

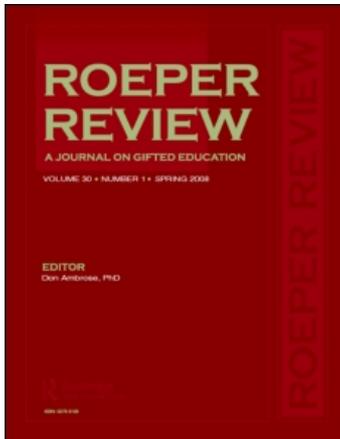
This article was downloaded by: [Canadian Research Knowledge Network]

On: 4 May 2011

Access details: Access Details: [subscription number 932223628]

Publisher Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Roeper Review

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t792156624>

## Preserving the true self of the gifted child

Maureen Neihart<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Psychologist at the Northwest Counseling Center, Billings, Montana

Online publication date: 20 January 2010

To cite this Article Neihart, Maureen(1998) 'Preserving the true self of the gifted child', Roeper Review, 20: 3, 187 – 191

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/02783199809553889

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02783199809553889>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Few themes that emerge from the stories of gifted children are more compelling than the striking demonstration, over and over, of early self-efficacy. It seems plausible that early self-efficacy is the visible evidence of early self-awareness and high intelligence in synergistic combination. High intellectual functioning, intense focus, probing curiosity, early acquisition of language, and rapid learning ability shape a young life differently. Children who are passionate in their pursuit of knowledge, who question conventions others take for granted, who care deeply about people and ideas, and who strongly resent injustice are children who may feel a stronger urge to reshape their environment than to accommodate to it. A robust sense of self as an active, capable, perceptive, valuable player in the field is a resource to be valued. Children

who display early self-efficacy appear to operate from this orientation. They offer the opportunity to advance our understanding of many aspects of that mysterious and very central entity: the self. They are hopefully our leaders of tomorrow, but also our teachers of today.

## REFERENCES

- American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders*. (4th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
- Assagioli, R. (1965). *Psychosynthesis*. New York: Viking.
- Blasi, A. (1983). The self and cognition. In B. Lee & G. G. Noam (Eds.), *Developmental approaches to the self*. Pp. 189-213, New York: Plenum Press, 189-213.
- Brinthaup, T. M. & Lipka, R. P. (Eds.) (1992). *The self: Definitional and methodological issues*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Clark, B. (1992). *Growing up gifted*. New York: Macmillan.
- Ferrucci, P. (1982). *What we may be*. Los Angeles: Tarcher
- Hollingworth, L. S. (1939). What we know about the early selection and training of leaders. *Teachers College Record*, 40, 575-592.
- James, W. (1890). *The Principles of psychology*. New York: Holt & Co.
- Lovecky, D. V. (1990) Warts and Rainbows. *Advanced Development* 2, 65-83.
- Meckstroth, E. (1991). Guiding the parents of gifted children: The role of counselors and teachers. In R. M. Milgrim (Ed.), *Counseling gifted and talented children: A guide for teachers, counselors, and parents*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex
- Miller, A. (1981). *The drama of the gifted child*. New York: Basic Books.
- Roedell, W. C. (1988). "I just want my child to be happy": Social development and young gifted children. *Understanding Our Gifted*, 1(1), 1, 7, 10-11.
- Roeper, A. (1991) Gifted adults: Their characteristics and emotions. *Advanced Development*, 3, 85-98.
- Roeper A. & Sigel, I. (1966). Finding the clue to children's thought processes. *Young Children*, 21(6), 335-348.
- Rogers, M. T. (1986). *A comparative study of developmental traits of gifted and average children*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Denver, Denver, CO.
- Sebring, A. D. (1983). Parental factors in the social and emotional adjustment of the gifted. *Roeper Review*, 6(2), 97-99.
- Silverman, L. K. (1997). Family counseling with the gifted. In N. Colangelo and G. A. Davis (Eds.), *Handbook of gifted education* (2nd ed.), pp. 382-397 Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Tannenbaum, A. J. (1992). Early signs of giftedness: Research and commentary. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 15, 104-133.
- Tolan, S. S. (1994). Psychomotor overexcitability in the gifted: An expanded perspective. *Advanced Development*, 6, 77-86.

