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## INEQUALITY AND UNDERREPRESENTATION

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# Segregation and the Underrepresentation of Blacks and Hispanics in Gifted Education: Social Inequality and Deficit Paradigms

Donna Y. Ford

This article examines the underrepresentation of African American and Hispanic students in gifted education, proposing that social inequality, deficit thinking, and microaggressions contribute to the inequitable segregated programs. Underrepresentation trends are presented, along with methods for calculating underrepresentation and inequity. Underrepresentation is placed under the larger umbrella of achievement gaps and inequities in school settings with attention to de jure segregation. I argue that underrepresentation is beyond statistical chance and is a function of attitudes and beliefs grounded in deficit paradigms among those with power or social capital. Denying access to gifted education based on race is counterproductive and illegal and is discussed with *Brown v. Board of Education* as the legal background and a recent court case in gifted education (*McFadden v. Board of Education for Illinois School District U-46*). Recommendations for desegregating gifted education are provided.

Keywords: achievement gap, African American gifted, deficit thinking, gifted underrepresentation, Hispanic gifted, microaggressions, segregation, social inequality

When developing this article on gifted education and social inequality or inequity, one quote and an analogy came immediately to mind: “Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men, the balance-wheel of the social machinery” (Horace Mann, 1848, p. 669). Also in the forefront of my thinking was and is the groundbreaking 1954 case of *Brown v. Board of Education* in which segregated schools were ruled unconstitutional. The Supreme Court declared an end to separate and unequal education in America and desegregation was to occur with all deliberate speed.

It is unprofessional and unethical to trivialize, tolerate, accept, or permit the inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities to marginalized students, many of whom are African American and Hispanic students. Inadequate

resources and opportunities fuel the myriad of educational, social, and economical disparities, which becomes a vicious cycle in which too many African American and Hispanic students are denied access to school programs that are essential to reaching their academic, intellectual, and economic potential and that hold promise for closing achievement gaps. As historically and currently operationalized, gifted education represents such a program or vehicle for promoting inequities. Educators and decision makers have consistently failed to recruit and retain an equitable percentage of these two culturally different groups as gifted. This results in de facto segregated gifted classrooms, which is by no means in the spirit of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), now 60 years old, and can be witnessed in *McFadden v. Board of Education for Illinois School District U-46* (2013). In this unprecedented gifted education case, the court affirmed that in creating a separate gifted education program for Hispanic students only, the Illinois school district violated the United States and Illinois Constitutions’ Equal Protection Clauses, as well as the Illinois Civil Rights Act. Instead of creating a single gifted education program for elementary school students that provided language support when needed, the District created a separate gifted program for

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Hispanic students, most of whom were proficient in English. The judge noted that establishing a separate gifted education program based on ethnicity and/or race perpetuates the very myths that our nation's civil rights laws were created to prevent (see Ziegler, 2012).

This court case is, I believe, a warning to other districts to remove discrimination from their practices for gifted identification and classrooms or services. With this in mind, I present national trends regarding the representation of Hispanic and African American students in gifted education utilizing data from the Office for Civil Rights Data Collection. In all years, underrepresentation is persistent and pervasive. After presenting trends for both groups, I situate underrepresentation within the context of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), arguing that gifted education must become desegregated and integrated. There is no place for de jure segregation in gifted education.

### SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHICS MATTER

Colorblindness is not the answer to addressing inequities. Demographers have consistently informed and forewarned that our nation was (and is) changing and that changes are coming quickly. Some educators seem not to have heeded the warnings; instead, they have continued to teach and test as if their students and testers have not changed; as if what worked for White students also works for culturally different students—curriculum and materials, instructional practices, testing instruments and checklists or forms, and so forth.

Given the current and looming sociodemographic changes in our nation's cultural makeup—with non-Whites projected to be the numerical majority in public schools in a few years—colorblindness is not realistic. In May 2012, the U.S. Census revealed a sober finding—White infants born in 2010 are the minority—50.4% of babies younger than age 1 were minorities or biracial/multiracial. This is a historic milestone in the ever-changing U.S. demographic shift. Nationally, the new figures make minorities the majority among America's youth for the first time on record (see <http://news.yahoo.com/more-minority-babies-whites-u-census-bureau-234612459.html> and <http://newsfeed.time.com/2012/05/18/minority-report-new-u-s-data-shows-more-ethnic-babies-than-whites/#ixzz20MCogVbc>). Clearly, in a few years, our nation's kindergarten class will be the majority or the *majority minority*.

A number of educational reports reveal that annually, our nation and schools increase diversity, racially and culturally, with White students becoming the numerical minority. Recently, the U.S. Department of Education published its annual report, *The Condition of Education* (Aud et al., 2013), which relies on data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights. The report presents macrolevel and microlevel perspectives on the demographics of teachers and school personnel, school-aged students, and how they are being identified and

served in gifted education. Combined, all culturally different students comprised 32% of public school populations in 1989 and 47% in 2011. Along with these demographic trends, *The Condition of Education* (Aud et al., 2013) presented several undeniable and unavoidable realities: (a) U.S. public schools are more racially and linguistically different than ever before; (b) these trends are expected to continue; but, conversely, (c) the cultural or racial demographics of educators remain relatively unchanged or stable, with White educators being the overwhelming majority (consistently 85% or more of the nation's teaching force).

