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creativity, mood disorders and the aesthetic

Abstract

This article explores the sensitivity and mood disorders found in a number of gifted people. Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration provides the theoretical framework through which issues for these people are examined. Personal narratives and poems from gifted young people provide insights to their sensitivities and struggles. The aesthetic is proposed as one way in which to understand their needs. There are direct implications for parents, teachers, health professionals, and creative people when mood disorders are considered developmental rather than purely pathological. In particular, the therapeutic influence of expressing strong feelings through creative writing has merit in terms of support. Dabrowski's theory and the use of the aesthetic deepens both our understanding and our appreciation of the gifted.

Creativity, Mood Disorders and the Aesthetic

There is some debate around the psychological well-being of the gifted in terms of their ability to cope with life's inevitable challenges. While some argue for greater adjustment ability (e. g., Austin & Deary, 2002; Kaiser & Berndt, 1985; Neihart, 1999) others attest to the opposite, claiming a higher incidence of mood disorders compared to the general population. Some of the latter research is outlined here and the incidence and consequences of mood disorders are considered. Mood disorders are generally categorized into

two groups by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM IV); these two categories are depression and bipolar disorder (formerly known as manic-depression). Traditional approaches to mental health and well-being pathologise these conditions that a number of gifted people experience. While this article does not deny the immense challenges and pain mood disorders create, it also offers an alternative discourse that considers the creative possibilities when the aesthetic is explored. For many people but especially the gifted, the aesthetic can be a path for self-knowledge and healing.

Who is at Risk?

The most compelling evidence of risk for the gifted in terms of mood disorders emerges from extensive work on the correlation between creativity and mental illness. From classical Greece through to the Romantics the notion that mood disorders and creativity go hand-in-hand has been claimed, and even expected (Hershman & Lieb, 1998). Aristotle believed that melancholy was inevitable amongst the best thinkers of his time and the Romantics insisted that madness was inseparable from genius. In contrast to the historical assumptions mentioned above, Neihart's (1999) review of the empirical literature found little evidence to suggest the gifted exhibited any more psychosocial difficulties than the rest of the population citing similar or lower levels of depression and suicide than their peers. She did add the caveat however, that creative writers and artists were the exception to this trend with "compelling evidence for higher rates of mood disorders and suicides among creatively gifted writers and visual artists" (Neihart, 1999, p. 14). Nonetheless, she concluded that "intellectually or academically gifted children who are achieving...are at least as well adjusted and are perhaps better adjusted than their non-gifted peers" (p. 15).

In contrast, Nettle (2001) found that mood disorders and creativity often runs in families. One sibling may be gifted while another may have bipolar disorder. In addition, a family member can be both creative *and* bipolar. This led him to conclude that creativity and mood disorders are strongly related and are two sides of the same coin. The genes that give rise to mood disorders

are often the same that give rise to creativity. Mood disorders thus, are not entirely negative as the traits can have psychological benefits as well as costs. To summarise he argued that "the very traits that make madness possible also underlie one of those things that we as humans most value, namely enhanced creativity" (p. 187). This perspective has considerable support:

Increased rates of suicide, depression and manic-depression among artists have been established by many separate studies. These investigations show that artists experience up to 18 times the rate of suicide seen in the general population, eight to 10 times the rate of depression and 10 to 20 times the rate of manic-depression and cyclothymia.

(Jamison, 1995, p. 49)