# Preserving the True Self of the Gifted Child

Maureen Neihart

*Fundamental principles of self psychology are described to explain how the self begins and develops over the life span. The influences that contribute to the creation of false and true selves in gifted children are discussed and strategies for promoting the true self of gifted children are presented.*

Maureen Neihart is a psychologist at the Northwest Counseling Center, Billings, Montana, a member of the Editorial Advisory Board of the *Roeper Review*, and Guest Editor of the special issue on the Psychological Well Being of the Gifted Child.

*It is only now, in looking back — after deflating experiences later in life when I was told either to lower my sights or to rein in my enthusiasms — that I fully appreciate the seriousness with which my ideas were taken by my parents and their friends; and it is only now that I really begin to understand how desperately important it was to both my intellectual and emotional life to have had my thoughts and enthusiasms given not only respect but active encouragement. An ardent temperament makes one very vulnerable to dreamkillers, and I was more lucky than I knew in having been brought up around enthusiasts, and lovers of enthusiasts.*

(Jamison, 1995, p. 26)

There is no one definition of the self. However, there is some agreement that it comprises the very core of the personality. It includes identity, self-esteem, and what one brings to the world. Winnicott said, "For me the self, which is not the ego, is the person who is me, who is only me, who has a totality based on the operation of the maturational process. At the same time the self has parts, and in fact is constituted of these parts" (1989, p. 271)

Self psychology is the study of the self and its development. It is a field pioneered by Heinz Kohut (1971, 1977) and comprises several guiding principles. One principle is that the essential processes of self development include the phenomena of differentiation, self-efficacy, authenticity and self-esteem. Two other principles that Kohut proposed are that the enduring goal of development is preservation of the integrated self and that this integration, or cohesion, is the center of personality. A fourth principle delineates the determinants of health and psychopathology. Kohut argued that health is the result of frequent experiences with empathy and responsiveness from caregivers and is demonstrated in feelings of mastery and self-efficacy. Kohut further argued that psychopathology arises when the individual repeatedly experiences lack of empathy and responsiveness from caregivers. In other words, the most important factor in determining the development of a healthy self is the response of others to the individual. When an individual repeatedly experiences lack of positive response, the process of integration is impaired and the result is often frag-

Manuscript submitted January, 1997.  
Revision accepted November, 1997.

mentation, demonstrated by feelings of emptiness, alienation, and anxiety.

These principles of self psychology improve our understanding of the healthy development of gifted children. They shed light on how expressions of giftedness influence personality development and they explain why it is the *response to the gifted child* that is pivotal in development. This article describes basic tenets of personality development from the perspective of self psychology and discusses implications for healthy personality development in gifted children. Specific strategies that preserve the true self of the gifted child are also presented.

## Initial Development of the Self

The self is not present at birth; it develops from the time of birth as a result of a process called introjection, which refers to the incorporation of attitudes, ideas, and beliefs. Winnicott (1989) said that the self develops as a result of the interactions with the human environment. The self first sees itself in the eyes of the primary caregiver, which serve as a mirror for the self to come to know itself. As a result of introjection, the self becomes elaborated and organized. The self is a product of what the individual takes in and internalizes from people and events in the immediate environment. Once incorporated, such objects are called introjects. For example, the mother typically becomes the first introject. Father is usually the second. Other significant persons with whom the individual spends considerable time early in life are potential introjects. This in part explains why so many of us at age 35 realize that we have become our parents. We have introjected them; they became internal objects, core pieces of our personality that we carry with us always. They are us.