These changes have been trivialized and/or ignored, as well as poorly addressed, for far too long in gifted education, and we all (students, educators, families, colleges, businesses, etc.) have paid a price, with significant educational costs being underrepresentation and the myriad of achievement gaps. The price our nation pays for undereducated students from any and all groups is so costly.

Under the excuse and guise of colorblindness, gifted education has too often operated as if culture *and* cultural differences are trivial and inconsequential to the recruitment and retention process—screening, testing and assessment, curriculum and instruction, and placement and policies and services. Some educators contend and argue *ad nauseum* that tests, policies, and procedures are equitable—fair and unbiased (see Santelices & Wilson, 2010). Many argue that the education (delivered by a predominantly White teaching force) that caters to, privileges, and benefits White students is appropriate for African American and Hispanic students. Many advocate for the rights of gifted students in general but rarely fight for those who have different needs, concerns, values, opportunities, and experiences. Essentially, the need and sense of urgency to prevent, intervene in, and cope with social inequalities is not as proactive and urgent as needed to reduce or eliminate social injustices associated with culturally different students.

### GIFTED UNDERREPRESENTATION TRENDS FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS AND HISPANICS (2009 AND 2011)

When addressing inequities in gifted education, underrepresentation cannot be ignored. The poor presence of African Americans is the bane of our field, and this concern is followed closely by the underrepresentation of Hispanic students. The data reveal the tragic reality of de jure segregation in gifted education for both groups (see Ford, 2011, 2013b).

Underrepresentation can be analyzed statistically in several ways. I rely on the composition index rather than risk method. The Relative Difference in Composition Index (RDCI) for a racial or cultural group is the difference between their gifted education composition and general education composition, expressed as a percentage of their general education composition. This focuses on the question:

“What is the difference between the composition (percentage) of African American or Hispanic students in gifted education compared to the composition of African American or Hispanic students in general education?” This measure also permits the comparison of disproportionality of various groups against each other. A discrepancy would be considered significant when underrepresentation exceeds a threshold determined legally or by decision and policy makers.

Is it essential to note that thresholds are not racial quotas, which are currently illegal. With quotas, group representation in general and gifted education is mirrored, leaving no range or allowance to account for and reconcile group differences (e.g., income, resources, language, gender). That is, with quotas, if Black students comprise 65% of a school district (or state), they must comprise 65% of gifted education. After sharing examples using the composition index, I share an equity index (EI) method to guide decision makers and legal personnel in determining whether underrepresentation is beyond statistical chance—that is, more influenced by human-made barriers and thus possibly discriminatory.

The RDCI for underrepresentation is computed as

$$\frac{[(\text{Composition (\% of African American students in gifted education)} - \text{Composition (\% of African American students in general education)}) / (\text{Composition (\% of African American students in general education)})] \times 100}{}$$

As of 2009 and 2011, at least one half million African American and Hispanic students combined are not identified as gifted. As shown in Table 1, Blacks continue to be the

most underrepresented group, and this group is more often the focus of litigation in gifted education (Ford, 2010, 2013b; Office for Civil Rights, 2009, 2011), which should not be surprising given that their degree of underrepresentation consistently exceeds all other groups.

As with African American students, although less severe, equity has not been achieved for Hispanic students. This group comprised 22.3% of our public school system compared to 15.4% of gifted education in 2009, representing 31% underrepresentation. In 2011, the percentages were 25% of public schools compared to 16% of gifted education.

Debates and discussions abound regarding how to determine when underrepresentation (in referrals, screening pool, gifted education identification, and eventual placement) is unreasonable and when discrimination is likely in operation. Such questions include but are not limited to “When is underrepresentation significant?” “How severe must underrepresentation be in order to make changes?” “How severe must underrepresentation be before it is discriminatory?” Borrowing from the Office for Civil Rights’ (2000) 20% threshold allowance (also see *Griggs vs. Duke Power*, 1971), I am using an *equity index* to guide decision makers: (a) in determining a target for what is the *minimally* accepted level of underrepresentation for each group (i.e., relative to race/culture, gender, income, etc.) and (b) in acknowledging that proportional percentages are ideal and equitable but cannot always be achieved due to how chance and real factors influence individuals and groups (e.g., one group is wealthier, has more education and/or has more resources than another). The important stipulation is that, when the percentage of underrepresentation *exceeds* the designated threshold in the EI, it is beyond statistical chance; thus, human error is operating (e.g., attitudes, biased or inappropriate tests and instruments; see Ford, 2013b), and attitudes, policies, and procedures may be discriminatory against Hispanic and African American students.

Districts must be diligent about studying, evaluating, and disaggregating their student demographics (taking into account race, income, gender, and language) and proactively and aggressively advocating for underrepresented students from such groups.