Depression and bipolar disorder tend to run in artistic and high achieving families. The families of Alfred Lord Tennyson and Lord Byron are two such examples (Jamison, 1995, 1999; Nettle, 2001). A number of twin studies further confirm this genetic link. When one identical twin is bipolar the other "has a 70 to 100 percent chance of also having the disease" (Jamison, 1995, p. 48). In Jamison's own study of 47 eminent British writers and artists she found that over a third had been treated for mood disorders and half of the poets had needed considerable medical and psychological support. She cited a range of other studies that corroborate that the gifted experience mood disorders more often than other groups. For example, severe depression is rated as approximately 15 percent of the general population (Aisbett, 2000; Edwards, 2003) whereas Jamison (1995, 1999)

found that artists and writers in particular had two to three times this rate of mood disorders. Most at risk appear to be the poets, with figures climbing to 30 times more likely to have mood disorders, 20 times more likely to be committed to a mental institution, and five times more likely to attempt suicide than the general population. Hershman and Lieb (1998) go so far as to argue that not only is bipolar disorder correlated with creativity, but the number of geniuses without bipolar disorder are in the minority. In addition, Simonton (1994) found that in some circumstances psychopathology is the "cost of attaining greatness" (p. 284).

In the worst of situations the individual can hide chronic mood disorders beneath their many coping skills and overt behaviour (Amend, 2009) leading to a tragic and devastating outcome. An example of this was reported by a parent of a gifted young man who took his own life:

His long time girl-buddy told us that, the week before Reed suicided, he'd taken her out to dinner. They'd had a wonderful time, just like always. Neither she (nor other friends) had seen anything out of the ordinary-even after they became aware of the much touted "suicide warning signs." Our common analysis is that Reed had lived with depression for so long that he'd learned to "put on a happy face." And we on the other hand, had just accepted all the funny little bits-they were just part of "Reed".

(Cross, Gust-Brey & Ball, 2002, p. 257)

The gifted person's ability to mask

their feelings of despair cannot be underestimated. The skill required to accurately assess a young person's psychological well-being requires sensitive, careful, and intelligent professional analysis. Cross et. al. (2002) advised that the prevention of suicide "requires an in-depth understanding of the person at risk" (p. 247). This in-depth understanding requires an appreciation of the characteristics and needs of their creative psyche. Dabrowski's (1970) theory of positive disintegration can illuminate the psychology of the gifted, deepening our understanding of their particular needs. It also provides an alternative discourse to the prevalent medical model of psychosis and traditional approaches to treatment. This alternative discourse does not deny mood disorders but it positions mood disorders as part of a developmental process necessary for an individual's growth and transformation. His theory suggests a number of implications for the gifted.

Developmental Potential

Dabrowski (1970) argued that positive disintegration is a developmental process in advanced development and that creative breakthroughs can emerge from this disintegration in terms of what he called positive maladjustment (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009). His levels of development (from 1 to 5) suggest that for advanced development existential challenges are inevitable as the individual questions his or her basic instincts (levels 1 and 2) and seek to reach higher levels of development (levels 3 to 5). Level 3 is a significant watershed in this theory as it is at this level that Dabrowski posited that the

individual feels the enormous tension between 'what is' and 'what ought to be' in oneself. While the general population experiences the first two levels, it is only the advanced who reach levels three and above. For Dabrowski then, "certain psychopathological symptoms (particularly neurosis and even some psychoses)" are essential in the personality development of advanced individuals (Amend, 2009, p. 86). In addition, Piechowski argued that the heightened sensitivity and intensity of the gifted is typical of what Dabrowski termed the over-excitabilities. Skilled mental health professionals who understand these heightened sensitivities of the gifted are invaluable in providing support (Silverman, 1993). Jackson, Moyle & Piechowski (2009) sum up the professional health approach required with clarity:

The characteristic of an effective therapist to suspend a tendency to diagnose mental illness or pathologize symptoms is crucial. This does not mean, however, that a therapist can ignore traditional knowledge of mental health issues, nor that she does not need a thorough grounding in a reputable counselling or psychology program. However, a mental health professional needs to keep a consistent consciousness on the possibility that supposed symptoms of mental illness might be mechanisms of growth for the gifted individual. (p. 449)

Dabrowski's original theory on positive disintegration (1970) stemmed from his work in studying and treating the mental health of intellectually and artistically gifted children and adults

