

Dąbrowski 101Z: The Theory of Positive Disintegration.

**by Bill Tillier.
Revised 2016**





- “Here, then, is a great mystery. For you who also love the little prince, and for me, nothing in the universe can be the same if somewhere, we do not know where, a sheep that we never saw has – yes or no? – eaten a rose . . . Look up at the sky. Ask yourselves: is it yes or no? Has the sheep eaten the flower? And you will see how everything changes . . . And no grown-up will ever understand that this is a matter of so much importance!”

- **de Saint-Exupéry, A, (1943). *The Little Prince*. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace.**

- Integrated many diverse streams of thought: from philosophy, from literature, from psychology, from neurophysiology and from psychiatry.
- There is an intuitive element in comprehending Dąbrowski: As some have said, “it’s a theory best understood by its application in one’s life,” some who approach it academically, “just don’t seem to get it.”

4 **TDP: A nomological network of constructs*.**

- Dąbrowski's work has many (~20) interrelated constructs.

One example:

Personality Ideal

↑-Hierarchy of Values

↑-3rd Factor

↑-Inner Psychic Milieu

↑-Multilevelness

↑-Hierarchization

↑-Positive Disintegration

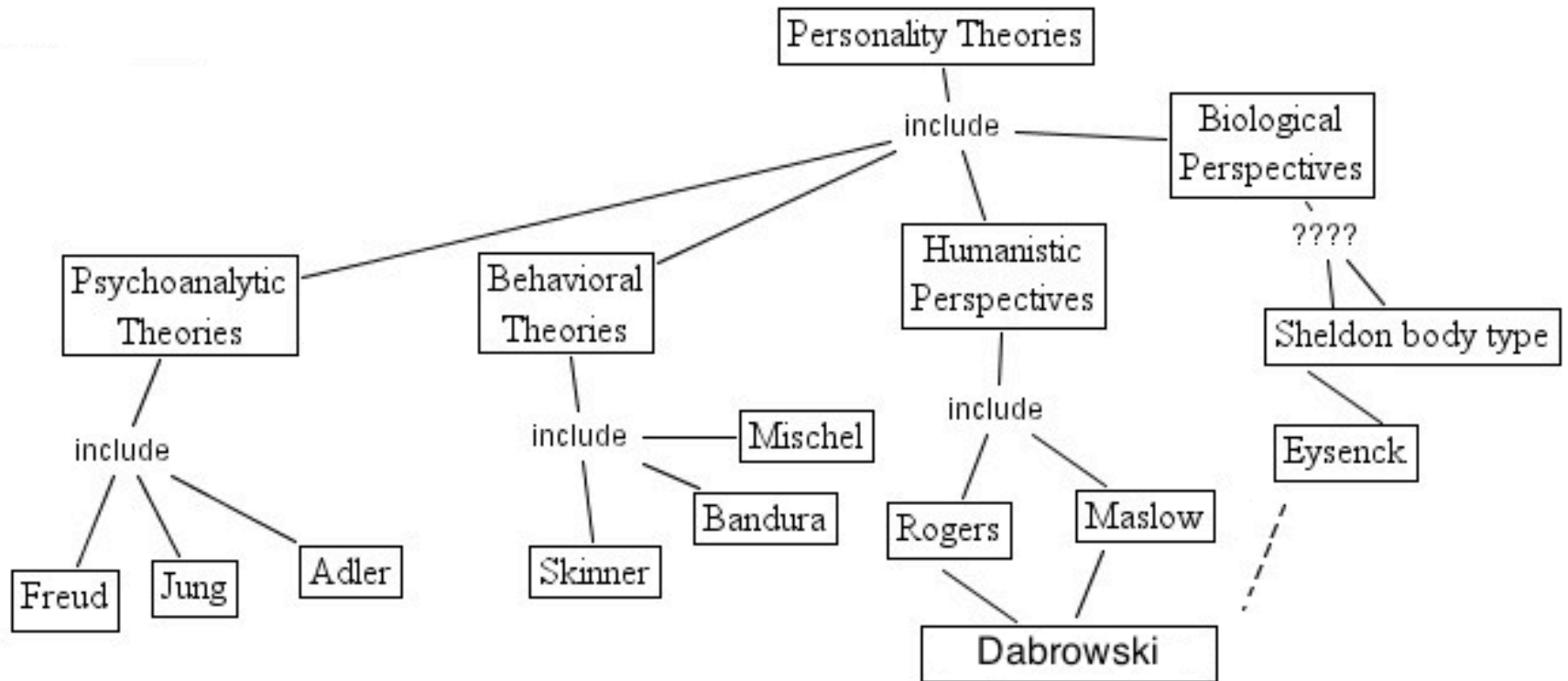
↑-Psychoneurosis

↑-Developmental Potential

* Cronbach, L. J., & Meehl, P. E. (1955). Construct validity in psychological tests. *Psychological Bulletin*, 52, 281–302. doi:10.1037/h0040957

- Used a “dynamic” multilevel approach: One construct has different descriptions at different developmental levels. For example, unilevel love versus multilevel love.
 - Previous efforts to assess the theory (like OEQII) are, by design, inadequate to capture these differences.
- Dąbrowski built a new, somewhat radical, theory but based on solid academic and philosophical foundations.
- The real introduction to Dąbrowski remains reading his original works and seeing his ideas emerge.

Personality theories.



- Many approaches have described personality.
- Fewer approaches have described personality development.
- No approach is similar to TPD on several points:
 - The idea that crisis and psychological distress (Psychoneuroses / Positive Disintegration) are *necessary* (but not sufficient) for development.
 - The contrast between the unilevel and multilevel experience of reality.
 - The description of developmental potential and its role in inhibiting or promoting development.
 - The emphasis on developing a unique and authentic personality, shaped by the individual toward his / her personality ideal.

8 A philosophical & psychological approach.

- TPD combines essentialism with the individual choices of existentialism (the “existential-essentialist compound”).
- 1). One’s [genetic] essence is one’s raw potential (sets the parameters of development).
- 2). Must be shaped to fit one’s authentic self (personality shaping). Our deep traits must be consciously evaluated, guided and developed – lower aspects inhibited, higher ones embraced – this differentiates humans from animals.
[Self-Actualization (Maslow) said don’t differentiate; actualize it all -- the lower and the higher.]