The RDCI alone is not adequate for determining what is unacceptable or possibly illegal/discriminatory underrepresentation; nor is it specific enough to determine goals for improving representation. This is where the EI comes into play. Calculating the EI is a two-step process.

- Step 1: (Composition (%) of African American students in general education) × Threshold of 20% = A. This is abbreviated as C × T = A.
- Step 2: (Composition (%) of African American students in general education) – A = EI. This is abbreviated as C – A = EI.

For example, if African Americans are 17.13% (rounded to 17%) of students in general education nationally in 2012

TABLE 1  
Gifted Education Underrepresentation and Equity Data: African American and Hispanic Trends (2009 and 2011)

Race/Ethnicity	2009		2011	
	National Percentage	Gifted Percentage	National Percentage	Gifted Percentage
African American/Black	16.7	9.9	19	10
% Underrepresentation (relative difference composition)		-43		-47
Equity index (targeted goal for minimal % of identified gifted)		13.4		15.2
Hispanic/Latino	22.3	15.4	25	16
% Underrepresentation (relative difference composition)		-31		-36
Equity index (targeted goal for minimal % of identified gifted)		17.8		20

Source: Office for Civil Rights. (2009, 2011). Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Survey. Retrieved from <http://ocrdata.ed.gov/>.

Note. Due to rounding, calculations will not always equal 100%.

(see Table 1), the EI using a 20% threshold would be as follows: A is  $19\% \times 20\% = 3.8\%$  and EI is  $19\% - 3.8\% = 15.2\%$ . Thus, African Americans should represent at *minimal* 15.2% of students in gifted education. Nationally, the percentage is 10%. Thus, underrepresentation is significant and beyond statistical chance. To achieve minimal equity, educators must increase African American representation nationally from 10% to at least 15.2%. For Hispanic students, also see Table 1. The formula is  $(25\% \times 20\% = 5\%)$ ;  $(25\% - 5\% = 20\%)$ . Hispanic students should make up at least 20% of gifted programs nationally to be equitable. Yet, they represent only 16%.

These patterns depict the disturbing reality that our nation's gifted programs are segregated against African American and Hispanic students. One irony is that in 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education* ruled racial segregation in schools to be unconstitutional, and this was the same year that the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) was founded. We are far from fulfilling the mandates of *Brown*—African Americans and Hispanics have yet to be the beneficiaries of NAGC's mission, leadership, and advocacy. With the revised NAGC-CEC standards (National Association for Gifted Children, 2010), the field is moving in the right direction. We are not there yet; the journey is rocky and the destiny has not been reached.

### TRIPLE THREAT—SOCIAL INEQUALITY, DEFICIT THINKING, AND COLORBLINDNESS

Gifted education underrepresentation contributes to inequality in our society and schools—not only in the form of de facto segregation but also in the form of achievement gaps. Instruments (tests, checklists, and referral forms) aided by policies and procedures and guided by deficit thinking about African American and Hispanic students' culture, intelligence, and academic potential contribute to underrepresentation. This is human-made gatekeeping (Baldwin, 2002; Castellano, 2010; Delpit, 2012; Ford, 2010, 2013a, 2013b; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008a, 2008b; Ford, Trotman Scott, Moore, & Amos, 2013; Frasier et al., 1995; Lewis, Rivera, & Roby, 2012; Sternberg, 2007a, 2007b).

#### Social Inequality

Social inequality is linked to variables such as race, gender, language, income, and wealth. How people view and treat others, through prejudice and other forms of discrimination, frequently hinders or denies opportunities for disenfranchised individuals (see Shapiro, 2004, 2005; Shapiro & Oliver, 2006). Racial inequality is the result of hierarchical social distinctions between ethnic groups within a society and often are established based on characteristics such as skin color and other physical characteristics or an individual's place of origin or culture. Unequal treatment

and opportunities between racial groups are usually the result of some ethnic groups being considered superior to others.

Social inequality is at the heart of deficit-oriented paradigms. Deficit thinking is a type of blaming the victim that views the alleged and imagined deficiencies of culturally different students as the primary reason for their school problems and academic failures. This paradigm holds structural inequality blameless (Valencia, 1997, 2010) and holds decision makers and educators unaccountable for their roles in such injustices and inequities. "The deficit thinking paradigm, in all of its forms, is deeply embedded in urban schools; it reflects a proclivity in national debates about a range of problems . . . and a narrow focus on perceived individual and group weaknesses obscures the importance of these other, more potent, factors" (Weiner, 2006, p. 42).

Three models of prejudice are relevant to this discussion of racial injustices gifted education underrepresentation. Allport (1954) theorized five degrees or scales of prejudice that represent escalating amounts of hatred and violence—antilocution, avoidance, discrimination, physical attack, and extermination (see Figure 1). Only the first three are discussed in this article because they are most relevant to gifted education underrepresentation.

