Intellect as Prelude:

The Potential for Higher Level Development in the Gifted

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Abstract: Many gifted children and youth display characteristics indicating an enhanced potential for higher level development, as described by Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration. This potential is influenced by environment, and its presence in gifted youth implies certain intellectual and emotional needs. Higher level development is placed in the broader context of spiritual and mystical development that occurs across cultures. Within different spiritual traditions there are structures and methods for supporting this development. Two examples are discussed—the Aboriginal medicine man, and Sufism through the life of the Andalusian mystic, Ibn 'Arabi. It is argued that such traditional models of spiritual development can provide contemporary western society with valuable insights into ways of supporting those with the potential for higher level development, including the intellectually gifted.

My heart has become capable of every form:
It is a pasture for gazelles,
and a convent for Christian monks,
And a temple for idols and the pilgrim's Ka'ba
And the tables of the Torah and the book of the Quran.
I follow the religion of Love:
whatever way Love's camels take,
that is my religion and my faith.

from Tarjuman al-Ashwaq

Ibn 'Arabi (1982)

This poem, by the twelfth century Andalusian mystic, Muhyi-d-din Ibn 'Arabi (1982), can be seen as an expression of universal love—a capacity that has been described as an aspect of higher level development of the personality (Dabrowski, 1964). Besides characteristics of universal love and compassion, such
higher level development includes the growth and increasing integration of the personality, self-actualization and moral autonomy. Its concerns are not solely to do with the intellect, and are ultimately beyond it. There appears to be a connection, however, between this higher level development and the intellect, in that the gifted (usually defined as those of high intellectual ability) are more likely to show potential for higher level development, and those exhibiting higher level development are more likely to be gifted (Brennan & Piechowski, 1991; Piechowski, 1991). Within the field of study of the gifted, such recent theoretical developments as the concept of asynchronous development (Morelock, in press; Silverman, 1993a; Silverman, 1993b; Silverman, 1995) and Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration (Dabrowski, 1964; Piechowski, 1979) have broadened the concept of giftedness to include aspects of emotional and moral development, with a greater focus on the inner experience of giftedness.

A number of writers have suggested that gifted children and adolescents demonstrate advanced moral reasoning and potential for higher level development more frequently than other children (Bear, 1983; Brennan & Piechowski, 1991; Gross, 1993; Piechowski, 1991; Silverman, 1994). However, it appears that not all gifted youth exhibit this potential. Piechowski and Colangelo (1984) conducted a study of gifted adolescents that revealed "two contrasting types of development in gifted adolescents" (Piechowski, 1991, p. 300). One type, the rational-altruistic, was pragmatic, with relatively short term goals and little inner exploration. The other type was called introspective-emotional and it was in this type "that we see the potential for emotional growth as described by Dabrowski's theory." (p. 300). This latter group showed concern with the meaning of life and displayed a high level of existential questioning. They often felt isolated and misunderstood by those around them (Piechowski, 1979; Piechowski, 1991). Piechowski explains their vulnerability:

What calls for concern is the fact that great emotional intensity and sensitivity combined with high intelligence makes a youngster acutely aware of the precariousness of human existence and the precarious condition of our world. Because of this, and because others understand it so little, gifted children can be extremely vulnerable and at risk. (Piechowski, 1991, p. 301)

**Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration**

Piechowski (1991) sees Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration as addressing many of the concerns raised by the existential questioning of some gifted youth. This theory outlines stages of personality development from the lowest level of self-serving egotism, through inner conflict, self-judgment and aspiration toward an "ideal self," to the highest level—universal love and compassion. Lysy and Piechowski (1983), in a study using the theories of Dabrowski and Jung to assess the developmental levels of graduate students, describe the assumptions on which Dabrowski's theory is based including the following:
Psychological development takes place through the disintegration of a lower level of intrapsychic organization and its replacement by a higher level... The capacity for psychological development is based on enhanced reactivity in several areas of functioning, which Dabrowski calls overexcitabilities. (p. 272)

In their study, Lysy and Piechowski assessed Jungian functions, overexcitabilities (psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, imaginative and emotional) and developmental level in graduate students from counseling psychology and other fields. The authors found in their research that two of the overexcitabilities—the intellectual and the emotional, and the Jungian function of intuition, were the most significant determinants of higher level development in the sense intended by Dabrowski. The two overexcitabilities involve characteristics such as symbolic thinking, the desire to search for knowledge and truth, concern with death, emotional attachments, empathy, self-judgment, depression and intensity of feeling (Lysy & Piechowski, 1983; Piechowski, 1979; Piechowski, 1991). Jung's intuitive function can be understood as the apprehension of possibilities, and functions "by apprehending the whole of a situation including non-concrete background factors and suggestions of future potential" (Lysy & Piechowski, 1983, p. 276). Their findings also led them to conceptualize two types of personal growth—conserving, which involves exploring one's current individuality, and transforming, which involves personality transformation in response to an ideal. It is the transforming growth that "...appears to embody the essence of Jung's and Dabrowski's conceptions of the evolution of the personality" (p.269).

