

# An Implementation of Culturally Responsive Protective Factors to Meet the Needs of Girls of Color in Gifted and Talented Education

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**Abstract:** This article presents an overview of factors that contribute to the inequitable underrepresentation of girls of color in gifted and talented with an emphasis on Blacks since they are most frequently absent. After presenting this national context, the authors present Ford's Female Achievement Model for Excellence as a gendered and racial culturally responsive resource for effectively addressing the intersectional needs and development of students who are female *and* gifted and talented.

**Keywords:** culturally responsive, gifted and talented, Black females, girls of color

Mariah attends Clinton Elementary School, which is one of two schools in the district that has gifted and talented (GATE) programs. Forty percent of the students are Black, 25% are Hispanic, 15% are White, and the remainder are Asian. The school and district have been applauded for recruiting Black and Hispanic students for GATE. However, they have not been as successful with retention in fifth and sixth grades; thus, underrepresentation exists. The good news is that Mariah is in the GATE program and one of the highest-performing students. However, she and other Black girls complain of being teased by White girls in her GATE classes for being dark-skinned and/or having short hair. Male classmates say she is "bossy." Mariah only interacts with classmates when assigned to do peer or group work; at recess and lunch, she keeps to herself, preferring to read books about being a biologist. She is fascinated with Dr. Corbett, a Black female scientist credited with playing a key role in discovering one of the Covid vaccines.

(<https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/press-releases/kizzmekia-corbett-joins-harvard-ghan-school/>). She is also tired of the negative peer pressures and wants to stop attending GATE. As two Black females, we can identify with Mariah and would enjoy working with her on being persistent and successful as a high-achieving Black girl. Below, we delve into relevant literature and then describe Ford's FAME model with application to Mariah and other girls of color.

## Introduction

Access to colleges and universities, especially those deemed "elite" contribute to higher incomes, gainful employment, and overall quality of life (e.g., better health). Such access often consists of being labeled and enrolled in GATE and Advanced Placement (AP) programs and services. However, access and opportunities are not equitable for all groups. A substantial amount of literature by the second author and others (e.g., Baldwin, Frasier, Grantham, Davis, Trotman Scott, Moore III, Bonner) continuously focuses on inclusion and equity for students of color in opportunities for advanced learners. The dire need is to both recruit and retain underrepresented students.

Noteworthy is that prejudice and discrimination have been reported about and by students of color. FBI hate crime reports and statistics for multiple years reveal that race-based incidents in colleges and schools are often among the top three types of prejudices and discrimination (see [Federal Bureau of Investigation \(2021\)](#); [Irwin et al., \(2021\)](#); [United States Department of Justice \(2020\)](#)).

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Black students are underrepresented in GATE by almost 50% nationally, and this lack of access is not a new phenomenon and problem. Per the National Center for Education Statistics (2021), there were 48.1 million students enrolled in elementary and secondary schools in the United States in 2020. White students accounted for 22 million, and Black students 7.2 million, amounting to 19% of the entire population but they only comprise 10% of all students enrolled in GATE. Black females remain a point of contention in this discourse as they are underrepresented in GATE by approximately 35% (Ford, 2013a). Many studies speak to the need to identify and cultivate the gifts and talents of Black males, as stated earlier. However, often negated are the experiences of Black females who are too often “blackened out” or “whited out” of conversations speaking to inclusivity in GATE (Ford et al., 2018). Unfortunately, this egregious miseducation of Black females follows a theme of insignificance for this group that has existed since the inception of education.

In this article, we present an overview of factors that contribute to the inequitable underrepresentation of girls of color in GATE with an emphasis on Blacks since they are the most absent overall. After presenting this national context, we adopt Ford’s Female Achievement Model for Excellence (F<sup>2</sup>AME) as a gendered and racial culturally responsive resource for effectively addressing the intersectional needs and development of students who are female *and* gifted, and talented. Culturally, they share developmental needs and issues with White females *and* with males of color. F<sup>2</sup>AME is unique and appropriate because it was created with this duality in mind. We are interested in supporting girls of color like Mariah in having self-determination and reaching their full potential academically, psychologically, culturally, and socio-emotionally.

