

Triple Identity Theory: A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Gifted Black Males with Dyslexia

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Much of the current scholarship on Black males focuses on the achievement gap; their under-identification as twice-exceptional, underrepresentation in gifted and talented programs, and their overrepresentation in special education programs. Although overrepresented in special education, twice-exceptional Black males are seldom given attention in scholarly literature and there are no current theoretical or conceptual articles that have fully considered their experiences. Further, there has been limited research that examines the intersection of race, disability, and giftedness. Therefore, to address the lack to scholarship focusing on twice-exceptional Black males the article begins with a summary of the academic experiences of gifted and Black males with disabilities followed by the three interwoven perspectives. Next, the description of a proposed theoretical framework for understanding twice-exceptional Black males with dyslexia and its implications will be considered. The article will end with a discussion and conclusion.

Keywords: Black males, dyslexia, twice-exceptional students

The demographics of America's educational institutions are rapidly changing to reflect culturally and linguistically diverse student populations (Johnsen, 2014; Ford, Coleman, & Davis, 2014; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). However, what is not changing is the pervasive underrepresentation of Black males being identified as twice exceptional (2E) (Ford & Moore, 2004; Gilman et al., 2013; McCallum et al., 2013; VanTassel-Baska et al., 2009). According to the National Association for Gifted Children (2015), students who are identified as 2E "often have educational journeys that are fraught with challenges, as they do not fit the traditional definitions of either exceptionalism" (Reis, Baum, & Burke, 2014; p. 217).

Researchers with the National Education Association (2006) described six types of 2E and students with a specific learning disability (i.e., dyslexia) are the largest sub-group as well as students with dyslexia: (1) are frequently under-identified because the characteristics they demonstrate pigeonhole them as average performers and (2) they do not appear to need gifted or special education services. Even with current definition and laws (see Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act of 1988; U. S. Department of Education, 1993; Gifted and Talented Act, 1978, PL 95-561, Title IX, sec. 902; P.L. 107-110; Title IX, Part A, Definitions 22, 2002; 20 U.S.C. Sec. 7802, 22, 2004) Black males continue to be underserved in programs serving gifted and talented students (Lohman, Gambrell, & Lakin, 2008; Ford, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014).

The underrepresentation and overrepresentation of Black males is not a new phenomenon. The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) through their data collection effort has analyzed academic disparities and inequities between Black and White students for years in the following categories: disability (e.g., behavioral), discipline, seclusion and restraint, college and career readiness, student retention (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). Despite these data collection efforts, what remains uncertain is the percent of Black males who have been identified as 2E (Karnes, Shaunessy, & Bisland, 2004). Also, there has been very little research from the 2E Black males' perspective as their voices have been silenced (Ali, Fazil, Bywaters, Wallace, & Singh, 2001).

The lack of literature on the experiences of 2E Black males contributes to educators' failure to provide families, practitioners, and teachers with the understanding and resources needed to help Black males in gifted and special education classes (Robinson, 2015a). Further, there seems to be a deficit perception about their abilities to achieve at high levels, which limits their identification (Ford, Trenton, Blakeley, & Amos, 2014; Whiting, 2009, 2014). Therefore, the purpose of this article is to call attention to a new proposed theoretical framework for understanding 2E Black males with dyslexia. First, I will examine a conceptual article written by Mayes and Moore (in press) where the authors discuss the intersection of giftedness, Black male identity and disability. Next, I will describe the Triple Identity Theory: A theoretical framework for understanding gifted Black males with dyslexia followed by the implications of the theoretical framework for researchers. The article will end with a discussion and conclusion.

Understanding the Academic Experiences and Needs of 2E Black Students with Disabilities

In their analysis, *The Intersection of Race, Disability, and Giftedness: Understanding the Education Needs of Twice-Exceptional, African American Students* Mayes and Moore (in press) asserted that within the existing scientific literature on 2E, there are limited theoretical or conceptual articles that have fully considered the intersection of race, disability, and giftedness (Blanchett, 2010; Blanchett, Klingner, & Harry, 2009). I find their analysis compelling due to my own experiences as 2E Black male with dyslexia who has navigated multiple identities (i.e., otherness) throughout the educational systems (Delpit, 1995; Tsalach, 2013).