At birth and early infancy, the child is in a symbiotic relationship with the primary caregiver, usually the mother. The child and mother are one. Due to perceptual limitations, children are not able to differentiate themselves from their mother until they are nearly three months of age. Until then the child views Mother as an extension of his or herself. Everything is self. During this stage the baby's bodily sensations are the initial organizing components of the self because the infant lacks the cognitive and perceptual machinery needed to make the distinction between *self* and *other*. However, as cognitive development advances, the infant differentiates self from other and later begins to differentiate a *good self* from a *bad self*. Initially, the child denies or rejects the bad self and keeps the good self to ward off the loss of love. The good self includes those emotions, qualities, and thoughts that are accepted and valued by parental figures. The bad self includes those emotions, qualities, and thoughts that are not liked or are rejected by parental figures.

Perception, cognition and affect all strongly shape the self because they influence the process of introjection. Csikszentimihalyi (1993) says that what individuals pay attention to shapes the self. "There is nothing mysterious, or mystical, about the way objects become part of ourselves. The man who spends most of his time polishing his car, tuning up its engine, and talking about it to his friends will gradually end up including the car in his conception of his self...Therefore, what we pay attention to is no trivial matter; we are what we attend to" (p. 218). Objects are introjected as they are perceived, not necessarily as they really are. Over time and with repeated experiences, the self expands and is shaped by the internaliz-

ing of these perceived experiences. Initially, the components of the self are very loosely connected, but with maturity a healthy self becomes integrated, cohesive.

## Later Development of the Self

Most differentiation of the self takes place primarily from between the ages of three to thirty-six months and during adolescence. Self psychology theory proposes that a cohesive self develops via two pathways as a result of interactions with others known as selfobjects (Csikszentimihalyi, 1993; Miller, 1981; Pine, 1990; Wexler, 1992; Winnicott, Shepherd, & Davis, 1989). The term, "selfobject", refers to any person, thing or image that helps restore order when the self feels threatened (Wexler, 1991; Wolf, 1988). Selfobjects serve an organizing function for the individual. This power to soothe and reorganize comes from the individual's *relationship* with the selfobject.

The first pathway to integration is through the affirming, nurturing mirroring of an empathic mother. The child who receives such empathic support for his feelings, ideas, existence, learns at a preverbal stage that he is of value. The child who does not receive this good enough mirroring is vulnerable to narcissistic injury and narcissistic rage. The second pathway is through acceptance of an idealized father. Through internalizing the magnificence and power of the father the child develops a healthy self.

It is the nature of these interactions then, in combination with the individual's biology, that develops the self. Full differentiation is crucial to health, and inadequate differentiation contributes to adjustment problems and psychopathology. A healthy self is differentiated, well ordered and able to stand alone. Unhealthy selves may be fragmented, undifferentiated, full of holes, brittle, chaotic or disorganized.

The early components (introjects) of the poorly differentiated self are unintegrated. They are taken in, but loosely connected. Integration of the components of the self is the ongoing task of development. There are predictable stages of integration. One of these Heinz Kohut (1971) referred to as "grandiose self". It refers to that stage of early development when very young children have an exaggerated sense of their self worth. They live as though they are the center of the universe and as though everything they do deserves an adoring audience. They tend to view themselves as all good at this stage, protecting the self by denying those components (the "bad self") that are not liked by parents or by projecting the bad components onto others. As children develop, the grandiose self is integrated, allowing a realistic self concept to develop. Eventually, children can acknowledge and accept both their bad and good characteristics. They can hear criticism without throwing a tantrum.

If the grandiose self remains unintegrated, the individual struggles to regulate self esteem. The failure to integrate the grandiose self results in self-centeredness, lack of genuine empathy, and an inability to accept criticism or negative aspects of the self. Instead of feeling sadness about disappointments, the individual blames others for them and develops a deep resentment. Carder and Carder (1995, p. 53) explain that children need "just enough failure" in their relationships to assure separation and strong sense of self. This suggests that some very precocious gifted children could be at risk for failure to integrate this grandiose self because they may have so few experiences with failure. These ideas are congruent with

Pine's (1990) observation that there is an optimal level of praise needed for healthy development, and with Rimm's (1990) caution against extravagant praise that can cause the child to feel pressured.

