

Arousing the Sleeping Giant: Giftedness in Adult Psychotherapy

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When the term gifted is used in casual conversation, it generally is assumed the discussion is about someone under the age of eighteen. Yet the attributes and concerns of the gifted do not disappear in adulthood, and at certain junctures in an adult's lifespan can become critical to an individual's well-being. As adults proceed through various stages of development, they inevitably seek a clearer sense of identity, integration, and purpose. Such tasks are replete with difficulties, particularly for those gifted adults whose drive toward realization is obstructed by mistaken self-concepts. Especially challenging to the counseling psychologist are clients who were identified as gifted children, but now believe their special abilities have somehow expired, who never were appropriately identified as gifted or educated about what giftedness means, and who suffer from anxiety, depression or relationship problems that are unknowingly related to lack of information and support as a gifted person. To further understandings of the nature of giftedness across the lifespan, this article offers a glimpse into the clinical "aha" experience of under-recognized giftedness in adults, and suggests methods for exploring and supporting a reunion with the gifted self.

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Individuals usually seek psychological evaluation because of a vague perception that something is out of balance, incomplete, unexplained, or that some vital factor in their well-being equation is missing. Rarely do clients enter with more than a list of symptoms and complaints, which are, of course, the very place to sort through the problem puzzle and a necessary part of a complete assessment. Yet limiting an evaluative inquiry to current symptoms is far from adequate for the gifted adult.

A simplistic symptom focus often shortchanges the gifted client who has not been accurately identified as such, and therefore has no method of introducing a topic of immense significance or of explaining the existential angst that arises from being vaguely aware of a disparity between potential and fulfillment. As Linda Silverman reminds us (Silverman, 1993, p. 644), for the gifted, "Counseling is essential, because the journey to discovering that which is finest in oneself is precarious, and those who embark upon this journey sometimes falter and lose their way."

The psychotherapist is in a unique position to offer the gifted adult accurate information about gifted traits and what giftedness really means over the life cycle. Within a reassuring atmosphere the client can – often for the first time – feel truly understood and valued. Face to face with someone who understands, a rare opportunity arises in which gifted adults may openly discuss their inner lives and existential questions, talking freely without the usual holding back. When sound psychoeducation is blended with a supportive and challenging

therapeutic relationship, as many of my clients have claimed, the effect can "change everything." Clients who are able to reclaim and honor their traits and talents, reuniting with a truer sense of self as a gifted individual, are prepared to shed the constraints of a defensive false self established in childhood as a countermeasure against pressures to conform. From there, the needs, intensities, vulnerabilities, intuitions, and intellectual idiosyncrasies of giftedness can be reframed as personal strengths, the wellspring of self-confidence, autonomy, fulfillment of high potential, and enriching new contacts with true peers.

Relying on anecdotal and observational material derived from clinical practice based on a broad range of research findings, I describe a method of inquiry for the therapist who suspects unidentified giftedness as an underlying issue of well-being, common components of the process of gifted-self discovery, attendant affective and behavioral responses of both client and therapist, and suggestions for assisting the client's post-therapy stability and growth.

An Overview of Characteristics

A survey of clinical and educational literature reveals certain identifying characteristics known to be indicators of giftedness that fall more in the realm of personality traits, habits, and/or needs than numerical findings of IQ tests. This is especially important for the clinician who works with self-referred adults and for clients for whom evaluation via a battery of intelligence tests is ordinarily unwanted, unproductive, and perhaps ethically unjustifiable. Since the goal of identifying giftedness in adulthood is generally for personal growth and self-efficacy, as opposed to school placement or advocacy for special services, an inquiry approach is often most appropriate.

Not once in my clinical experience has a gifted client sought evaluation or therapy straightforwardly suggesting giftedness, high potential, or unusual creativity as an important issue for exploration. Indeed, why would a therapist hold such an expectation given what is known of the experience of gifted persons, many of whom have learned to deny and attempt to excise the very traits and mannerisms that make them gifted in order to manage societal pressures to "be normal". Because of the hidden quality of giftedness in adulthood, it is essential that within a thorough clinical interview intended to uncover and specify diagnostic data, the well-informed therapist observe the client in two ways. On a parallel and more subtle level than direct questions, the therapist must be heedful of the particular behaviors, attitudes, past experiences, and complaints suggestive of unidentified giftedness.