(Piechowski, 2006). Here again artists feature, the group that Neihart believed was most at risk of mood disorders. What is refreshing even today is that he avoided pathologizing the gifted people he saw in his clinic as delusional or psychotic, and instead regarded their angst as inner conflicts of a spiritual nature. Indeed, his extensive study of eminent and spiritually advanced people was crucial to his theory. Wrestling with spiritual concerns and working towards higher states of consciousness inevitably bring periods of agony and despair. Such disintegration and development is painful and challenging. Many gifted youth attest to the crippling feelings that beset them at times. There are numerous examples in the literature drawn from interviews with, and the writings of, gifted young people. These young people lucidly convey their frustration, immense sensitivity, and despair. For example:

I am a "deviant". I am often considered "wild", "crazy", "out of control", "masochistic", "abnormal", "radical", "irrational", "a baby"...or simply too sensitive, too emotional or too uptight. "Mellow out", they say to which I can only respond, "If I only could." At birth I was crucified with this mind that has caused me considerable pain, and frustration, with teachers, coaches, peers, my family, but most of all myself. (Piechowski, 2006, p. 26)

Every decision I make I know why I made it-even ones made in reaction to something back when I don't have time to think up front. Even the wrong decisions I know why I made them. And I know why my mind is

set up to make those decisions. And the worse part about it is that the whole mess is a trap. Each 'wrong' decision is 'right' by some reason; and I am forced to accept that. I can't even fix the problem; because even though I could get rid of all this decision-making machinery of mind with the help of a good psychologist; there's one further problem.

"I've become the machinery. To destroy it would be to destroy me...and I can't live while I'm broken." (Cross et al., 2002, p. 256)

I want to understand how people work so I analyse everything that they do, to find rules for everything. I guess subconsciously I'm trying to create a perfect world. It's frustrating and sometimes I get disgusted at myself, for being so cold and analytical...I couldn't relate to any of my peers because I was searching for depth and emotional fulfilment and no one I knew really understood me. ..I've been finding it harder and harder to interact with peers because no one I know takes spirituality or emotion seriously. (Moltzen, 2006, p. 6)

"Ben" in the last extract above conveys the classic tension described in Dabrowski's level 3 (multilevel disintegration) between what the person sees as the status quo and what they feel ought to be. This gap between 'what is' and 'what could be' feels frustrating, isolating and bewildering. The desire to make meaning where meaning cannot be found is evident in the last two statements. These extracts also underscore the limitations of rational thought. Mood disorders

cannot be fully addressed through simple rationalization, a point that the gifted quickly seem to identify themselves: "Rationalizing with myself was making me so grey. Overthinking everything and determining, 'Why am I thinking this, what is causing me to think this, if I was not thinking this would this be happening?...It's not just confusing, it's fairly helpless'" (Moltzen, 2006, p. 10).

Whether multi-level disintegration is pathological or not, is not really the salient issue. The issue is that what these young people experience is invariably gut-wrenching, soul searching, and lonely. Dealing with the inevitable loneliness can be very challenging. The inner turmoil they express is largely invisible and the complex interplay of traits and behaviours that contribute to it can make the gifted feel extremely isolated and misunderstood (Jackson & Moyle, 2009). Feeling isolation like this is a theme that recurs in the literature. For example, in Rimm's (1999) study of 1000 successful females she found that most of them had felt sadness and self-doubt from the social isolation they experienced at school. Many times, their abilities set them apart from their peers and the more gifted they were the more likely to feel excluded. The isolation was not all negative as it certainly freed girls to pursue their avid interests and to develop deep levels of independence. Moreover, some did find social support, particularly through their areas of interest. However, the girls' parents who were most likely to visit Rimm's clinic described their daughters as "especially sensitive, bright, creative and insightful but aren't accepted by the other girls" (pp. 196-197). The in-group, out-group cliques of adolescence can

exacerbate this phenomenon further. Rimm's advice says much about building resilience, despite one's sensitivity:

