

"If You're So Smart, Why Do You Need Counseling?"

by Deborah L. Ruf, Ph.D.

Abstract: A reasonably clear perception of self appears to be one prerequisite to advanced emotional development. For people who are outside the norm in any significant way, as gifted people are, obtaining accurate feedback about their abilities, strengths, weaknesses, and the acceptability of their personality characteristics is difficult.

The current article gives examples of the confusing feedback that many gifted adults received during their childhoods, feedback that was often so harmful or confusing as to jeopardize the subjects' sense of both purpose and value.

Such examples reveal some of the issues counselors of the gifted need to address in order to assist their clients toward the achievement of more accurate self-concepts and support them as they try to find meaning, purpose, and higher-level emotional development.

Self-indulgent. Whiny. Weak. Many of the generation who lived through the Great Depression and World War II would admit that they do not understand the current popularity of psychotherapy. If you're depressed, get on with it. Fix it. Change your attitude.

To many people, needing therapy implies lack of strength, self-sufficiency, or competence. In fact, our "G.I." generation views life quite differently than younger generations. According to Strauss and Howe (1991), "Throughout their lives, these G.I.s [the generation] have been America's confident and rational problem-solvers" (p. 261).

They continue,

Such a generation has had little thirst for spiritual conversion, no need for transcending new consciousness...Valuing outer life over inner, G.I.s came of age preferring crisp sex-role definitions...G.I.s matured into a father-worshipping and heavily male-fixated generation. As rising adults, they came to disdain womanish influences on public life...The G.I.s' rift with their own children arose, in substantial part, from the refusal of Boomer youths to accept the exaggerated masculinity of G.I. fathers (p. 264).

The Baby Boomers, who are the focus group of the current paper, have been born into and raised in an unprecedented era of prosperity and relative safety.

If one considers Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1968), Maslow theorized that self-actualization could not even be considered until physiological, safety, belongingness and love needs are met for individuals.

Ironically, the very attitudes and accomplishments of the G.I. generation may have paved the way for the current younger generations to take the time necessary for inner growth and change.

The G.I. generation who underplay their problems and behave as though there is a solution to everything if you just try hard enough has spawned generations who more and more can recognize and admit when they are depressed, angry, sad, or unfulfilled.

Etty Hillesum, a young Dutch Jew who died in the holocaust, recognized that different times allow different kinds of talents and strengths to emerge (1983). In her final entry to her journal prior to her death in a Nazi extermination camp she wrote,

gifted adults, gifted adult personality, psychology of giftedness, gifted and talented books, psychology of creativity

Talent Development Resources

Personal Growth Information - products & programs

Anxiety Relief Solutions

Index / search

Articles

Interviews

Podcasts

Newsletter

Sections :

Coaching Resources

Depression and Creativity

Developing Talent

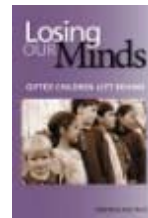
High Ability

Highly Sensitive

The Inner Actor

The Inner Entrepreneur

The Inner Writer



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[The Gifted Adult](#)

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[The Highly Sensitive Person](#)

Elaine N. Aron Ph....

Meaning and Purpose

Teen / Young Adult

Women and Talent

~ ~

I always return to Rilke [philosopher-poet]. It is strange to think that someone so frail and who did most of his writing within protective castle walls, would perhaps have been broken by the circumstances in which we now live. Is that not further testimony that life is finely balanced? Evidence that, in peaceful times and under favourable circumstances, sensitive artists may search for the purest and most fitting expression of their deepest insights so that, during more turbulent and debilitating times, others can turn to them for support and a ready response to their bewildered questions? A response that they are unable to formulate themselves since all their energies are taken up looking after the bare necessities? Sadly, in difficult times we tend to shrug off the spiritual heritage of artists from an "easier" age, with "What use is that sort of thing to us now?"

It is an understandable but shortsighted reaction. And utterly impoverishing. (pp. 242-243).

