

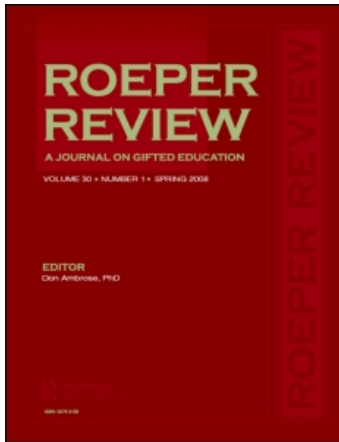
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## The Essential Elements of Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration and How They Are Connected

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## The Essential Elements of Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration and How They Are Connected

Cheryl M. Ackerman

The purpose of this article is to present Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration (TPD; Dabrowski, 1964) in a thorough and accessible manner so that those in the gifted community can better understand it and its usefulness to the field of gifted studies. The article goes beyond what has typically been presented in recent research literature on the theory and discusses the major theoretical elements and how they are interconnected, to give a taste of the theory's complexity. In the article, levels of development, developmental dynamisms, overexcitabilities, and other foundational aspects of the theory are described. In addition, the author provides examples of how TPD has already been used with gifted populations and challenges the reader to look at the interdisciplinary applications that exist beyond the boundaries of gifted studies.

The purpose of this article is to present Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration (TPD; 1964) in a thorough and accessible manner so that those in the gifted community can gain a better understanding of it and its usefulness to the field of gifted studies. Though many professionals working with and studying gifted individuals are familiar with the overexcitabilities Dabrowski describes, they are only part of a larger more complex theory describing human development. This article provides an overview of the essential elements of the theory, how they are interconnected, and a "taste" of its complexity. TPD has depth and breadth that cannot be conveyed in a single journal article. Each construct presented is complex and the reader is encouraged to delve into Dabrowski's writings for a more complete understanding of the theory.

Throughout the article I have used quotes from Dabrowski's original works and the works of those who worked closely with him, in some cases to a greater degree than is typically found in articles such as this. However, these writings are often so clear or so nuanced that paraphrasing them would diminish their meaning too greatly. Finally, I invite you to consider how different parts apply to your work with gifted individuals. Though the reader is tasked to make connections

between theory and practice, some suggestions and pertinent questions are described toward the end of the article.

TPD is a developmental personality theory that describes the factors contributing to development, the process of development, and the characteristics of people at different levels of development. TPD was developed out of Kazimierz Dabrowski's experience as a doctor of psychiatry and psychology and over two decades of clinical and biographical studies of patients, artists, writers, members of religious orders, and gifted children and adolescents (Kawczak, 1970). His experiences during both World Wars also played a major role in the development of his theory. Dabrowski wanted to explain "the juxtaposition of inhuman humans with those who were sensitive, capable of sacrifice, [and] courageous" (Dabrowski, 1975, p. 233). Dabrowski sought to describe the radically different types of people in society and the mechanisms that facilitate and inhibit individual development leading to these differences.

Dabrowski wrote: "Superficiality, vulgarity, absence of inner conflict, quick forgetting of grave experience, became repugnant to me. I searched for people and attitudes . . . that were authentically ideal, saturated with immutable values, those who represented 'what ought to be' against 'what is'" (1975, p. 234). In addition, Dabrowski became interested in "the intensity and richness of thought and feeling, vividness of imagination, moral and emotional sensitivity [of people whose] . . . interactions with the world . . . seemed above average in intensity, duration and frequency of occurrence" (Piechowski & Cunningham, 1985, p. 154).

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## FOUNDATIONS OF THE THEORY

### Positive Disintegration, an Oxymoron at First Glance

Positive disintegration is the name of the developmental process by which a higher-level personality structure replaces a lower-level structure. It is disintegrative because the existing personality structure must come apart and positive because it contributes to development. Dabrowski (1964) stated that “the disintegration process, through loosening and even fragmenting the internal psychic environment, through conflicts within the internal environment and with the external environment, is the ground for the birth and development of a higher psychic structure” (pp. 5–6). Dabrowski further suggested that any negative aspect of the disintegrative process is marginal and unimportant when considered against the development of personality to higher levels. However, all disintegrative processes are not developmental and “chronic disintegration of mental functions is associated with negative disintegration” (Dabrowski, 1996, p. 13), the results of which can be serious mental illness and suicide.

It is worth noting that some authors writing on Dabrowski’s theory refer to it as the *theory of emotional development* (e.g., Baum, Olenchak, & Owen, 1998; Miller, 1994; Silverman, 1994). Though the importance of emotions in TPD is significant, and it is a theory describing emotional development, Dabrowski emphasized the importance of the central process of development by calling his theory the theory of positive disintegration.

### Roots of the Theory

In the first English translation of Dabrowski’s writings on TPD (1964), the work of three individuals who provided conceptual underpinnings for TPD, Jackson, Mazurkiewicz, and Piaget, was described. Jackson described three principles related to the evolution of the central nervous system, two of which Dabrowski felt were compatible with his theory: “Evolution is the transition from the simplest toward the most complex centers . . . [and] . . . is the transition from more automatic toward more voluntary functions” (Dabrowski, 1964, p. 103). What is important to draw from Jackson’s work is that the most complex processes are the least automatic (Piechowski, 1975). You will see how this applies to TPD when the details of multilevelness, dynamisms, and higher levels of development are described later in this article.

Mazurkiewicz emphasized “qualitative changes in the development of the nervous system and the significance of emotions as directing forces” (Dabrowski, 1964, p. 85). He also described what he referred to as “own” forces that are “more than simple reflexes to a stimulus” (Aronson, 1964, p. xii). Dabrowski integrated Mazurkiewicz’s emphasis on self-determination (own forces) into his conception of an autonomous factor influencing development, as well as the

importance of emotions in the process of development. Jean Piaget’s work focused on reasoning development in children and emphasized that reasoning ability gradually unfolds for a child. This progressive unfolding is what influenced Dabrowski’s theory.

Dabrowski (1967) drew additional conceptual underpinnings from the work of von Monakow, specifically von Monakow’s “theory of the structure and functions of instincts” (p. 49). Von Monakow’s differentiation between lower level and more evolved forms of basic instincts, such as self-preservation and sexuality, shows another place from which Dabrowski’s notions of multilevelness and hierarchization were developed.

TPD can be further understood by examining the psychological theorists who Dabrowski felt were sympathetic to his own thinking and those who were not. The theorists to whom Dabrowski was receptive, because they aligned with his multilevel understanding of human phenomena, included Jackson, Sherrington, Jung, and Rorschach. Dabrowski considered psychoanalytic theories, Pavlov’s theory, behaviorism, and some of Adler’s ideas “incomprehensible” because they did not include multilevel components (Dabrowski, 1975).

### Fundamental Differentiating Characteristics

There are four fundamental characteristics I would like to describe that differentiate TPD from many other theories of development. First, development is considered nonontogenetic, that is, unrelated to physical maturation (Dabrowski, 1972). Development through the levels is not automatic and one’s age is not an indication of one’s developmental level. Therefore, some younger people will be at higher levels of development than their elders. In addition, not all people are born at the lowest level of development and there is no guarantee that a person will develop past the level into which he is born. Dabrowski, in fact, suggested that the vast majority of people in the world were at the lowest two levels of development described in his theory, and that only very few reached the highest level.

