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Abstract

Literature exploring the experiences of gifted individuals has often focused on asynchronous development, particularly during childhood and adolescence. Also discussed in the literature are the unique social, emotional, and behavioral characteristics associated with giftedness. However, there is still an unclear picture concerning the implications of this work as related to the specific counseling needs of gifted students, and little empirical support is provided. This study seeks to build, through a developmental lens, a more comprehensive base from which to design counseling and teaching approaches with gifted students. Findings indicate that the ego levels of gifted students are slightly higher than those of typical adolescents. Empirical evidence of the level of development related to Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration for gifted adolescents is provided, with the majority of respondents (70%) falling within Dabrowski's Level II—Unilevel Disintegration stage. Results also indicated that the gifted students studied are relatively well adjusted and that the behaviors exhibited by gifted adolescents are normally distributed. Study results are interpreted as indicating that although ego development and Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration may share similarities, they are different constructs, and further investigation is needed to best use these theories in designing appropriate and effective counseling and teaching intervention strategies for working with gifted adolescents. Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are presented.

Keywords

gifted students, ego development, Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration, social and emotional development

Gifted individuals experience the world from a different perspective than the norm, with *qualitative* differences, including intensities, sensitivities, idealism, perceptiveness, overexcitabilities, asynchrony, complexity, introversion, perfectionism, and moral concerns (Silverman, 2005). Although researchers differ on the exact nature of "giftedness," the field of gifted education often defines giftedness as asynchronous development, "in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm" (Columbus Group, 1991, para 8). It is this qualitative difference that can render gifted children and adolescents particularly vulnerable across a number of social and emotional domains, thus requiring attention from parents, teachers, and counselors for optimal development to occur.

Teachers and parents often focus on gifted children's intellect while attending less to their emotions. However, neglect of the emotional lives of children and adolescents can influence their intellectual achievement, as emotions are critical

to the learning process and the full development of the individual (Sword, 2001b). By examining the experiences of gifted adolescents through both Dabrowski's framework (1964) and Loevinger's theory of ego development (1976), we can expand our understanding of the complexities of emotional development in this population and better support their unique needs.

Loevinger's ego development theory (1976) offers a wealth of understanding relevant to an individual's emotional development throughout the life span. Dabrowski's (1964) theory of positive disintegration (TPD) provides a unique perspective regarding the role of an individual's sensitivities and

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intensities as related to their developmental potential and developmental growth. However, little research has been done in the counseling field linking Dabrowski's TPD to other developmental theories and approaches, and ego development has not been specifically studied in gifted populations. This research seeks to combine the available research in ego development with Dabrowski's TPD to build a more comprehensive base from which to conceptualize counseling and teaching approaches with the gifted students. A number of recently published works concerning implications of Dabrowski's theory in the field of gifted education (Ackerman, 2009; Daniels & Piechowski, 2009; Kane, 2009; Mendaglio, 2008; Piechowski, 2008; Silverman, 2007) highlight the current relevance of this theory for understanding the developmental issues faced by gifted individuals and cite the need for more studies that can provide the empirical evidence necessary to move application of the theory forward.

Research examining the social and emotional characteristics of gifted individuals has reported mixed findings. While some research has indicated that gifted students are typically as well adjusted as other peers, it has also been shown that gifted students are vulnerable to a number of issues and situations that can hamper their cognitive, as well as affective, development (Colangelo & Assouline, 2000). An overview of research concerning the social and emotional needs of gifted students (Neihart, Reis, Robinson, & Moon, 2002) includes a wide range of issues, including asynchronous development, in which a student's cognitive development may outpace his or her social and emotional development (Silverman, 2007). In addition, researchers have focused on the impact of sensitivities, intensities, and overexcitabilities in gifted students' cognitive and affective development (Silverman, 2005). These factors, along with asynchronous development, create vulnerabilities that require differentiated teaching and counseling approaches for gifted students (Columbus Group, 1991).

Sword (2001a) described the unique emotional, intellectual, and social characteristics of gifted students, highlighting that not only do gifted children think differently from their peers, they also feel differently. Piechowski (1992) explained these differences in feeling as intensities and an expanded field of subjective experience. He argued that intensity must be understood as a qualitatively distinct characteristic of gifted individuals that is not a difference of degree but of a different quality of experiencing (Piechowski, 1992).

Cognitive differences, an intense desire for knowledge and understanding, pronounced intellectual curiosity, and a need for constant mental stimulation can prove challenging for gifted students in traditional education settings (Lovecky, 1992; Silverman, 1993). Dockery (2005) identified the added stress such issues can place on these students as they attempt to fulfill their desire for learning without becoming overextended into too many activities at one time. Such students can encounter frustration when faced with problems or concerns for which they cannot discern a solution.

This cognitive complexity in gifted students extends into their emotional development and emotional reactions (Silverman, 1993). As with their intellectual pursuits, gifted students express greater intensity in their emotional responses. These students have higher levels of sensitivity and awareness, intuitively understanding complex emotions at young ages, but often lack the resources to adequately cope with these emotions (Levine & Tucker, 1986; Robinson, 2002). Research points to the asynchronous development common in gifted students as an underlying component that creates for these students a qualitatively different experience (Miller & Silverman, 1987; Silverman, 1993, 2002). This asynchrony has social ramifications as gifted students, "by definition . . . have more of something, and they have it earlier than do their age-mates" (Delisle, 1990, p. 224) and may feel out-of-step with their social context. This feeling, coupled with the gifted students' heightened awareness and understanding of their differences from peers, can cause further dissonance and emotional stress. Further, a gifted student's ability to think more abstractly and complexly may translate to an earlier quest for identity and individual values (Dockery, 2005; Gross, 2002; Silverman, 1993). Such students may not yet have had the experiences and support necessary to navigate and understand this process as it unfolds, encountering greater stress in trying to make sense of themselves in relation to those around them. Robinson (2002) highlights this struggle: "By virtue of being ahead in one or more domains, the degree of internal differences gifted children experience is usually greater than those encountered by [the average child]" (p. xvii).