Terman's longitudinal study group was part of the G.I. generation. According to Terman and the follow-up studies, the gifted group had above average mental health including a low incidence of depression (Terman & Oden, 1947, 1959).

The then-popular notion that giftedness brought with it mental illness or peculiarity was largely debunked by Terman's study. It is possible, though, that the gifted group played the games of the day exceptionally well.

Highly Gifted Adults and Counseling

In the early 1990s I collected case study material from 110 highly gifted men and women between the ages of 20 and 83, three generations, as part of my doctoral dissertation study (Ruf, 1998).

No one over age 60 reported any counseling; nearly a third of subjects between the ages of 40 and 60 sought counseling; and about half of the under-40s had already had some sort of counseling by the time they participated in the study.

It became clear that a generational cohort effect was greatly influencing the viewpoints and outlooks of my subjects. Already needing a data reduction device, I decided to limit the data analysis to people of my own generation, the Baby Boomers.

The subjects quoted for this paper are part of a subset of 41 adults who were between the ages of 40 and 60 (in 1993 at the time of data collection), who have all scored at the 99th percentile and above on standardized tests of intellectual ability, and who all volunteered for an anonymous study of high giftedness in adults.

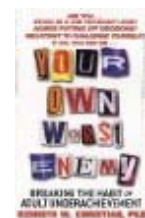
Nearly all the subjects reported some painful experiences relating to their differentness as gifted when they were children. Fully 75% of the subjects wrote about their intellectual struggles to make sense of the world and their place in it.

In fact, the overriding cause of expressed sadness, disappointments, and depression appears to relate to that existential question. When intelligent members of the Baby Boomer generation tried to talk to their similarly intelligent G.I. generation parents about "finding themselves" and other existential questions, it was all too common to hear, "If you're so smart, why can't you figure it out for yourself?"

What makes you think you need counseling?" As a result, guilt and shame were often added to the list of issues with which the study's subjects struggled.



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[Your Own Worst Enemy](#)

Kenneth W. Christi...



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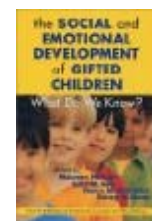


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Within the 41 subject highly gifted group, 13 (nearly 32%) people reported that they received therapeutic counseling. Although several of the excerpts presented in this paper are from people who did not receive counseling, all are reflective of the issues that motivated individual searches for personal growth.

Of the nine people (22%) of the study subjects who, at the time of data gathering, were exhibiting some evidence of higher level development behavior described by Dabrowski (1964), only three of them did not mention having received counseling support, although, unfortunately, it was not a direct question in the study questionnaires.

Incidence of Abuse Among the Gifted

In my dissertation study group of highly gifted adults, 56% reported some degree of abusive treatment in their childhoods. Although approximately half the group reported slappings and spankings - a common form of discipline among this age cohort that I did not include in the abusive category.

Instead, repeated verbal and emotional abuse is included, as are the 19% who reported sexual abuse, the additional 12% who experienced sexual interference (inappropriate touching or adult exposure, for example, that the subjects reported as disturbing to them), and the 15% who described stronger physical abuse.

Three subjects admitted to being outright beaten more than once during their childhoods.

Direct comparisons of abuse for study subjects compared to normal population figures are not possible because statistical incidence of abuse is for reportable, confirmed cases only.

Only one of the 41 subjects wrote that abuse in her home was ever reported to authorities. According to figures reported in 1994 for 1993 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, for all forms of substantiated abuse, about 1% of the population under age 18 was living in reportable, abusive conditions for which authorities were called to intervene.

It seems reasonable to assume that "reportable abuse" accounts for little of actual abuse in most homes.

It is important to note that some subjects described emotional or physical abuse but did not personally identify it as such. When they emphatically stated that they experienced no abuse, I did not include them in the "abused" category for the study.