The self continues to differentiate and integrate during latency and adolescence. Between ages five or six until puberty, significant developments in the self occur as the result of failures and successes in learning. Self-esteem is shaped via experiences with peers and success or failure in learning. How one experiences being treated by others contributes to the evolution of one's self-esteem. Again, it is the response of others to the individual that has the greatest influence in shaping the self.

Although the self continues to be shaped and gently molded throughout the life span, adolescence is the time when the self is most surely and clearly defined and established. The components that were loosely connected earlier are strengthened. It is a time of natural narcissism. It is a time when feeling different means feeling wrong.

Mary Pipher (1994) stresses that the losses and gains of the self in adolescence can last a lifetime. She suggests that depression and anger can be reactions to the abandonment of the self. "...those who blame themselves feel depressed, while those who blame others feel angry" (p. 43). Since a main tenet of self psychology is that the goal of development is preservation of the self, even destructive behaviors are considered to have as their goal to preserve the self. Acting-out behaviors in adolescents, for example, often represent attempts to protect and differentiate the self. Some therapists have observed increased acting-out behavior in adolescents who are battling against loss of the true self in order to preserve who they are (McConville, 1995; Pipher, 1994).

## Loss of the True Self in Gifted Children

The creation of false selves follows a continuum from socialization to abuse (Pipher, 1994). Parents and teachers naturally approve of some behaviors in children and disapprove of others. Everyone learns to give up some of their true self in exchange for social acceptance. It is very rare that the true self of any child is totally destroyed. Rather, the loss of the true self is in degrees. The tenets of self psychology suggest that gifted children may have to fight harder to preserve the true self, particularly if they live in homes or attend schools where their giftedness is not recognized or affirmed. *The response of others to the child's giftedness will have the most impact on the development of the self, since it is the reflection from others onto the self that fuels its differentiation.* Therefore, environments and relationships that are more affirming of a child's giftedness are more likely to promote the true self and minimize loss of the true self. Gifted children experience a loss of their true selves when their giftedness is ignored, rejected, or denied.

It is theoretically evident that a gifted child's interactions are going to differ from the norm as a result of their giftedness. Certain types or expressions of giftedness will cause more deviation from the norm than others and put the child more at risk for loss of the true self. For example, creative giftedness is typically less welcome in school environments than is academic giftedness. Creatively gifted children, then, may feel more pressure to create a false self — to deny or abandon some aspect of themselves — than would academically gifted children.

In her book, *The drama of the gifted child*, Alice Miller (1981) described how children lose their true selves. She wrote

of the danger facing some children in that they adopt a false self in order to please others. Gifted children may feel pressure to become someone they are not (Kerr, 1985; Pipher, 1994; Rimm, 1990). This pressure can come from parents, other significant relationships and even the culture itself.

As the gifted grow in their awareness of how they are different from their peer group, they may struggle more with the sense that something is wrong with them. The struggle is exacerbated when teachers or family members are rejecting of those gifted behaviors that do make them different. The personal circumstances of adolescence and the individual choices made determine whether a *true self* or *false self* will be preserved.

Dabrowski and Piechowski's (1977) work suggests that gifted children might be more vulnerable to painful subjective experiences of self. They are, perhaps, more likely to take up the burden of self criticism at an early age. The betrayal of self that takes place for many individuals is probably made worse for gifted people who are more likely to be consciously aware that they are losing themselves. This may explain in part the intensity of suffering that some gifted people experience regarding their perceived loss of self esteem.

For example, Type IV gifted children (Betts & Neihart, 1988) may include those who betrayed or denied the true self in an attempt to gain social acceptance and are now painfully aware of their self-betrayal. Type IV individuals are adolescents who are "...angry with adults and with themselves because the system has not met their needs for many years and they feel rejected. They may express this anger by being depressed and withdrawn or by acting out and responding defensively" (p. 252).

It is important to recognize that culture greatly impacts the development of the self. The growing self intersects with the cultural arena in which it develops. The bigger the gap between the true self and what the culture welcomes, the bigger the problems are for the individual. The bigger the gap generally, the bigger the pressure the individual feels to deny the true self. The implications for the gifted child are obvious. For example, one might predict that very creatively gifted individuals would struggle with this more so than those who are academically gifted because many environments are less welcoming of creative talent than of academic talent. Culture acts as a splitting agent, dividing true and false selves. When gifted children find themselves in environments that reject what is true for them, they experience pressure to deny their true selves.