- In traditional developmental theories, higher levels are built on top of lower levels – components of lower levels remain and are added to.
- In TPD, Multilevelness represents a new view of reality and emerges from lower (uni-) levels that are disengaged from, disintegrated, transcended or transformed.
- There are metaphysical aspects to Dąbrowski's approach. The self, in particular, “the inner psychic milieu” and “third factor” emerge from lower features but become developmental forces in their own right, transcending biological and social origins.

What is a positive approach?

- Jahoda's (1958, p. 23) features of positive mental health:
- 1. Positive self-attitudes; (*self perception*).
- 2. The individual's style and degree of *growth, development, or self-actualization* are expressions of mental health. This is not concerned with self-perception but with what one *does* over a period of time.
- 3. *Integration*: the relatedness of all processes & attributes.
- 4. *Autonomy*: the individual's degree of independence from social influences (most revealing of one's mental health).
- 5. The adequacy of an individual's *perception of reality*.
- 6. *Environmental mastery*.

- Dąbrowski said that mental health should not be defined simply by the presence or absence of symptoms, rather, definitions of mental health must look at men and women as they *ought to be* and by the potential of the individual to achieve ideal, desirable, developmental qualities – to aspire to become an authentic human being.

Personality is rare.

- Dąbrowski's observations led him to an unusual conclusion:
 - that individual personality is not universally, or even commonly, achieved. The average “well socialized” person lacks a unique, individual personality and therefore cannot be considered mentally healthy – the “state of primary integration is a state contrary to mental health” (1964, p. 121).

- “Hierarchization” is a process helping create multilevelness: a contrast between the lower and higher in life, it expands the range of human experience, creating vertical conflicts between higher and lower choices.

Five Levels.

- **Level V - Secondary Integration.**
- **Level IV - Organized Multilevel Disintegration.**
- **Level III - Spontaneous Multilevel Disintegration.**
- **Level II - Unilevel Disintegration.**
- **Level I – Primary (or primitive) Integration.**

- Dąbrowski estimated that the majority (about 65%) of people live life at Level I – in Primary Integration:
 - A very stable, integrated, horizontally based level.
 - Behavior often automatic, reflexive, rote, unthinking.
 - Lower Instinct (first factor) and social forces (second factor) guide and determine behavior.
 - A difficult level to break free of: integration creates a strong sense of belonging and security.
 - Inner harmony: Most conflicts are external; often an inner sense of “always being right” and of selfish entitlement, “don’t worry it’s the other guy’s problem.”

General characteristics of unilevelness.

- The “average” view of life is horizontal – unilevel:
(Ken Wilber: “flatlanders,” von Bertalanffy and Yablonsky: “robopaths”)
- Unquestioningly adopt and follow social roles & values.
- Behaviorism model: stimulus-response reactions.
 - Skinner’s black box: no processing/thinking required.
- Equal alternatives create “illusion of choice.”
- Conflicts are between different but equivalent choices.
- No vertical component to allow for higher growth.
- Lack of, or low degree of general consciousness, especially of self-awareness and self-consciousness.

Advanced development is uncommon.

- “A fairly high degree of primary integration is present in the average person; a very high degree of primary integration is present in the psychopath. The more cohesive the structure of primary integration, the less the possibility of development; the greater the strength of autonomic functioning, stereotypy, and habitual activity, the lower the level of mental health” (1964, p. 121).
- An illustrative hierarchy:
 - Average person exhibiting psychoneuroses
 - Average person exhibiting social conformity
 - Psychopath exhibiting social conformity
 - Psychopath exhibiting antisocial behaviour

The more rigid one's integration, the harder to have disintegration and growth.

- 3 levels describe varying types & degrees of disintegration:
 - Level II – Unilevel Disintegration: Horizontal conflicts create ambiguity and ambivalence. Very stressful, chaotic period, maximum *dis* – ease:
 - High risk of falling back or falling apart.
 - Dąbrowski described this as a transitional level.
- Paradigm shift: Multilevel, vertical aspects appear at III, IV.
 - Level III – Spontaneous: Multilevel, vertical conflicts arise spontaneously, create multilevel disintegrations.
 - Level IV – Organized (Directed): We now see and actively seek out vertical conflicts (challenge oneself), we play a volitional role in “directing” crises and development.

- Higher levels show distinct consciousness, inner psychic transformation, autonomusness, creativity (1972, p. 297).
- Development is linked to a “new” – vertical – ML view:
 - One begins to see and imagine higher possibilities in comparison to lower realities.
 - A vertical, ML view creates a hierarchical model of life, of values and of behavior – allows us to become aware of and choose the higher over the lower alternative.
 - Similar to Pierre Janet’s reality function?

Paradigm Shift from UL to ML.

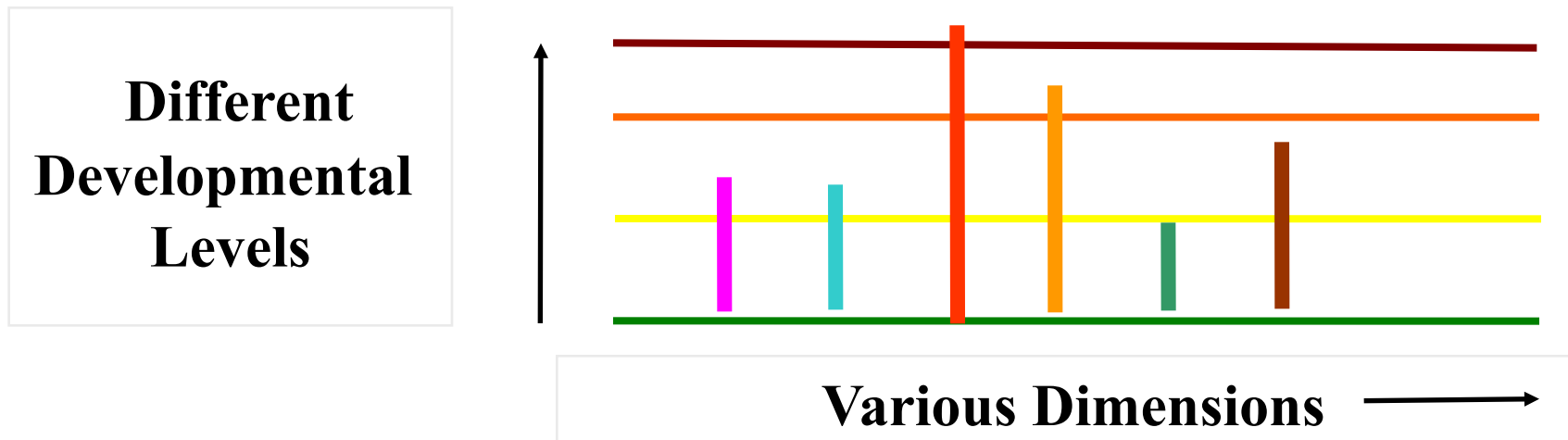
- Transition to multilevelness is the “greatest step.” The shift from the unilevel to the multilevel / vertical perception of life is the key to development.
 - Once one truly sees and appreciates the vertical, there is no turning back to a unilevel existence.
 - Dąbrowski compared this with Plato’s cave: Once one breaks free and “sees the sunlight,” one can no longer be happy returning to live in the darkness.
 - The shift takes tremendous energy and places major demands on the person: One may initially feel alienated and be overwhelmed with depression and despair.