*Antilocution* refers to verbal and nonverbal messages said to or about others. Antilocution includes name-calling, racial and ethnic jokes and slurs, and nonverbal messages (e.g., symbols and signs). Hate speech or racial put downs are the quintessence of such verbiage. In gifted education, antilocution is evident with such statements as: "Black students are not as smart as other students." "That test score is a fluke." "I don't know why those Hispanic students can't speak English. Until they do, they don't deserve to be in gifted classes." "You are smart and articulate for a Black student . . . most of you don't speak well." "Our gifted program is being diluted with those Black and Hispanic students being admitted. We must keep our standards high."

*Avoidance* exists when an individual or group seeks to decrease or eliminate interactions with others. The term most associated with avoidance is *White flight*. The classic example is that of White families moving to the suburbs to avoid living around other racial and cultural groups (most often Black). Educationally, avoidance is evident when White caregivers choose to place their children in schools where they will not be in classes with culturally different students. Gifted education has been used as a means to segregate along racial lines. Again, see *McFadden vs. Board of Education for Illinois School District U-46* (2013) where gifted White students were intentionally separated from Hispanic gifted students.

Avoidance is also in operation when culturally different children and/or caregivers do not want to attend predominantly White gifted programs. The reasons for the two groups preferring and practicing avoidance are quite different. White flight is often cloaked under concerns about the quality of education lacking rigor; however,

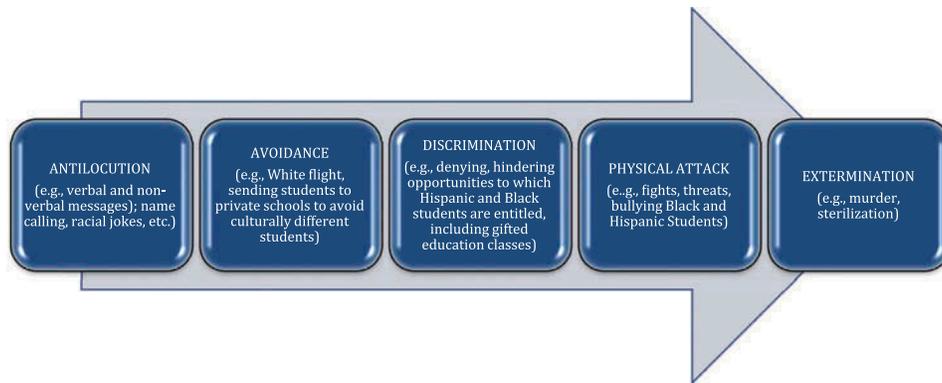


FIGURE 1 Allport's five degrees of prejudice in educational contexts.

African American and Hispanic families and students frequently express concerns about isolation and alienation from classmates and educators. The quality of education is not necessarily questioned; rather, the social-emotional and psychological well being of their children is being questioned and protected (e.g., feeling included and valued, having friends in classmates).

Whether antilocution and avoidance are illegal depends on the specific nature and intent of the words and acts, along with instruments, policies, and procedures (Ford et al., 2013). For example, it is possible to select and use an instrument and have policies without knowing that they are inappropriate for culturally different students and thus contribute to inequities. However, once it is found that such students are negatively impacted by attitudes, instruments, policies, and procedures, if changes are not made, discrimination may be in operation. Discrimination is illegal in the workplace, federally funded programs, and privately owned facilities open to the public under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (see <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/rights/reg/ocr/edlite-34cfr100.html>). Title VI prohibits discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. It is noteworthy that Title VI prohibits not only intentional discrimination but also practices that have the effect of discriminating against individuals and groups because of their race, color, national origin, religion, or sex. Thus, unintentional discrimination is subject to litigation. This point will be revisited with Merton's (1957) typology and the notion of disparate impact.

*Discrimination* exists when the rights of an individual or group are denied. Underrepresentation stems from avoidance, as well as discrimination, which is much more difficult to prove. The underrepresentation of Hispanic and African American students exceeds statistical chance nationally and in most school districts. These unidentified gifted Black and Hispanic students (i.e., false negatives) are not being served in gifted education and thus are denied the education to which they are educationally, legally, and morally entitled. Discrimination is operating when there is a pattern of teachers not referring African American students for gifted screening, identification, and services (see summary

by Ford et al., 2008a, 2008b). Other policies, procedures, and practices may also be biased and discriminatory (e.g., designated cutoff scores, weighted matrices, sibling preferences, the time of year when students are tested, the age/grade level when students are evaluated).

Many forms of prejudice and discrimination are evident in microaggressions—which also arise from deficit paradigms. Sue (2010) and Sue et al. (2007) did not coin the term and concept, but they developed a detailed model that is applicable to gifted education. Microaggressions fall into three categories and include the antilocution, avoidance, and discrimination described by Allport (1954). The examples presented after each microaggression are actual comments that colleagues and I have collected from classes, workshops, conferences, readings, overhearing conversations, and communications (e-mails, notes, social media, student projects, and letters) shared with me by students, families, and educators (see Ford et al., 2013).