First, the existing literature fails to address how 2E Black males are treated based on their prescribed status as “otherness” as well as how they respond to their academic and social environments (Ali et. al., 2001; Barber, & Mueller, 2011; Connor, 2008). Second, knowledge regarding the three interwoven perspectives can help educators and scholars across a wide array of academic disciplines who are interested in meeting the needs of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (i.e., Afro-Caribbean, Bangladeshi, Black, Hispanic, Native American, and Pakistani) who are usually academically and socially marginalized (Stambaugh, & Ford, 2014).

Third, providing a theoretical or conceptual framework that analyzes students' experiences could contribute to conversations in education regarding the ways in which identity is a factor among students who are marginalized for their “otherness” and to understand how identity factors intersect during their academic journeys (Banks & Huges, 2013). Mayes and Moore (in press) examined key areas that must be considered by special and gifted education practitioners, which include the intersections: (1) Blackness and disability, (2) Blackness and giftedness, and (3) Blackness, giftedness and disability.

Brief Overview of the Intersection of Giftedness, Black Males, and Disability

When examining the intersection of giftedness, Black males, and disability (i.e., dyslexia) and the under-identification of 2E, there is a multiplicity of areas that need to be analyzed (Mayes & Moore, in press). First, educators and scholars must continue addressing how racism is engrained within the fabric of America's educational institutions, policies and procedures (Kozol, 2005; Noguera, 2008; Shannon & Edmondson, 2011). There also needs to be a serious conversation about the over-representation of Black males in special education who exhibit the qualities of 2E, but are overlooked because of teachers' “negative perceptions” (Albrecht, Skiba, Losen, Chung, & Middelberg, 2011; Ferguson, 2003; Hardman & Dawson, 2008). Scholars need to examine different factors contributing to the over-representation of Black males in special education (Pitre, Lewis, & Hilton-Pitre, 2007; Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, & Reffings-Azziz, 2006), which include, but are not limited to: identification and assessment, and cultural mismatch (Ancheta, 2006; Ford, & Helms, 2012; Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005;

Orellana, Reynolds, & Martinez, 2011; Proctor, Graves & Esch, 2012; Raines, Dever, Kamphaus, & Roach, 2012). Second, scholars must address dyslexia among Black male populations (Robinson, 2013).

Robinson (2013) asserted that Black males with dyslexia are seldom given attention in scholarly research; an extensive review of the literature uncovered a lack of empirical research (Blanchett, 2010; Lindo, 2006). Lindo examined a time period of 10 years of articles from the *Reading Research Quarterly* (1994-2004), the *Journal of Educational Psychology* (1994-2004) and all volumes of the *Journal of Scientific Study of Reading* (1997-2007). She found that no research articles reported race (Black) and suggested that scholars need to increase the quantity of rigorous studies and reading interventions for Black students (Proctor, Graves & Esch, 2012). Further, Robinson (2013, 2014) concluded that the number of studies that examine the intersection of race and dyslexia were nonexistent (Hoyles & Hoyles, 2010). Additionally, studies should more precisely focus on empirical studies on reading interventions, theoretical perspectives on reading, and remediation (Bowman-Perrott & Lewis, 2008; Davis & Palmer, 2010; Flowers, 2007).

Finally, with the high percent of under-representation among 2E Black males, educators and scholars need to address the prevailing issues that prevent them from being served in gifted and talented programs, which include, but are not limited to: culturally relevant/responsive pedagogy, referrals, and identification and assessments (Gilman et al., 2013; Grantham, Ford, & Henfield, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2012; Leggett, Shea, & Wilson, 2010; Lovett & Sparks, 2011; Naglieri & Ford, 2011). Teachers need to be aware of the characteristics that 2E Black males display (Baldwin, Omdal, & Pereles, 2015; Bianco & Leech, 2010; Ruban & Reis, 2005). Teachers overlooking the characteristics that 2E Black males display in the classroom will most likely view their learning from a deficit perspective (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008), and have lower expectations regarding standards towards their ability, which may result in difficulty building relationships (Tatum, 2011; Tatum & Muhammad, 2012; Valencia, 2010). Overall, when considering the multiple layers limiting Black males from being identified as 2E, teachers must acknowledge their lived experiences and the different forms of literacy and capital they bring in and out of school (Wharton-McDonald & Swiger, 2009).