In addition to common issues and concerns, gifted students constantly encounter myths and mixed messages from parents, teachers, and peers. Prevalent among these in the education setting are conflicting messages and expectations related to intelligence, gender, social class and ethnicity (C. Tieso, personal communication, 2008). A common myth that continues to be perpetuated in society and education is that giftedness enables students to cope with any challenges that life may hand them (Coleman & Cross, 2001; Delisle & Galbraith, 2002). This myth is exacerbated by those gifted students who are able to hide how they feel even if they are under great stress, appearing to have it all together when they are, in fact, ready to drop of exhaustion from performing at such high levels (Delisle & Galbraith, 2002). A second myth that builds on this notion is that gifted students do not need to work hard because things "just come to them" (Coleman & Cross, 2001). Many gifted students, themselves, believe in this fallacy and struggle when they are faced with tasks in for which they are unprepared or uncertain how to proceed.

Bloom (1985) countered these mixed messages and myths, stating that "no matter what the initial characteristics (or gifts) of the individuals, unless there is a long and intensive process of encouragement, nurturance, education and training, the individuals will not attain extreme levels of capability" (p. 3).

Coleman and Cross (2005) described the internal conflict that gifted students experience

Much of the conflict in gifted students' lives is a consequence of their advanced developmental rate accompanied by the emergence of more complex abilities and interests, which is incongruent with the behavioral expectations set out for them. The source of conflict is not something inherent in the traits of gifted children, but rather in the interplay between the individual and his or her surroundings. (p. 11)

Hence, it is incumbent on educators, parents, and counselors to recognize this conflict and clarify the mixed messages that are constantly being conveyed to the gifted students. It is our role to assist gifted students in understanding the dynamics of this internal conflict and their position in the social environment, as well as to provide gifted students with the encouragement, nurturance, and education necessary for their optimal development.

Cognitive Developmental Theory

Ego development and Dabrowski's TPD both fall under the overarching umbrella of cognitive developmental theories and are based on the principles that individuals move through a set of qualitatively distinct stages over the course of their life span (Sprinthall, 1994). These theories describe individuals in terms of their thought processes and the influence of those thought processes on their behavior, focusing on how individuals make meaning out of their experiences. Furthermore, such theories have been utilized by counselors and educators as a way of understanding the meaning-making structures inherent in the thoughts, actions, emotions, and behaviors of those with whom they work. A developmental perspective provides powerful explanation and insight into conflicts within the self and conflicts with others (Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007), as well as a framework for matching counseling and educational approaches to the specific developmental needs of the individual.

Loevinger's Theory of Ego Development

Ego development is an abstract concept, born out of work done across a number of fields, and defined as "the evolution of meanings that the [individual] imposes upon inner experience and perceptions of people and events, a sequence of increasingly mature stages of functioning across the domains of personal relationships, impulse control, moral development, and cognitive style" (Hauser, Powers, & Noam, 1991, p. 6). Loevinger (1976) viewed ego development as a "master trait," encompassing all other domains as the organizing structure of personality. It has been described as being made up of interwoven, inseparable strands from other developmental

domains such as cognitive development, moral development, conceptual development, and interpersonal relationship development (Lee & Snarey, 1988). Ego development is conceptualized as a frame for how the self, others, and the environment are perceived and interpreted, thereby guiding the individual's behavior (Borders & Fong, 1989). Loevinger (1976) has described it as a developmental scale of psychological maturation beginning in childhood and a major source of individual difference in adult personality organization (McDonald, 2006).

Ego development is an adaptive process, related to cognitive complexity, that helps us understand how individuals construct and make meaning of their lives. Loevinger (1994) postulated that individuals at higher levels of ego development are better able to adapt to new environmental conditions than those at lower levels. Cognitive development is a necessary, but insufficient component of growth as ego development occurs through maturation, socialization, education, more complex roles, self-exploration, and often following stressful or positive life changes. Thus, ego development provides an extremely useful construct for understanding how gifted adolescents understand self in relation to others and make meaning of their world.

Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration

Although Dabrowski's TPD has not been traditionally considered under the umbrella of cognitive developmental theories, it shares a number of similarities and has been described as a theory of moral development, a theory of emotional development, and a theory of personality development. In the broadest sense, the theory is about the "inner life of the person and the development that takes place there," and "relationships with others and the relationship to the larger community" (Piechowski, 2003, p. 314). Hence, it shares with Loevinger's construction of ego development a focus on understanding the inner experiences of the individual and how those experiences affect the self in relation to others. Dabrowski's levels of development describe a process of maturation that involves transformations in the person's self.

Dabrowski's TPD delineates five levels of personality development along a continuum from low (egocentric) to high (altruistic), explains the process by which development occurs along these levels, and identifies individual characteristics that are equated to developmental potential (O'Connor, 2002). The hallmark of Dabrowski's theory is that development to higher levels is achieved through a process of inner conflict, described as a disconnect between "what is" and "what ought to be" in oneself (Dabrowski, as cited in Piechowski, 1975). This "positive maladjustment" is defined as conflict with expectations of one's environment that are incompatible with one's growing awareness of and striving toward a higher set of values (Dabrowski, 1970), and is viewed as a necessary component in the process of developmental growth.

Dabrowski felt that each individual is born with a set capacity for development, or developmental potential, and described this as a “constitutional endowment which determines the character and extent of mental growth possible for a given individual” (Dabrowski, 1972, p. 293). He felt that this developmental potential does not change throughout the life span; however, the extent to which a person has achieved his or her potential and the degree to which his or her potential seems evident can vary (Piechowski, 1978).

Dabrowski’s developmental levels have been summarized by Piechowski (2003) and are presented in Table 1 alongside Loevinger’s stages of ego development as outlined in the Hy and Loevinger (1996) revision manual. Dabrowski’s TPD has been validated through qualitative research and rich case studies (Dabrowski, 1966, 1967, 1970, 1972; Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1977; Piechowski, 1978, 1990, 2003, 2008); however, few empirical studies specifically examine the levels of development along the TPD continuum.