- *Microassaults* are explicit and conscious verbal or nonverbal racial attacks against a culturally different student and/or group.
  - *Environmental microaggressions* (all gifted education scholarships or awards named after or in honor of Whites, even in predominantly Hispanic and African American communities; those who receive gifted education awards are seldom Hispanic and African American; videos, reading materials, posters, and other visuals exclude or rarely include African Americans and Hispanics).
- *Microinsults* are subtle communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity that demean the racial heritage, culture, and/or identity of a student or group.
  - *Ascription of intelligence* (“I don’t want Hispanic students in my group or class project; they will bring down my grade.” “I can’t believe there are Black males taking an AP [advanced placement] class. It is too hard for them.” “I did not expect to see African American students in my class to be so motivated and smart. They are not typical and must have exceptional parents.”)

- *Assumption of criminal status* (“African American males are so violent. They are too disruptive and cheat so they don’t deserve to be in our gifted class because we won’t get any work done.”)
- *Second class citizen* (“You are in gifted education? I know it is tough for you. I guess the school counselors messed up your schedule. Poor thing . . . I will help you with your homework.”)
- *Pathologizing cultural values and communication styles* (“Those Black girls are so loud and emotional. Why do Hispanic students want to work in groups rather than independently?” “Why do Mexicans have such large families? They are taking over our communities and schools.”)
- *Microinvalidations* are communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the thoughts, feelings, emotions, and/or experiences and realities of a culturally different student and/or group.
- *Alien in one’s own land* (“You speak English well as a Hispanic student.” “You are so articulate to be Black.”)
- *Colorblindness* (“I don’t see color; that is trivial because we are all the same; therefore, the test we choose does not matter—tests don’t see color.” “We are all Americans, so there is no need to have multicultural gifted education classes for students or training for teachers. It is a waste of everyone’s time.”)
- *Denial of individual racism* (“I am not a racist. I have referred African American students for gifted screening.” “I am not a racist. I hired a Hispanic teacher to work with her own people.”)
- *Myth of meritocracy* (“Prejudice does not exist. Those minority students need to work harder if they want to be in gifted classes.” “Black students need to stop complaining about discrimination and apply themselves. If I can work hard and succeed. . . . So can they. Stop whining.”)

As informative as microaggressions are, it may be difficult to decipher the origin of comments. Do school personnel really understand and believe what they just asserted? Were the comments conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional? Merton’s (1957) *Typology of Prejudice* gives us more to contemplate regarding how social inequality—grounded in deficit-oriented paradigms—contributes to underrepresentation. His two-by-two model focuses on whether an individual is prejudiced or not *and* whether the person discriminates or not. The result is four types of prejudice (prejudiced/discriminates; prejudiced/does not discriminate; nonprejudiced/discriminates; and nonprejudiced/does not discriminate; Ford, 2013a).

Social inequality and, thus, underrepresentation likely will result when educators are prejudiced in their thoughts *and* discriminate in their actions. This needs little

explanation. To decrease or eliminate inequities in gifted education, we must have educators who are not prejudiced and do not discriminate, who are in tune with their biases and prejudices, and who work diligently to be culturally competent.

Between the aforementioned two opposites are educators who are prejudiced but do not discriminate and educators who are not prejudiced but do discriminate. When educators are prejudiced but do not discriminate, they likely are aware of the legal and/fiscal ramifications of doing so. Thus, they will take the necessary steps to not have instruments, policies, and procedures that contribute to underrepresentation (recall the *McFadden* [2013] court case). It may be surprising and upsetting or unsettling for some educators to learn that discrimination can occur by someone who is not prejudiced. In this case, discrimination can be intentional or unintentional but is often the result of social pressures to conform to the status quo. For instance, a teacher or administrator may believe that African American or Hispanic students are being discriminated against but refuse to challenge the system, status quo, and colleagues for fear of retribution (e.g., social isolation, threats, job loss, demotion, etc.). Doing so is very much in line with scholarship on bystander effects (see Grantham, 2011).

It would be disingenuous and naïve to contend that prejudice and discrimination do not exist in schools and gifted programs—regardless of intent. Both are operating and have in common a victim in the form of Black and Hispanic students who are denied access. With intentional discrimination, there may be no excuse or apology offered for denying marginalized students access to gifted education; with unintentional discrimination, excuses and apologies run rampant. Unintentional or unintended discrimination is just as damaging as intentional discrimination given that both result in denied opportunities. Recall that under Title VI, unintentional discrimination can be illegal. This is where disparate impact comes into play—intent is less important than impact. Consider these noneducational scenarios:

- You are rear-ended in a car accident, and your car sustains \$8,500 in damages. The driver who hit you says that he or she *is sorry* and it was not intentional.
- You are rear-ended in a car accident, and your car sustains \$8,500 in damages and you incur more in medical expenses. The driver who hit you says that he or she *is not sorry* and you are responsible.
- You are rear-ended in a car accident, and your car sustains \$8,500 in damages and you incur more in medical expenses. The driver who hit you says that he or she *intended* to hit you.

The three scenarios have the same outcome, with two exceptions—intent and response. Educators, decision makers, and policy makers must analyze and eliminate intentional *and* unintentional discriminatory barriers to gifted

education as such roadblocks have the same impact or outcomes—underrepresentation and segregation.