Triple Identity Theory: A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Gifted Black Males with Dyslexia

Mayes and Moore, (in press) posed that within the body of research on 2E, there are no cultural lenses that assess: What does it mean to be African American who is gifted and in need of special services (that is, who has a disability, yet is in need of gifted education services)? (p. 10). I argue that there is a cultural lens that can assess their question, which *is* called the Triple Identity Theory. This theory may serve as a theoretical framework for understanding 2E Black males with dyslexia or students who feel like the “other” in school contexts.

The components of the Triple Identity Theory may be used to investigate the educational experiences of 2E Black males with dyslexia throughout the P-20 academic pipeline. The theory serves as a possible instructional model for understanding how students who feel a sense of “otherness” may be navigating multiple factors as they develop their identities. The Venn diagram (see Figure 1) of the theory describes an interconnected relationship in the context of my lived experiences, the capital I exhibited, and the interrelated links that comprised the circumstances associated with the academic factors that influenced my ability to achieve academically.

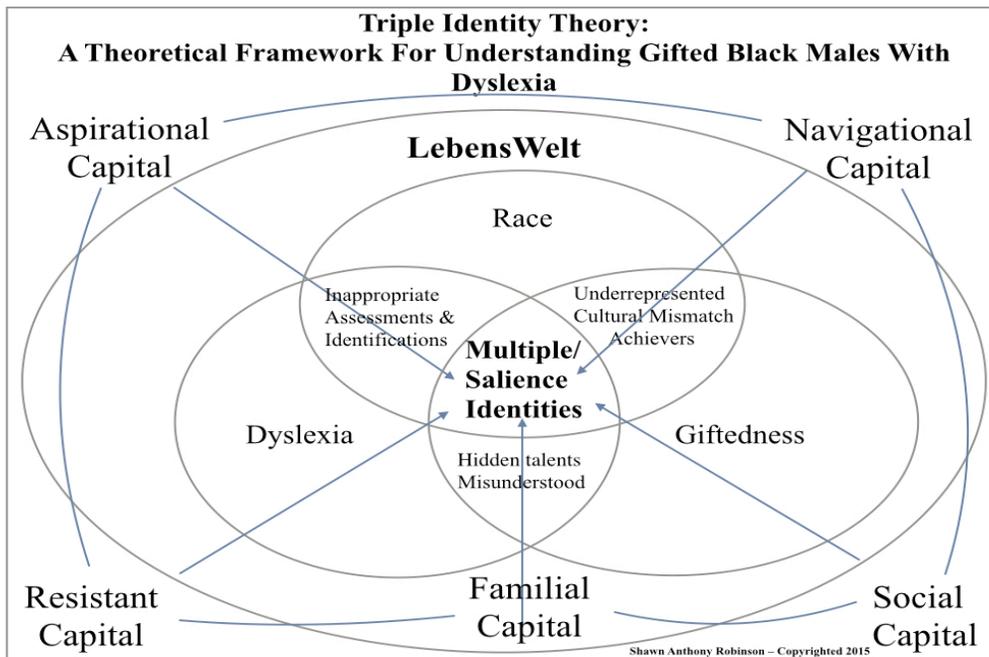


Figure 1. Triple Identity Theory

The interconnectivity around the three main constructs of race, dyslexia, and giftedness are the foundation of my proposed framework (McDonald, Keys, & Balcazar, 2007). Figure 1 displays the interrelated link of three theoretical frameworks that address the intersection of giftedness, race and dyslexia, which are factors that I experienced navigating the academic system. Paterson and Hughes (1999) defined the word *lebenswelt* from a phenomenological approach and disability perspective as the everyday life experiences, and my identity was shaped through my academic and social exchanges while navigating the academic system as an “other” (Robinson, 2015b). In addition, my identity as a 2E Black male with dyslexia was shaped by how society treated me and my response to that treatment. The inner circle represents the intersection of the three predominant aspects of my identity as well as my world of lived experiences. The Triple Identity Theory offers a different viewpoint about how I have constructed my identity and have understood my experiences throughout the academic systems (Humphreys, 2005; Johnson, 2013). Further, the five areas of capital are critical components in understanding how identities are developed as students navigate multiple academic communities.

Aspirational capital is viewed as “the ability to maintain hopes and dreams of college for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers.” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77)

Navigational capital refers to “skills of maneuvering through institutions.” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80)

Resistant capital is “knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior(s) that challenges inequality.” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80)

Familial capital refers to “those cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition.” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79)

Social capital is viewed as understanding the “networks of people and community resources.” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79)