- Level V – Secondary Integration:
 - Full realization of multilevelness and personality ideal.
 - One’s unique hierarchy of values directs behavior.
 - Third factor promotes autonomous, volitional, unselfish behavior – as this is simply the right way to be.
 - Exemplars describe and show us this highest level.
 - Inner harmony: One is satisfied that one’s values and behaviour now reflect one’s “true” self as one feels it ought to be – no *internal* conflict.
 - May have more *external* conflicts – strong sense of social justice motivates social action and reform.
 - Rarely seen (but a future trend in evolution?).

- Personality:
 - “The quality of being self-chosen involves the process of development, the repeated acts of choosing one’s personality many times until the moment of the final choice” (1973, p. 109).
 - “Those qualities which were chosen at the time of the ‘birth of personality’ and later, authentically developed as central and most important, do not undergo qualitative changes. They will grow quantitatively and may be supplemented by new qualities” (1973, p. 109).
 - The individual becomes fully aware of those qualities that make him or her uniquely himself or herself. Once this core of unique qualities is chosen, they do not change, but, as the quote above shows, they will grow and be added to.
- If 35% have some degree of DP, why don’t more go on further?

Multilevelness and Multidimensionality.

- People are often at different levels of development on different dimensions. We need to consider the level for each dimension we choose to look at.
 - This complicates our theoretical conceptualizations, our operationalization, and assessment.

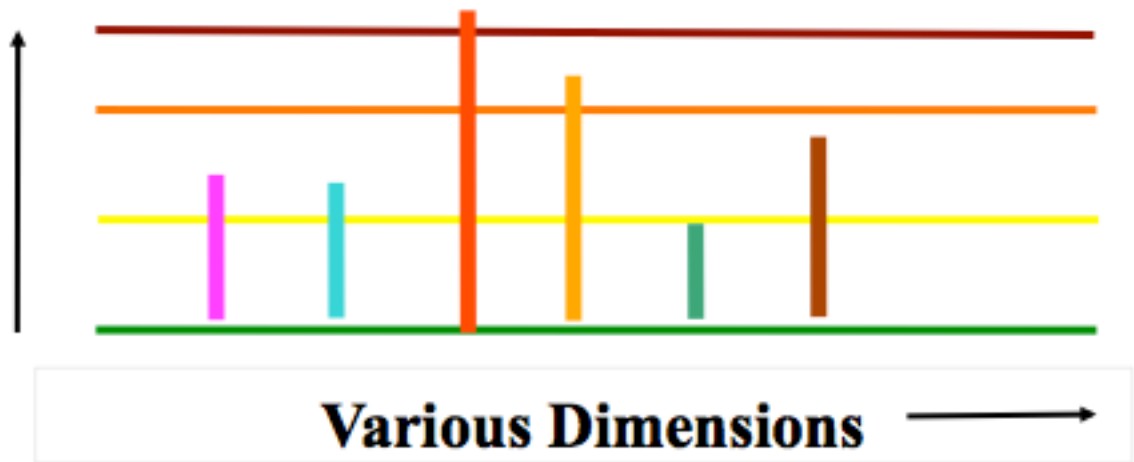


Multilevelness and Multidimensionality.

Examples of dimensions:

Perspicacity (insight)	5 factor model	Emotionality
Common sense	Acumen	Thespian?
Artistic talent	The five OEs	Empathy
Raw intelligence	Creativity	Rigor
Athleticism	Musical talent	Aesthetic Appreciation
The 3 factors	Open boundaries	Subject – Object
Neuroticism	Asceticism	Conscientiousness
	Self-criticism	Extra-Introversion

**Different
Developmental
Levels**



- Personality:
 - Definition: “a self-conscious, self-chosen, empirically elaborated, autonomous, authentic, self-confirmed and self-educating unity of basic mental, individual and common qualities” (1973, p. 111).
 - “Personality is the force which integrates mental functions on a high level” (1973, p. 108).
 - “We could associate personality with the concept of a complete human individual who, in regard to the scope and levels of his functions, represents a coherent and harmonious structure of a high degree of insight into himself, into his aims and aspirations (self-awareness) (1973, p. 108).
 - “The first quality of personality – that is to say, self-awareness – is relatively clear and does not need much comment” (1973, p. 109).

- Personality Ideal:
 - Definition: “An individual standard against which one evaluates one’s actual personality structure” (1970, p. 175).
 - In the personality ideal, there is a tendency to adjust to ‘what ought to be’ versus ‘what is.’ This is evidence of the multilevel, hierarchical view of life in action.

- **Autonomy:**
 - “Autonomy is the state of the gradual acquisition of independence from the lower levels of internal and external reality” (1973, p. 89).
 - “Autonomy is the expression of the developmental process from lower to higher levels, from that which ‘is’ to that which ‘ought to be’”. . . . The result of its activity is a consciousness of being independent in thinking, experiencing and behaving” (1973, p. 89).
- **Authenticity:**
 - Definition: “A human individual is authentic, if he has developed an autonomous attitude toward himself, his environment and his ideal of personality; if he has achieved a high level of synthetic inner psychic transformation, consciousness, self-consciousness, empathy, hierarchization and a strong feeling of his essentialist existence” (1973, p. 94).

- Disintegration:
 - Definition: “Loosening, disorganization, or dissolution of mental structures and functions” (1972, p. 293).
 - “The term disintegration is used to refer to a broad range of processes, from emotional disharmony to the complete fragmentation of the personality structure, all of which are usually regarded as negative” (1964, p. 5).
- Dąbrowski described various types of disintegration:
 - Unilevel / Multilevel.
 - Negative / Positive.
 - Spontaneous / Organized (Directed).
 - Partial / Global.