Whether or not subjects were abused, or perceived themselves as having been abused, was not the most prominent consideration for those seeking counseling.

Feeling depressed, sad, or hopeless were the primary factors that lead subjects into counseling, and for most people, these factors related only peripherally to actual incidence of abuse.

Furthermore, there were as many people who wrote about being depressed who did not seek therapy as those who did.

Understanding Viewpoints Based on Dabrowski Levels

Readers familiar with Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration (see

Volume I, *Advanced Development Journal*, 1989, for an excellent review; see also Clive Hazell's paper in the current journal) know that positive disintegrations are episodes in the maturing individual's inner life where old viewpoints are now seen as questionable rather than naively acceptable.

Although it is probably more likely that it will - at least passingly - occur to highly intelligent people, than for people of more average intellect, that some things that are should not be, my research shows that many intelligent people clearly do not tackle these questions to any substantial degree.

The more self-controlled, "can do" thinking of the G. I. generation and many of their descendants leads many people from that group to make the best of a less than perfect world.

"Making the best of it" is a coping strategy that leaves many of its possessors with an unwillingness to interfere with what appears to work for them; such people are unlikely to seek counseling and are also unlikely to experience advanced inner development.

For others, however, their whole inner world can be turned upside down until they make their own sense of it. Many of them need and seek the support of counselors to guide them through their struggle.

The selected excerpts illustrate progress from the mere questioning and wondering of early emotional development, captured by the question, "Who am I?" to the more advanced, complex viewpoints displayed by people who actively ask, "What exactly is the point of life and what should my role in it be?"

The final section of excerpts illustrates the viewpoints and thought processes of subjects who have achieved advanced levels of emotional reasoning and inner growth.

From the point of view of the therapist it is important to note that these people are not ill, but they are suffering. The therapist needs to provide support, empathy, and guidance as the subjects clarify these existential issues for themselves.

Who Am I?

Degree of giftedness is significantly related to social and emotional adjustment (Gross, 1993, Hollingworth, 1942; Janos & Robinson, 1985). The degree to which the individuals are different from the expected norm affects the way significant people (e.g., parents, teachers, age-mates) in the highly gifted people's environments react to them.

In other words, it is the gifted child's perception of the acceptance, approval, or rejection that leads to the social and emotional adjustment.

A 45-year old woman wrote,

Some saw me as a person with rare insight, others thought I was crazy. It was very hard to see it clearly. I was often confused by the variety of responses. Even reading about giftedness and having my own children identified [as gifted] was confusing. I did not see them as any smarter than I was, so could not see that they could be gifted. Seeing a list of characteristics made it very clear that I was probably in the gifted range, yet it was hard to accept. It feels like I am boasting, or somehow trying to claim something I have not earned. There is something bad about claiming to be smart, it is arrogant and boastful. I have less confusion now, but there are still beliefs that make it hard to say I am anything but average. There is nothing wrong with being average, but somehow there is an idea that there is something wrong to see yourself as anything more than average.

The desire to underplay the abilities of the gifted child so that relatives would not feel bad was common in the subjects' families.

Unfortunately, the gifted children ended up feeling depressed and less valued than those whose feelings were being protected.

Three women, all in their early 40s, reported feedback they received from well-meaning parents and relatives who tried to keep them from feeling superior to others:

My mother never wanted me to feel superior, so she always told me that I was not terribly smart, just good at taking tests. Perhaps that explains why I had such a distorted view.

My mother told me, as an adult, that she didn't praise me [as a child] because she thought it was obvious that I was outstanding and she didn't want me to get a swelled head.

I received lots of mixed messages, even from my extended family. As soon as my father would "brag" about me in some way, grandmother or aunts would be quick to point out something one of the distant cousins had done. It was their attempt to keep me from getting a big head, I think.

A 51-year old man spoke for many of the subjects when he described his own situation during his school years:

I took the usual number of aptitude-type tests, and, from the reactions of teachers and principals, did extremely well. But, nobody would tell me how well I did, or who else did well...the stated grounds were that I would immediately change into someone with an insufferable ego.