Your daughter needs your support to know that it's all right to walk a school hallway alone and that being different and alone some of the time doesn't make her a bad person. Indeed, successful women need to be independent and will feel alone many times. Teach courage instead of teaching a girl to feel sorry for herself in the name of sensitivity. She can be both sensitive and strong. (1999, p. 197)

Rimm's advice that girls can be both "sensitive and strong" underscores the importance of holding the tension of apparent opposites in order to build resilience. Access to trusting people who understand the experience of positive disintegration in all its pain and gain can also be phenomenally helpful (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009; Jackson, Moyle & Piechowski, 2009; Piechowski, 2006). The more sensitive and creative the gifted individual, the more at risk they appear to be to the crushing effects of such transformative development. Conversely though, the more likely they are to experience such disintegration in the quest for self-improvement. Even awareness of Dabrowski's theory can be healing and insightful for the gifted as they recognise their 'over-excitabilities' (their sensitivities and intensities) as within the range of gifted behaviour and not abnormal or necessarily pathological. The intensity of feelings exhibited by many gifted people are part and parcel of their profound ability and insights (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009; Jacobsen, 1999; Jamison, 1995,

1999; Piechowski, 2006; Rothenberg, 1990). Care needs to be taken therefore, not to seek to numb or eliminate these behaviours, but rather, to help the gifted live productively with them.

Nonetheless, the sensitivity that is felt by many of the gifted can be overwhelming and crushing. The person experiences intense self-criticism, cynicism, depression, and a profound sense of defeat:

I feel like a man at the world's end, when the greatest chaos of chaos revolves itself in the utter destruction of everything familiar. There is no more suffering, only a neutral calm of total resignation. I sometimes long for the abyss. My life is futility, vanity, dark comedy. I am the mason without bricks; I am the sailor without a boat; I am the thinker without knowledge. My past is a lie fed on lies, my future is a grey stretch of interminable road, and I'm merely a hitchhiker on that road. My mental life is poverty and pretension. The dogmas and dictums have worn my soul thin. What can I scrape from this empty bowl? I am the chasm that falls down itself. What can I find in empty rooms when I cannot find myself? (Jackson & Moyle, 2009, p. 105)

The articulate perceptiveness of the young man above underscores the strength of his intellectual, emotional and creative abilities. Fynn's rich use of metaphor is both finely nuanced and powerful. The vividness of his metaphors conveys the experience of depression at both cognitive and spiritual levels. There is no doubt about the intensity of his pain and his

existential crisis; his overwhelming sense of loss, failure and fraudulence. In expressing these strong feelings he has an avenue for being known, being seen, and being understood. Suppression of strong feelings like this can magnify mood disorders and anger in particular, when not expressed, can feed depression (Aisbett, 2000; Miller, 1990).

Thus, the expression of strong feelings through writing as seen in Fynn's piece can serve multiple purposes. It can provide insight for readers; it can offer up self understanding and while it may be painful, it can also be cathartic. Jackson and Moyle reported that Fynn's therapeutic regime did not include attempts to eliminate his depth of feeling. Instead, it focussed on counselling, healthy food, exercise, meditation, music, writing like that above and other aesthetic pursuits. Over time, Fynn's poetry and journal writing revealed a growing sense of self-acceptance, connection with trusted others, and a wondrous sense of peace. In other words, it showed development. He wrote, " I have SOME continuing issues with stress, but I am breathing deep when I feel pains, and at times I feel the most relaxed I have been in a loooooong time" (Jackson & Moyle, 2009, p. 122).

Understanding and connecting with a deep sense of self can open a door to the possibility of joy. Indeed, Fynn's writing reveals both his suffering and his optimism: "I fought for so long, was so misunderstood, and now it's humiliating to me. Just the same it is bittersweet, and that means I have some sweet..."(p. 123). Gifted young people like him need to know that his depth

and complexity of thinking are not necessarily aberrant or problematic, and that while his sensitivity to life creates great anxiety at times, it can also foster profound insights, growth and well-being. It is this well-being that led Dabrowski to term disintegration like this as positive. With a focus on development, the individual is unlocked from a perpetual static mire of despair. The limitation of more traditional approaches to pathology is the tendency for behavioural labels to assume permanent conditions, rather than developmental stages that nurture seeds of renewal.