The second characteristic is the role that emotion plays in development. Theories of human development may emphasize the importance of cognitive, societal, or physical contributions to development. However, Dabrowski focused on the important developmental role of emotions. He went so far as to say, “The emotional sphere at every level of development is the decisive factor that determines and controls human activity” (Dabrowski, Kawczak, & Piechowski, 1970, p. 112). This is clearly articulated in his description of the levels of development, developmental forces (dynamisms), and the developmental emphasis on emotional overexcitability, all of which are addressed later in this article. Dabrowski’s view of psychoneurosis and conflict is the third fundamental differentiating characteristic of his theory. He felt that many conflicts and forms of mental illness generally thought to

have negative developmental consequences were necessary for growth. According to Dabrowski (1967),

Conflicts play an extremely important role in the development of personality. Of all types of conflicts the inner conflict is particularly significant. . . . Without the disturbance and disequilibrium brought about by nervousness and psychoneurosis, the process of personality development cannot be realized. (p. vi)

Dabrowski's definition of psychoneurosis is rather different than that of most in his field. He defined psychoneuroses as "those processes, syndromes and functions that express inner and external conflicts, and positive maladjustment of an individual in the process of accelerated development" (1973, p. 151). For Dabrowski, psychoneuroses contain the nuclei necessary for a rich psychic life. They constitute the beginning phases of development, not, as most would say, the beginning of mental illness (Dabrowski, 1972).

The fourth characteristic is Dabrowski's premise that values are not relativistic. Dabrowski, with Kawczak and Piechowski (1970), proposed that human emotional and instinctive functions exist at different levels of development and that this level of functioning can be seen in an individual's goals, actions, and value system. That is, not all value systems are considered equally "right." He believed that different levels of psychological development exist; that each level has its own instinctual and emotional expressions; and that these expressions lead to different sets of values for those with primitive mental functions and those who are more refined. Therefore, Dabrowski stated, it is unreasonable to put all conceptions of right and wrong on equal footing: "The relativistic idea that value judgments of each human individual count the same, the idea that there is a kind of 'equality' in valuation among men, is not only completely mistaken, but leads to manslaughter on a mass scale" (p. xi). One can presume that Dabrowski's statement comes, at least in part, from his first-hand experience in two world wars. How can Hitler's acts of mass slaughter have the same value as the acts of people who risked their lives to save those people Hitler intended to annihilate (Block & Drucker, 1992)?

### Factors Influencing Development

Dabrowski (1996) described three sets of factors that influence individual development, two of which are typically seen in most theories of development, heredity and environment, and a unique autonomous factor. Hereditary endowment is the first factor influencing personality development and consists of "the genes and the permanent psychical changes in the organism's constitution which may occur during pregnancy, birth, or soon after . . . [and] represents innate constitutional characteristics and potentialities of the organism" (p. 14). Dabrowski, with Kawczak and Piechowski

(1970), said that constitutional elements are recognizable in children as young as 1 year old and can be clearly identified in children between 1 and 3 years of age.

Second factor influences are environmental and include the social influences brought to bear by individuals and groups of people (Dabrowski, 1996). The nuclear and extended family, educational and other institutions, religious affiliations, and all cultural influences at the local, national, and international level contribute to second factor influences. These influences interact with an individual's innate psychological constitution (factor 1) and can either weaken or strengthen it. Dabrowski et al. (1970) described three possible interactions between the first two factors:

If the developmental potential [factor 1] is distinctly positive or negative, the influence of the environment is less [developmentally] important. If the developmental potential does not exhibit any distinct quality, the influence of the environment is important and it may go in either direction. If the developmental potential is weak or difficult to specify, the influence of the environment may prove decisive, positively or negatively. (p. 34)

It is important to note that *positive environmental conditions* does not mean a life defined solely by wealth, emotional support, and other characteristics typically considered ideal. Dabrowski et al. (1970) were clear that inner conflicts and some unfulfilled basic needs are necessary for development.

The third factor is where Dabrowski's theory differs from most developmental theories. According to Dabrowski (1996), the third factor is not present in all individuals. It "represents those autonomous processes which a person brings into [his] development, such as inner conflict, self-awareness, choice and decision in relation to personal growth, [and] conscious inner psychic transformation" (p. 14). Though the third factor is shaped by both hereditary endowment and positive environmental conditions, Dabrowski et al. (1970) clearly stated that the third factor is not solely derived from them.

[The] third factor arises from cross-influences of the first two factors, but represents a new ability, irreducible to its sources. The third factor affirms and accepts some innate drives and some social patterns while it denies, rejects and relegates to atrophy other drives and stimuli. It is critical, evaluative, and selective. The shaping of a free, independent and authentic person is unthinkable without [it]. (p. 25)

The importance Dabrowski et al. (1970) placed on the third factor is unmistakable. As a group, the autonomous factors, or "own forces," are the strongest force in human development. "They denote the transition from that which is primitive, instinctive, automatic, to that which is deliberate, creative and conscious" (p. 35). Finally, it is essential to remember that there is nothing automatic about the emergence of the third factor influences. For most people,

development is restricted to influence by the first two (Piechowski, 1975).

### Developmental Potential

Dabrowski's (1972) theory states that each person is born with a set capacity for development called *developmental potential*, described as,

the constitutional endowment which determines the character and extent of mental growth possible for a given individual. The developmental potential can be assessed on the basis of the following components: psychic overexcitability (q.v.), special abilities and talents, and autonomous factors (notably the Third factor). (p. 293)

These components can be considered some of the innate material comprising factor I. Overexcitabilities are the most commonly examined component of developmental potential and the focus of gifted studies research (see Ackerman & Nian, 2008). However, because developmental potential has multiple components, OEs should not be used as its sole measure (Mika, 2005).

Though the degree to which a person has achieved his or her potential and the degree to which his or her potential seems evident can vary, it does not change throughout the lifespan (Piechowski, 1975). In addition, for development to progress beyond the lowest levels, an individual must possess some "multilevel nuclei"; otherwise, development is restricted to the lower levels. This will be described in more detail in the following sections on multilevelness and developmental levels.

### Multilevelness and Hierarchy of Values

A fundamental premise of TPD is that behavior, thought, and emotion have qualitatively different expressions at different levels of development and are based on individual or group values. Some are considered higher, whereas others are considered lower. Dabrowski et al. (1970) called this *multilevelness* and this concept of higher and lower can be applied to all behaviors, thoughts, and emotions (e.g., altruism, love, courage, self-preservation). At the time when the third factor begins influencing development, an individual begins differentiating between the lower and higher paths of thought, emotion, and action and an authentic hierarchy of values.