A 43-year old woman wrote about how her apparently higher intelligence seemed to cause problems for her family. She is one of the subjects who did not write about seeking therapy and gave evidence in many places that she wanted to handle her feelings and worries in her own way.

Her "can do" attitude is more common in the G.I. generation than her own.

At the core, I always felt loved, but I seldom felt that anything I did was quite good enough. My parents bent over backwards not to over-praise my accomplishments so that none of my siblings were hurt. They explained it to me and I understood it intellectually, but still felt bad when there was much more fuss made over someone else's three "A's" than my card full. Looking back, I don't know how they could have done any better, but it did feed my perfectionistic tendencies. Overall, I did know they believed in me, which was terribly important.

One of the older subjects, 58 at the time of the study, still experienced a sense of anger over the way she was treated in childhood. She experienced father-daughter incest during childhood and was seeing counselors her entire adult life.

It appears that the sexual and emotional abuse issues received, of necessity, such priority in her treatment that she has been unable to effectively address her giftedness issues. She wrote,

When I was a preschooler I was always drawing stories and did not care to socialize with other children. My mother was told that I was a genius--she cried and said she just wanted a normal child...A friend of mine in the third grade thought I was weird because I skipped all over my books and read ahead in assignments. In high school I was considered weird because I only listened to classical music and read extra books that were not required. I felt there was something wrong with me. I was not good-looking enough, I was too tall, I was awkward, I was shy, I had a lousy personality, I was weird, I wore glasses.

It is true that many people suffer similar feelings as they are growing up and learning about themselves.

What makes these stories particularly salient is that giftedness, even high giftedness, does not automatically make individuals better able to interpret their personal worlds.

The theme of strangeness and loneliness ran throughout the case studies. During the formative early years of school, most of the gifted children learned that they did not seem to fit in and that something must be wrong with them.

At least half the subjects did not discover until adulthood that the oddness and alienation they were feeling were due to a difference from their age-mates in intellectual functioning.

Additional subjects described the pain that lack of information caused them. A 57-year old man wrote,

I was aware [of being more intelligent than others], but thought it more of a "strangeness" than a qualitative difference, thus thought of myself as not fitting in. Nevertheless, it was not an extreme isolation, just a sense of being "peripheral" to mainstream.

Three more men remembered their feelings of not fitting in:

I had interests that did not seem to match up with anyone else's interests, I did not fit in, and I sometimes felt lonely.

To some extent I always felt like a social outcast. Felt I was just not liked by peers--something wrong with me.

General feeling of being "different" in several ways--interests, thoughts I thought only I was having.

Two women further noted how their intellectually different personalities and interests often left them with an array of bewildering feedback:

I often thought I was really stupid because I couldn't understand why teachers taught things that I thought were obvious. I thought that other children were smarter because they saw complexities that I now know never existed. Instead of realizing that I had grasped the concepts quickly or knew them already, I thought I was missing some subtle point that confused others and I was too dense to see it.

I always thought being smart was an advantage. I didn't know why I didn't fit in. I always felt there were social rules that everyone but I understood.

One of the male subjects echoed her observation:

I did not understand the social issues in high school life--dressing choices, etc.

High intelligence often places the young person in an untenable position with those in authority. Silverman (1990, p.175) summarizes Hollingworth regarding this problem:

Negativism toward authority tends to develop when the gifted child perceives those in authority as illogical, irrational, erroneous, or unjust (1939, 1940a, 1942). "It is especially unfortunate, therefore, that so many gifted children have in authority over them persons of no special fitness for the task, who cannot gain or keep the respect of these good thinkers" (Hollingworth, 1942, p.261).

The gifted child and emerging young adult may appear to be a know-it-all

or have a bad attitude as a result of encounters that involve vastly different perspectives.