Markers of adult giftedness include a broad knowledge base that is highly interconnected and readily linked to new information (Coleman & Shore, 1991; Larkin, McDermott, Simon & Simon, 1980; Resnick, 1989; Shore & Kanevsky, 1993). It is common to observe a striking habit of self-monitoring and self-guidance, personal insight and

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metacognition (Flavell, 1976; Meichenbaum, 1980; Shore & Kanevsky, 1993; Coleman & Shore, 1991). Gifted clients tend to demonstrate pliable thinking and unusual perceptivity, an ability to grasp seemingly conflicting perspectives, and to quickly ascertain problems and reinterpret them beyond the obvious, combining intellectual strengths for effective and efficient solutions (e.g. verbalizing imagery) (Clark, 1992; Davidson, 1986; Dover & Shore, 1991; Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976; Kay, 1991; Lewis, Kitano, & Lynch, 1992; Lovecky, 1986; McCrae, 1987; Piechowski, 1986).

The astute therapist will catch a client's preference for complexity, original responses, and novelty, and be watchful of a pronounced tolerance or penchant for ambiguity (Bowen, Shore, & Cartwright, 1992; Piechowski, 1991; Roeper, 1991). A tendency to be excitable, with high levels of energy (not hyperactivity) is typical. This may be evidenced by overt expressiveness, by a love of discussion and debate, by an ability to concentrate for long periods of time, multiple interests and multipotentiality, and by complaints of being easily bored (Clark, 1992; Freed, 1990; Gallagher, 1985; Lewis, Kitano, & Lynch, 1992; Lovecky, 1986; Meckstroth, 1991; Piechowski, 1979, 1986, 1991; Schiever, 1985; Silverman, 1983a; Whitmore, 1980).

Frequently, clients report a history of uneven or asynchronous intellectual, emotional, psychomotor, language, and/or social development (e.g. reasoning ahead of language skills; complex ideas ahead of ability to sufficiently express; emotional maturity lagging reasoning). Many also chronicle signs of exceptional intelligence, high academic achievement or unexplained underachievement despite exceptional ability (Kerr, 1991; Page, 1983; Piechowski, 1991; Roedell, 1980; Silverman, 1991; Terrasser, 1985; Tolan, 1994; Webb & Kleine, 1993; Webb, Meckstroth & Tolan, 1982). They are inclined to disclose exceedingly high standards for themselves and others, a perfection orientation, an intolerance for mundane tasks, idealism, and an injurious habit of self-criticism (Clark, 1992; Frost, Marten, Lahart & Rosenblate, 1990; Hamachek, 1978; Hollingworth, 1926; Kaiser & Berndt, 1985; Parker, 1995; Powell & Haden, 1984; Rocamora, 1992; Roeper, 1988; Silverman & Conarton, 1993; Webb, Meckstroth & Tolan, 1982).

Particularly for the gifted female, it is not uncommon to find a self-perception distorted by accompanying feelings of being a failure, a fraud or impostor, or a belief that it is others who are truly gifted (Bell, 1990; Bell & Young, 1986; Clance, 1985; Clance & Imes, 1978; Dweck, Davidson, Nelson & Enna, 1978). In general, the gifted exhibit sensory and emotional sensitivity, difficulty in accepting criticism, extraordinary empathy and compassion, passionate dedication to causes, deep concern and worry, overwhelming feelings of responsibility for the well-being of others and the advancement of humanity, and become easily outraged by injustices and inhumane acts (Dabrowski, 1972; Lovecky, 1986, 1990; Piechowski, 1979, 1991; Post, 1988; Roeper, 1991; Silverman, 1993b). Not unexpectedly, gifted adults are prone to periods of existential depression.