According to Dabrowski et al. (1970), prior to developing a hierarchy of values, people experience a *unilevel* personality structure. They described it as unconscious, lacking a hierarchy of values, and influenced by biological and environmental forces. This is in comparison to a *multilevel* personality structure, which Dabrowski described as conscious, authentic, including the development of a hierarchy of values, and influenced by autonomous forces.

It is important to understand that multilevel structures do not derive from unilevel structures in a natural or automatic progression.

In unilevel disintegration conflicts are horizontal, the opposing tendencies of equal value; everything is relative, arbitrary, governed by moment and circumstance. In multilevel disintegration the conflicts are vertical, the opposing tendencies of lower and higher value ("what is" and "what ought to be"): relativism and chance yield to a developmental hierarchy of autonomous direction and autonomous choice. (Piechowski, 1975, p. 295)

The process of positive disintegration is how a person moves from a unilevel personality structure to a multilevel one, and for this to happen, a person must possess multilevel nuclei.

### Developmental Dynamisms

Though Dabrowski (1972) described three broad factors that influence individual development, he also detailed numerous internal processes present during development that facilitate growth. He called these processes *dynamisms* and defined them as "biological or mental force[s] controlling behavior and its development. [They are] instincts, drives, and intellectual processes combined with emotions" (p. 294). Though some dynamisms are active in only one developmental level, most can be active in more than one. Selected dynamisms will be described as they relate to the five levels of development.

## LEVELS OF DEVELOPMENT

Dabrowski described five levels of personality development as "structural conceptualizations . . . [each with] a characteristic constellation of intrapsychic dynamisms" (Piechowski, 1975, p. 259). Dabrowski's levels of development are different from common conceptions of developmental stages like those described in Piaget's work. There are two characteristics that distinguish the two: First, in TPD an individual can begin the process of development at a level other than the lowest level. So, the personality structure and developmental dynamisms of a child may indicate that he is at level II or III. The second difference between TPD and most stage theories is the possibility of regressing to a lower level. Given the arduous process of development occurring during disintegration, it is possible to move to a lower level, even temporarily (Dabrowski, 1996). Dabrowski referred to this as *positive regression*, though he did not consider every regression positive.

In the process of development, a person's personality structure is often characterized as bridging more than one level. However, though the structures of neighboring levels

can coexist, they are in conflict; therefore, growth is not a simple transition. "The conflict is resolved and the 'transition' [from one level to the next] is accomplished when one of the structures is either eliminated, or comes under complete control of the structure of another level" (Piechowski, 1975, p. 259). Further, personality development does not progress consistently over time. "There are periods of great intensity and disequilibrium (psychoneuroses, depression, creative process), and there are periods of equilibrium" (p. 259).

Again, unilevel and multilevel personality structures are qualitatively different types of developmental functioning, and "the two structures have nothing in common. Consequently, there is no way in which to produce a multilevel structure out of all possible unilevel ones. Unilevel times unilevel times unilevel remains unilevel" (Piechowski, 1975, p. 265). Increasing or intensifying the processes at the two lowest levels will not result in multilevel development. Some external influence must facilitate development.

The levels of development can also be described as integrated or disintegrated. Levels I and V are cohesive personality structures essentially devoid of internal conflict and characterized as primarily integrated personality structures. Levels II–IV are not cohesive due to internal and external conflicts and are characterized by various degrees and forms of disintegrative, often developmental, processes (dynamisms). These conflicts will be described later as they relate to specific levels of development and their corresponding dynamisms. In addition, as each level is described below, either limited examples of people are provided or the reader is directed to accessible literature for further exploration.

### Level I—Primary (Primitive) Integration

Primary integration is the lowest level personality structure described by Dabrowski. Individuals at this level have a cohesive, integrated personality lacking inner conflict and self-reflection. Dabrowski et al. described it as "automatic and impulsive, determined by primitive, innate drives" (1970, p. 21). Self-interest is the primary motivation for people at this level. "Behavior is oriented toward the satisfaction of basic needs and is in all its aspects egocentric, such as striving for positions of recognition and power" (Piechowski, 1975, p. 260). People at level I exhibit no real empathy and consideration for others. Conflict is external and its form and degree are determined by how well the individual fits into society. Those with a better fit will experience less conflict. People at this level can be average, "normal" people or psychopaths, depending on how well they fit into the social system. Their hierarchy of values does not conform to Dabrowski's ideas of what is higher and lower. What is of greater value to them is that which results in providing their own needs. Other people are seen as good or bad based on their usefulness in meeting the level I person's needs.

Should an individual at level I also have a highly developed intellect, he or she could be a serious danger to society.

There are no active dynamisms at the level of primary integration and the strongest influence on behavior is the individual's hereditary endowment. "Disintegration of this primitive structure is possible only if there are nuclei of psychoneurotic traits, or sensitivity, which are acted upon by very strong positive influence of a highly developed environment" (Dabrowski et al., 1970, p. 21).

Those corporate leaders, now incarcerated for manipulating financial aspects of their companies for their own benefit with total disregard for how their behavior effects others around them, are excellent examples of people at this lowest level. However, there are also many people at level I who are fine citizens having homes, jobs, and families. Low-level development is not synonymous with being a bad person and it does not prevent a person from becoming an upstanding person. Piechowski (2008) describes an adolescent boy with limited developmental potential but a nearly optimal environment supporting trust and autonomy. Despite limited developmental potential, he was "self-reliant, responsible, endowed with a sense of fairness, well-liked as a team member and as a leader, unafraid of authority, and virtually free from adolescent conflict and rebellion" (p. 54).

### Level II—Unilevel Disintegration

Individuals at level II are beginning to see that there are multiple value systems, all of which are considered equally valid. Because no values are seen as better or worse, individuals at this level are susceptible to social opinion. "Rigidity [at level I] is replaced by hesitation, doubt, wavering attitudes, and changing likes and dislikes" (Piechowski, 1975, p. 260). Individuals at level II experience a great deal of vacillation from competing values in their environment. For example, they would feel great pressure from important individuals in their lives and would have difficulty deciding whose views to adopt. Because they have no mechanism to evaluate these competing options, they experience internal discomfort. This discomfort signals the beginning of a fledgling hierarchy of values.

At level II, two developmental dynamisms are active: ambivalences and ambitendencies. Ambivalences are wavering and changeable individual feelings. Ambitendencies are the individual's inconsistent behaviors. Both reflect the lack of personality cohesion seen in level I. Shame and guilt are also present in level II development; however, they are not considered dynamisms, as they are in level III, because they do not contribute to individual growth yet. At level II, shame and guilt are experienced in relation to external expectations and do not propel the individual toward inner reflection and hierarchization of values (Dabrowski, 1996). "Because of the general looseness and lack of hierarchical structure at this level of development, it can result in

the most severe mental disorders: psychosis, schizophrenia, phobias, psychosomatic disorders, alcoholism, or drug addiction” (Piechowski, 1975, p. 261).