Not all therapists, psychologists and psychiatrists will have perceptive insights to the needs of the gifted. As Henry (2006) discovered "there are literally hundreds of different schools of psychotherapy, often operating from very different theoretical orientations that are applied in clinical, educational, organizational, and other settings" (p. 121). Her comparison of a range of approaches with self-report studies found that well-being is enhanced through a wider range of approaches than what is traditionally suggested by mental health professionals. Self-reports do not dismiss the value of counselling and certain medications such as anti-depressants, but they also emphasise the value of exercise, creative expression, meditation, spirituality and a sense of purpose. In fact the latter list strongly features ways in which people achieved lasting positive change in their lives. These broader approaches are more embodied, more embedded and less analytic than traditional therapy and position the individual as capable of transformative growth. Rothenberg added, "the best psychotherapy is itself

a creative process and one that also functions to enhance creativity of all types" (1990, p. 179). Psychotherapy with the gifted is often not effective at all unless it is approached as an intentional creative process. Professionals who work with the gifted can be mindful of the distinctions outlined that consider the developmental possibilities within mood disorders. Any supportive intervention needs to address the extreme crippling effects of mood disorders "without sacrificing crucial human emotions and experiences" (Jamison, 1995, p. 51). Moreover, Hershman and Lieb (1998) claimed that *mild* forms of depression and mania foster creativity, thus eradicating such feelings entirely is counterproductive. For the gifted, aesthetic expression is not only 'natural' but can be a route to self-understanding. It also provides opportunities for healing and well-being.

A Lens of Paradox and the Value of the Aesthetic

Noteworthy in supporting the creatively gifted are opportunities to share with other like-minded people who have experienced the depths and heights of emotional and spiritual intensity. The extracts from young gifted people above provide some solace for others in similar circumstances who, through reading these, appreciate they are not alone after all and that their suffering makes some spiritual (rather than rational) sense. It might seem contradictory to read about the suffering of others to alleviate one's own yet this paradox has some merit. In terms of psychological well-being, paradox

appears to be a more fruitful way to understand the developmental potential of the gifted.

There is support for this theory from research on the lives of the gifted. Richards (2007), for example, found that the gifted can present with above-average psychopathology (especially mood disorders) as well as the healthy trait of adapting to reality. Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) study of 91 eminent creators across fields ranging from science, to business, to the arts, found that the typical personality type of these creators (regardless of the field they worked in) was a complex ability to hold the tension of opposites. In other words, these creators tended to live the extremes and be able to move from one extreme to the other as the situation demanded. Moreover, as they moved from one end of a spectrum to another, they experienced both with equal intensity. Some of these paradoxical opposites that co-existed within their personalities include: playfulness and discipline; imagination and reality; ambition and selflessness; rebelliousness and conformity (when necessary); plus being passionate yet objective about their work. It is just this ability to move between extremes that can appear pathological to an observer but enables a flexibility that deepens a creator's ability to persist with, and produce, the unique and unexpected. In contrast to Neihart, it was not just the creative writers and artists that were capable of great suffering. Csikszentmihalyi's entire sample appeared capable of great suffering including mood disorders, but also capable of great joy. The latter is often overlooked in profiles of the gifted. Much is made in popular film and media of the immense suffering and

mood disorders of Vincent Van Gogh, Sylvia Plath, Virginia Woolf, Michael Jackson and Michelangelo, but much less is made about their capacity for joy. It seems that society's voyeuristic fixation on suffering makes for entertainment and stories of creators who balance the extremes in productive ways are of less interest in the popular media.