On the other hand, one of the more glaring traits of giftedness is extraordinary goal orientation that coexists with a relentless curiosity. Challenge seems to be more of a need than a want, and feelings of being driven or pressured to understand and excel are the companions of achievement. Entelechy (from the Greek entelekheia meaning full realization, a vital force urging one toward self-actualization) is the sum and substance of their remarkable self-motivation and perseverance

(Lovecky, 1986, 1990; Piechowski, 1991; Roeper, 1991; Rocamora, 1992).

Contrary to popular opinion and faulty expectations of nerdism, the gifted adult commonly shows unusual psychosocial maturity, popularity, charisma, trustworthiness, social adjustment and relationship competence. For many of them, leadership is a natural role that is upheld by self-assuredness and an excellent sense of humor (Hollingworth, 1931; Mönks & Ferguson, 1983; Olszewski-Kubilius, Kulieke, & Krasney, 1988; Robinson & Noble, 1991; Silverman, 1993b, 1993c; Terman, 1925).

Despite their abilities, the gifted experience recurring feelings of isolation and being largely misunderstood. Most have been aware since early childhood that they are inherently different, though they may not know in what ways, and typically believe their differences are disreputable. Likewise they may eventually admit to chronic experiences of deep loneliness in spite of a preference for working alone.

In addition, many have been berated for being picky, perfectionistic, or overly-committed to orderliness because neither therapist nor client realize it is normal for the gifted to seek security by systematizing. Gifted adults may fail to respect their own need for solitude, reflection, and time to daydream or play with concepts and ideas. They may shame themselves when their strong bids for autonomy result in a pattern of butting heads with authority figures when most have never been told that they challenge tradition because of their deep personal values and a reverence for truth and authenticity (Clark, 1992; Dabrowski, 1972; Gallagher, 1985; Krueger, 1988; Lewis, Kitano, & Lynch, 1992; Piechowski, 1979, 1986; Silverman, 1983).

Overall, gifted adults are almost entirely unaware that the so-called excesses of their nature are the very same traits that underpin excellence. With help, as gifted adults discover their true identities, they can rewrite their histories in terms of assets rather than liabilities. They may come to understand a gifted child's tears and rage over playground unfairness or pointing out politically incorrect truths were early signs of moral leadership. They may finally realize that badgering teachers and parents with questions and getting into all kinds of investigative mischief often foreshadows entrepreneurship and innovation. They may also discover that when the gifted child's touchiness seems excessive, it may be a harbinger of profound empathy, the kind revered in social reformers and servants of the poor and needy. Thus, a corrected personal history is fundamental for self-support, a prerequisite for confidently embarking on new ventures in a world that is still stuck on stereotyped notions about the gifted.

The Case of Smart Alec

An unassuming man in his late forties, Alec was recently promoted to CEO of a nationally-recognized sales incentive company. It was obvious that Alec was smarter than most and he was revered by associates and competitors alike as the idea man. Everyone around him was taken by his remarkable perceptivity and creative vision, assets that were the booster rockets of his rapid ascent.

Without understanding why or how, Alec was able to see at once all sides of an issue, to quickly assess the motivations of others, and to sniff out hidden agendas. His popularity was underscored by his ability to see sparks of underdeveloped potential in others, to believe in them even more than they did

Lenore: Queen of Hearts

Everything mattered to Lenore, a trained nurse who divided her time and energy amongst a small family-owned sporting goods store, her husband and young twins, teaching on an adjunct basis at a local community college, and concerns about her older brother's failing marriage. When it came to relationships, Lenore never overlooked the tiniest shift of tone in any situation, picking up the shades of gray in all the feelings of her world, feelings that went by undetected by nearly everyone else. When Lenore felt any emotion, she *really* felt it. In truth, she was quite sure she could actually think with her feelings.