Much has been written about the gifted woman's struggle to remain true to herself. She often faces pressure to reject the true self in exchange for social acceptability. Pipher (1994) suggests that many gifted girls settle for splitting into two selves.

*Ironically, bright and sensitive girls are most at risk for problems. They are likely to understand the implications of the media around them and be alarmed. They have the mental equipment to pick up our cultural ambivalence about women, and yet they don't have the cognitive, emotional and social skills to handle this information. They are paralyzed by complicated and contradictory data that they cannot interpret. They struggle to resolve the unresolvable and to make sense of the absurd. It's this attempt to make sense of the whole of adolescent experience that overwhelms bright girls (p. 43).*

These ideas are congruent with those put forth by Betts and Neihart (1988) regarding the underground gifted — young, adolescent girls who tend to deny their abilities and resist

attempts to provide them with appropriate education. They are confused by the mixed messages they hear — achieve, but don't perform too well, be nice, but be yourself; know your culture, but don't criticize it. Deny your true self. Be less than who you really are.

The literature on the development of the self (Miller, 1981; Pine, 1990; Pipher, 1994) emphasizes the important role of parents in the healthy development of the self in their children because it is the response of others to the child (mirroring) that has the most impact on the development of the self. Whenever a part of a child's personality is viewed as unacceptable, a child must choose between abandoning his or her self or being abandoned by those he or she loves. Growth and differentiation occur via introjection of others. For example, when infants and toddlers are not free to express their own emotional reactions and feelings with their parents, they learn to deny those parts of themselves in order to avoid the loss of their parents' love. This denial continues under the influence of the parental figures. This is readily seen in not all, but in some very intellectualized families where the gifted child shows deficiencies in certain affective areas. Similarly, when the gifted child is not free to express his giftedness, he or she learns to deny that in himself in order to avoid the loss of love.

Parents who have rejected, denied or split off aspects of their own giftedness (i.e. betrayed their true self) will likely contribute to the betrayal of the true self in their children. Unfortunately, some parents have not been able to help their children integrate their giftedness because they themselves are still discounting their own giftedness. Parents need to have a solid understanding about the impact their giftedness has on their own life before they can assist their children.

When parents minimize their own giftedness or fail to acknowledge their differences what children hear is, "It's not OK to know about this," or, "There's something bad about this." The implications for loss of the true self are obvious.

Children and parents must both be provided with comprehensive information regarding what it means to be gifted. It's hard to know who you are if you lack this information. Giftedness pulls on the self. When people are unaware of their giftedness or deny it, they are distant from a part of their self and lack wholeness. Gifted students need information about giftedness just as minority youth need information about their cultural heritage. Giftedness must become an integrated piece of the self, and should not be denied or ignored.

## Strategies to Preserve the True Self

There are many ways in which adults can help preserve the true selves of gifted children. One strategy is to help them see themselves and their lives in the broader context of the culture and times within which they live. Many gifted people tend to be self-analyzing and overly self-critical, blaming themselves for what they feel is wrong with them. Helping them to explore and understand the cultural and political pressures frees the self to remain true. One can fight back against what one can see. "They learn that they have conscious choices to make and ultimate responsibility for those choices. Intelligent resistance keeps the true self alive" (Pipher, 1994; p. 44).

Another strategy is suggested by Alice Miller (1981). She stressed that people with true selves are able to experience all feelings, including pain, honestly. Therefore, teaching people how to acknowledge and express their emotions, and how to cope with intense emotions strengthens the true self. When the

true self is weak, brittle, or fragmented people are easily overwhelmed by their emotional experiences, especially during adolescence. They tend to do whatever they can to avoid pain. They may deny their pain, abuse alcohol or drugs, run away, or lose themselves in relationships. Very bright people may become adept at intellectualizing their feelings to protect the true self from the pain. That is, they think about their feelings rather than feel their feelings. To become whole they must learn to identify, feel and accept their feelings.