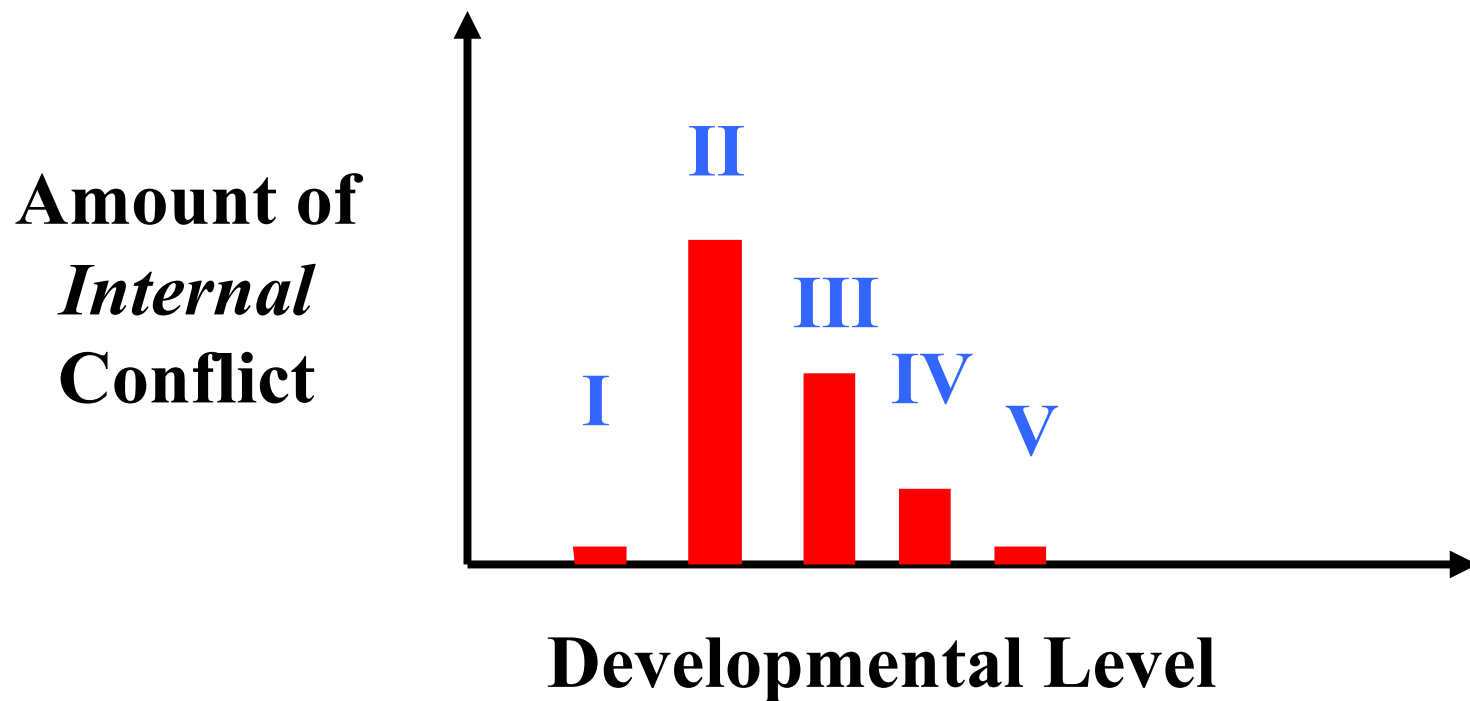
- “Every authentic creative process consists of ‘loosening,’ ‘splitting’ or ‘smashing’ the former reality. Every mental conflict is associated with disruption and pain; every step forward in the direction of authentic existence is combined with shocks, sorrows, suffering and distress” (1973, p. 14).
- “Experiences of shock, stress and trauma, may accelerate development in individuals with innate potential for positive development” (1970, p. 20).
- “Inner conflicts often lead to emotional, philosophical and existential crises” (1972, p. 196).

- “The chances of developmental crises and their positive or negative outcomes depend on the character of the developmental potential, on the character of social influence, and on the activity (if present) of the third factor. . . . One also has to keep in mind that a developmental solution to a crisis means not a reintegration but an integration at a higher level of functioning” (1972, p. 245).
- “Crises are periods of increased insight into oneself, creativity, and personality development” (1964, p. 18).
- “Crises, in our view, are brought about through thousands of different internal and external conflicts, resulting from collisions of the developing personality with negative elements of the inner and external milieus” (1972, p. 245).

- “We are human inasmuch as we experience disharmony and dissatisfaction, inherent in the process of disintegration” (1970, p. 122).
- “Prolonged states of unilevel disintegration (level II) end either in a reintegration at the former primitive level or in suicidal tendencies, or in a psychosis” (1970, p. 135).
- Inner conflict is a *cause* of positive disintegration and subsequent development – conflict acts as a motive to redefine, refine, and discover one’s “new” values.
- Inner conflict is also the *result* of the process of positive disintegration and the operation of the dynamisms of development.

- The last slide mentioned dynamisms – what is a dynamism?
- Dynamism is an old term (100 years ago), popular in psychoanalysis (“psychodynamics”). Literally, it refers to the underlying forces that move matter or mind toward activity or progress.
- Associated with emotion and especially in the sense of “*emovere*” – to move – to cause movement.
- Dynamism: “Biological or mental force controlling behavior and its development. Instincts, drives, and intellectual processes combined with emotions are dynamisms” (1972, p. 294).

- *Dis*-ease is necessary as a motivation to change the status quo. The amount of inner conflict is linked to the degree of change – maximum at Level II and in the borderline region between Level II and III:



- Psychoneurosis: “those processes, syndromes and functions which express inner and external conflicts, and positive maladjustment of an individual in the process of accelerated development” (1973, p. 151).
- Dąbrowski saw a positive role for psychoneuroses in advanced development:
 - “Connected with the tension arising from strong developmental conflicts” (1973, p. 149).
 - “contain(s) elements of man’s authentic humanization” (1973, p. 152).
 - Dąbrowski’s approach is almost unique: at odds with the traditional views of Freud, Maslow, and most others.

- Neuroses are traditionally seen as a coping strategy/ mechanism: symptoms *protect* the person *from* crisis, maintain stability – not associated with growth.
- D.: Psychoneuroses act as an immunization, not a defense.
 - Psychoneuroses “are the protection against serious mental disorders – against psychoses” (1973, p. 162).
- Dąbrowski said don’t try to “help” psychoneurotics, rather, learn from them, appreciate their uniqueness, their creativity, their values, their sensitivity:
 - See Dąbrowski’s poem, “Be Greeted Psychoneurotics.”