Indeed, Lenore's world was one of outstretched hands, all seeming to be aimed at her. From an early age she had been acutely troubled by things stirred up in her sensitive awareness, many of them unbidden feelings of uneasiness about the human condition, famine, disease, inequity, and oppression. Lenore recalled at age six witnessing a developmentally delayed boy being teased by a neighborhood bully. Undiscovered by anyone, she cried herself to sleep that night, feeling vaguely responsible even though she had only been a far-off observer. Somewhere along the way she translated her unusual sensitivity and empathy into a personal call of responsibility. Almost as if deep within her heart she had made a life decision: *If there's an unattended hurt out there, I'll sense it; and if no one else seems to care, it must be mine to repair.*

Yet more than once, Lenore had been touted a "drama queen". She knew she was emotional, but had no idea her intensity was a fundamental characteristic of the gifted who tend to freely share themselves with others. But since she had no knowledge of the source of her exceptional empathy, she had no strategy to balance it with self care. Lenore had never learned to distinguish the difference between feeling with and feeling for someone else. Increasingly she felt cheated out of her own emotional needs. She had no way of protecting her vulnerability in the face of obvious need and thus continued to be a perennial responder to others' predicaments.

A while back a friend had ridiculed her as she shared her concern for an overworked peer: "Lenore, I swear if a stray cat was hit by a bus in New Delhi, you'd be on the first plane over there to rescue it." Even as she scoffed at the absurdity of his gibe she caught herself thinking: *Is there really a wounded cat lying alone on some dirty street? Is there someone I should call?* That remark was the catalyst that brought Lenore in for an evaluation.

When she entered my office Lenore first apologized for taking my time, suggesting perhaps others needed to be seen far more than she. After being reassured her distress was legitimate, Lenore admitted to many times over having wished for "an emotion-ectomy":

The problem is", she objected, "too much of the time I don't know where other people's feelings end and mine begin. Lots of times I feel so joined at the hip with other people's problems that I feel overloaded, almost like the weight of the whole world rests squarely on my shoulders. But I really and truly care about them, you know. It's not something I can just get rid of. Believe me, I've tried.

Though Lenore had no intention of remaking herself as an aloof, emotionless automaton, she was desperate to understand herself and to make a change. She sought a way to care intensely without feeling like a pushover, and to be close to others without being drained dry.

themselves, and to bring out the best in those who worked for him. The most often repeated commentary about Alec was "He's one in a million."

Everyone was sure Alec was riding a high of success and fulfillment. Everyone but Alec. Undoubtedly he was professionally satisfied and genuinely grateful. Alec had never been arrogant or selfish. But he couldn't help noticing an unshakable feeling of emptiness that had crept into his life, a feeling he couldn't easily explain.

There was a growing distance between Alec and his subordinates. Little by little his enthusiastic descriptions of a new vision for the company elicited more distrust than zeal. He was privately frustrated with what he saw as naysaying and uncreative foot dragging. His mind was filled with conflicting thoughts and a dislike for his own feelings:

Why can't the others see what I see? Their sights are set too short; they just keep making minuscule changes that aren't really advancing anything. The big new things we do are just remakes of the tried-and-true, nothing spectacular or evolutionary. The others here have no idea how much I hold back. I know exactly what it means when I throw out ideas and my managers look at me like I just sprouted ten heads. I'm too far down the road in my thinking for them to go along with me, so they think I'm not being realistic, that it can't be done, that I'm a dreamer.

Little by little Alec began to wonder if he'd lost his business touch. He worried that mid-life was doing a number on both his common sense and credibility. The bewilderment threw him into a frenzy of self-analysis to no avail. The only thing he could figure out was that suddenly his work seemed meaningless and he needed to make a change. Or perhaps he had simply fooled everyone including himself and he was not so smart after all. Perhaps his talents had hit the limit. Alec was afflicted with a creeping case of existential angst. At the beginning of our first session, Alec confessed:

I've always been a dyed-in-the-wool seeker of best-fit solutions for complicated problems, someone perennially on the trail of the larger truths of life. And I've learned to apply my clear-sightedness to the practicalities of business. But right now I think the truths that evade me must be my own. For the life of me I can't put my finger on anything wrong at work or with the family or my health. So why all of a sudden do I feel lost and unsure? Lately I've even begun to feel like a fraud? It seems like there's something about my identity that's missing, something vital. But what could it be?