Thus, creative people seem to hold the tension of opposites better than most and it is little wonder that few people understand this apparent paradox. In addition, Smith and Carlsson (2006) found that a positive mood can thwart creative output and that anxiety "seems to be a necessary companion of creative efforts" (p. 228). This conclusion follows when one considers that comfort with the status quo is unlikely to stimulate the change creativity encourages. But extreme discomfort and despair can lead to depression, anxiety and existential angst. It seems then, that there is both immense struggle and immense success possible through the particular sensitivities and mood challenges many gifted people face.

Paradox also features in some of the best literature as a way in which people learn to make sense of their lives and emotions. From Shakespeare's "parting is such sweet sorrow" to the poignancy of hard won bitter-sweet insights mentioned earlier. The following poem by Gendler encapsulates the challenge of living with immense sensitivity and the strength gained from courage:

Compassion

Compassion wears Saturn's rings on the fingers of her left hand. She is intimate

with the life force. She understands the meaning of sacrifice. She is not afraid to die. There is nothing you cannot tell her.

Compassion speaks with a slight accent. She was a vulnerable child, miserable in school, cold, shy, alert to the pain in the eyes of her sturdier classmates. The other kids teased her for being too sentimental, and for a long time she believed them. In ninth grade she was befriended by Courage.

Courage lent Compassion bright sweaters, explained the slang, showed her how to play volleyball, taught her you can love people and not care what they think about you.

In many ways Compassion is still the stranger, neither wonderful, nor terrible, herself, utterly always.

(1988, p. 23)

Gendler's poem on compassion reveals much about the author's insights and suggests a depth of knowing beyond the purely cognitive. The symbolism inherent in such expressive writing evokes an intuitive rather than rational response. Meaning making through the aesthetic like this appeals to the depths of one's being. It is these deepest areas of concern that are often untouched by education (Grant, 2002) yet are central to a sense of existential purpose. Parkyn goes further to claim that we all need expression through the arts to "give expressive form to our deep unconscious perceptions, feelings, and urges" (p. 48).

The young people cited earlier convey a vivid embodied understanding of their 'condition' and within their creative expression is both insight

and salvation. Parents, teachers and therapists who understand the value of writing, poetry, metaphor and other creative arts can tap a valuable resource for healing and growth. Moreover, the aesthetic enables a depth of understanding of feelings that is difficult to express in other ways. Parkyn (1995) argued that understanding feelings is essential for mental health. He stated that "one of the most important tasks of education, therefore, should be to help us understand our feelings and teach us how to communicate our understanding to our fellows. It is here that we may find those basic human values on which humankind's survival depends" (p. 47). Dabrowski (1972) also repeatedly stressed the importance of understanding the inner life of the gifted.

Despite the importance of the aesthetic as a way of knowing it is not always valued in either academia (McCrary-Sullivan, 2000) or in the support of the gifted yet it has much to offer (Eisner, 2004, 2002; Gendler, 1988; Lovecky, 1990; Parkyn, 1995). Writers in aesthetics have demonstrated how the experience of artistic expression such as creative writing involves the exercise of the mind, emotions, discernment, social awareness and spirituality (Eisner, 2004, 2002; McCrary-Sullivan, 2000; Parkyn, 1995). McCrary-Sullivan (2005) added that "the poems we read can take us across boundaries, give us vicarious experience, render the abstract concrete, take us under the skin of the other, generate empathy" (p. 29). Reading Gendler's compassion enables an appreciation for the great cost that comes from being so sensitive towards others and also how courage can

strengthen one's identity and integrity.

As understanding the gifted is key to supporting them (Cross et al., 2002), then their creative expression is a strategy for knowing them more deeply. Fynn mentioned earlier, wrote about his disintegration and his healing in a subsequent poem:

*A haggard man was I
When I staggered through your door,
And for weeks and months I waffled
With an overload of garbled stories...
With therapy and work and beer
I see that poetry's a job for living people,
Not for grammatical corpses...
I've learnt:
If I can take my insanity, and
Swallow it like a pill a thousand times
I'll be the sanest man on earth.*

(Jackson & Moyle, 2009, p. 124)

Information alone about mood disorders is sterile. What becomes meaningful and illuminating is the connection one can make with the experience. While Fynn writes of 'swallowing' his insanity he did not suppress or deny his depth of feeling. The power of the aesthetic allowed him to condense his experience into a few brief lines. It is like packing "a world into a tennis ball" (McCrary-Sullivan, 2005, p. 25) and the reader becomes privy to that world through the creative gift offered.