The quality of education *and* access to a quality education are directly tied to racial stratification. Regardless of the reason(s) for underrepresentation—inequitable access to gifted education—such denial compromises or suppresses the development of ability, achievement, and social and economic progress for Hispanic and African American students. Denied opportunities, regardless of intent, fuel achievement gaps. Clearly, when a half million Hispanic and Black students are not participating in our purportedly most rigorous classes and programs, the trajectory of their life opportunities changes (is diminished) in significant ways. To the point, underachievement is virtually guaranteed for many unidentified gifted Black and Hispanic students as they lose interest in school from being underchallenged (Ford, 2010). When denied gifted services in elementary and middle school, students are less likely to be referred and admitted to AP classes, which further hinders their access to higher education (especially elite universities) and profitable financial and vocational opportunities. The cycle of inequity is vicious and predictable.

There is no denying that gifted education classes and services are disproportionately represented by and serving White, higher-income, and privileged students, and gifted education gives them a boost up the social and fiscal hierarchy—known as *White privilege* (McIntosh, 1988). Social inequality and underrepresentation go hand in glove—social inequality feeds underrepresentation; underrepresentation feeds social inequality.

### White Privilege

White privilege, made known by McIntosh (1988), refers to unearned advantages that benefit Whites. It operates in an invisible veil of silence and secrecy, confers power to Whites, and is based on the mistaken notion of individual meritocracy, supremacy, and colorblindness (three microaggressions). White privilege is embedded in the structural and cultural fabrics and workings of U.S. society (i.e., standard operating procedures) and is a form of affirmative action and social capital (e.g., Bourdieu, 1972; Bowles & Gintis, 2002; McIntosh, 1988; Valencia, 2010) that favors Whites across all economic levels and genders but goes unacknowledged and/or denied by beneficiaries.

White privilege in gifted education appears in such realities as (a) the majority of educators are White (see Aud et al., 2013); (b) the instruments used to identify students as gifted are created by Whites; (c) educators who administer and interpret students' scores and information are often White; and (d) the gifted education curriculum is unlikely to be multicultural (Ford, 2011).

Discourses on racial inequality/inequity neglect or fail to discuss social status or capital differences between Whites and non-Whites. However, they certainly discuss the failure

of Black and Hispanic groups to achieve “normal” social status and achievements. This practice effectively holds Whites unaccountable for their role in social injustices and excuses them from acknowledging and resolving such problems.

In 1996, Sapon-Shevin issued a potent and compelling critique of gifted education—its purpose/intent, practices, and impact:

- Gifted education as it is defined and implemented in this nation is elitist and meritocratic and constitutes a form of educational triage and segregation.
- Gifted programs cater to the status quo—students for whom educational failure will not be tolerated (White, privileged families).
- Gifted education constitutes one type of formalized meritocracy training; students are taught who is smart and worthy of challenging opportunities, and learn their privileged role and place, albeit unearned, in the larger society.

Borland (1996) also acknowledged the social, economic, and political ramifications of inequitable gifted programs. “First, services for gifted students are disproportionately allocated to students who are White and upper income and, second, programs for gifted students are, without this being their advocates’ intention, serving to widen the gulf between society’s have and have-nots, between mainstream and minority cultures” (p. 139).

Borland’s (1996) second point reinforces Merton’s (1956) typology (i.e., unprejudiced people do discriminate). Again, educators and decision makers must be mindful of the notion of disparate impact in which intentions aside, the outcome or effect is what matters. In *McFadden* (2013), mentioned earlier, disparate impact was found in which the court ruled that the school district’s policies and procedures closed doors to gifted education for minority students. Unintentional discrimination can have the same effect or outcome as intentional discrimination (i.e., underrepresentation and segregated gifted programs and services).

In summary, deficit thinking, which includes White privilege, provides some explanations for the question: Why do White students get certain educational benefits while others are denied them? The various positions and arguments can be analyzed in terms of explicit and hidden agendas, intended and unintended outcomes, and how gifted education is linked to and embedded in complex and broader social, cultural, moral, political, and economic ideologies fueled by social inequalities.

How might the pressures and barriers generated within inequitable schools influence the structure and dynamics of gifted education programs and services? It is reasonable to conclude that underrepresentation persists because decision makers acquiesce to the status quo. For instance, the demand for gifted programming by higher income White parents can be traced, in part, to the increasing racial

resegregation of most schools and communities (see studies and reports by Gary Orfield and colleagues of the Civil Rights Project at <http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/resources/publications> as well as this recent story on segregated schools in 2014 at <http://www.propublica.org/article/segregation-now-full-text>). I agree with Sapon-Shevin's (1994, 1996) position that segregated gifted programs have served to decrease White flight. Kohn (1998) advanced a similar argument, indicting privileged White parents, and educators who cater to them, for contributing to and intensifying social inequities. Charges of elitism and claims of "defensible" gifted programming should make us stop to consider the effects of the current state of the field on the larger society and vice versa. For a field that prides itself on critical thinking and problem solving, this is not too much to ask for and to expect.

## SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Too many African American and Hispanic students do not achieve to their potential because they are stifled by society's deeply ingrained bias of equating Whites and whiteness with superiority. Prejudices and deficit paradigms exist and cannot be denied as contributing to segregated gifted programs.

Table 2 lists questions, comments, and areas that must be targeted and analyzed to respond equitably to social inequalities and deficit thinking. The content focuses on several aspects of underrepresentation—student demographics, educator demographics and preparation, representation patterns overall and by gifted categories, placement, and services. Listed is what educators must consider minimally in their discussions about, evaluations of, and solutions for desegregating gifted education for underrepresented Black and Hispanic gifted students.

Expanding and expounding upon Table 2, recommendations follow. Equitably, all educators must have the will to eliminate human-made barriers, to take on the status quo, and to advocate for all of their students. They must also resist simplistic solutions to complex issues and problems. Thus far, the law of parsimony has been ineffective in understanding and correcting the persistent and pervasive problems of underrepresentation. The law of parsimony has yet to demonstrate effectiveness or efficacy with Black and Hispanic students given data and trends (see Table 1 and longer trends in Ford, 2013b).

### Analyze Data for Underrepresentation

Attitudes (deficit thinking) and inequitable practices must be acknowledged, examined/analyzed, challenged, and corrected. Are Hispanic and African American students being screened in proportion to their representation in the district? What is the magnitude or severity of underrepresentation? What are the contributing factors to underrepresentation (and

underreferral), such as attitudes and values, instruments, and policies and procedures? Which teachers/educators underrefer culturally different groups, and how are they being assisted and held accountable? Which policies and procedures are contributing to underrepresentation (e.g., reliance on teacher referral or checklist versus school-wide grade level screening, parent/caregiver referral or checklists, designated cutoff scores, grade at which gifted programs begins, whether screening is ongoing, convenience and location of testing sites, methods of communicating with the community, and more)? How would underrepresentation decrease if teacher referrals were eliminated and if different instruments were adopted? How does other information collected contribute to underrepresentation (e.g., grades, products, parent/caregiver forms)?

### Determine Equity Goals/Allowance

After exploring the magnitude and causes for underrepresentation, it is essential to set equity goals to desegregate gifted education using the 20% equity allowance (Ford, 2013b). The allowance is a recognition that gifts and talents exist in every racial and cultural group; however, life experiences, resources, and supports are not always equal or equally distributed. This equity allowance takes such inequities into consideration and opens doors for many students who might otherwise not be identified and served in gifted education.

### Collect Data on the Experiences of Gifted Black and Hispanic Students

What are the experiences of former and current Black and Hispanic students in gifted education? Disaggregate data for both groups by gender and income: What are the experiences of culturally different males compared to females and low-income students compared to high-income students from these culturally different groups? Surveys, interviews, focus groups, and case studies from culturally different students and caregivers regarding their experiences are useful.

### Analyze and Improve Educators' Preparation in Gifted Education

Too few educators are formally trained in gifted education. Gifted education preparation is essential via course, degreed programs, and professional development. Even if educators have received academic degrees in gifted education, professional development must be ongoing and substantive, targeting equitable identification and assessment instruments, policies, and procedures; affective development; psychological development; social development; cultural development; curriculum and instruction; and services and programming for gifted students from all backgrounds.

TABLE 2  
 Gifted Education (Under) Representation: Factors to Analyze with Equity and Access Focus

<i>Factor(s)</i>	<i>Unit of Analysis/Target Area(s)</i>
Data analyses: Percentages and numbers (disaggregated by race × gender × income) Determine the percentage of African American and Hispanic students referred for gifted education screening and placement Determine percentage of African American and Hispanic students identified as gifted Determine the percentage of African American and Hispanic students served in gifted education Examine discrepancies	Recruitment and retention (referral, identification, and participation) Referral rates (under, proportional, over) Representation (under, proportional, over) Participation (services, programs, classes) Retention (student removed/dismissed by educator or caregiver) Persistence (student chose to opt out)
Racial/cultural representation Determine how representation (and referral, placement, etc.) differs by each group Examine patterns for each group Calculate the underrepresentation index (i.e., relative difference of composition index) for each group Calculate the Equity index for each group	Racial/cultural group and subgroups White/Caucasian Hispanic/Latino (Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, etc.) Black/African American (African, African American) Asian American/Pacific Islander (Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Korean, etc.) American Indian/Native Alaskan (Sioux, Cherokee, Navajo, etc.)
Gender representation Determine representation (and referral, placement, etc.) by gender Calculate the Equity index for males and females	Gender Female Male
Income and socioeconomic status Calculate representation (and referral, placement, etc.) by income or socioeconomic status	Income and lunch status Low (free lunch) Low with some form of income (e.g., the working poor; reduced lunch) Middle and high (paid lunch)
Gifted category Determine which specific areas of gifted education category/categories Hispanic and African American students identified and served	Gifted category/subcategory Intelligence Academics (which content area/areas?) Creativity Visual and performing arts (which area/areas?) Leadership
Placement and services Where are gifted African American and Hispanic students placed? Examine the extent to which they are enrolled in classes with White students Examine how African American and Hispanic students are being served	Degree of segregation or desegregation General education class Self-contained gifted education class Pull-out class Advanced placement class Honors class Gifted center Other Services Acceleration/grade skipping (by subject or grade) Early entrance into kindergarten Dual enrollment (high school and college) Mentorships Internships Independent study Other
Decision makers Examine the demographics of decision makers Examine the gifted education experiences and training of educators Examine the cultural experiences and training of educators and decision makers	Race/culture and type of preparation Race Gender Childhood family income and socioeconomic status Gifted Degree License/endorsement Coursework (no degree) Professional development No formal preparation Cultural/multicultural/culturally responsive Degree License/endorsement Coursework (no degree) Professional development No formal preparation