The Present Study

Uneven development is a universal characteristic of giftedness, with gifted children and adolescents in any cultural context having greater discrepancies among various facets of development than average youth (Silverman, 2007). The National Association for Gifted Children (1995) highlights that “gifted and talented children, because of heightened intellectual and social-emotional needs, may experience difficulties that require professional intervention” (para 6). They assert that it is imperative that those providing such services have expertise in understanding the impact of giftedness on development. However, in-depth examinations of gifted students’ experiences in specific developmental domains have been limited, particularly in conjunction with how these developmental domains may be influencing the social, emotional, and behavioral experiences of these students during adolescence. Ego development enables a focus on the social and emotional development of gifted adolescents, and provides a framework for understanding the ways in which gifted adolescents make sense of themselves in relation to others and their social context. Dabrowski’s TPD provides a framework for better understanding the sensitivities and overexcitabilities inherent to gifted adolescents and the impact these characteristics may have on their developmental potential and developmental growth. Hence, this study examined gifted adolescents’ development through both ego development and Dabrowski’s conception of developmental growth as frameworks that provide better understanding of the qualitatively different ways in which gifted students experience and understand the world.

The general goals of this study included examining the ego development levels of gifted adolescents, the Dabrowskian developmental levels of gifted adolescents, and the exhibited behavioral characteristics of gifted adolescents in the school context. Further, the researcher more specifically examined

five research questions. Are the range and distribution of gifted adolescents’ levels of ego development different from established adolescent norms? Is there a correlation between gifted adolescents’ stage of ego development and their Dabrowskian developmental level? Is there a correlation between gifted adolescents’ ego development and their degree of internalizing behavior? Conversely, is there a correlation between gifted adolescents’ ego development and their degree of externalizing behavior? Finally, what is the statistical distribution of behaviors exhibited by gifted adolescents in the school as observed by their teachers?

Method

Participants

A convenience sample was derived from an accessible population of students attending regional academic-year schools for the gifted as outlined by a southeastern state’s department of education. Eligibility for these programs was based on multiple criteria, including assessment of performance, observation in the classroom, individual interviews, aptitude and achievement tests, and previous accomplishments. Those students who had been identified as gifted and eligible for gifted programs in the state met the operational definition of giftedness used in this study.

The school districts and locales of the students in the study ranged from small rural communities to large urban areas and represented a student population of diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. The sample included gifted students representing various domains because of the academic foci of the schools selected for inclusion. A liaison at each school randomly selected students that were then invited to participate in the study, ensuring a wide cross-section of students and helping to address sampling issues that may arise with a more restrictive sampling technique. A total of 40 students were invited to participate from School A and 60 from School B. Of those invited, 70 chose to participate and completed the instrumentation. The sample consisted of both male and female students from Grades 9 through 12.

Instrumentation

Five instruments were used to collect necessary information for completing this study: (a) consent form, (b) demographic information form, (c) Washington University Sentence Completion Test (WUSCT), (d) Definition Response Instrument (DRI), and (e) Clinical Assessment of Behavior–Teacher Rating Scales (CAB-T).

The WUSCT developed by Loevinger and Wessler (1970) was used to assess the students’ levels of ego development. This study used the shortened form of WUSCT to meet the time constraints imposed by testing during the school day. The WUSCT (short form) is a semiprojective test consisting of 18 sentence stems with different versions provided for males

Table 1. A Comparison of Loevinger's Stages of Ego Development and Dabrowski's Levels of Positive Disintegration

Loevinger's ego development (Hy & Loevinger, 1996)	Dabrowski's positive disintegration (Piechowski, 2003)
Impulsive (E2) Impulsive, egocentric Dependent Preoccupied with bodily feelings Cognitive simplicity and lack of psychological insight Dichotomistic thinking	Level I: Primary integration "Dog-eat-dog mentality" Dominant concern with self-protection and survival Self-serving egocentrism Instrumental view of others
Self-protective (E3) Opportunistic Manipulative Preoccupied with control Lack sense of responsibility Seek immediate gratification/materialistic	Level II: Unilevel disintegration "A reed shaken in the wind"—Matthew, XI, 7 Lack of inner direction Inner fragmentation—many selves Submission to the values of the group Relativism of values and beliefs Unilevel dynamisms: Ambivalences—fluctuations between opposite feelings, mood shifts Ambitendencies—changeable and conflicting courses of action "Second factor"—susceptibility to social opinion, feelings of inferiority toward others
Conformist (E4) Respect for rules Cooperative, loyal Preoccupied with appearances, behavior, and social acceptance Shift to group centeredness Tolerance of differences <i>not</i> a feature Inner emotions perceived in simple terms	Level III: Multilevel disintegration "I regard the better but follow the worse."—Marcus Tullius Cicero Sense of the ideal but not reaching it Moral concerns Higher versus lower in oneself Multilevel dynamisms: Ways of critically perceiving and evaluating the world, others, and oneself—leading to the work of inner transformation Hierarchy of values and social conscience—empathy, "what is" contrasted with "what ought to be"; positive maladjustment, protest against violation of ethical principles Emotionally charged self-reactions and self-judgments—dissatisfaction with oneself, anger at what is undesirable in oneself; inferiority toward oneself, not realizing one's potential; disquietude with oneself, disharmony in one's inner state of being; astonishment with oneself; shame over deficiencies and others' view of one's moral standard; guilt over moral failure
Self-aware (E5) Exceptions allowable Helpful, self-aware Preoccupied with feelings, adjustment Feelings describe self in relation to others Sense of distinction between self and group Realization of multiple possibilities	Conscientious (E6) Self-evaluated standards, self-critical Intense, responsible Preoccupied with motives, achievements Internalization of morality Tolerance for and understanding of alternate viewpoints becomes possible Capacity for reflection Able to perceive broader social context of situations and concepts