In conclusion, there are no current cultural lenses, theoretical and conceptual framework models that discuss the interrelationship of all three of these identity categories regarding 2E Black males (Adams, 1990; Mayes & Moore, in press; Renzulli, 2012; & Yosso, 2005). Further, Jones and McEwen (2000) addressed that within the existing body of literature in psychology and student affairs there are no current models that have been developed concerning multiple identities. Therefore, it may be useful for educators, researchers and psychologists to consider the intersection of multiple factors and capitals, which may necessitate bringing multiple theoretical perspectives to bear, particularly with the purpose of reviewing academic programs and barriers hindering their academic success.

Theoretical Framework Implications

My analysis used the work of Yosso (2005), Adams (1990), and Renzulli (1986, 2012) as models to help me understand how I constructed my identity as well as the experiences I had navigating the academic systems. My life experiences explored through those lenses helped me to develop a theory that may serve as a cultural lens to examine the educational experiences of 2E Black males and other culturally and linguistically diverse students with dyslexia throughout the P-20 educational pipeline. The Triple Identity Theory serves as a phenomenological approach to help understand: (1) identity formation may impact students' academic and social experiences, (2) marginalized students who feel a sense of "otherness" may be navigating multiple factors as they develop identities, and (3) do identities (e.g., salience) become activated in situations (Jones & McEwen, 2000; Stets, & Burke, 2000).

For instance, how do Black males and other culturally and linguistically diverse students who are 2E self-identify? How high ranking is gifted or dyslexia in how they see themselves as learners and individuals? Does gifted have more salience than dyslexia, or the reverse? Which is their strongest identity of the two? These are important questions to examine in understanding more about multiple/salience identities of a population that has been voiceless within the literature (D. Ford, personal communication, August 21, 2015). Thus, as the demographics of the classrooms are changing to reflect culturally and linguistically diverse students, researchers should test and apply the Triple Identity Theory to find out how generalizable it is across other populations of not only 2E Black males, but also with culturally and linguistically diverse students with dyslexia. Researchers focusing on both familial and aspirational capital (i.e., occupational attainment) might investigate how these capitals differ between culturally and linguistically diverse 2E students, and their White counterparts with dyslexia (Chin, 2013; Harry, 2008; Hogg, 2001; Zell, 2014).

Researchers investigating educational outcomes (i.e., degree attainment) should examine the effects that navigational and social capitals have on degree attainment of culturally and linguistically 2E students with dyslexia (Sullivan, 2011; Zell, 2014). For resistant capital, Bonner (2014) and Wayman (2002) discussed that the utilization of an academic resilience framework may increase knowledge about degree attainment, and researchers should study how resistant capital may turn into community and school engagement (Bonner, Lewis, Bowman-Perrott, Hill-Jackson, & James, 2009). Further, researchers should consider how linguistic capital differs between culturally and linguistically diverse students with dyslexia identities (Yosso, 2005).