- Positive Disintegration: “Loosening, disorganization or dissolution of mental structures and functions” (1970, p. 164).
- “Positive when it enriches life, enlarges the horizon, and brings forth creativity, it is negative when it either has no developmental effects or causes involution” (1964, p. 10).
- Recovery from crisis can lead to a reintegration at the former level and former equilibrium or to a more healthy integration and new equilibrium on a higher level.
- If a person has strong developmental potential, even severe crises can be positive and lead to growth.

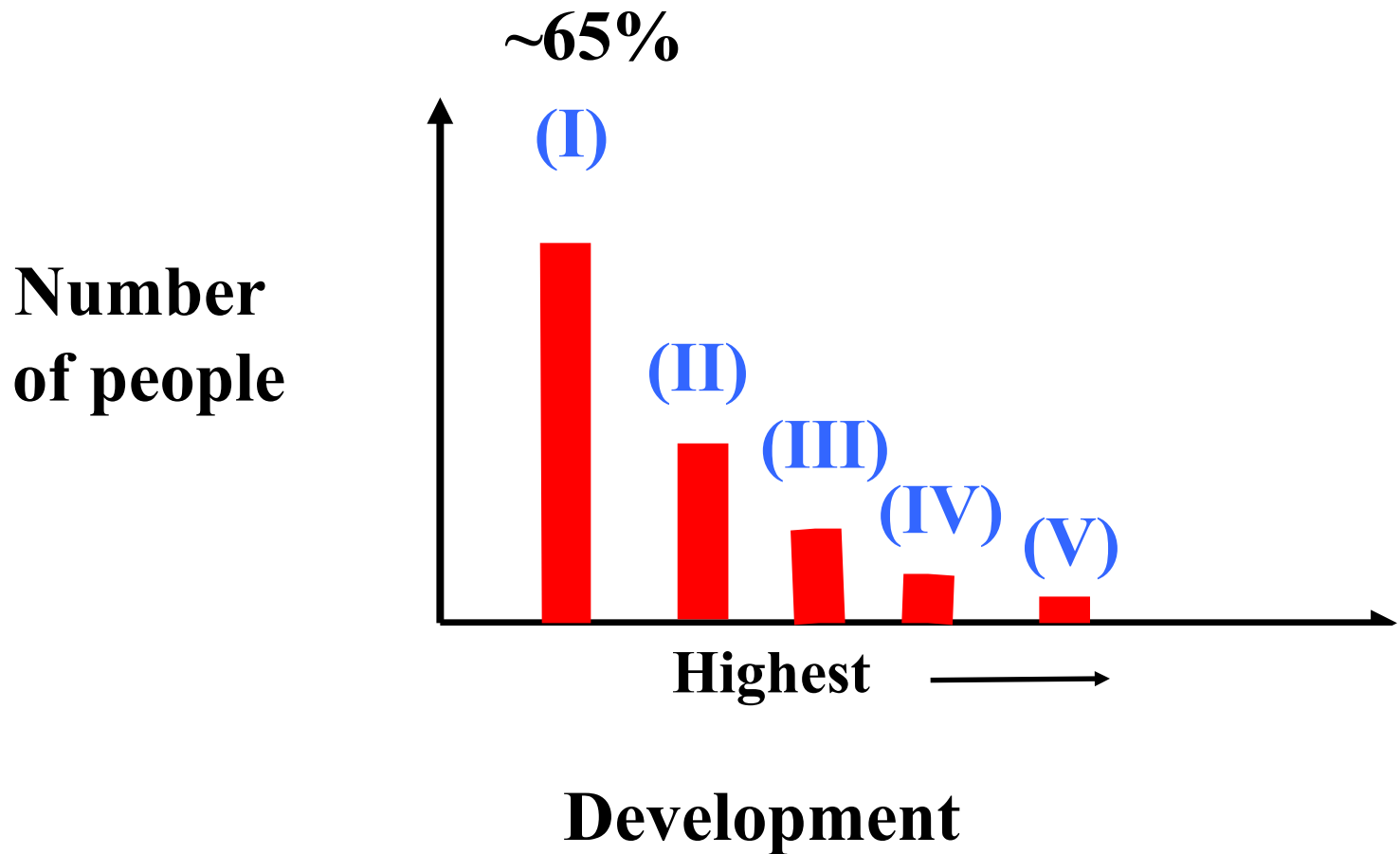
- Instinct: a fundamental dynamism (force) in the lives of animals and men that has a great intensity, a significant degree of compactness and cohesiveness, its own sphere of activity, and its own direction (1970, p. 170).
- “Such forces as the creative instinct and the instinct of self-perfection are specifically human. On the other hand, such forces as the sexual instinct appear in animals and man, but in both are differentiated into levels.” (1973, p. 11).
- “The developmental instinct acts against the automatic, limited, and primitive functional patterns of the biological cycle of life” (1970, p. 28).
- Developmental instinct: “The whole process of transformation of primitive drives and impulsive functions into more reflective and refined functions occurs under the influence of evolutionary dynamisms which we call the developmental instinct” (1973, p. 22).

38 Developmental potential is uncommon.

- People dominated by their lower instincts appear to have little potential or motivation to develop or to change.
- People dominated by socialization occasionally show potential to develop but social forces and peer pressure are strong and resist change.
- Some people appear to have strong autonomous potential to develop (“can’t be held back”). May go on to become exemplars of advanced development.
- Dąbrowski studied exemplars and described common traits in them that he called Developmental Potential (DP).

Where are we Today?

- Dąbrowski's ideas concur with most other models of advanced human development in observing that very few people actually reach the highest levels:



- Many complex and interrelated components form DP:
 - The three factors of development.
 - The many dynamisms, like subject-object in oneself, self-awareness and identification with development.
 - Psychoneuroses and positive disintegration.
 - Emerging, internal features of the self [Hierarchy of aims, Hierarchy of values, Inner Psychic Milieu, Third Factor, Personality Ideal, etc.].
 - Instincts: The developmental instinct, the creative instinct, and the instinct for self-perfection.
 - Overexcitability (Five types).
 - Special talents and abilities.