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Loevinger's ego development (Hy & Loevinger, 1996)	Dabrowski's positive disintegration (Piechowski, 2003)
Individualistic (E7) Tolerant Mutual mode of relating Preoccupied with individuality, developmental roles Growing tolerance and respect for individual differences Awareness of inner conflict	Level IV: Organized multilevel disintegration "Behind tranquility lies conquered unhappiness"—Eleanor Roosevelt Self-actualization Ideals and actions agree Strong sense of responsibility on behalf of others' well-being and inner growth Dynamisms of inner restructuring: Subject-object in oneself—critical examination of one's motives and aims "Third factor"—executive power of choice and decision in one's inner life; active will in self-regulation and self-determination
Autonomous (E8) Includes the characteristics of E7 and ... Coping with conflict Interdependent mode of relating Preoccupied with self-fulfillment Acknowledgement of and means to cope with inner moral conflict among duties, desires, and needs Aware of multifaceted complexities of real people in real situations High tolerance for ambiguity and paradoxes of life	Responsibility—empathic responsiveness to social needs Inner psychic transformation—inner restructuring at a deep level with lasting consequences beyond return to lower level Education-of-oneself Autopschotherapy—self-designed and preventative measures Self-control—regulating development and keeping in check interfering processes Autonomy—confidence in one's development; freedom from lower level drives and motivations
Integrated (E9) Includes the characteristics of E8 and ... Cherishing individuality Preoccupied with identity Reconciliation of conflicting demands	Level V: Secondary integration "A magnetic field in the soul"—Dag Hammarskjöld Life inspired by a powerful ideal such as equal rights, world peace, universal love and compassion, sovereignty of all nations Personality ideal—the ultimate goal of development, the essence of one's being Dynamisms continuing across levels: Creative instinct Empathy Inner conflict Identification—with higher levels and personality ideal Dis-identification—distancing from lower levels and drives Disposing and directing center—status of will

and females. Although there is some loss of reliability in using the shortened form of the WUSCT, this does not influence validity (Foster & Sprinthall, 1992; Novy & Francis, 1992). Furthermore, although the WUSCT was developed for adult men and women, it has been used internationally in a number of studies with adolescents, supporting the cross-age and cross-national reliability and validity within the age range of the current study (D'Andrea, 1984; Westenberg & Block, 1993; Westenberg, Jonckheer, Treffers, & Drewes, 1998).

The completed WUSCTs were scored by two independent raters trained in accordance with the most current training manual (Hy & Loevinger, 1996) and in consultation with an expert rater. Rater 1 established interrater reliability with the expert rater with 91.9% agreement across the 18 stems. Rater 2 established interrater reliability with the expert rater with

90.8% agreement across the 18 stems. Loevinger and Wessler (1970) reported interrater reliability to be between .86 and .90 for self-trained raters; thus a strong interrater reliability was established during the training process and confirmed in the scoring and analysis of the actual study instruments.

Each item on the WUSCT was individually scored for ego stage and used to derive the continuous item sum score (SUM SCT) and the total protocol rating (TPR SCT) indicating ego stage. Reliabilities for the individual items on the WUSCT range from .47 to .93. Internal consistency of the instrument has also been tested with Loevinger and Wessler (1970) reporting an alpha coefficient of .91 for all 36 items.

A recent review of the validity of the WUSCT (Gilmore & Durkin, 2001) provides substantial empirical support for the instrument's external validity as well as the conceptual

soundness of both ego development theory and the WUSCT. The instrument's construct and concurrent validity has been established by several studies that have examined ego development in relation to other developmental stage assessments such as moral development and attitude and behavioral measures (Lee & Snarey, 1988; Loevinger, 1979).

The DRI is a six-item, free-response questionnaire developed by Gage, Morse, and Piechowski (1981) for the purpose of measuring the level of development as conceptualized in Dabrowski's TPD (Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1977). The DRI is an empirically tested instrument based on the individual's written responses to verbal stimuli that elicits the individual's personal history of emotional experiences and crucial life events (Miller, 1985). In the development of the instrument, convergent and discriminant validity were established and shown to be comparable to previous methods of assessing the same concepts (Gage et al., 1981). Internal consistency of the DRI items has been found to be .71 (Miller, 1985). Scores on the DRI produce a developmental index that ranges from 1.0 to 5.0 and represent the five levels of Dabrowski's TPD, with higher scores indicating growth toward higher levels of development.

A number of studies have since demonstrated the acceptability of the DRI as an instrument to be used to discriminate levels of development as defined by TPD (Brennan, 1987; Gage et al., 1981; Lysy, 1979; Miller, 1985). Miller (1985) expanded on the initial DRI instrument and coding procedure in her development of an updated content analysis coding system, the Miller Assessment Coding System (MACS). Extensive work with the instrument has increased systemization and objectivity in the scoring process, thus improving interrater reliability to a range between .77 and .80 (Miller, 1985) and permitting the instrument to be more sensitive to the theoretical constructs of each of the TPD developmental levels (Miller & Silverman, 1987).

The most recently revised edition of the Miller Assessment Coding System (Miller, 1991) was used in training the individual raters, along with personal communication and clarification from the coding system's author (N. B. Miller, personal communication, 2008). Average interrater reliabilities using this system and training have been reported as .72 (Miller & Silverman, 1987). In this study, an interrater reliability was established with 76.7% agreement across the individual items. In addition, the Pearson correlation found when all protocols were compared was $r = .94, p < .01$. Thus, relative to past use of this instrument, a sufficient degree of interrater reliability was established.

The Clinical Assessment of Behavior (CAB) was designed by Bracken and Keith (2004) to measure both adaptive and problematic behaviors of children and adolescents from age 2 to 18 years. The teacher version (CAB-T) was chosen for use in this study, as the focus of this inquiry was behavioral characteristics exhibited by gifted adolescents within the school context. The instrument has been found to be valid across a

wide range of geographic and racial/ethnic backgrounds (Beran, 2006). Bracken and Brown (2004) reported internal consistency ranges, as measured by Chronbach's alpha, from .92 to .99 along with test-retest reliabilities ranging from .89 to .95 on the teacher rating form. This instrument was chosen based on its strengths as a short, easily administered, and easily scored tool that can provide clear data regarding the nuances of behavioral characteristics of gifted adolescents.

Procedures

Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from each of the participating school districts to conduct the study at a time most convenient to the needs of the students and school. The researcher worked in collaboration with an identified liaison at each school to select the student sample and communicate with the students' parents. Parents of selected students received a description of the study and consent forms for their gifted adolescent to take part in the study. Teachers of the selected students also received consent forms prior to their participation in completing behavioral ratings for student participants.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed first using descriptive statistics to determine means and standard deviations. The Pearson product-moment correlation, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) were used to measure the magnitude and direction of relationship between the variables of ego development, Dabrowskian development, and behavior, as well as to assess for significant differences between groups. The alpha was set at .05 for establishing statistical significance. When significant differences were determined from the MANOVA, follow-up post hoc tests were conducted to specify which variables are significantly influencing each other. Grimm and Yarnold (2006) delineate that "[MANOVAs] determine the statistical significance of differences among groups of subjects . . . by determining whether there is significant prediction of subject's scores on the dependent variable from knowledge of their group membership" (p. 20). Thus, MANOVAs, along with follow-up univariate ANOVAs were conducted to test for the effects of gender, age, ethnicity, grade, and school attending.