For example, a woman who now runs her own small business reports the following incident:

I began a master's thesis in mass communications, but quit when the mass media department, in 1980, refused my master's thesis topic, "Computers as a Mass Medium". The department contended that computers were not mass media.

The next two subjects are further examples of people whose lack of information regarding intellectual differences led to issues with authority.

Both of these people are defensive, which may be a result of insufficient recognition or understanding of their abilities earlier in their lives.

The apparent result is that they were unaware that some people really do think and reason differently than they do and they were resentful of an "ineptitude" they did not understand.

Their lack of compassion and understanding, which certainly manifested itself as intolerance, coupled with defensiveness, made them personally unpopular in the workplace and continued their pattern of being under-appreciated.

A man who by age 52 still experienced difficulties with those in authority explained his attitude as follows:

I regard myself as "normal"--this created (and creates) a problem in that I became disillusioned with people around me who constantly fell short of what I regarded as "their potential"--teachers who could not, or would not, attempt to answer complex questions--people who seemed to have no passion, people who took the beauty of life for granted.

A 50-year old woman described a familiar problem among the gifted adult subjects:

My biggest problems with jobs is when there is rigidity, stupidity and control on the part of those in charge--and, unfortunately, these are the very type of people who tend to rise to the top in my field. I quit, I come dangerously close to quitting, or get fired...because I speak up.

Many gifted children take negative messages about their gifted personalities into adulthood. Their asynchrony of development (Silverman, 1993) causes problems when adults assume more advanced maturity than the young, highly verbal child possesses.

A woman who by her early 50s, with the help of counseling, had figured out that she was not really a bad little girl after all reported the following:

I was often taken to the cloakroom and shaken by my second grade teacher, who left fingernail marks in my arms every time; she lost no opportunity to catch me in a mistake and ridicule me in front of the class--"and you think you're so smart!" ...And as my mother said, when she refused to take my part and go to the school to defend me, "You let your eyes show how you feel about her and what she does--so what do you expect?"

A 47-year old woman who also sought counseling to put her experiences into perspective wrote,

I was inquisitive, which both parents interpreted as rude and challenging to their authority. I was smart so they confused my ability to learn with a capability for understanding my actions in a greater context. Therefore, they attached adult motivations to even the simplest questions of a 4-year old.

A 49-year old woman who still had many unresolved issues and was experiencing great depression at the time, wrote about her efforts to make sense of her experiences:

My father mostly yelled, criticized harshly and disapproved. My mother was quite harsh with me and used physical punishment and disparagement, too. Both were somewhat inconsistent and moody and both had high expectations for perfect obedience and no expression of anger or protest from me. I never felt loved or approved of. I often felt that if I'd only been a bit more perfect or good, then they'd love me, but they never did.

What Exactly Is the Point Of My Life?

The remaining excerpts all come from among the nine subjects who have struggled with inner growth and the advanced levels of emotional development described by Dabrowski (1964).

All the gifted adults who sought counseling took an active role in their own growth independent of therapy; and for the three who did not utilize counseling support, their paths were otherwise quite similar.

They, like the counseling recipients, read widely, attended conferences, even sought degrees in counseling, psychology, theology, and philosophy.

One fairly young woman, aged 40, admits she came from a supportive, nurturing family that probably gave her the freedom to explore existential questions earlier in life than most people. She sought counseling as an adult to help her with her emotional journey.

I had my first developmental crisis at age 10 when I felt that my life had no meaning. I considered committing suicide with the shotgun Dad kept in the basement but decided not to because I thought that would make my parents sad. I resolved the crisis by deciding I had two self-chosen purposes in my life:

1. To help others.
2. To have pleasure myself.

Shallow and simplistic as these goals now seem, when I've had mid-life crises since then, I've continued to come up with these same very basic life goals.

I guess I should comment on how becoming an atheist was a turning point. Once I decided there was no god, I had no foundation for my values, which was largely Judeo-Christian-based. So I had to rethink all my moral decisions from a basis I decided for myself. I'm still doing this, and it's hard.