41 Developmental Potential (DP): Overview.

- “The relations and interactions between the different components of the developmental potential give shape to individual development and control the appearance of psychoneuroses on different levels of development” (1972, p. 78).
- Just as intelligence varies in the population, developmental potential varies between individuals.
- Most have too little DP to allow for advanced growth.
- A few have strong DP and achieve the highest levels.

Key Features of DP.

- Developmental potential may be:
 - positive or negative
 - general or specific
 - strong or weak
 - expressed or not expressed
- One major neglected aspect is third factor.
- The most misunderstood aspect of DP is OE:
 - OE is usually not appreciated by others or by society.
 - OE is often suppressed or hidden by the individual.
 - OE needs to be understood within the context of DP.
 - OE can be hard to manage or completely overwhelming.
 - OE heightens the joys but also intensifies the lows of life.
 - OE needs to be validated not seen as an abnormality.
 - OE may lead to self-mutilation or suicide.

- Overexcitability (OE): “Higher than average responsiveness to stimuli, manifested either by psychomotor, sensual, emotional (affective), imaginal, or intellectual excitability or the combination thereof” (1972, p. 303).
- A physiological property of the nervous system: “Each form of overexcitability points to a higher than average sensitivity of its receptors” (1972, p. 7).
- Dąbrowski emphasized two aspects: a higher than average sensitivity of the nerves (receptors) and a higher than average responsiveness to stimuli.

- “The prefix over attached to ‘excitability’ serves to indicate that the reactions of excitation are over and above average in intensity, duration and frequency” (1996, p. 7).
- OE affects how a person sees reality: “One who manifests several forms of overexcitability, sees reality in a different, stronger and more multisided manner” (1972, p. 7).
- Dąbrowski called OE “a tragic gift:”
 - As both the highs and lows of life are intensified.
 - Because the world is not yet ready for people who feel at such deep levels.

Overexcitability (OE).

- “Because the sensitivity [excitability] is related to all essential groups of receptors of stimuli of the internal and external worlds it widens and enhances the field of consciousness” (1972, p. 66).
- “Individuals with enhanced emotional, imaginal and intellectual excitability channel it into forms most appropriate for them” (1972, p. 66).
- Critical three types: “Emotional (affective), imaginal and intellectual overexcitability are the richer forms. If they appear together they give rich possibilities of development and creativity” (1972, p. 7).

Overexcitability (OE).

- Dąbrowski linked overexcitability with disintegration:
 - [First] “Hyperexcitability also provokes inner conflicts as well as the means by which these conflicts can be overcome” (1970, p. 38).
 - Second, hyperexcitability precipitates psychoneurotic processes.
 - Third, conflicts and psychoneurotic processes become the dominant factor in accelerated development.
- “It is mainly mental hyperexcitability through which the search for something new, something different, more complex and more authentic can be accomplished” (1973, p. 15).

Overexcitability in the gifted field.

- Michael Piechowski (1979) introduced overexcitability to the field of gifted education.
- Research zeroed in on OE largely because it was operationalized by Piechowski with the overexcitability questionnaire (OEQ) (Lysy, & Piechowski, 1983).
- Over the past 30 years, many research projects and papers have addressed the topic, most in the context of gifted populations (see Mendaglio & Tillier, 2006).
- The construct validity of these scales seems a fatal problem.
- Results have been inconsistent and have not been able to demonstrate “the big three” OEs (intellectual, imaginal and emotional) in gifted populations.

Three Factors of Development.

- Three factors influence behavior and development:
 - First Factor – the expression of genetic instincts:
 - Most basic: primal biological survival instincts.
 - Primitive, reflexive instincts and reactions.
 - Today, we might generalize to our “dog-eat-dog” mentality and social obsession on material success.
 - Reflected in egocentrism: Focus on self-satisfaction, feeling good, regardless of costs to others.

Three Factors of Development.

- Second Factor – external influence: environment and socialization (includes education).
 - Moral authority and criteria for good behavior are derived from external (social) values.
 - Most people live life under the day-to-day influence of second factor, for example: Kohlberg's conventional level of moral reasoning or Loevinger's conformist stage.
 - Most people are socialized and conform without thinking deeply about life – without comparing how things are versus how things could be or ought to be – also see Bergsen.

50 **Normal integration defeats the third factor.**

- Dąbrowski said the common route of maturation leads to a “premature” integration of mental structures based on “the desire to gain a position, to become distinguished, to possess property, and to establish a family” – “the more the integration of the mental structure grows, the more the influence of the third agent weakens” (1964, p. 57).

Third factor starts out as one thing.

- More than just “will” – the third factor is the totality of our autonomous features and forces.
- The third factor arises from genetic roots, initially a vague and undefined feeling; a stirring to express one’s “real” self, but later “emerges” and becomes an autonomous force.
- Third factor eventually expresses our sense of who we ought to be and controls the direction of our development – it transcends its genetic roots.

Third factor emerges into something else.

- In ideal, advanced development, the maturational period is ‘protracted’ and “is clearly accompanied by a strong instinct of development, great creative capacities, a tendency to reach for perfection, and the appearance and development of self-consciousness, self-affirmation, and self-education” (1964, p. 57).

- As third factor develops, it compels us to make conscious choices that express our authentic self: to choose what is “more me” and to reject what is “less me.”
- “The third factor has a fundamental role in education-of-oneself, and in autopsychotherapy. It arises and grows as a resultant of both positive hereditary endowment (especially the ability for inner psychic transformation) and positive environmental influences” (1970, p. 179).
- Its presence and operation is essential in the development toward autonomy and authenticity.

- Dąbrowski outlined four types of adjustment:
 - 1). Negative maladjustment – antisocial, selfish ego dominates behavior that flaunts social mores:
 - Expression of primitive first factor: criminals, unscrupulous CEOs (see themselves above law).
 - 2). Negative adjustment – “ordinary” socialization:
 - “Robotic” and uncritical acceptance of “what is.”
 - Adjustment to prevailing social norms and values.
 - Expression of second factor – we are social conformers: antisocial and primitive impulses are repressed (so is our autonomy) so we will “fit in.”
 - Adjustment to a “sick” society is to also be sick.

- 3). Positive maladjustment – rejection of what is, in favor of what ought to be:
 - Creates major crises and often psychoneurosis.
 - Initial expression of third factor (autonomy).
 - Pits one against social norms and mores – often confused as “ordinary” antisocial maladjustment.
 - May be seen in gifted students (but often mislabeled).
- 4). Positive adjustment – adjustment to inner sense of what ought to be: to consciously chosen values:
 - Full expression of third factor / personality ideal.
 - Expression of highest personal values.
 - Seen at Level V – secondary integration.
 - Ideal society: everyone is at this level.