Results

Demographic Data

Of the 100 students contacted, 70 participated in the current study. The participants were evenly divided by gender with 50% (35) of the sample females and 50% (35) males. The ages

Table 2. Distribution of Behaviors Exhibited by Gifted Adolescents as Measured by the Clinical Assessment of Behavior ($N = 70$)

	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Range	Skewness	Kurtosis
Clinical Behavioral Index (CBI)	42.01	41.00	40	6.57	28-58	0.494	-0.125
Internalizing Behaviors (INT)	41.66	40.00	35	8.23	26-72	1.202	2.830
Externalizing Behaviors (EXT)	40.43	40.00	33	6.76	29-56	0.295	-0.575
Social Skills (SOC)	56.97	58.00	59	7.26	42-72	-0.352	-0.286
Competence (COM)	56.97	57.00	53	8.71	36-80	0.038	0.113
Gifted and Talented (GAT)	57.03	57.50	65	7.52	39-74	-0.318	-0.335

of the students ranged from 14 to 18 years and were normally distributed across this range. These students were also distributed across grades levels with 17.1% (12) in Grade 9, 28.6% (20) in Grade 10, 32.9% (23) in Grade 11, and 21.4% (15) in Grade 12. The students were distributed across three ethnic groups with 88.6% (62) of the participants identifying themselves as Caucasian, 7.1% (5) identifying themselves as African American, and 4.3% (3) identifying themselves as Asian American.

The results of the WUSCT ($M = 5.31$, $SD = 0.941$, $Mdn = 5.00$, mode = 5) indicated that ego development scores for the sample population ranged across five levels. The Self-protective level represented the smallest group in the sample with just four respondents (5.7%). The Conformist level was represented at 8.6% ($n = 6$). The highest numbers were found in the Self-aware level with 41.4% ($n = 29$) of the respondents. There were also a high number of respondents scoring at the Conscientious level, 37.1% ($n = 26$). A small number of the research sample, 7.1% ($n = 5$), were found at the Individualistic level. There were no respondents either at the lowest level, Impulsive, or at the two highest levels, Autonomous and Integrative.

The results of the DRI for the 70 respondents in the current study ($M = 2.0$, $SD = 0.527$, $Mdn = 2.0$) indicated that scores for the sample population ranged across four levels, from Level I—Primary Integration (1.0-1.49) to Level IV—Organized Multilevel Disintegration (3.5-4.49), with the current sample having scores ranging from 1.0 to 3.83. A number of students ($n = 13$, 18.6%) had developmental indices indicative of Level I. The majority of the students ($n = 49$, 70%) were at Level II, a small number of students ($n = 6$, 8.6%) scored within the Level III, and two students (<3%) had developmental index scores that indicated Level IV.

Clinical Behavioral Index (CBI) scores from our respondents indicate an overall healthy and adaptive level of functioning ($M = 42.01$, $SD = 6.57$, $Mdn = 41.00$, mode = 40), with no CBI scores in the clinical risk range. Internalizing (INT) scores ranged from 26 to 72; thus a few respondents ($n = 3$) scored within the clinical risk range. However, the overall INT scores were within the normal range ($M = 41.66$, $SD = 8.23$, $Mdn = 40.00$, mode = 35). Externalizing (EXT) scores ranged from 29 to 56, with all respondents falling

within the normal range ($M = 40.43$, $SD = 6.76$, $Mdn = 40.00$, mode = 33). The participants in the current study averaged at the high end of the normal range for Social Skills, Competence, and Gifted and Talented behaviors, a finding in line with the specific population and sample focused on in this inquiry.

Research Questions

Five general research questions were examined with MANOVAs and follow-up univariate ANOVAs conducted to test for the effects of gender, age, ethnicity, grade, and school attending on the stated research hypotheses.

The range and distribution of gifted adolescents' levels of ego development was found to differ significantly from established adolescent norms. Examination of the current study data demonstrated a normal distribution of ego development levels with a slight negative skewness; the mean for the current study data was 5.31 ($SD = 0.941$). Although the Bursik and Martin (2006) sample also demonstrated a normal distribution of ego developmental levels with a slight negative skewness, the mean for that sample was 4.27 ($SD = 1.17$), more than a full level beneath our sample. The mean for the Westenberg et al. (1998) sample was 3.79, significantly lower than that for the current sample ($M = 5.31$).

The second research question examined the correlation between gifted adolescents' stage of ego development and their Dabrowskian developmental level. Statistical analyses using a Pearson product-moment correlation were conducted to examine the relationship between DRI scores and WUSCT scores as measured by both the summed protocol scores (SUM SCT) and the total protocol rankings (TPR SCT). A significant correlation at the $\alpha = .05$ level was not found between scores on the DRI and the summed protocol WUSCT scores ($r = .221$, $p = .066$) or between scores on the DRI and the total protocol WUSCT rankings ($r = .165$, $p = .173$). An initial MANOVA was conducted to assess for effects one or more of the independent variables may have on the dependent variables and to guard against Type I error (Grimm & Yarnold, 2006). Wilks's lambda was chosen as the test statistic, and results of the MANOVA indicated significant differences for males and females, as well as for School A and School B.

Table 3. Significant Correlations Between Demographic and Measurement Variables ($N = 70$)

	Pearson <i>r</i>	Significance <i>p</i>
Gender ^a		
with Ego (SUM SCT)	-.241	.044
with Dabrowskian Development (DRI)	-.342	.004
with CAB–Behavioral Index (CBI)	-.300	.012
with CAB–Competence scale (COM)	.267	.025
with CAB–Gifted and Talented (GAT)	.314	.008
Age		
with CAB–Competence scale (COM)	-.260	.030
School ^b		
with Ego (SUM SCT)	.326	.006
with Ego (TPR SCT)	.238	.047
with Dabrowskian Development (DRI)	.315	.008
Ego development		
SUM SCT with TPR SCT	.931	.000
SUM SCT with Gender	-.241	.044
SUM SCT with School	.326	.006
TPR SCT with School	.238	.047
Dabrowskian developmental level (DRI)		
with Gender	-.342	.004
with School	.315	.008
with CAB–Behavioral Index (CBI)	.252	.036
with CAB–Gifted and Talented (GAT)	-.240	.045
Clinical assessment of behavior		
CBI with Gender	-.300	.012
CBI with DRI	.252	.036
COM with Age	-.260	.030
COM with Gender	.267	.025
GAT with Gender	.314	.008
GAT with DRI	-.240	.045

Note: DRI = Definition Response Instrument; SUM SCT = summed protocol scores; TPR SCT = total protocol rating; CAB = Clinical Assessment of Behavior scale; CBI = Clinical Behavior Index.

a. Negative correlations reflect toward females, and positive correlations reflect toward males.

b. Negative correlations reflect toward School A, and positive correlations reflect toward School B.