No matter how insightful he was, the missing identity piece that was undermining Alec's well-being was something he was unlikely to guess. Even though he knew he was smart and capable, no one had ever told him about the personality traits and life issues of giftedness. Hence, an essential part of him was indeed missing from his awareness.

For someone whose reputation was built on getting to the core of an issue with lightning-speed, his unsettled feeling was tantamount to waking up one day to discover he was mysteriously lost in a familiar-appearing place. Alec was facing a developmental crisis of unknown origin as he wrestled with a growing intolerance for the get-ahead-at-all-costs agenda of competitive business. Though he was being hailed as an exemplar of leadership and was envied as a master of his immediate universe, he was secretly agonizing over questions of purpose and meaning.

She discovered there had been very little "I" in Lenore's perspective for many reasons. But the one source of her profound compassion central to her development was as yet unknown, the fact that she was receptive to collective angst and overly responsible because she was gifted.

On the Trail of the Gifted Self: A Strategic Inquiry Process

Once equipped with basic information about the traits of gifted individuals, the evaluation process that begins psychotherapy is set to include, on the periphery at least, a screening for unrecognized or discounted giftedness. With training and experience, the therapist or evaluator can develop an intuitive sense of undetected giftedness, which is essential since adults rarely broach the subject directly. Listening and watching for clues, behavioral or verbal indicators of the characteristics set forth above, is one valuable means of investigation. Yet I find the client must subsequently be questioned more directly to tease out enough information to decide if unresolved issues related to giftedness are an important and beneficial focus of treatment. Moreover, the client's interest will be peaked in this process if, indeed, the therapist is on the right track.

In my estimation there are three critical reasons for proceeding gingerly and initially withholding any blunt declaration of suspected giftedness. A client's presenting concerns must be treated with respect and taken seriously. Because the term gifted is *emotionally loaded* with potentially incompatible connotations and stereotypical images that can evoke intense resistance, too much too soon may seriously impair further progress (Lovecky, 1990; Piechowski, 1986; Rocamora, 1990). And if the client's responses, history, behaviors, and characteristics fit criteria for giftedness, whether or not this is to become a central factor of treatment must ultimately be decided by the client.

An in-depth exploration of the psyche and life experience of the gifted person is central to therapeutic change when giftedness resonates at some level with the client's self-understanding, and the therapeutic relationship is bolstered by the therapist's *social* and *referent power* (Kerr & Claiborn, 1991; Kerr, Olson, Claiborn, Bauers-Gruenler, & Paolo, 1983; Strong & Claiborn, 1982; Strong & Matross, 1973).

The following suggestions for strategic inquiry of a client suspected to be one of the millions of unidentified gifted adults can be framed in various ways with the intent to open a channel for growth-oriented self-reflection (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Moreover, when interspersed respectfully in a timely way, they can provide a pathway to the obscured gifted self and a foundation for further dialogue and psychoeducation befitting the client's specific needs.

Ask the client for her or his theory about both current and longstanding problems of well-being and obstacles to gratification. In an attempt to explain emotional reactions, don't press for revelations of childhood trauma that may never have occurred.

Briefly investigate the client's intellectual, educational, and creative background, looking for indicators of early skill development, asynchronous progression (mental conceptualization preceding the means to manifest an imagined product), a history of remarks from adults about prematurely probing questions, a tenacious curiosity, artistic, musical, or spatial, an early sense of morality, a willingness to butt heads with

authority figures, an intolerance of unfairness.

Don't always suppose the client is accurate when at first your suggestions of unidentified giftedness are heartily renounced. Do not assume giftedness is as rare as popular opinion suggests, or that because a client comes from an undistinguished or uneducated family that such is evidence of lack of giftedness.

Resist interpreting the client's defensiveness, autonomy, demandingness, and suspiciousness as an insult to your professional integrity or authority. See through the veneer of apprehension, irritability, distrust, and resistance to the underlying fear. Remember that the vulnerability that accompanies giftedness often outweighs advantage. Consider established defenses as legitimate, intelligent products vestiges of the gifted life within an unsupportive and often hostile society. Judiciously disclose personal experiences or confidentiality-protected stories of other gifted individuals to normalize the client's experience.