Adjustment and the Factors.

- Negative maladjustment: First Factor.
 - – antisocial, asocial, selfish, egocentric, egotistical
- Negative adjustment: Second Factor.
 - – adjustment to what is; to conventional social mores.
 - Society is currently “primitive & confused” (1970, 118).
 - “The individual who is always adjusted is one who does not develop himself” (1970, p. 58).
- Positive maladjustment: Initial expression of 3rd Factor.
 - – rejection of ‘what is,’ in view of what ‘ought to be.’
- Positive adjustment: Full 3rd Factor / Secondary integration.
 - – full adjustment to what ought to be: behavior follows one’s authentic consciously chosen values.

Emotional and instinctive functions.

- The theory distinguishes various levels of development of “emotional and instinctive functions.” The level of these functions reflects one’s values and one’s general level of development. Dąbrowski called these “levels of emotional development analogous to the levels of intellectual development” (1970, p. 19).
- Dąbrowski (1996) could not accept that psychology had so embraced the study of cognitive development and so eschewed the study of emotional development.
- For Dąbrowski, “a general theory of human development is not possible if it does not include emotional factors” (1996, p. 6).

- Dąbrowski included traditional cognitive development but added a new role for emotional factors, where “emotional factors are not considered merely as unruly subordinates of reason but can acquire the dominant role of shapers of development” (1996, p. 6).
- Traditional theories of development rest on ontogeny – the idea that development automatically unfolds according to some pre-programmed biological sequence of events: Each subsequent step unfolding on the foundation of, and predicated upon, the features of the previous stage.

Emotion is non-ontogenic.

- Dąbrowski's observations of emotion lead him to conclude that emotion does not conform to ontological development (ontogenesis), rather, it is determined by, and emerges from, "other" conditions and factors.
- A key implication is that emotional development may not match cognitive development – as cognitive growth follows ontogenesis, and may achieve advanced levels, emotional functions may or may not follow.
- This lopsided situation was referred to by Dąbrowski as one-sided development and created a perilous situation. Cognition is allowed to act as an instrument of first and second factor influences without the emotional and moral constraints that reflect the values of the individual.

- Dąbrowski saw cognition as a weak and fallible basis for morality. One's moral beliefs are often easily challenged by impulse and yield to rationalization or peer pressure.
- Awareness of one's higher emotions is the best guide to one's own sense of morality. In advanced development, amoral or immoral behavior would elicit negative emotions, feelings of repulsion and a general emotional awareness that one ought not yield to temptation.
- Likewise, success at moral behaviour would elicit positive emotions: not egocentrism and self-congratulation.

- “To each level of mental development, there is a corresponding level of value experience. Mental development of man and the development of a hierarchy of values are, in fact, two names for the same process. One cannot separate the two” (1970, p. 98).
- “Above a certain level of development there is more universal agreement in valuation, i.e. highly developed (eminent) people tend to share the same values” (1970, p. 93).

Emotion and hierarchization.

- Emotional overexcitability is a key component of development because it evokes strong internal conflicts at the very beginning of multilevelness. As hierarchization begins, positive emotional experiences are linked to higher choices and negative experiences are associated with lower choices. As vertical conflicts become more common, they become harder to ignore and, driven by emotion, eventually create crises when lower choices are made.
- Emotion acts as a guide to the process of hierarchization in the establishment of multilevelness and the multileveled view of reality that is the basis of advanced growth.

Emotion and values become synonymous.

- “‘Psychoneurotic experiences’ by disturbing the lower levels of values help gradually to enter higher levels of values, i.e., the level of higher emotions. These emotions becoming conscious and ever more strongly experienced begin to direct our behaviour and bring it to a higher level. In this way higher emotions play a dynamic role in our development and give meaning to our life. As new and higher values, the higher emotions slowly begin to shape our ‘new harmony’ after the collapse of the primitive harmony of lower level” (1972, p. 3).

Many links in the developmental chain.

- Let's follow the links of the chain: Emotion working with hierarchization creates one's higher values – the hierarchy of values.
- One's hierarchy of values then guides the fine-tuning of one's personality ideal, leading to a hierarchy of goals and aims designed to express one's authentic sense of self in the world.
- The faithful expression of one's authentic self creates inner harmony and internal conflicts fade. One's humility and sense of empathy and compassion become focused on the inequities of the world, often creating strong external conflicts and collisions with the status quo.

Are the gifted prone to disintegration?

- Dąbrowski conducted one study with gifted children:
 - Reported in Dąbrowski (1967) and again in (1972).
 - Examined 80 children: 30 intellectually gifted and 50 from “drama, ballet and plastic art schools” (1967, p. 251).
- Found ‘every child’ showed ‘hyperexcitability,’ various psychoneurotic symptoms and frequent conflicts with the environment.
- “The development of personality with gifted children and young people usually passes through the process of positive disintegration” (1967, p. 261).
 - This hypothesis has not yet been tested.

- In the manuscript, *On Authentic Education*, Dąbrowski said:
 - “The nervous and psychoneurotic individual is present in an overwhelming percentage of highly gifted children and youths, artists, writers, etc. [The] tendency to reach beyond the statistical norm and mediocre development presents the privilege and drama of psychoneurotic people.”

Hypothesis for gifted students.

- Hypothesis: as a group, students identified as gifted will tend to display stronger DP (and OE), increased levels of psychoneuroses, and will be predisposed to experience positive disintegration:
 - Many students will display “symptoms” that may reflect higher potentials:
 - May display unusual sensitivity, frequent crises, anxieties, depression, perfectionism, etc.
 - May express strong positive maladjustment:
 - Strong sense they are different, don’t fit in.
 - Have conflicts with social (unilevel) morality.
 - Feel alienated from others, from their peers.

The OEQ.

- Piechowski developed the OEQ to test OE (not full DP):
 - (Lysy, K. Z., & Piechowski M. M. (1983). Personal Growth: An empirical study using Jungian and Dąbrowskian measures. *Genetic Psych Monographs*, 108, 267-320.)
- Ackerman found problems with the OEQ:
 - Ackerman, C. (1997). *A secondary analysis of research using the Overexcitability Questionnaire*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas.)
- A revised test, the OEQ-II, was developed:
 - Falk, R. F., Lind, S., Miller, N. B., Piechowski, M. M., & Silverman, L. K. (1999). *The Overexcitability Questionnaire-Two (OEQII): Manual, Scoring System, and Questionnaire*. (Available from the Institute for the Study of Advanced Development, 1452 Marion St., Denver, CO 80218).
- “This version is for research with group data and is not intended to provide diagnostic information about an individual.” from the manual (reference above).
- Research based on this instrument hinges on its validity – a major problem seldom discussed.