Research has noted that recruitment and retention in GATE and AP courses better prepare students for college and higher educational opportunities (Wouters et al., 2011). The literature cites GATE students as being able to adjust to the academic demands of higher education due to exposure—to opportunities that facilitate intellectual growth and environments that are academically challenging (Baker, 2004). Gifted and talented learners have the ability to process information and achieve higher academically than non-gifted college-age students, while also engaging in classrooms as active agents who communicate and build relationships with faculty in and outside of the institution (Diezman et al., 2001; Janos et al., 1989). However, for Black females who are silenced and depicted as being aggressive when they speak up in class, this engagement is too often stifled in high school and, consequently, in collegiate levels. As already mentioned, conversations around GATE often speak to groups based upon gender *or* race/ethnicity,

while the unique experiences and needs of Black females are negated, leading to a disservice for this population.

Despite their absence in GATE and AP courses, Black females are currently outpacing their male counterparts in college acceptance and graduation rates ([https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19\\_326.10.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_326.10.asp)). This group has continued to persevere academically, despite being inundated with obstacles and barriers due to the intersectionality of their race/ethnicity and gender (Crenshaw, 1989; Ford, 2010; Ford et al., 2018). Research has noted that despite their academic success, Black females continue to report conditions at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) as being unwelcoming, unsupportive, and littered with racial and gender microaggressions that are facilitated by institutions, faculty, and students (Lewis et al., 2016; Mowatt et al., 2013; Sue et al., 2007). GATE is analogous to PWIs because of the lack of racial and ethnic diversity. These reported conditions facilitate feelings of imposter syndrome and invisibility, altering their perception and self-esteem, socio-emotional and psychological well-being, and racial pride that follows them throughout adulthood. Resiliency for this group is discussed at great length (Evans-Winters, 2014); however, associated psychological costs warrant further investigation as it has been noted that Black females meet criteria for clinical depression more than their counterparts, but engage in mental health treatment at lower rates (Hall, 2007).

Gifted and talented is often celebrated as a vehicle to prepare students for advanced learning necessary in higher education through the encouragement of critical thinking in collaboration with colleagues and instructors in classroom settings. Black students who are accepted into GATE report feelings of low self-esteem, self-doubt, and stereotype threat (Ford, 2010; 2011; Steele, 1997). Additionally, the intersectionality of multiple identities for Black females further exacerbates feelings, thus making conditions within GATE unfavorable even when included.

Ford (2013b) has recognized that the uniqueness of Black females demands specific academic support that encourages achievement through the recognition of psychological, socio-emotional, and cultural characteristics necessary for academic excellence. This is evident with Mariah. Ford’s Female Academic Model for Excellence (F<sup>2</sup>AME Model) proposes that Black females who make social sacrifices and are independent, goal- and future-oriented, and leaders are more likely to be academically successful than their other Black female counterparts. Ford’s (2013a; 2013b) work is extensive and reflective of the experiences of Black girls in K-12 settings, notably exploring the lack of inclusion within gifted and talented and Advanced Placement courses. Middleton and Ford (under review) applied this model to Black females enrolled in higher education, and an

<b>VARIABLE DESCRIPTION SUB VARIABLES</b>	<b>APPLICATION TO MARIAH MANIFESTATION OF VARIABLE AND SUB VARIABLE</b>
<p><b>Psychological variables and affect are comprised of self-beliefs, and racial and gender identities.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Resilient</li> <li>● Self-Efficacious</li> <li>● Intrinsically Motivated</li> <li>● Goal-Oriented</li> <li>● Racial/Gender Pride</li> </ul>	<p>Supporting Mariah entails introducing her to curricular lesson plans, multicultural literature, and movies where the main or a central character is facing similar issues. Using this multicultural form of bibliotherapy helps students to feel less alone and more empowered to resolve problems challenges.</p>
<p><b>Socio-emotional variables pertain to views of self as influenced by others, along with the confidence that contributes to independence and self-sufficiency.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Social Sacrifices</li> <li>● Introverted</li> <li>● Independent</li> <li>● Self-Sufficient</li> </ul>	<p>Connecting Mariah to a mentor (Black female) will help her to discuss shared lived experiences with social and academic challenges (e.g., low and negative peer pressures). An essential topic is discussing the value of independence and ending unhealthy friendships/relationships when faced with social challenges.</p>
<p><b>Academic factors relate to educational performance and views of self in academic settings.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Work ethic</li> <li>● Academic Identity</li> <li>● Self-Confidence.</li> <li>● Field Independent</li> <li>● Flexible/Adaptable Learning Style</li> </ul>	<p>To maintain or recapture Mariah’s self-perception in GATE, teachers can assign culturally relevant and engaging assignments that support higher views of effort and the importance of work ethic toward achievement. Providing tutoring, and test-taking and study skills can be helpful. Mariah needs assurance from her teacher(s) that she is a welcomed and valuable member of the GATE classes. Multicultural literature should be included in classes and counseling. Ford’s Bloom-Banks Matrix should be implemented so that curriculum and literature are rigorous and culturally relevant. In this way, historical and cultural pride are promoted and nurtured in Mariah and other minoritized students.</p>
<p><b>Cultural factors pertain to views and performance of self as a cultural being who is similar to and different from Whites. It includes affiliation with primary culture and skills in mainstream settings.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Cultural Pride, Cultural Competence, Bicultural, Bilingual</li> </ul>	<p>School counselors need to be familiar with racial identity theories and use strategies and resources to teach 1-2 of them to Mariah that centers on her as a cultural being who is Black and female. Promoting racial awareness and pride necessarily includes discussions about social injustices, along with role models, mentors, literature, and group meetings.</p>