Additionally, gifted children, like all children, need to learn to manage their own pain if they are to become authentic adults. False selves are encouraged by attempts to escape suffering. Suffering is not to be avoided but understood. Adolescents in particular need to be taught to acknowledge and describe their pain rather than run from it. They need to learn to express it in some form — through writing, exercise, or the arts. They need to learn to respond to the question, "What is this experience saying to you?"

Another implication from the literature for helping the gifted child is the benefit of adult-facilitated peer group exercises and discussions. Since mainstream culture puts great pressure on adolescents to move away from parents and depend on friends, there naturally will be limits to how much influence parents can have. Adolescents are terribly reluctant to actively seek guidance from parents. However, parents and other adults can lead or facilitate discussion groups, seminars, cultural activities, support groups, etc., that have as their goal the development of the authentic self. Pipher (1994) warns that it will be crucial in such peer groups to attend to the deep-structure questions and not be misled by the surface-structure conversation. Surface-structure refers to what can be observed, while deep-structure refers to the internal struggle. Pipher cautions that surface structure comments and behaviors are often coded to address the deep-structure issues.

*"Can I dye my hair purple?" may mean "Will you allow me to develop as a creative person?" "Can I watch R movies?" may mean, "Am I someone who can handle sexual experiences?" "Can I go to a different church?" may mean, "do I have the freedom to explore my own spirituality." ... I try to understand what their surface behavior is telling me about their deep-structure issues. I try to ascertain when their behavior is connected to their true selves and when it is the result of pressure to be a false self. Which thinking should I respect and nurture? Which should I challenge? (Pipher, 1994; p. 54)*

Reading is also an activity that can build the self through the mirroring of characters whom we admire or whose admiration or approval we desire. "It is there, seemingly in the space between the page and the eye, that a reader can discover his best self, and also communicate that self right back to the author." (Hamilton, 1996)

Finally, guided experiences with determining one's boundaries and defining relationships contribute to defining the self. The more adolescents can take responsibility for their own lives, the better definition of self they will achieve. Decisions should be made thoughtfully and with the counsel of trusted adults. Determining one's boundaries and defining relationships may be more difficult for girls because they are generally socialized to let someone other than themselves do the defining. It may be easier within some cultural groups where boundaries and relationships are very clearly defined. Fostering this autonomy does not mean indulging youth or letting them go their own way; it means accepting them and providing affection while setting limits. They need to learn to be independent while remaining emotionally connected to people.

## Conclusion

Self psychology theory suggests that it is the response of others to the child's giftedness that has the greatest influence on the development of the self. It further suggests that gifted children may be at risk to deny their true selves and create false selves when their giftedness is not affirmed and encouraged. Whether or not a false or true self is preserved depends largely on the response of others to, or mirroring of the child's giftedness. Children who feel pressure to deny some aspects of their giftedness in order to keep the love of caregivers are most at risk to create false selves. Although no specific research has been done on self differentiation in gifted children, it is possible to infer from self psychology theory what needs to happen to secure the health of gifted children and what risks are more likely for the gifted child. The developmental dangers for gifted children include betrayal of the self, denial of the self, and compartmentalization of the self.

The goal is to help gifted children grow to be authentic adults. To be authentic means to own all thoughts and feelings, including those that are socially unacceptable. Self-esteem is based on one's capacity to be authentic. When one disowns part of oneself, self esteem is lost and with it confidence. Miller (1981) used the term, "vibrancy", to refer to this state of psychological health in which people accept themselves instead of relying on others to accept them.

Parents and school personnel can play a significant role in helping gifted children preserve their true selves so that they become authentic adults, able to realize their full potential. Of

greatest importance is to acknowledge and affirm the child's giftedness and to assist the child in understanding his or her giftedness as a part of his or her identity. Adults serve as mirrors in which the self of the gifted child comes to know itself. This means that growth and integration of the true self occurs in the space of the relationship between child and adult. Obviously, adults who deny or minimize their own giftedness will be less effective in preserving the true selves of gifted children than adults whose giftedness is an integrated component of their own true self.