Michael Piechowski (2008) describes the complexity of level II: He stated that level II can exist as a partial integration and therefore be somewhat stable or as constant oscillations and rather unstable. Stability, characterized by trust in authority or being defined by the external world (e.g., I am my mother’s daughter, husband’s wife, child’s mother), can be shattered, becoming more unstable and open to growth when, for example, an authority figure proves to be untrustworthy, wrong, or abusive. Piechowski suggests that this occurred for our country during the Vietnam War but can happen in a relationship, family, or religious institution. One of several examples Piechowski discusses is a woman who believed that following the rules prescribed by society and the church would make her happy, yet she was not. When her religious leader had no answers for her, she realized she needed to look inward to find them.

### Level III—Spontaneous Multilevel Disintegration

Spontaneous multilevel disintegration is the first level where a hierarchy of values, as defined by Dabrowski, begins to form. The developmental process at this point does not begin intentionally, so multilevel disintegration has a spontaneous beginning. At level III, an authentic hierarchy of values forms and “the individual no longer merely reacts to ‘what is’ in the outside world trying to conform to it, but there emerges a sense of ‘what ought to be’—a sense of what is worthwhile, what is of value” (Hague, 1986, p. 127). This often results from a significant event that forces the individual to reconsider his inner life and interactions with the world. For example, the death of a loved one, exposure to catastrophic global events like the genocide in the Sudan, or several thoughts or emotions pieced together over time can build to disillusionment enough to catalyze a spontaneous disintegration. No longer are opinions and values considered equal—on a horizontal plain as in unilevel disintegration (level II). An individual begins to see some as better or higher than others vertically differentiating values and beliefs. “Self-evaluation, reflection, intense moral conflicts, perception of the uniqueness of others, and existential anxiety are among the characteristic phenomena at this level of development” (Piechowski, 1975, p. 262). Typically, people at this level of development experience much internal and external conflict, as well as various forms of neuroses (e.g., anxiety, depression, etc.), especially positive maladjustment, a dynamism described later.

Level III is where we see the third factor begin to play a role in development. These “own forces” make self-determination possible allowing an individual to transcend, to a greater or lesser extent, his or her innate constitution and environmental influences (Dabrowski, 1996). As Dabrowski et al. (1970) describe it,

[T]he third factor arises from cross-influences of the first two factors, but represents a new ability, irreducible to its sources. The third factor affirms and accepts some innate drives and some social patterns while it denies, rejects and relegates to atrophy other drives and stimuli. It is critical, evaluative, and selective. The shaping of a free, independent and authentic person is unthinkable without [it]. (p. 25)

There are several dynamisms active at the third level, a number of which focus on how a person reacts to the growing discrepancies between his developing sense of “what ought to be” and the reality of his current thoughts, feelings, and actions. This is significantly different than level II where there is no internally derived sense that any way of being is better than any other. Dissatisfaction with oneself, disquietude with oneself, inferiority toward oneself, and astonishment with oneself are dynamisms that reflect an individual’s struggle between his emerging higher path and frequent inability to be true to it. For example, a child who believes that it is important to help others may be surprised by her own behavior when she chooses to watch television instead of helping her brother get a game from a shelf too high for him to reach. At level III, shame and guilt take on a developmental role not seen in level II (Dabrowski, 1996). Because the evolving person has a vision of who she should be based on internal reflection and consciousness, she has a basis for internal comparison and experiences guilt because of the inconsistencies between her vision and what she does at that time.

At the onset of multilevel disintegration, there are also a number of dynamisms that emerge in a partially developed form becoming fully functional at higher levels. Personality ideal is one such dynamism. Personality ideal is “an image of the ideal self that is not neurotically unrealistic, nor a mere velleity that one would like to strive for ‘sometime but not now’” (Hague, 1986, p. 131). As a person begins identifying higher values and behaviors, she begins to form her personality ideal authentically and autonomously. Dabrowski (1996) emphasizes the dynamic nature of the personality ideal as a unifying force leading to inner transformation. Eventually, the personality ideal becomes the standard used to evaluate one’s personality structure (Dabrowski et al., 1970) and a developmental force of its own; however, at level III, it is only in its early phase of development.

Hierarchization, another dynamism, is the precursor to creating an autonomous hierarchy of values at higher levels of development. As the least differentiated multilevel dynamism, it is the “recognition of higher and lower levels of experiences and phenomena” (Dabrowski, 1996, p. 35). The process of recognizing higher and lower applies to all internal and external experiences relating to self and others, as well as physical, emotional, social, and intellectual phenomena.

Positive maladjustment is another dynamism and extremely active in level III development. According to

Dabrowski et al. (1970), "It consists of conflict with, and a denial and rejection of those standards, patterns, attitudes, demands and expectations of one's environment which are incompatible with one's growing awareness of and loyalty to a higher scale of values" (p. 163). So, whereas behaviors are seen as nonconforming and maladjusted by society due to lower level societal norms, the individual's actions are positive because they are authentic and higher level.

An excellent modern-day example of level III disintegration is the quest for personal growth described by Elizabeth Gilbert in her book *Eat, Pray, Love* (2006). In it, she recounts the debilitating depression she experienced, how it affected her life, and her inner struggle to move beyond it in a healthy way. She also describes her guiding voice that first speaks to her when she is on her bathroom floor in the throws of one of many depressive crying episodes. Gilbert chronicles her journey across three continents, describing her inner transformation through and past level III.

Laurence Nixon (2008) discusses personality disintegration and integration in the lives of mystics. He describes the mystical crises of two men from the 14th and 16th centuries and the incidents precipitating spontaneous multilevel disintegration. In both cases, that of Lin Zhaoen (1517–1598) and Sayyid Haydar Amuli (1319–1385), the realization that their deeds did not conform to their ideals led them to abandon highly prestigious governmental positions.

#### Level IV—Organized (Directed) Multilevel Disintegration

During level IV development, the growth process becomes less spontaneous, more conscious, more deliberate, and the individual takes more responsibility for his growth (Hague, 1986; Piechowski, 1975). The personality ideal becomes increasingly clear; and the "ought to be" quality of the previous levels, [has] moved far beyond any *tyranny of the shoulds*" (Hague, 1986, p. 131). In level IV, inner conflict decreases as the person becomes more authentic and the discrepancy between what is and what ought to be narrows (Dabrowski et al., 1970).

As development advances through spontaneous to organized multilevel disintegration, the individual consciously handles the conflicts, disturbances, depressions, and anxieties himself. Because of the great rise and differentiation of autonomous factors the individual has available to him the means not only to contain areas of conflict and tension but even more so to transform them into processes enriching and strengthening his development. (Dabrowski, 1996, p. 40)

Though regression to previous levels of development can occur through the lower portion of level IV, it cannot after that point. This is because in the process of growth, "the lower levels are disassembled and are excluded from the structure of secondary integration; with their disappearance,

regression to a lower level of functioning is no longer possible" (Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1977b, p. 29).

In addition to some of the dynamisms present in level III, such as hierarchization and positive maladjustment, there are several dynamisms that become active during level IV growth: subject-object in oneself, inner psychic transformation, pervasive self-awareness, self-control, education of oneself, self-perfection, the third factor, authenticity, and auto-psychotherapy. Most of these dynamisms clearly reflect how the individual is consciously taking responsibility for her personal growth.