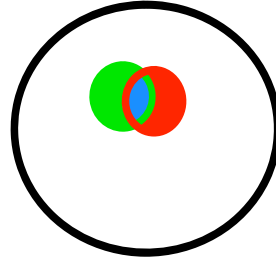
Research findings.

- Mendaglio & Tillier (2006) presented an overview of the literature.
- Michael Pyryt (2008) reviewed the research concluding:
 - Gifted individuals are more likely than those not identified as gifted to show signs of intellectual OE, but based upon the research strategies and testing done to date, the gifted do not consistently demonstrate “the big three,” intellectual, imaginal and emotional OE.

- Pyryt (2008) concluded: “it appears that gifted and average ability individuals have similar amounts of emotional overexcitability. This finding would suggest that many gifted individuals have limited developmental potential in the Dąbrowskian sense and are more likely to behave egocentrically rather than altruistically” (p. 177).
- In reviewing the literature, many articles simply ignore findings that do not agree with their position. (This is called referencing bias).

The gifted subgroup.

Identified as
gifted, but little
DP is seen
(24%).



Not identified as
gifted but DP is seen
(35%).

Overlap: those identified as gifted and who show DP.

- Ackerman (1997): identified three groups as shown above.
 - She concluded the 35% with higher DP *must* be gifted but have not been identified by conventional gifted testing.
- Dąbrowski: one *can* have DP and not be “gifted” although he suggested that above average intelligence was a necessary but not sufficient condition for advanced development.

Research poses questions.

- Research suggests that gifted students do not display higher anxiety, depression or suicide (Neihart 1999):
 - If it is true that gifted have higher OE as a group, why don't more appear to have psychoneurosis and go through positive disintegration as Dąbrowski's theory hypothesized?

**Sweet are the uses of adversity,
Which like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head;**

**Shakespeare W. (1914). *The Oxford Shakespeare.*
As You Like It Act II. Scene I**



He shall be found the truly wise.

'Tis Zeus alone who shows the perfect way

Of knowledge: He hath ruled,

Men shall learn wisdom, by affliction schooled.

Aeschylus (525 – 456 B.C.). Agamemnon.

{ess ka less}

{agg ga num non}

Eliot, C. W. (Ed.). (1909). Nine Greek dramas. The

Harvard Classics. Volume 8. New York, NY: Collier. (p. 11).

- **References.**

- Dąbrowski's overexcitabilities Dąbrowski, C. (1937). Psychological basis of self mutilation. (W. Thau, Trans.) *Genetic Psychology Monographs*, 19, 1-104.
- Dąbrowski, K. (1964). *Positive disintegration*. Boston, MA: Little Brown & Co.
- Dąbrowski, K. (1966). The theory of positive disintegration. *International Journal of Psychiatry*, 2, 229-244. (Reprint of pps.1-32 of *Positive disintegration* (1964).
- Dąbrowski, K. (1967). *Personality-shaping through positive disintegration*. Boston, MA: Little Brown & Co.
- Dąbrowski, K. (with Kawczak, A., & Piechowski, M. M.). (1970). *Mental growth through positive disintegration*. London, England: Gryf Publications.
- Dąbrowski, K. (1972). *Psychoneurosis is not an illness*. London, England: Gryf Publications.
- Dąbrowski, K., (with Kawczak, A., & Piechowski, M. M.). (1970). *Mental growth through positive disintegration*. London, England: Gryf Publications.

- Dąbrowski, K. (1972). *Psychoneurosis is not an illness*. London, England: Gryf Publications.
- Dąbrowski, K. (with Kawczak, A., & Sochanska, J.). (1973). *The dynamics of concepts*. London, England: Gryf Pub.
- Dąbrowski, K. (1976). On the philosophy of development through positive disintegration and secondary integration. *Dialectics and Humanism*, 3-4, 131-144.
- Dąbrowski, K. (1994). The heroism of sensitivity. (E. Hyzy-Strzelecka, Trans.). *Advanced Development*, 6, 87-92.
- Dąbrowski, K. (1996). *Multilevelness of emotional and instinctive functions. Part 1: Theory and description of levels of behavior*. Lublin, Poland: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego.
- Dąbrowski, K. & Piechowski, M. M. (with the assistance of Marlene [Rankel] and Dexter R. Amend). (1996). *Multilevelness of emotional and instinctive functions. Part 2: Types and Levels of Development*. Lublin, Poland: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego.
- Jahoda, M. (1958). *Current concepts of positive mental health*. Joint Commission on Mental Illness and Health, Monograph Series No. 1. New York, NY: Basic Books.

- Lysy, K. Z., & Piechowski, M. M. (1983). Personal growth: An empirical study using Jungian and Dabrowskian measures. *Genetic Psychology Monographs*, 108, 267-320.
- Mendaglio, S. (2002). Dąbrowski's theory of positive disintegration: Some implications for teachers of gifted students. *AGATE: Journal of the Gifted and Talented Education Council of The Alberta Teachers' Association*, 15(2), 14-22.
- Mendaglio, S. (Ed.). (2008). *Dąbrowski's theory of positive disintegration*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.
- Mendaglio, S. (2012). Overexcitabilities and Giftedness Research: A Call for a Paradigm Shift. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 35, 207–219. doi:10.1177/0162353212451704
- Mendaglio, S., & Tillier, W. (2006) Dąbrowski's theory of positive disintegration and giftedness: Overexcitability research findings. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 30, 68-87.
- Piechowski, M. M. (1979). Developmental potential. In N. Colangelo & R. T. Zaffrann(Eds.) *New voices in counseling the gifted* (pp.25-57). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.
- Piechowski, M. M. (2014). Rethinking Dąbrowski's theory: I. The case against primary integration. *Roeper Review*, 36, 11-17. doi:10.1080/02783193.2013.856829
- Pyryt, M. C. (2008). The Dąbrowskian lens: Implications for understanding gifted individuals. In S. Mendaglio (Ed.), *Dąbrowski's theory of positive disintegration* (pp. 175-182). Scottsdale AZ: Great Potential Press.