Source: Adapted from Middleton and Ford (under review).

Figure 1. Ford’s F<sup>2</sup>AME model with attention to Mariah and other Black females.

extension of this model to support those included in GATE aides in developing and maintaining a strong academic identity that can serve them throughout their educational path. Necessary is not only a conversation about inclusion and access, but also protective prevention and intervention factors, such as the F<sup>2</sup>AME Model, that promotes academic success while improving resiliency, affective, and psychological health.

### Ford's Female Academic Model for Excellence (F<sup>2</sup>AME Model)

Ford (2010, 2011, 2013a, 2013b) notes the characteristics that are necessary for academic excellence while offering specific strategies to maintain a strong academic identity during distinct developmental periods. This model extends Whiting's (2006) Scholar Identity Model for males of color that introduce protective factors within academia through the establishment and maintenance of a solid scholar identity. Whiting defines the scholar identity as how culturally different males view themselves academically, demonstrating studiousness, self-efficacy and agency, competence and capability, and intelligence in academic settings. Ford has bemoaned the exclusion of Black women in GATE conversations via what she calls culture blindness (i.e., color blindness) calling for a model that addresses the unique racial *and* gender needs of this population. We contend that if not cultivated, negative academic identity can have a lasting impact on professional identity development that can alter personal development. The next section and Figure 1 describe the domains of this model—psychological, socio-emotional, academic, and cultural—in detail with attention to the intersectionality of identities (gender/racial/ethnicity) shared for this population. More details appear in Middleton and Ford (under review).

### Summary

The impact of the issues just described can damage the self-esteem, self-concept, and academic identity of victims, specifically Black females. Necessary is a conversation about Black females like Mariah who outperform counterparts—despite social and environmental stressors, as noted earlier. Often, Black females are omitted or generalized into populations of race and gender, which devalues this group by nullifying their significance and validation throughout academic settings (Battle, 2016; Evans-Winters, 2014; Middleton & Ford, under review).

Themes of social and cultural insignificance have further perpetuated feelings of inadequacy and incompetence for marginalized groups within academia. Numerous accounts of educational inequalities compared with gender and racial counterparts have been reported. Experiences speak to the intelligence and academic

pro prowess of this group being questioned or having to prove their capabilities and potential. This essential work sheds light on the varying experiences of girls of color striving for acceptance, validation, and equity in GATE and AP classes, programs, and services. Due to the harsh realities within academia as students, many girls of color, like Mariah, opt out of these classes and offerings. Those electing to persist report mental anguish and exhaustion known to accompany racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2008).

Research has also pointed to the presence of “imposter phenomenon” or imposter syndrome, which describes feelings of high-achieving females who suffer from intense internal struggles of being intellectually phony and not qualified for advanced courses. Gutiérrez y Muhs et al.'s book *Presumed Incompetent* (2012) is an important body of work on this issue. In a quest to disprove feelings of incompetence and inadequacy “imposters” develop perfectionistic standards. Unfortunately, the associated cost can magnify anxiety, depression, and lack of confidence (Clance & Imes, 1978). Follow-up studies have identified links between mental health and imposter phenomenon (Austin et al., 2009), while others note higher instances and impact among multiethnic groups. Findings suggest that the gender inequalities and societal expectations influence the psychological impact of the phenomenon for females significantly more than males (Clance & Imes, 1978; Cokley et al., 2013; McGregor et al., 2008). Culturally-based prevention and intervention work tailored to the lived experiences of this group is necessary. Relatedly, the need for curriculum to be rigorous and relevant cannot be overstated or over-emphasized. Adopting Ford's (2010) Bloom-Banks Matrix is highly recommended due to its dual curriculum goal of rigor and cultural relevance. Mariah and other students of color benefit greatly when their cultural groups are affirmed; when they see themselves in all areas of teaching and learning, and counseling.

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