For example, in level III, someone might seek counseling to work through the tumultuous times he or she is experiencing as part of the developmental process. However, as a person moves into level IV, the individual consciously handles the developmental difficulties, like neuroses, to remain stable and continue growing (Dabrowski, 1996). The internalization of the self-help process is the dynamism auto-psychotherapy.

Autonomy is another critical level IV dynamism. It is nearly synonymous with freedom but not freedom to do anything at any time under any condition. "In the process of becoming more autonomous the individual consciously and deliberately ties himself with the highest levels of his personality (and of his personality ideal) and engages in struggle with its lower levels" (Dabrowski et al., 1970, p. 78). Autonomy in Dabrowskian terms refers to freedom from low-level internal and environmental influences.

Dabrowski provided clinical examples to illustrate his theoretical constructs. Though the following excerpt was intended to illustrate the third factor acting in a developing individual, it also illustrates several other dynamisms such as self-awareness, subject-object in oneself, authenticity, and positive maladjustment.

I have chosen my "self" from among many "selves," and I find that I still must constantly make this choice. For many years, during everyday activities, I have found myself questioning which *is* my "true self," the one I think of as true or another which seems more and more strange to me?

In spite of these self-examinations, my "strange self" appears very strong and may be the cause for my fear of it and my concern for what is the truth of my internal makeup. But I persist in choosing my "true self." Often I am able to discover that certain types of activities belong to my "true self" and others do not.

My immediate environment is of little help to me because (except for a few people spiritually close to me) my environment itself is generally strained. I have a tendency to be opinionated, yet manifest uncertain attitudes in moral problems. These habits tend to provoke hostility about me.

However, when my anxieties weaken and my "true self" gets stronger, it is easier for me to endure pressure from my "strange self" and the effects of my external environment. I become stronger and, at the same time, more serene. (Dabrowski, 1964, pp. 54–55)



Elizabeth Gilbert's response to people wanting to know how, with their busy daily lives, they can go on a journey like hers, a full year living in Italy, India, and Indonesia, is an excellent example of how her autonomous factors were active in her development:

The last thing I ever want to become is the Poster Child for "Everyone Must Leave Their Husband And Move To India In Order To Find God." . . . It was my path—that is all it ever was. I drew up my journey as a personal prescription for solving my life. Transformative journeys come in many forms, though, and often happen without people ever leaving home. (Gilbert, n.d.)

For other examples of movement to level IV, see Mroz (2009, this issue), where she details her study of seven individuals significantly engaged in multilevel growth. In a series of interviews with each person, she chronicles their life histories and their developmental paths, each of which has brought them to a point between levels III and IV.

#### Level V—Secondary Integration

The highest level of development in TPD is secondary integration, the second of two integrated personality structures in the process of development, the first being level I (primary integration). Though these two levels are both integrated, cohesive, and lacking inner conflict, they have little else in common. Whereas a person at level I lacks inner conflict because of a total absence of self-awareness and self-reflection, the person at level V lacks inner conflict because there is no longer a difference between "what is" and "what ought to be."

It is essential to understand that many of these differences are internal, unobservable. Though someone at level I may have similar altruistic and giving behaviors as someone at level V, his or her motivation is dramatically different, and that is the key. To illustrate this point, the motivating factors and manifestations of altruism at levels I and V are provided. At level I, altruism is not genuine, and "caring for the group's welfare *appears on the surface* [italics added] as a concern for others . . . [but] the attitude toward the family is based primarily on selfishness" (Dabrowski, 1996, p. 126). Therefore, for an individual at the level of primary integration, these altruistic behaviors and feelings will change once their personal needs are no longer being met. The level V person exhibiting similar caring behaviors does so out of true multilevel empathy for those around her, not because the altruistic actions feed selfish needs. Therefore, without examining behavior long-term or delving into their motivations for individuals at these levels of development, it would be extremely difficult, based on isolated incidents, to determine a person's true level of development.

According to Piechowski (1975), universal compassion and self-sacrifice characterize individuals who reach level V. "The cognitive and emotional functions are fused together in a harmonious and flexible union" (Dabrowski, 1996, p. 20). However, secondary integration is not "a state of perfection with all of the notions of homeostasis and a static way of being, [it] is a state of peace or centeredness" (Hague, 1986, p. 133).

There are a number of dynamisms active at the highest level of development, some of which were also active at level IV: authenticity, personality ideal, autonomy, responsibility, self-awareness, inner psychic transformation, the third factor, and subject-object in oneself (Piechowski, 1975). A few of the most important dynamisms working at level V are described later in this paper.

The disposing and directing center (DDC) is a dynamism that is actually present in some form at each level of development; however, it is characterized in radically different ways across developmental levels. At each developmental level the DDC is comprised of the factors that guide behavior (Dabrowski, 1996). It "determines each act of an individual as well as his long range behaviour, plans and aspiration[s]" (Dabrowski et al., 1970, p. 166). The DDC is vital for making concrete decisions and planning. As another illustration of multilevelness, and how qualitatively different the levels are, a description of the DDC at each level is provided. In primary integration, the DDC is extremely cohesive and comprised of the most primitive, least evolved, drives and instincts and can be expressed in ways such as cravings for ambition, power, security or financial gain (Dabrowski, 1996). At level II, because there is so little structure, the influences directing behavior and comprising the DDC are diverse and based on factors I and II, such as the external forces of family or society and internal mood, desires, and basic drives. The most salient characteristic of the DDC of spontaneous multilevel disintegration (level III) is that it consists of multiple centers that represent conflicting aspects of an individual's higher (personality ideal) and lower (primitive) personality components. At level IV, "the DDC becomes unified and is firmly established at a higher level. It is now the controlling agent of development directing its organization and systematization with personality ideal being the highest and most dominant dynamism" (1996, p. 41). At level V, the DDC is "totally unified and identifies with the personality ideal" (1996, p. 43).

Piechowski's (2009, this issue) article provides an example of Peace Pilgrim's developmental journey to level V. His discussion of her life is rich, detailing her path from egocentric to universal values and her ultimate renouncing of personal possessions and relationships in favor of walking thousands of miles across the United States for peace.

As you can see from these descriptions, Dabrowski's theory is complex and nuanced. Though I have presented some of the intricacies of the developmental levels and some of their associated dynamisms, there is much more

to the theory. However, let us stop and reflect on how the theoretical concepts presented thus far can be applied. The levels of development have implications in family and school relationships, as well as clinical and therapeutic settings. Consider the difficulties that can occur among family members at different developmental levels with their different value systems. What of the egocentric level I spouse paired with an uncertain level II spouse? What of the developing spouse who moves beyond his or her partner's level of development? What of the level III adolescent struggling to create himself according to his developing personality ideal running into conflict with his family or school? TPD provides a framework for understanding these difficulties and a foundation for how to move through them.