A follow-up univariate ANOVA on the SUM SCTs indicated a significant gender difference in ego development, $F(1, 69) = 4.209, p < .05$. An ANOVA on the DRI scores also found a significant gender difference in Dabrowskian developmental level, $F(1, 69) = 9.021, p < .01$. Further ANOVAs revealed significant school differences in ego development as measured by both the SUM SCTs ($F = 8.105, p < .01$) and the TPR SCTs ($F = 4.097, p < .05$), as well as a significant school difference in Dabrowskian developmental level as measured by the DRI ($F = 7.511, p < .01$). Bivariate correlational analysis examined the relationships between DRI scores and SUM SCT and TPR SCT scores while controlling for school and gender, with no statistically significant correlations found.

The third and fourth research questions examined the correlations between gifted adolescents' ego development and their degree of internalizing (INT) and externalizing (EXT) behavior as measured by the CAB-T. Initial Pearson product-moment analyses did not reveal significant findings. MANOVAs were conducted to determine the significance of the demographic variables gender, age, ethnicity, grade, and school on the INT and EXT scores. No significant differences were found. However, earlier MANOVA and follow-up ANOVAs indicated a significant gender difference in ego development, $F(1, 69) = 4.209, p < .05$, and significant school differences in ego development as measured by both the SUM SCTs ($F = 8.105, p < .01$) and the TPR SCTs ($F = 4.097, p < .05$). Thus, correlational analyses were run to examine the relationships between both INT and EXT scores and SUM SCT and TPR SCT scores while controlling for school and gender.

The final research question examined teachers' perceptions of gifted students' behaviors in the schools. The students in the study demonstrated normal distribution of behaviors as measured by the CAB-T. The CBI, which provides a total scale score, was used in examining this hypothesis. Statistical information for the distribution of the CBI, along with that of the relevant subscales, is presented in Table 2. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the current study sample, additional analyses were conducted to assess for possible relationships not considered in the original hypotheses. Pearson product-moment correlations were run between all variables and examined for potential significant relationships. A summary of those relevant to the current study is provided in Table 3.

Discussion

Ego Development

As there is little to no data in the research literature examining ego development in gifted populations, the first research question sought simply to establish a baseline understanding of what the ego development levels of gifted adolescents were for the current sample. Participants displayed a normal distribution and ranged across five levels, from the Self-protective level to the Individualistic level. The range of the distribution was slightly higher than established norms reported by Westenberg and Gjerde (1999) for a sample transitioning from adolescence to adulthood.

The distribution of students in this study reinforced Silverman's (2005) description of internal asynchrony. Although all of the students in our sample were presumed to have higher than normal levels of intelligence based on their admittance to competitive programs designed to meet the needs of gifted students, not all students of this sample displayed higher than normal levels of ego development. Silverman (2005) asserted that intelligence alone is insufficient as a predictor of advanced development and that individuals must

have within their personality the capacity to respond emotionally. Along with Piechowski (1992), Silverman (2005) stressed the need for potential to be cultivated and nurtured. The data for this study suggest that although gifted individuals may be advanced intellectually, there is definite need to promote ego development for some students. In the adolescent transition longitudinal study, precocious students with higher levels of ego development at age 14 years made significantly less progress in comparison with their less advanced peers. Westenberg and Gjerde (1999) suggested a developmental paradox and reinforced Silverman's (1997) contention that because of the asynchronous nature of their development, gifted individuals require support and guidance for optimal development to occur.

Dabrowskian Developmental Level

As initial research exploring the constructs of developmental levels in relation to Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration involved in-depth case studies, only a small amount of empirical support exists in the literature quantitatively describing the distribution of individuals relative to Dabrowskian developmental levels. This study contributes to the research literature by providing a comparison sample for future research endeavors and establishing baseline data on the levels of development related to Dabrowski's TPD for gifted adolescents as measured by the DRI.

Although there are no known samples in the literature with which to compare this sample, the data provide information regarding the potential counseling needs of gifted adolescents. A number of our respondents are still within the Primary Integration (Level I) stage, which Piechowski (2003) describes as being marked by primary mental organizations aimed at gratifying biological needs and conforming to social norms.

Level II, the current level for the majority of our sample, is a critical transition phase in Dabrowski's theory as it is during this phase that the process of positive disintegration begins. Positive disintegration is the process during which the previously held personality structure must come apart to be replaced by higher level personality structures. Dabrowski (1964) stated that "the disintegration process, through loosening and even fragmenting the internal psychic environment, through conflicts within the internal environment and with the external environment, is the ground for the birth and development of a higher psychic structure" (pp. 5-6). He felt that this process, although not always positive in its experience, was essential for the development of higher level personality structures.

Autobiographical research (Mróz, 2009) has shown that although these disintegrative processes may originate earlier in life, it is often during adolescence when they surface as defenses against negative emotions or as attempts to compensate for frustrated emotional needs. Mróz (2009) stressed that in every case the experience of being understood was an

essential component of successfully navigating the transition from Level II to Level III, and that without this support development often stalled and led to much deeper negative emotional experiences. Ackerman (2009) explained that in the process of development an individual's personality structure is often characterized as bridging more than one level and that in Dabrowski's theory there is the possibility of regressing to a lower level, even temporarily, given the arduous process of developmental growth. Piechowski (1975) emphasized that personality development does not progress consistently over time. Levels II to IV are characterized by internal and external conflicts, referred to as positive maladjustment by Dabrowski (1972), that are necessary in promoting further developmental growth. It is during this time that the unique vulnerabilities described by many in the field of gifted education (Cross, 2002; Delisle & Galbraith, 2002; Dockery, 2005; Mendaglio, 2008; Neihart et al., 2003; Piechowski, 1992; Silverman, 2005; Sword, 2001b) may be most evident. That 70% of our sample population fell within this critical transition period highlights a critical need for appropriate educational and counseling interventions to support these students through this difficult process.

