resolved by a supervised

and neutral peer board that has received substantive training in conflict resolution and culturally sensitive conciliation skills.

Summary and Conclusions

The focus of this monograph was the primary issues facing gifted African American students, specifically underachievement, racial identity, and social and emotional issues. It was emphasized that counselors have many roles and responsibilities that call for increased attention to barriers to gifted African American students' achievement and motivation. It was also stressed that learning styles, lack of motivation, poor peer relations, low self-concepts, weak racial identities, and environmental risk factors can work to the detriment of gifted African American students. Finally, it was emphasized that counselors should recognize both individual and group differences among *all* students. Given the nation's changing demographics, counselors are experiencing increased contact with African American and other minority students. With an understanding of their needs, counselors can better serve this student population by celebrating diversity and advocating for the human rights of all students.

A central theme of this monograph is that gifted African American youth are first and foremost human beings in need of understanding, caring, respect, and empathy. With this basic awareness and appreciation, counselors can begin the process of effective counseling. It is incumbent upon school counselors to help gifted African American students appreciate their gifts, manage negative peer pressures, cope effectively with social injustices, make appropriate educational choices, learn effective coping strategies, and to set realistic goals and expectations.

An equally important theme is that gifted African American students contend with issues associated with their giftedness and their race; however, the academic, psychological, and social and emotional difficulties may be more a function of race than ability. Thus, many of the issues raised throughout the monograph related not only to gifted African American students, but African American and other minority students in general.

The strategies, interventions, and philosophies espoused throughout this monograph emphasize the importance of understanding students from a holistic perspective. This includes focusing on the needs and concerns of gifted students in general (such as, high anxiety and stress, low self-concept, poor peer relations) and African American and minority students (for example, racism, low teacher expectations, learning style differences, disproportionate dropout rates, racial identity). There are no easy solutions to the many and multifaceted issues facing gifted African American students. It is clear, however, that with counselors as advocates and mentors, gifted African American students will be better prepared to achieve in school and life.

Guidelines

The following guidelines are recommended for working with gifted African American students to promote healthier self-concepts and identities:

Guideline 1: Focus on and acknowledge the strengths of gifted African American students.

Research Support: All students have strengths, yet they may be manifested differently among minority students. For example, the sensitivity noted among gifted students may be most apparent among gifted African American students regarding social and racial injustices. Similarly, African American students who question social injustices and inconsistencies may be viewed as trouble makers rather than insightful and sensitive. And, gifted African American students who ask many questions may be perceived as aggressive. Other strengths include tactile and kinesthetic preferences that may be misinterpreted as hyperactivity, social preferences may be perceived as a lack of independence. The interpretations made of behaviors exhibited by African American students must not be myopic.

Guideline 2: Help gifted African American students to build positive social and peer relations.

Research Support: African American students are generally socially oriented and extroverted. Friendships, therefore, are important for identity and emotional well-being. Counselors can work with teachers to establish more opportunities for group interaction and cohesion between gifted African American and students from other racial and ethnic groups, and between gifted African American students and non-gifted African American students. With the help of counselors, African American students can increase their social competence and relationships.

Guideline 3: Promote social competence and encourage biculturality among African American students.

Research Support: An essential characteristic of intelligence is the ability to adapt to one's environment and to different contexts (Sternberg, 1985). For African American students, this means learning to be culturally flexible and adaptive, that is, understanding which behaviors are most appropriate for one situation, and least appropriate for another. Biculturalism is the antithesis of assimilation—students are not asked to give up their cultural values, beliefs, or behaviors, but to be familiar with the values, beliefs, and behaviors of the predominant culture.

Guideline 4: Teach African American students how to cope with social injustices.

Research Support: An additional feature of social competence is learning to cope effectively with social injustices. Gifted African American students are not immune to social injustices; in some ways, they may be more susceptible to them because of

heightened sensitivity and insight. Numerous books and materials are available to assist counselors with empowering African American students. Assertiveness training, conflict resolution training, and many other strategies can enable minority students not to internalize injustices and inequities.