### PSYCHIC OVEREXCITABILITY

This section focuses on a component of Dabrowski's theory known far better in the gifted community. Psychic overexcitabilities, commonly referred to as overexcitabilities (OEs), sensitivities, intensities, and hyperexcitability have been explored and discussed by clinicians, educators, and researchers. In many instances, the conversations are not brought full circle by attempting to understand OEs in light of the complete theory (e.g., Gross, Rinn, & Jamison, 2007; Tieso, 2007a, 2007b). Therefore, what follows are clear descriptions of the OEs and their connections to personality development and the developmental levels.

Through his work, Dabrowski discovered that, regardless of age, some people consistently reacted with extreme intensity to external and internal (intrapsychic) stimuli (Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1977a); and as early as 1938, he introduced the term *psychic overexcitability* to describe the forms of nervousness he believed elicited these intense reactions (Dabrowski, 1996). He said, "The essential characteristic of nervousness is an increased excitability. . . . It consists in an unproportional reaction to a stimulus, an extended, long-lasting, accelerated reaction, and a peculiar reaction to a neutral stimulus" (Dabrowski, 1967, p. 81) that appeared limited to certain dimensions (Piechowski, 1975).

Dabrowski hypothesized that these very intense response patterns were innate (first factor) and indicative of greater developmental potential (Miller & Silverman, 1987). His research and clinical study resulted in two important findings:

1. The identification of five forms of overexcitability: psychomotor, sensual, imaginal, intellectual, and emotional (Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1977a).
2. Eminent and creative adults, as well as gifted students, had a greater abundance of OEs (Dabrowski, Kawczak, & Piechowski, 1970).

The five forms of OE can be thought of as dimensions of mental functioning (Piechowski, 1979) and are considered independent of one another. According to Dabrowski (1975), OEs have "the effect of making concrete stimuli more complex, enhancing emotional content, and amplifying experience" (p. 233). An individual can have all five forms, a few forms, or no forms of OE at all. Dabrowski (1972) suggested that people who have one or more forms experience reality in a stronger and more multisided manner.

Piechowski (1979) suggested that these five forms of OE could be thought of as the main channels of perception. They have frequently been likened to color filters through which all stimuli, external and internal, reach a person (Piechowski, 1974). Each filter can be widely open, partially open, or almost closed; the size of the opening determines the quality and quantity of the information flow. So, though two people can be exposed to the same stimulus—for example, the perfume section of a department store—someone with sensual OE might either become elated by the lovely fragrances or, alternatively, need to run away as fast as possible to get away from the intensely offensive odors. The non-OE person would not have a strong reaction. This difference could either be due to how much odor was perceived or a difference in reaction to the same perception.

Also, these filters determine to which stimuli an individual is capable of responding, and in what way, based on the OEs they possess. In addition, an individual who shows signs of OE will normally have a dominant form accompanied by varying strengths of other forms (Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1977a). Therefore, the wide variety of stimuli a person is exposed to will often be converted to the most reactive form for that person. For example, "A person with a prevailing emotional overexcitability will always consider the emotional tone and emotional implications of intellectual questions . . . and may fail to appreciate intellectual insights if they do not translate into human relationships" (Dabrowski, 1996, p. 71). Furthermore, my experience coding open-ended responses to the original Overexcitability Questionnaire (Lysy & Piechowski, 1983) provided unending examples of how regardless of the overexcitability a question was intended to elicit, a person responded based on his or her dominant forms.

Psychic overexcitability plays critical roles in the developmental process: First, psychic hyperexcitability, general or more differentiated . . . provokes conflicts, disappointments, suffering in family life, in school, in professional life, in short, leads to conflicts with the external environment. Hyperexcitability also provokes inner conflicts as well as the means by which these conflicts can be overcome. Second, hyperexcitability precipitates psychoneurotic processes. (Dabrowski et al., 1970, p. 38)

Therefore, given Dabrowski's emphasis on the critical developmental role of psychoneuroses and conflict, it is

clear that OEs are essential for accelerated or higher level development to occur.

The following are descriptions of the five OEs and are largely taken from Falk, Lind, Miller, and Silverman (1999). These more extensive descriptions are provided to show the breadth of overexcitable forms and expressions not typically discussed in recent journal publications.

### Psychomotor

Expressions of psychomotor overexcitability can be characterized in two ways, as a surplus of energy and as expressions of emotional tension. An organic excess of energy manifesting as a love of movement, impulsivity, marked enthusiasm, marked competitiveness, pressure for action, rapid speech, and intense physical activity, are all examples of psychomotor expressions of a surplus of energy. Compulsive chattering, impulsive actions, nervous habits (e.g., twirling your hair, biting your nails, tapping a pencil), workaholism, and acting out are ways emotional tension is expressed as psychomotor OE. Psychomotor OE should not be equated with physical prowess or athletic ability. It is excess energy of the neuromuscular system that may or may not result in athletic ability. Though many expressions of psychomotor OE are similar to characteristics of diagnosable disorders (e.g., ADHD), at times they co-occur and at others they do not. Though it is beyond the scope of this article, the reader is referred to Amend (2009), Lind (1994) and Webb et al. (2005) for information on differentiating between psychological disorders and OEs.

### Sensual

Expressions of sensual OE deal with enhanced sensory and aesthetic pleasure. For example, simple sensory pleasures derived from such things as touching objects (e.g., fabric, tree bark, skin), tasting food, and smelling anything from gasoline to an apple orchard in full bloom deal with sensory pleasure. This type of enhanced sensitivity can also result in *displeasure* when smells are overpowering, food texture is unpleasant, or the seams on your socks don't line up just right. The aesthetic component of sensual OE includes expressions such as delight in beautiful objects, sounds of words or writing styles, music, color, and balance. Similar to psychomotor OE, there are also expressions of emotional tension characteristic of sensual OE. For example, overeating, sexual overindulgence, buying sprees, and wanting to be in the limelight are sensual expressions of emotional tension.

### Imaginational

According to Falk et al. (1999), expressions of imaginational OE fall into four broad categories: (a) free play of the

imagination, (b) capacity for living in a world of fantasy, (c) spontaneous imagery as an expression of emotional tension, and (d) low tolerance for boredom. In its purest form, it is expressed through vividness of imagery, rich association, use of metaphor in verbal expression, strong and sharp visualization, and inventiveness. Other forms are vivid and detailed dreams or nightmares, fear of the unknown, a predilection for fantasy and magic tales, animistic and magical thinking, imaginary friends, mixing truth and fiction, and poetic creativity.

### Intellectual

Intellectual OE must first be distinguished from intelligence, especially because the concept of intelligence is often at the center of discussions in the field of gifted studies. Intelligence is seen in the *ability* to solve difficult math problems, for example, whereas intellectual OE is expressed by the *love* of solving such problems. Broadly conceived, intellectual OE expressions include intensified activity of the mind, a penchant for probing questions and problem-solving, and reflective thought (Falk et al., 1999). Intensified activity of the mind is expressed as curiosity, capacity for intellectual effort, avid reading, keen observation, and detailed visual recall. Examples of having a penchant for probing questions and problem-solving include the need to search for truth and understanding—not just the right answer—and forming new concepts. Finally, reflective thought, as an expression of intellectual OE, can manifest as thinking about thinking, love of theory and analysis, conceptual and intuitive integration, introspection (without self-judgment), and independence of thought (often expressed as criticism).