Moreover, it may be valuable to consider the intersection of multiple factors described in the theory, which can necessitate bringing several theoretical viewpoints to bear, particularly for the purpose of reviewing academic programs and barriers hindering the academic success of 2E culturally, and linguistically diverse students (Lovett & Spark, 2011). Thus, the application of the Triple Identity theory serves as a cultural lens for examining the experiences of these students (Ali et. al., 2001; Ford, 2013; Stambaugh & Ford, 2014). Applying the framework to

practice could be key to gaining new knowledge about the following questions: (1) what does it mean to be a gifted Black male (or minority) with dyslexia in need of special services (Mayes & Moore, in press), and (2) how do students construct their identity and understand their experiences while navigating the academic systems as an “other” and multiple identities? (Robinson, 2015b). However, more research and studies should be conducted in the future to examine the practical applications of the Triple Identity Theory.

Discussion

Consequently, within the existing scientific literature on 2E, there are no current theoretical or conceptual articles that have fully considered the intersection of race, disability, and giftedness, which made it very difficult to model (Mayes & Moore, in press). My search for a similar theory spurred me to read an array of literature across an array of academic disciplines in order to construct my theoretical framework and advocate for the need for a comprehensive approach while working with 2E Black males with dyslexia who become marginalized and oppressed by the academic system (Johnsen, 2014; Ford, Coleman, & Davis, 2014). Even subsequent to completing my advanced graduate studies I have found constantly seeking to improve my theoretical framework as a possible cultural lens for broadening educators’ knowledge for engaging 2E Black males with dyslexia as well as other minorities with dyslexia.

Throughout my analysis, learning that I possessed some of the identity characteristics discussed by Yosso (2005) and Renzulli (1986, 2012) gave me a sense of validation, which suggests alternative ways to view 2E Black males’ experiences from an asset-based perspective. Moreover, my research and lived experiences with dyslexia have caused me to fully explore my particular exceptionality in the area of literacy and language. Thus, a more engaged analysis of Adams’ (1990) research resulted in me learning more about the reading process – how children learn to read. It is hope that my analysis and theory will open up a critical conversation on 2E Black males and other minorities with dyslexia.

In summary, the lack of theoretical or conceptual theories that have synthesized a cohesive body of research that focuses on the intersection of race, disability, and giftedness led to develop my theory as well as the need to raise awareness of the experiences of a 2E Black male with dyslexia navigating the educational system as an “other.” My theory has implications for changing not only the ways the learning of 2E Black males with dyslexia are viewed, but also how educators take ownership of examining and changing their practices and perceptions with this population and other culturally, and linguistically diverse students. The information in this theory speaks to educators across all disciplines.

Conclusion

Given the state of affairs of the underrepresentation of 2E identification and overrepresentation of special education label for Black males in the academy, it is not surprising that they continue to face both racial and disability problems (Ferri & Connor, 2005; Proctor, Graves, & Esch, 2012). Black males are still subject to institutional racism; and inequalities are still prevalent within the academic system and classrooms. The purpose of this article was to call attention to a new proposed theoretical framework for understanding gifted Black males with dyslexia. Overall, I provided relevant literature that considered the: (1) intersection of giftedness, Black males and disability, (2) Triple Identity Theory: a theoretical framework for understanding gifted Black males with dyslexia, and (3) implications of the theoretical framework.

In conclusion, with the demographics of America’s educational institutions changing, the pervasive underrepresentation of Black males being identified as 2E, and the little research from their perspective (Ali et. al., 2001), scholars and educators should investigate how the Triple

Identity Theory serves a cultural lens to help teachers with the understanding and resources needed to help 2E Black males (Ford, Trenton, Blakeley, & Amos, 2014) and other minority students (Wayman, 2002; Zell, 2014). Furthermore, it is my hope that this article provides the framework for more research on 2E Black males. The Venn diagram of my theory may also describe an interconnected relationship in the context of the lived experiences of minority students, and the interrelated links may consist of circumstances associated with the academic factors that influence their ability to achieve academically.

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