Behavioral Characteristics

CBI scores for our respondents indicated an overall healthy and adaptive level of functioning. Thus, the data from the current study would seem to support the assertion that giftedness enhances resiliency. It is important to note that these scores represent the teachers' perceptions of the students as they view them in the classroom. Both of the schools represented in this study are highly competitive, gifted magnet schools, with rigorous admission criteria. Furthermore, students at the participating schools can choose to attend these academically challenging programs and thus are more likely to fit the behavioral profile outlined above, particularly regarding the Social Skills (SOC), Competence (COM), and Gifted and Talented (GAT) scales as they are constructed by Bracken and Keith (2004). Bracken and Brown (2006) have proposed use of this instrument in identifying students well suited for such programs. However, as proposed by Coleman and Cross (1988), some gifted students may be particularly adept at using social coping strategies to fit the expectations of their environment. Thus, although the students in this study do not appear to have significant emotional issues as perceived by their teachers, the data does not provide enough evidence to negate the possibility that the participants are experiencing psychological challenges. Further support for this interpretation are provided by a study of teacher perceptions of gifted adolescents (Greene, 2003), which found that teachers did not perceive most internal issues and expressed concerns about their limitations in addressing the social and emotional development of their students. Thus, future studies should address these limitations.

Research Questions

The first research question examined the range and distribution of gifted adolescents' levels of ego development. That the current study sample differed from established norms leads to the question that has been proposed by previous researchers in examining the link between intelligence and ego development. Although it has been concluded that ego development and intelligence are not interchangeable constructs (Cohn & Westenberg, 2004), results from the Bursik and Martin (2006) study demonstrated that ego level was a significant predictor of academic achievement, after controlling for the effects of intelligence and gender. Thus, it is not surprising that our sample, in which all students attend schools focused on high academic achievement, demonstrated higher ego levels. However, the evidence from our study is not sufficient to support a causal link.

The second research question examined a moderate positive correlation between gifted adolescents' stage of ego development and their Dabrowskian developmental level. Although a slight positive correlation ($r = .221, p = .066$) was found, lack of strong correlations indicated that though ego development and development as related to Dabrowski's TPD share similarities, they are two distinct constructs. Whereas ego development is conceptualized as a master trait that describes the way individuals make meaning of their personal life experiences and the world at large, TPD is more about the lived inner experiences and conflicts within an individual and the impact of those on how an individual is present in the world. Dabrowski's TPD is not necessarily sequential, nor does development always take a positive direction. An understanding of both concepts is critical to understanding and supporting positive developmental growth across domains, as the underlying constructs appear intertwined. The current study begins to shed light on possible connections but much more research is needed to delineate the two theories and determine how to best use them in constructing appropriate developmental interventions.

Westenberg and Gjerde (1999) asked, "If there is a general pull towards the Self-aware level, how then are some individuals able to move beyond this level?" (p. 249). Perhaps components of Dabrowski's TPD are part of what is necessary to move individuals to higher ego levels. Loevinger (1976) saw the transition toward the Conscientious level as a major shift likely dependent on internal pacers, such as intelligence or personality traits. Further exploration of ego development in conjunction with the traits inherent to Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration may provide more insight into what is necessary for movement beyond the Self-aware stage.

The third and fourth research questions examined correlations between gifted adolescents' ego development and their degree of internalizing and externalizing behaviors. Initial analyses for both internalizing and externalizing behaviors did not indicate overall significant correlations. However, as

previous analyses had indicated significant gender and school differences for ego development these hypotheses were further explored while controlling for these variables. These follow-up analyses indicated a significant positive correlation ($r = .452, p = .011$) between ego development and Internalizing behaviors for students from School A. As previously outlined, a number of confounding variables exist in the differences between the two school populations, which hindered the ability to determine the precise nature of this relationship. Research (Hauser & Safyer, 1994; Noam, 1992) finding higher levels of specific emotions, including anxiety, at more advanced ego stages often used self-report measures that may have provided greater access to these internalizing behaviors than the teacher rating scale used in the current study. Furthermore, it is possible that the nature of the relationships between teachers and students differs between the schools, thus influencing the current study results.

Follow-up analyses, controlling for gender and school, also indicated a significant negative correlation ($r = -.342, p = .044$) between ego development and externalizing behaviors for males, but not females, using the total protocol ratings (TPR SCT). Significant correlations were not found when using the summed protocol ratings (SUM SCT). As the TPR categorizes the sum scores into discrete stages, this grouping of scores may highlight slight differences that are not as pronounced when examining the SUM SCT ($r = -.264, p = .104$). Current study findings were consistent with those of Recklitis and Noam (1999), who did not find strong support for a connection between ego development and internalizing/externalizing behavioral distinctions but did find that a relationship between coping strategies and ego development varied with gender. These findings support their assertion that different intervention strategies may need to be developed for males and females in promoting ego development.

The final question examined the distribution of behaviors exhibited by gifted adolescents as measured by the CAB-T. CBI scores for our respondents indicated an overall healthy and adaptive level of functioning ($M = 42.01, SD = 6.57, Mdn = 41.00, mode = 40$), with no CBI scores in the clinical risk range. Analyses on the normalcy of the distribution of the current sample found that whereas our sample mean was below the normed mean ($M = 50, SD = 10$), the sample was normally distributed.

Additional Findings

Analyses of the distribution of the current sample on the related behavioral subscales revealed normal distribution of ratings on the EXT, SOC, COM, and GAT scales, with mean ratings at slightly more adaptive levels than the norm. However, ratings on the INT scale demonstrated a more positively skewed and peaked distribution than a normal distribution. A possible contributor to this finding may be the nature of the teacher-student relationship at the sample schools. As reported by Greene (2003), teachers were not as aware of internal issues

and had concerns related to addressing the social and emotional needs of their students. Data in our sample supported this assertion since the only item consistently left unmarked on the CAB-T response forms loaded on the INT scale, indicating that teachers felt less able to accurately assess the internalizing behaviors of their students.