### Emotional

The final form of overexcitability, and the most important for personality growth according to Dabrowski (1972), is emotional OE. Emotional OE has the most extensive array of expressions: feelings and emotions intensified, strong somatic expressions, strong affective expressions, capacity for strong attachments and deep relationships, and well-differentiated feelings toward oneself (Falk et al., 1999). Characteristic expressions include deep and meaningful relationships, strong affective memory, concern with death, and feelings of compassion and responsibility. Strong and complex feelings, both negative and positive, and identification with others' feelings are also expressions of emotional OE. Depression, need for security, self-evaluation, shyness, and concern for others are also ways emotional OE is expressed (Piechowski, 1975, 1986; Piechowski & Colangelo, 1984; Piechowski & Cunningham, 1985). Other expressions of emotional OE include complex emotions, difficulty adjusting to new environments; strong attachments (to people, places, and things); and somatic

expressions, such as blushing, sweaty palms, and a racing heart.

The following poem was written by a young woman about 16 years old named Kirsten (Bergh, 1997), and it captures sensual, imaginal, and emotional overexcitabilities intertwined.

*She Would Draw Flowers*

*She would draw flowers*

(yes, her mark, but not enough like a swastika to make them look twice)

wherever she felt an empty place (which was everywhere).

So they filled up the walls and cluttered up the corners, and dripped onto the floor in a rainbow puddle, which the people

(yes, smooth-brained wrinkles with starched shirts) slipped in.

And they squeaked at her to scribble on paper (yes, their telephone-wire paper) if she had to make a mess.

But she could only hear the colors of her flowers and they filled up her mind and her body until her skin (thin like a petal) could take no more and fell away.

And she became a rainbow.

And her colors shone their music.

And the people (yes, colorless and bagged like bread)

Forgot to wear their overshoes when they walked in her puddles.

So bit by bit, they soaked up her scribbles (instead of slipping)

and bit by bit,

They each became a flower. (pp. 48–49)

Piechowski (2006) wrote extensively on expressions of OEs among gifted children and adolescents giving voice to their experiences in his book, *Mellow Out, They Say. If I Only Could*. Using direct quotes and biographical material, he provided example after example of how OEs are manifest among gifted children and adolescents.

## INTEGRATING THE MAJOR THEORETICAL COMPONENTS

Overexcitabilities, levels of development, and dynamisms are integrated in the process of positive disintegration. Some OEs have more developmental power than others. Additionally, OEs are expressed in qualitatively different ways at different levels of development.

There are three forms of OE that Dabrowski believed are associated with greater developmental potential—imaginal, intellectual, and emotional. “If they appear together they give rich possibilities of development and creativity. If these three forms of overexcitability are combined with the sensual and psychomotoric than these latter two are both enriched and enhanced in their positive developmental possibilities” (Dabrowski, 1972, pp. 7–8). Dabrowski (1996) explained that the lesser developmental

importance of psychomotor and sensual OEs stems from their inability to engage in psychic processes that break down the structure of primary integration on their own. He explained that:

Emotional overexcitability . . . introduces controlling, inhibiting factors to psychomotoricity and sensuality. Imaginal overexcitability enriches them by elements of fantasy, humor, and prospection which tends to diffuse and control the primitive drive aspects of enhanced psychomotoricity and sensuality, by transferring the energy of the impulse to a different and broader territory. (p. 74)

As previously mentioned, OEs serve a developmental role (Dabrowski, 1972; Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1977a; Piechowski, 1979). “If more than one, or all five channels have fairly wide apertures, then the abundance and diversity of information (that is, simultaneous experiencing in different modes) will inevitably lead to dissonance, conflict, and tension” (Dabrowski & Piechowski, p. 32).

However, Piechowski (1975) explained that intensity and display of emotions are not sufficient to be considered developmentally significant expression of emotional OE: relationship feelings must be present. For example, “When a child is refused candy he may throw a temper tantrum just to show his anger. Or he may go away sad thinking he is not loved. In the first case we have a display of emotion alone, in the second a relationship” (Dabrowski, 1996, p. 73). Understanding how overexcitabilities and levels of development are integrated in TPD is very important and typically not addressed in the gifted literature. However, Dabrowski (1996) described it in detail:

1. At lower levels, OEs are isolated, while at higher levels they become integrated.
2. Expressions reflect the characteristics of a person’s level of development—low is egocentric, primitive, lacking reflection, ahierarchical, and high is the opposite.
3. Interactions among OEs are developmentally important—psychomotor and sensual can’t promote higher level development without imaginal, intellectual, and emotional, which are necessary to transform them.
4. OEs play a fundamental role in the development of dynamisms, their tension, their seeking for channels leading ‘upward’, their positive maladjustment and transformation not only of the inner milieu but also of the external milieu. (p. 74)

As previously stated, OEs are expressed in different ways at different levels of development. Further, though it may seem counterintuitive, expressions of different OEs at the same level are more similar than expressions of the same OE at different levels. This is due to their multilevel nature. Table 1 provides excerpts from Dabrowski’s (1996) writings describing expressions of

TABLE 1  
 Descriptions of Overexcitabilities at Different Levels of Development

<i>OE and level</i>		<i>Descriptions of OE at different levels of development</i>
Sensual	Level I	Sensualism in everyday contacts—"epidermal" attitudes of like and dislike, excessive kissing, caressing and hugging (children as well as adults), excessive eating, especially sweets, frequent nibbling, capriciousness in foods, laziness, frequent masturbation at the slightest stimulation.
	Level II	Periods of some reflection resulting in certain amount of attenuation of primitive sensualism and sexualism. At time, through short-lived astonishment or disquietude in relation to one's sensuality, some inhibition. In sexual needs egocentrism begins to weaken and yields to some personal consideration for sexual partners.
	Level IV	At this level sensuality never appears in isolated forms but is controlled and transformed by higher forms of overexcitability. This manifests itself in esthetic sensitivity, in responsiveness to the beauty of nature, in high level of dramatization such as perceiving movement and contrast in emotional attitudes and relationships—a sense of human drama, in the inclination for concreteness in relation to events, places, people and relationships. Sensual overexcitability adds to the warmth and cordiality in expressing empathy.
Intellectual	Level II	Intellectual activity consists mainly of skillful manipulation of data and information ("a brain like a computer"). Intelligence rather than intellectual overexcitability serves as an instrument subservient to the dictates of primitive drives.
	Level III	Intellectual overexcitability intensifies the tendency toward inner conflicts and intensifies the activity of all dynamisms of spontaneous multilevel disintegration. It enhances the development of awareness and of self-awareness. It develops the need for finding the meaning of knowledge and of human experience. Conflict and cooperation with emotional overexcitability. Development of intuitive intelligence.
Emotional	Level I	Aggressiveness, irritability, lack of inhibition, lack of control, envy, unreflective periods of isolation, or an incessant need for tenderness and attention.
	Level II	Fluctuations, sometimes extreme, between inhibition and excitation, approach and avoidance, high tension and relaxation or depression, syntony and asyntony, feelings of inferiority and superiority. These are different forms of ambivalence and ambitendency.
	Level III	Interiorization of conflicts, differentiation of a hierarchy of feelings, growth of exclusivity of feelings and indissoluble relationships of friendship and love. Emotional overexcitability appears in a broader union with intellectual and imaginational overexcitability in the process of working out and organizing one's own emotional development. The dynamisms of spontaneous multilevel disintegration are primarily the product of emotional overexcitability.
	Level IV	Emotional overexcitability in association with other forms becomes the dominant dimension of development. It gives rise to states of elevated consciousness and profound empathy, depth and exclusivity of relationships of love and friendship. There is a sense of transcending and resolving of one's personal experiences in a more universal context.