Weave into the assessment a query about unfulfilled purpose or burning desire such as: "Let's imagine you had somehow been free to go your own way, that you had all the training and skills necessary to accomplish your life mission. What would that look like now? What would that mean to you?"

Approach the subject of feeling inherently different, lonely, and misunderstood with questions that simultaneously elicit information and imply empathy for a glimpse of a potentially supportive connection with you. For example: "Has there ever been a time in your life when you felt fully understood?" Or: "How long has it been since you felt you could truly be yourself, without covering up, slowing down, or holding back?"

If not essential, being gifted yourself is invaluable to successful therapy. This special population requires a therapist prepared to: follow the client's expressions of intense interest with enthusiasm and intentness, even if the subject matter is abstract, complex and/or presented in a somewhat circuitous or tangential fashion; occasionally and respectfully intersperse humor and curiosity that dovetails with the client's wonderings, avoiding excessive, inactive listening and routinized responses; be an understanding collaborator who is sophisticated in the ways of psychological development, self-actualization, and the gifted personality without being a competitor or someone with all the answers; portray a genuine self and an authentic preference for the idiosyncrasies of the gifted personality; discuss, explore, then discuss some more, from many angles and on several levels of meaning; operationalize abstract insights and offer the client homework (whether direct or subtle suggestions) for continuation of the process between sessions (Kerr & Claiborn, 1991; Lovecky, 1986).

Be sure the client knows you value her or him as a unique person with or without the creation of socially-desirable products.

Work with the client in a collaborative manner, negotiating the direction, pace, and approach to treatment, and setting clear boundaries when necessary. Let the client know you understand her or his needs and that you have concrete ideas about how to be of assistance, but be sure the client's story has been allowed enough air time for her or him to feel understood.

Encourage reflection, meditation, and transpersonal inquiry even if it may look to others as a radical search for deep self-understanding, regular time-outs for unproductive fun, consistent application of relaxation training to offset the painstaking hard work and rewarding achievement, solitude, development of peer relationships with gifted kindred spirits. Deal openly

and directly with spiritual concerns, referring to other professionals as necessary. Do not discount the import of transpersonal awakenings, deeply felt dreams, and the supportive role of symbolism.

Promote outreach efforts to establish new intellectual, educational, musical, artistic, social, recreational, and spiritual resources, as well as opportunities to serve others. The right combination, which must be determined individually, will markedly strengthen the gifted person's confidence, intelligently focus and prioritize multiple passions, restore depleted energy, bolster creativity, and profoundly augment integration and self-realization.

Help the client balance time and energy so she or he may be intensely involved in as many areas of interest (usually far more than the average person) as is healthy and fulfilling. Be mindful of the fact that understimulation can be as emotionally damaging as overstimulation. But do not overlook the need to question the client's efforts when she or he seems to be spread too thin with reminders that some, even the most desirable new ideas might be another's to develop.

Expect a variety of reactions from the gifted client, including denial, annoyance, anger, grief, apprehension, self-doubt, self-berating, joy, relief, intermixed with surges of restored energy and self-determination. Count on particular reactions of your own, such as irritation, fatigue, frustration, envy, delight, fascination, kinship, and protectiveness, working through each as they arise.

Refer when appropriate for specialized career counseling or job coaching, leadership training, peer groups, mentorship, supplementary learning opportunities, journals and educational resources for the gifted, psychoeducational and esoteric literature, and religious or numinous resources designed for the advanced self-realization and synthesis seeker.

Conclusion

Evaluating and counseling gifted and talented adults is as stimulating and rewarding as it is demanding and challenging. Within the context of giftedness the uniqueness of the human personality and the many faces of high potential are, perhaps, even more acutely evident. Counselors who wish to help gifted clients must first be prepared to read between the lines of communication within the domain of the psychological assessment. A direct and indirect inquiry process can facilitate a client's coming to grips with his or her giftedness, and what that means when re-discovery unlocks feelings of guilt, remorse, regret, anger, and fears about expectations.