Another 40-year old from a background where he felt loved, if not understood, the next subject knew his IQ from an early age but did not know the larger impact of what it meant.

When my daughter received a WISC-R score of 150 I began to explore this issue of giftedness. I had essentially discounted my own IQ [a CTMM of 172] as something in the past. As I studied I was confronted with my own life story, my own issues, my own giftedness. For a long time I was unable to discuss my own giftedness without crying.

He described how his new insights led him on a new journey of emotional exploration and growth, one that has been supported by therapy. In response to a question about where he grew up he wrote,

My answer is that I am still growing. The idea that a human creature grows up between time A and time B and then stops growing is a fascinating concept. Who started speaking of life in that fashion? It only really makes sense if time A is birth and time B is death. I know that it seems painfully obvious when stated so bluntly but listen to how we speak, look at how we really behave. Now, stepping down from my soapbox, I was raised by my parents and lived

in [small Midwestern town] until I went away to college.

Another counseling recipient, the woman quoted here was 52 when she participated in the study. She wrote about how she would change the way her parents treated her:

I'd have them express love and support rather than criticism and demands for achievement. I was motivated internally to do well and didn't need the constant demands for perfection. An A- was a problem, a B a disaster. If I wasn't first at something there was hardly any point in doing it.

I wish I'd had more hugs and more play and fewer rules for good character. Good character meant being orderly, neat, respectful, quiet and unfailingly rational. I was messy, disorganized, challenging to authority, loud and emotional. I was also imaginative, funny, bright and loving, and if those traits had been recognized as much as the others were criticized, I would have had a very different view of myself.

A 46-year old subject who dropped out of the study returned to complete the questionnaires when he was about 50.

His experience is, I think, a wonderful firsthand account of what Dabrowski described as a "positive disintegration" and a resulting "personality transformation".

I would like to share with you some of things that have happened since I dropped out of your study some years ago. I spent a year or so crying almost every day, then met with a psychologist for another year, but got frustrated with the psychologist because I felt he wasn't doing anything, just listening. I started reading psychology books. I have now read about 30 books on psychology, ethics, and relationships. I do not feel depressed now. I am slowly changing my beliefs about personal responsibility, authenticity and tolerance, and integrating these changes into my life. I feel that forms of authoritarianism and intolerance have been a major problem for me. I would like to accelerate the change process, but I resist and take time to integrate one change before I take another step.

He wrote more about his own process:

I think that my irrational feelings, prejudices and sexual stereotypes distorted my view of the world. The taboo about discussing sex and my aversion to people meant that there were very few avenues open to changing my viewpoints and beliefs...I feel there has always been a great variety of choices available to me, but that I have rarely had the courage to make the choices. I have let events or other people decide for me. I chose not to choose. I am changing that now and I am going to keep changing it.

Two women, both in their mid-40s and veterans of much counseling and the personality transformation of inner growth described by Dabrowski (1964), complete the picture of the usually painful but rewarding journey toward emotional maturity.

The first woman answered an item on the study questionnaire about how she would encourage a troubled gifted young adult who was contemplating suicide:

I would try to start with how changes are so subtle that even while they are happening, it is hard to see them, but more and more happen, and when there are enough, there is a change that appears to be sudden and major. While life is often painful, especially for those who see more and don't shut it out, all those pains add to the depth of our understanding and enrich our lives when the little changes add up to one big leap...I would add that every person fills a hole in history, that everyone affects the life of every person around him or her.

Although I started the data collection in 1993, my own emotional growth process made the completion of the data analysis and write-up of the study results fill about five years.

The following subject quoted here took advantage of my extended time frame and completed her questionnaires over a 5-year period. She admitted that she used both the experience of writing about her life and the five years it required to help her in her own growth process.