*Note.* From *Multilevelness of Emotional and Instinctive Functions* (pp. 75–78), by K. Dabrowski, 1996, Lublin, Poland: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego. Copyright 1996 by Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, Lublin, Poland.

OEs at different levels of development. Three OEs were chosen—sensual to represent one that is less developmentally significant, intellectual because of its clear connection to gifted studies, and emotional because of its critical role in personality development. The specific levels for each OE were chosen to capture the diversity and breadth of expression.

#### APPLICATIONS OF THE THEORY OF POSITIVE DISINTEGRATION

Some professionals in the field of gifted studies have taken TPD and applied it in counseling and educational settings and others have made recommendations for how it can be used in everyday life (e.g., Daniels & Piechowski, 2009; Mendaglio, 2008; Silverman, 1993). Some of the literature focuses primarily on overexcitabilities, whereas other work focuses on several components of the theory. For example, Lind (2001) focused on overexcitabilities and for

each one, provided several strategies for dealing with issues that may cause concern for overexcitable individuals or those who work and live with them. She suggested that it is helpful for an emotionally overexcitable person to learn the physical signs of emotional stress and learn to anticipate them. Then they will be better prepared to cope with their experiences and emotional reactions. In addition, Lind also cautions readers to "remember that being overexcitable also brings with it great joy, astonishment, beauty, compassion, and creativity" (Remember the joy section, ¶1), not just stress, frustration, and pain.

Ackerman and Kane (2002) took a broader look at TPD, and though their work focused on gifted children, much of it is also valuable when addressing adult development. They presented several reasons why it can be helpful to teach children about the theory and its components, as well as numerous strategies for working with overexcitable kids. They addressed these things from both individual and global perspectives. For example, teaching someone about TPD can help him make sense of his inner experiences and

feelings of being different. From a global perspective, it can provide great insight into how people around the world differ. One specific strategy regarding sensual OE is to provide opportunities for experiencing beauty (as defined by the individual) and, from a global perspective, investigating what is considered beautiful in other countries. These strategies can be applied in educational, counseling, and home environments.

Mendaglio (2002) described TPD and a number of implications he discerned from the theory that can benefit educators of gifted students. One implication is that by using TPD as a framework for facilitating the growth of students, a teacher's role will necessarily change. At its most basic level, teachers will need to look at their students' crises as opportunities for development.

Counseling gifted individuals from a Dabrowskian perspective has received less attention than educational applications. However, I would like to mention the work of a couple of professionals applying TPD in their counseling practices. Silverman (1990) wrote about the use of Dabrowski's theory in addressing the issues of affective development for gifted children. Similar to the educational implication described by Mendaglio (2002), Silverman stated that when "using the Dabrowskian model, the counselor *does not attempt to help the child resolve the problems*" (p. 25) the child is experiencing. She explained the importance of providing support and validating the importance of the problem, but letting the child solve it himself. The counselor is not supposed to "cure" the child because this would interfere with the child's development.

Moyle (2002) has focused on more clinical applications of the theory, citing Dabrowski's comments about counseling and discussing her own experiences and thoughts on the theory's applications to counseling gifted individuals. Focusing on misdiagnosis, missed diagnosis, and dual diagnosis among gifted children, Amend (2009) details how understanding and applying TPD, emphasizing overexcitabilities, can facilitate accurate diagnoses among gifted children as well as appropriate interventions.

Finally, to stretch the application of TPD even further, I believe that looking to applied and theoretical work outside the field of gifted studies could be beneficial to our field: It has been going on for much longer and is far broader in scope. A diversity of this work is captured in the conference proceedings from several meetings focused exclusively on Dabrowski's theory. Table 2 is intended to give the reader a taste of the connections that have been made to philosophy, religion, literature, health care, and other topics. Like most of Dabrowski's original writings, it is not always easy to obtain copies of these materials. However, Dabrowski's book and the proceedings from several conferences are now available on compact disk (Tillier, n.d.).

TABLE 2  
Presentations from Dabrowski Meetings

<i>Conference Proceedings</i>	<i>Presentation title and author</i>
Perspectives on the Self: The Second Biennial Conference on Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration (Tillier, 1996)	<i>Everybody Has to Be Somewhere: Speculations on Levels and the Relativity of the Self</i> , by Bill Tillier <i>Personality Growth and the Search for Spirituality</i> , by Marlene Rankel <i>A Dabrowskian Perspective on the Practice of Meditation</i> , by Laurence Nixon
Texturizing and Contextualizing Dabrowski's Theory. Proceedings From the 3rd International Symposium on Dabrowski's Theory (Ackerman, 1998)	<i>The Space Between the Stars—Beyond Secondary Integration</i> , by Bill Hague <i>A Comparison of Ken Wilbur's Full Spectrum Theory and Kazimierz Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration</i> , by Jeff Wieckert, Bill Tillier, and Laurie Nixon <i>Haptonomy—The Science of Affectivity—In a Holistic Context</i> , by Annemarié Verschelling
The Labyrinth: Safe Journey and Homecoming. Proceedings From the 4th Biennial Advanced Symposium on Dabrowski's Theory (Bouchet and Toth, 2000)	<i>From Psychopath to Saint</i> , by Marlene Rankel <i>Creative Dynamisms in the Life and Work of George Elliot</i> , by Elizabeth Robinson
The Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on the Theory of Positive Disintegration (Duda, 2002)	<i>Feminine Ethics and the Theory of Positive Disintegration</i> , by Ewa Hyzy <i>Development of Personality Towards Higher Values as Prophylaxy of Social Pathology (Application of K. Dabrowski's TPD to Prevention and Therapy of Suicide and Drug Addiction</i> , by Czeslaw Cekiera

CONCLUSION

The theory of positive disintegration provides a detailed and profound view of personality development and applies to the broad diversity of people and the environments from which they come. Though this article has clearly shown that it is not a theory only for the gifted, I hope it is equally clear that it is relevant to the field of gifted studies at individual and group levels, in education and clinical settings, and beyond. Dabrowski's work is still evolving from both theoretical and practical perspectives. He intended his work to continue far beyond himself and provided an extensive list of hypotheses based on his understanding of personality development to help guide further validation or refutation of his work (Dabrowski et al., 1970). It is my hope that this

article has sparked interest in one or more components of the theory of positive disintegration and that you will find some way to use it in your work or personal life.

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