## REFERENCES

- Betts, G. and Neihart, M. (1988) Profiles of the gifted. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 32(2), 248-253.
- Carder, S. and Carder, L. (1995). Richard Wagner: The symbolic expression of the grandiose self. In Panter et. al. (Eds.) *Creativity and madness*. Burbank, CA: AIMED Press, pp. 41-56.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1993). *The evolving self*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Dabrowski, K. and Piechowski, M.M. (1977). *Theory of levels of emotional development: Multilevelness and positive disintegration*. Oceanside, NY: Dabor Science Publications.
- Hamilton, J. (1996). Claiming Jane. *The Carleton Voice*, 61(4), 21-23.
- Jamison, K.R. (1995). *An unquiet mind*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Kerr, B. (1985). *Smart girls, gifted women*. Columbus, OH: Ohio Psychology Publishing.
- Kohut, H. (1977). *The restoration of the self*. New York: International University Press.
- Kohut, H. (1971). *The analysis of the self*. New York: International Universities Press.
- McConville, M. (1995). *Adolescence: Psychotherapy and the emergent self*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Miller, A. (1981). *The drama of the gifted child*. New York: Basic Books.
- Panter, B.M., Panter, M, Virshup, E. and Virshup, B. (Eds.) (1995). *Creativity and madness*. Burbank, CA: AIMED Press.
- Pine, F. (1990). *Drive, ego, object and self*. New York: Basic Books.
- Pipher, M. (1994). *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the selves of adolescent girls*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Rimm, S. (1990). *How to parent so children will learn*. Watertown, WI: Apple Publishing.
- Wexler, D. (1991). *The adolescent self*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Winnicott, C., Shepherd, R., and Davis, M.(Eds.) (1989). *Psychoanalytic explorations*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Wolf, E. (1988). *Treating the self: Elements of clinical self psychology*. New York: Guilford.

---

## The Self Victorious: Personal Strengths, Chance, and Co-Incidence<sup>1</sup>

Michael M. Piechowski

---

*Models of talent development and outstanding achievement emphasize as one of the necessary conditions a strongly supportive environment. Historic and contemporary cases are presented as exceptions to this rule. Examination of these cases shows that personal strengths of the individual are the key factor in overcoming deficiencies in environmental support. This makes the self the centerpiece of the scenario of talent development. Of the four models examined here, Feldman's and Piirto's give more weight to the whole individual than do Tannenbaum's and Gagné's. Attributes of the self-will, entelechy, striving for autonomy and self-realization suggest areas of inquiry in further development of these models.*

---

Michael M. Piechowski is a professor of Education and Psychology at Northland College in Ashland, Wisconsin.

The importance of a strongly supportive environment for the achievement of excellence has received considerable attention (Albert, 1994; Amabile, 1994; Bloom, 1985; Feldman, 1986; Simonton, 1994a; Tannenbaum, 1991). Achieving excellence despite obstacles presented by an unfavorable environment has received less attention, at least in models of talent development.

Several models have attempted to identify the set of conditions necessary to produce excellence, outstanding achievement, or the starburst of a prodigy. These models are so persuasive that it is easy to overlook the existence of notable exceptions. The purpose of this paper is to examine cases in which outstanding achievement was attained despite deficiencies in one of the allegedly necessary conditions: a supportive environment.

Four models of talent development will be examined: Tannenbaum's psychosocial filigree of factors, Feldman's co-incidence, Gagné's differentiated model, and Piirto's pyramid.

### Tannenbaum's Model

Tannenbaum's (1983, 1991) psychological model is a five-pointed star whose arms represent clusters of factors necessary to produce excellence: general intelligence (G), special aptitudes (A), nonintellective traits and attributes (NI), environment (E), and chance (CH). Each of the five clusters must operate at least at threshold level. If any one of the

---

<sup>1</sup>I wish to thank Dr. David Henry Feldman for helpful discussions of this complex subject.

*Manuscript submitted January, 1997.  
Revision accepted November, 1997.*