For the client to experience a successful reunion with the gifted self, the therapist must acquire specialized skills and a distinct attitudinal approach that permeates the relationship, one that embodies positive regard, sagacity, and support for the client's creative authority and individuality. With the gifted there is an art to knowing how to plant seeds of suggestion and then let go, respecting the client's powers of discernment and self-analysis.

The capable counselor will be aware of resources for the gifted and be ready to offer suggestions that might further self-understanding and self-efficacy, aiming the client toward opportunities to connect with true peers and new opportunities for actualization of potential. Likewise, the therapist must have at her or his disposal a wealth of clinically sound, effective, creative interventions, and be willing to challenge the client's self-defeating inaccurate perspectives with established facts

and new understandings about what giftedness is and is not, and expedient ways to manage life as a gifted person.

In every case, therapy must be conducted in a way that does not mirror society's overt and covert attempts to tamper with the gifted personality and place sanctions on the ways and means of high potential. Gifted adults need an advocate who champions their differences, not someone who unwittingly reflects inapt urgings to "slow down and stop being so touchy, driven, overly-responsible, and intense", to impersonate the social norm. In due course, in stepwise and sometimes circular fashion, the therapist moves the client's self-perception from "a problem person", to "a gifted person with a few problems", and ultimately to "a gifted person prepared to prevent problems of well-being".

The results of suitable therapy for the gifted are sometimes subtle, sometimes sharp, and nearly always a matter of emancipation. The "aha" experience of the newly-identified gifted adult might be summed up in the words of a former client:

All these years I thought being so sensitive, picky, emotional, and driven was something to be ashamed of. I can't tell you how many times I looked to the sky and pleaded to be "normal". This changes everything. I'm not weird after all. Maybe now I can make up for lost time in the selfhood realm; supporting myself and my goals from the inside out for a change. I don't know whether to laugh or cry. All I know is I'm back. My vitality has returned along with hope. I can be me in my own way, differences and all. What a relief to no longer be absent in my own life!

When at last the gifted adult repossesses an authentic, unfettered identity, a radical shift occurs, a coming out of the potent individual who can breathe free, and create with vigor, and whose talents may mature without shame or disabling wariness. Then, and only then, can the gifted adult arouse the sleeping giant of high potential and adroitly sidestep obstacles to happiness and actualization. In turn, the gifted person's revolutionary bequests to humanity may enrich us all.

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Emotional and Behavioral Problems Among Highly Intellectually Gifted Youth

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There is some controversy in the literature regarding the relationship between exceptionally high intellectual ability and psychosocial adjustment. Despite some evidence to the contrary, myths persist about an inverse relationship. Using a well standardized scale of emotional and behavioral problems, this study examined this relationship with 191 intellectually gifted youth ages 13 to 15 years. Results indicated that the youth's scores on the scale were well within normative ranges and the most highly gifted of the group tended to exhibit fewer problems than the moderately gifted. Thus, these findings are contrary to some popular myths about highly intellectually gifted youth.

Several research studies have supported the original findings of Terman and colleagues (1925-1959) who reported that students with IQs of 140 or greater were not more emotionally disturbed than the general population (Cornell, Delcourt, Bland, Goldberg, & Oram, 1994; Janos & Robinson, 1985). However, there are prevailing popular myths suggesting that gifted youth, especially the exceptionally gifted, are

likely to exhibit poor psychosocial adjustment (Oram, Cornell, & Rutemiller, 1995). Despite a lack of empirical support, this myth persists due perhaps to anecdotal examples or the "ironic, compelling quality" of the presumed relationship between high ability and low adjustment (Oram, et al., 1995). The purpose of this study was to examine this relationship empirically, using standardized, well established measures.

Highly gifted children, often defined as those with IQs above 150 to 155, are considered by some theorists to be especially vulnerable to adjustment problems. Hollingworth (1942) originally proposed the concept of "optimum intelligence," suggesting that a certain range of intelligence is optimal for a child's personal happiness and adjustment to society. Children with IQ levels between 125 and 155 are likely to have enough interests in common with con-

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