Adapted from *Recruiting and Retaining Culturally Different Students in Gifted Education*, by D. Y. Ford, 2013b, Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

### Analyze and Improve Educators' Cultural Preparation

Formal and comprehensive cultural/multicultural preparation helps to ensure equitable changes and progress (e.g., Banks, 2007; Castellano, 2010; Delpit, 2012; Ford, 2011, 2012; J. Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lewis et al., 2012; Nieto & Bode, 2008). The nature, extent, and quality of educators' training to work effectively/equitably with students from both culturally different groups should be examined. Professional development on culture and cultural differences must be ongoing and substantive. Some nonnegotiables are the following:

- Defining and understanding culture and cultural differences without a deficit orientation and recognizing how culture impacts teaching, learning, testing and assessment, and classroom environment (e.g., relationships with teacher and classmates, classroom management).
- Valuing the culture of African American students (males/females, urban/suburban/rural, low/middle/high income).
- Valuing the culture of Hispanic students (males/females, immigrant, U.S. born, limited English proficient, bilingual).
- Understanding how cultural subgroups vary (e.g., Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, etc.).

Opportunities for becoming immersed in the culture of students are important; thus, field experiences, attending community events, and visiting with families are important. Equitable multicultural preparation does not avoid uncomfortable issues, as persuasively demonstrated in Boler's (1999) classic scholarship on the pedagogy of discomfort. Thus, preparation is incomplete if deficit paradigms (e.g., prejudices, stereotypes, and biases) go unpacked. Educators who are not prepared for and/or are uncommitted to working with culturally different students risk compromising the educational process and contributing to segregated gifted education.

### INCREASE THE REPRESENTATION OR DEMOGRAPHICS OF HISPANIC AND AFRICAN AMERICAN EDUCATORS

White teachers comprise a dominant proportion of the entire education profession nationally (almost 85%; Aud et al., 2013). Students from every racial and cultural background continue to graduate without ever having a Black or Hispanic teacher, counselor, or administrator. This is not a trivial matter or one that can be discounted under the naïve propositions that race and culture do not matter and that educators are objective and colorblind/cultureblind to

differences across groups. The fallacies of cultural homogeneity, colorblindness, and melting pot paradigms are real and problematic. Though formal preparation in multicultural education is crucial, there is an equally important need to increase the representation of Hispanic and African Americans among teachers and other educators, as indicated by several professional organizations. Culturally different educators often serve as cultural brokers, role models, mentors, and strong advocates for culturally different students (Castellano, 2010; Delpit, 2012; J. Gay, 2010; Hale, 2001; Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2005, 2009; Nieto & Bode, 2008).

### CONCLUSION

In the landmark decision *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the Supreme Court ruled that separating children in public schools on the basis of race was unconstitutional. It signaled the end of legalized racial segregation in U.S. schools, overruling the *separate but equal* principle set forth in the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case. Segregated gifted programs grounded in discrimination were found recently in the *McFadden* (2013) court case. While other districts may not have been found guilty of intentional discrimination, it is clear that de facto segregation is in operation—intentionally and unintentionally—in some or many school districts. This social inequality is unacceptable, to state the obvious.

Gifted education must adhere to the mandates and spirit of *Brown* (1954) regarding desegregating classrooms, programs, and services. Examining and interrogating the role of our field in contributing to and exacerbating social inequalities and inequities is needed and long overdue. The data demonstrate that trends and progress in gifted education underrepresentation have been neither significant nor equitable. Our field must follow the mandates of *Brown* and desegregate gifted education—with all deliberate speed. We must be proactive, deliberate, and diligent about correcting intentional *and* unintentional problems to equitably recruit and retain Hispanic and African American students in gifted education.

The request and obligation to desegregate gifted education along racial or cultural lines is rational and equitable. Admittedly, tackling social inequality is a daunting task; however, with equity based preparation, educators can decrease and ideally eliminate deficit thinking and associated actions.

Unlike gifted education, our nation and schools are more culturally different than ever before. Our field must change, become more accountable, and become more responsive to our increasingly large and culturally different student population. Our field must not continue business as usual. Doing so results in more losers than winners.

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