Guideline 5: Adopt broader and more comprehensive definitions of underachievement.

Research Support: Traditionally, definitions of underachievement are based on discrepancies between achievement and intelligence test scores. This exclusive reliance on tests ignores the consistent finding that African American and other minority students do not perform well on standardized tests. Thus, they are less likely to be identified as gifted and/or underachieving. More promising definitions and measurements of underachievement must include attitudinal information, motivational information, learning style preferences, test anxiety, test taking and study skills, and assessment of students' self-concept and racial identity. Once students have been identified as underachievers, counselors must also assess the severity, duration, and intensity of underachievement.

Guideline 6: Involve families, African American professionals, and community leaders in the learning and counseling process.

Research Support: Families represent an essential component of students' achievement and social and emotional well-being. Along with community members, families can provide the emotional and social support African American students may need in school and counseling. Family involvement is, therefore, strongly recommended to enhance academic performance and social health.

Guideline 7: Explore the quality and quantity of support systems and resources available to African American students.

Research Support: Counseling can be difficult for African American students if they do not have adequate home and community support and resources. For example, are there community programs that provide academic and social support? Are parents and other family members aware of summer and enrichment activities and programs? Are they financially able to provide these activities? Do they have transportation? How far away is the library and what is the quality of the materials?

Guideline 8: Integrate multiculturalism throughout the learning and helping process.

Research Support: When a philosophy of multiculturalism permeates schools and counseling, all students benefit. Multicultural education and counseling can increase students' racial sensitivity, understanding, and acceptance. Equally important, multiculturalism avoids culturally assaultive classrooms and counseling settings. This

harmony increases racial pride within students of color, while also increasing the relevance of school (Banks, 1994) and counseling (Sue & Sue, 1990).

Guideline 9: Counsel African American students using their preferred learning styles.

Research Support: Most of the literature on learning styles has focused on educational settings. Just as the achievement of African American students increases when learning styles are addressed (Hale-Benson, 1986; Shade & Edwards, 1987), so may counseling outcomes. Dramatherapy, music therapy, art therapy, and other strategies represent promising practices for counseling gifted African American students, particularly those who are underachieving.

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Appendix A

Exercises to Promote Harmony in Schools

Exercise 1: The Label Game

The objective of this exercise is to gather feedback by others in order to discover the labeled identity that others perceive an individual to have. Procedures: (1) Prepare a variety of *positive* adjectives (e.g., friendly, generous, caring, empathetic) on sticky labels; (2) Attach one label to the forehead or back of each student as (s)he comes into the classroom. The student should not be able to read the label; (3) Allow students to mingle and interact on a topic of interest; (4) Instruct students to treat every other student as though the label the individual is wearing were actually true, to say and do things one would with that kind of person; (5) After 10 minutes, students are given one guess at the label, after which they can remove it.

During debriefing, students are asked to disclose how they decoded the feedback from others, and to discuss how they felt about being both labeled and treated as if the label were accurate. The ultimate learning principle is that we all wear labels as though they were true. By increasing our awareness, we can become more aware of the labels that others perceive about each of us.

Exercise 2: Symbols of Our Culture

The objective of this exercise is to have students get in touch with the emotional symbols of various cultures. Students are asked to draw the symbols of their culture without including words. In this manner, African American students are encouraged to explore the less articulate aspects of their racial identity.

First, students are assembled in a room with sufficient table space so that each one can spread out a large sheet of paper. (Supply students with different colored crayons.) Students are instructed to draw symbols, a picture-story, lines, designs, or scribbles on the paper that symbolizes their own personal ethnic, racial, or cultural identity. Next, instruct students not to draw or write words on the paper. After 10 or 20 minutes of drawing the symbols of their culture, students are divided into small groups. Students explain their drawing and how it symbolizes significant parts of their identity.

During debriefing, students can find similarities between the drawings, and well as note the frequency of recurring symbols. Which symbols are negative? positive? With this exercise, students learn about the difficulty of discussing their identity in words. It is important for African American students to accept themselves, especially if they are socially and economically different from the majority of students.

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