Although she was not familiar with Dabrowski's theories when she wrote these passages, the similarity of her words to Hazell's description of advanced emotional reasoning described in the previous paper is clear.

I have learned that I never really need to be lonely if I call upon my connections to participate. Most are glad to support me. My mistake early on was to believe that there were these special friends who were "kindred spirits," and I used to "throw people away" when I discovered that they did not complete me in that fashion. I have learned that no one--no matter how close (even my dearest daughter and husband) can ever be the person who is you. So you invite people to participate at the level that they can. And if you feel continually depleted by an individual, you ask that person less often than someone who fulfills you.

She continued,

What is most important to me is to grow, change, and be part of something beyond my own little life. To contribute to the world, even if in some small, unseeable way. It does not bother me, for instance, to have people not recognize me or know I was the founder of this association or on the founding board of that program. I am happy to see the thing take a shape of its own, independent of its beginnings.

In conclusion, the same woman described her clear understanding of herself and her goals for her life in the world as she now understands it. The five subjects in the study who had reached this level wrote virtually the same philosophies.

In the following excerpt she wrote what she would tell a young person about life:

Learn to trust yourself--no matter who disagrees with you. What looks to your parents like craziness might be creativity, what looks like nonconformance might be individuality, what looks like antisocial isolation might be a need to reflect and contemplate. Always rely and depend on yourself, never on things outside yourself--like food, drugs, alcohol, movies, or friends.

Friends are there to share a journey, share joy or sorrow, but they are not there to lead or follow. And always know that the answer to your problems, the answer to your questions is inside yourself, because as you develop knowledge to ask the question, so you are developing the power to answer it.

You can do anything you want to do, and an academic grade no more reflects your interest or ability to succeed in a subject than your age reflects your maturity. A subject you understand poorly today may catch your imagination and prove your genius tomorrow.

Never, never, never let anyone tell you who you are or what you can be, no matter what the evidence is to you. You can change yourself to be anything you focus on. What you think you are is what you are. What you dream is what you become. Never turn your thoughts or dreams over to anyone else.

And finally, forgive yourself, love yourself. Hatred and resentment will tear away at your creativity and imagination until nothing is left. Forgive others for what they do to you. Remember that everyone is doing the best job they can with what they have to work with. Expect a miracle every day, and the world will unfold miraculously before you.

Summary and Conclusions

The Baby Boomer subjects discussed in this paper are unlike their parents in that a higher proportion of them have chosen to question much about life.

Such a stance often put them odds with their parents. People of high

intelligence often derive most of their sadness through existential discrepancies, such as "Where and how do I fit into the world?"

Their G.I. generation parents did not understand this type of questioning and thought it foolish for their children to be depressed for these reasons.

In fact, a high number of subjects' parents contributed to their children's confusion over the existential question of "Who am I?" by working hard to make their children "fit in."

Best estimates are that advanced emotional development is relatively rare within a normal population, probably considerably less than 10%.

My doctoral research indicates that nine subjects (nearly 22%) of my highly gifted adult subjects attained advanced levels of emotional development as described by Dabrowski (1964), thereby indicating that high intelligence helps toward such development.

There is no reason to assume that the levels of both emotional and physical abuse experienced by my subjects are significantly different from an intellectually normal population.

It is important to note, however, that although advanced development was achieved by subjects who rated themselves as both abused and nonabused, the majority of either group who achieved advanced development also received counseling.

Only one abused subject, of the 23 abused subjects, who did not receive counseling reached an advanced emotional level of development, and only two nonabused subjects, of the 18 nonabused subjects, who did not receive counseling reached advanced levels.

The wide range among the subjects in eventual emotional maturity makes it clear that emotional maturity and high intelligence are two separate entities.

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Deborah L. Ruf, Ph.D. founded [Educational Options](#) to "help the families of gifted children, particularly highly and profoundly gifted children, to know where to begin their search for answers related to gifted issues."

She is author of [Losing Our Minds: Gifted Children Left Behind](#)

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