Not only can the gifted discover camaraderie amongst the experiences of others like them, they can realise with immense relief that others can explain and live with their condition. Despite the pain of desolation of mood disorders, the aesthetic like poetry offers hope and the encouragement to hold on.

It underlines the universal nature of despair and loneliness yet offers the solace of one's right to a place in the world. As Ben, a gifted 13 year old explained, "During the holidays I found these websites with poetry and art and I realize that there are great people out there. Then school starts and everyone is an arsehole again..." (Moltzen, 2006, p. 9). For Kate aged 10, writing is a way in which she captures the importance of having hope:

Hope

*She wears a pale white cloak
Her eyes are blue and seem to glow.
Her face is lit up as though she has been
waiting for something for a long time
And finally, it has come.
Wherever she walks, good things happen
as if to make a trail.
Her best friend is Joy because to be
hopeful you must have first have
experienced Joy.
She understands people and is never
greedy.
She is fair and is a gainer and a giver.
She has what is important, that is
friends.
If you are ever to meet her, remember,
That first impressions do not matter to
her.*

The aesthetic holds much potential for fostering understanding and transformation. The developmental lesson is that mood disorders like depression need not be the defining factor in the gifted who exhibit immense sensitivity, but can also contribute to personal growth and well-being. Joy and hope are felt more deeply when one has experienced pain and suffering. The caveat must be added that employing the aesthetic is no guarantee of positive

growth; Hitler was an artist and author; Picasso could be sadistic; and Nietzsche was a misogynist (Miller, 1990). However, there is understanding to be found in the cathartic process of artistic expression.

Parents, teachers and health professionals can encourage the gifted to find positive outlets for their intense feelings. This may be through putting on exhibitions of their work, public readings of their poetry in supportive contexts, publishing of their writing, public performances, joining groups in their areas of talent that welcome excellence, hard work and creativity; and reading the biographies and autobiographies of gifted people (e. g., Gardner, 1993) to learn that although they feel so, they are not completely alone and misunderstood.

Conclusion

Parents, teachers and significant others in the lives of the creatively gifted can take heart from the possibilities here; mood disorders can be crippling but they can also be understood as part of the creative person's unique, remarkable and complex development. Providing a safe environment for the gifted to be who they truly are and want to be and enabling them to express themselves through aesthetic ways of knowing are ways to support and appreciate their gifts. It also provides others in their lives with a deeper understanding of their feelings, dreams and insights. In addition, through the aesthetic, mood disorders can be framed in ways that provide opportunities for expression and growth. While the focus in this article has been on writing, this is

not to preclude the ways in which creativity manifests across a range of disciplines and domains (see Gardner, 1993). Focusing on artistry like creative writing however, provides a tangible form that can be communicated on the page in order to express the seemingly inexpressible (Eisner, 2002).

Must the gifted inevitably experience mood disorders during their lives? There are many accounts that suggest this, supporting Dabrowski's (1970) theory of disintegration and development and Piechowski's (2006) examination of the lives of many young gifted people. It is difficult to claim with any certainty that mood disorders are not only inevitable but necessary, given the many variations in personality types, contexts, theoretical positions and historical settings. What might appear to be pathological in 1920 may not seem so now. And today, mental health professionals can vary widely in their diagnoses and approaches to therapy. What is evident is that the aesthetic such as creative writing provides a window of both understanding and appreciation. Moreover, there is potential growth inherent in mood disorders and an alternative view to traditional pathology considers the transformative potential inherent in disintegration.

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