An additional finding of particular interest for the current study is the significant negative correlation ($r = -.240, p = .045$) between Dabrowskian developmental level (DRI) and GAT behaviors as measured by the CAB-T. Although this relationship did not hold when gender and school variables were held constant, a contrasting significant positive correlation ($r = .252, p = .036$), was found when examining the relationship between Dabrowskian developmental level (DRI) and the overall Behavioral Index (CBI). This relationship presents a paradox since higher Dabrowskian developmental levels were related to lower scores of gifted and talented behaviors, the opposite of what one might expect in light of Dabrowski's theory and the components comprising developmental potential that are essential to positive developmental growth (Ackerman, 2009). However, individuals at higher Dabrowskian developmental levels, which are stages involving positive disintegration and coinciding inner conflict, were rated as having more adaptive behavioral traits. Although this is consistent with the cognitive development assertion that "higher is better" and that higher developmental levels are positively related to adjustment (White, 1985), it is in opposition with what might be expected when taking into consideration the tremendous inner conflict purported to be necessary to move to these higher levels (Ackerman, 2009).

One potential explanation again involves the image management model proposed by Coleman and Cross (1988) that describes a process in which gifted adolescents use social coping strategies to meet the expectations of their environment. Such an interpretation may indicate that teachers are not adept at recognizing signs of inner distress in some of their students, and/or that some students are adept at concealing this inner distress from those around them. While much more examination is needed to fully understand these findings, this interpretation emphasizes the need for counseling interventions to be proactive in reaching out to gifted students and providing them an environment of understanding, acceptance, and validation that may enable students to address troublesome issues they may otherwise feel a need to conceal.

Limitations inherent to this study suggest that more research is needed to further explore these constructs and their potential implications for counseling gifted students. The correlational design of this study, though illuminative of complex relationships, does not allow for the precise nature of these relationships to be determined; nor can the influence of external variables be accurately assessed. An ever-present challenge inherent to studying gifted students is the lack of a consistent, unified definition of giftedness (Silverman, 1997). Participants included only those students who met state gifted and talented guidelines, and only those who met

the admissions requirements for, and chose to attend, two specific gifted academic-year programs. There was no typical adolescent comparison sample, nor was there a comparison sample of students identified as gifted but not attending these specialized schools. Sampling limitations included the small sample size ($N = 70$), limited diversity of the sample, and potential selection bias. Despite these limitations, there are important implications and recommendations for future research and interventions.

Conclusion and Implications

This study advances the understanding of developmental theories as they relate to the experience of gifted individuals during adolescence. Specifically examined in the current study are the domains of ego development and development as related to Dabrowski's TPD. Research has described gifted individuals as experiencing the world from a qualitatively different perspective because of the unique social and emotional characteristics of this population. The current study empirically investigated this assertion through examining the intersections of developmental domains and exhibited behavioral characteristics in gifted adolescents.

Results of this study provide a starting point from which to examine how an understanding of the intersection of these developmental theories and expressed behaviors can shape counseling interventions aimed at promoting growth and development in gifted adolescents. The quantitative data presented provide a baseline against which future studies can build. Hence, one immediate direction for future research involves replication studies to verify the results among larger and more diverse samples. Critical to this line of research is the inclusion of typical, "nongifted" samples as comparison groups.

It is important to note that this research line does not only provide insight into the gifted population. Although Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration has been widely discussed in the gifted literature, it is not confined to use with a gifted population. TPD is a complex and nuanced developmental theory that has many components, such as the overexcitabilities, that resonate with the gifted community and are extremely useful in understanding the social and emotional characteristics of gifted individuals. However, as concluded by Ackerman (2009), "the theory of positive disintegration provides a detailed and profound view of personality development and applies to a broad diversity of people and the environments from which they come . . . [TPD] is not only a theory for the gifted" (p. 93), but is relevant in a broad range of educational and clinical settings. Furthermore, the study of ego development has been extensively explored with typical adolescent populations, but research specific to gifted adolescents has been limited. Replication studies exploring the intersection of these two developmental theories using comparison samples will greatly strengthen the foundation for building intervention programs aimed at both gifted and typical adolescent populations.

Finally, since the ultimate goal in understanding the social, emotional, and developmental issues of gifted adolescents is to develop appropriate and effective educational and counseling interventions to promote growth and psychological well-being, future research must embark on empirically testing various interventions and counseling approaches. Researchers in the field of gifted education have proposed a number of counseling approaches based on the ideas of Dabrowski's TPD. Ogburn-Colangelo (1979) first presented the theory in a counseling approach by highlighting the possibilities for support and reframing offered by Dabrowski's TPD. Nelson (1989) emphasized the power of the theory in validating the intense experiences of gifted individuals, ". . . to hear that psychoneurosis is not an illness can help the intensely sensitive make meaning of their experience of life" (p. 11). Mika (2002) outlined specific strategies that counselors can employ in assisting students and clients cope with each of the Overexcitabilities described in Dabrowski's TPD. Finally, Dabrowski (as cited in Mendaglio & Tillier, 1992) himself advocated a long-term, well-planned program for individuals based on their unique presentation of potentials, personality, and interests. He specified that such an approach should be multidimensional and developmentally focused, assisting the individual to cope with the often conflictual initial developmental experiences rather than treating them as symptoms to be ameliorated.

Uneven development, emotional and moral intensity, sensitivity to expectations and feelings, overexcitabilities, idealism, and complexity are but a few of the areas of difference for many gifted adolescents. Although the research literature examining the unique social, emotional, and behavioral characteristics of gifted individuals is growing, a need still exists for empirical studies exploring these traits as they intersect with the developmental paths of gifted students. Counselors are charged with the application of human development principles in addressing wellness and personal growth (American Counseling Association, 1997). School counselors are called on to provide comprehensive, preventative, and developmental programs that address the needs of all students (American School Counselor Association, 2005). The National Association for Gifted Children (1995) highlights the need for counselors to have a deep understanding of the impact giftedness can have on a student's development. Hence, it is imperative that researchers continue exploring a wide range of developmental theories, across various developmental domains, to build a more comprehensive understanding of the unique experiences and challenges faced by gifted individuals across the life span.

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Bio

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