One of the most important aspects of Dabrowski's theory is that many of the characteristics mentioned above, which are often perceived as negative, are interpreted as positive forces or dynamisms breaking down lower personality structures, and propelling an individual towards higher levels (Lysy & Piechowski, 1982; Piechowski, 1991). Contrary to expectation, Lysy and Piechowski (1983) found that the counseling students in their study were not showing more personal growth than students from other fields. They suggest that the kind of personal growth found in most counseling psychologists is conserving rather than transforming and thus different from the kind of inner change described by Dabrowski. Further, they asserted that most theories of counseling address the concerns that arise at Dabrowski's lower levels of development. The implications for transformational counseling are as follows: "It is generally acknowledged...that a therapist cannot guide a client into realms where he has not ventured himself" (Lysy & Piechowski, 1983, p. 270). This suggests that conventional psychological counseling may not offer adequate support for gifted children or adolescents in their struggle towards levels of higher functioning. Instead, such individuals may be misunderstood, and the very characteristics which Dabrowski sees as positive forces for development may be perceived as negative or in need of "cure" (Silverman,1993b).
Higher Level Development and Cultural Context

The Universality of Higher Level Development

Some commentators have placed higher level development of the personality within the broader context of the spiritual or mystical development that is found universally across cultures. Nixon (1994) analyzes the lives of several mystics within different religious traditions, including Neo-Confucian, Christian, Islamic and Buddhist. He concludes that "personality disintegration in mystical lives is a universal phenomenon...[and that] this general process of mystical growth corresponds in many respects with the stages of personality development as formulated by Kazimierz Dabrowski" (p. 57). Arasteh (1974), in a study of the personality development and mystical growth of the Persian poet, Rumi, notes the parallels between processes of psychological integration and spiritual progression, and finds them in various cultural contexts:

My understanding of Eastern wisdom and Western psychoanalytic thought has led me to believe that final integration in the succession of identities and the growth of personality is a universal state regardless of time, place, and the degree of culture. (Arasteh, 1974, p. xv)

Environmental Effects on Developmental Potential

While the potential for higher level personality or spiritual development can be found universally across a variety of cultural and social conditions, many have argued for environmental effects on the development of this potential (Lysy & Piechowski, 1983; Nixon, 1994; Piechowski, 1991). Silverman (1993a) points out that within Dabrowski’s model of personality development, environment, heredity and inner drive are three factors influencing higher level development, and that environment acts “either as an enabler or an inhibitor of developmental potential” (p.639). Lysy and Piechowski explain that Dabrowski saw developmental potential as probably inborn, and, if strong, able to overcome an unfavorable environment. However, if this potential is borderline “...the quality of the environment can be decisive” (1983, p.279). Piechowski believes that “...higher levels of development depend on the presence of strong developmental potential in a favorable environment” (1991, p.299).

The Sociocultural Context

The term “environment” refers to many different contexts in which individuals find themselves. They range from the immediate family environment to more extensive social networks of friends, school or work, to the broader social or cultural context. The effects of the larger social context on individual psychological development may be less obvious and direct than those of more immediate settings such as the family, but they cannot be ignored (Feldman, 1986; Sarason, 1981; Simonton, 1984). In an extensive survey using historiometric techniques, Simonton (1984) demonstrates that the fulfillment of great potential in areas such as science, philosophy, religion, art and leadership, is an interactive process between individual attrib-
utes and broader social conditions—"being the right person in the right place at the right time" (p.165). Feldman (1986), in a discussion of the development of prodigies, provides a summary of Simonton’s findings which could equally be applied to those with potential for higher level personality development:

As we have noted, the prodigy exists within sociocultural, historical, and evolutionary contexts that each affect the expression of potential. By virtue of the point in time and the place at which the prodigy is born, he lives within a context of a certain zeitgeist, or spirit of the times, a political atmosphere of stability or unrest, war or peace, and a cultural milieu in which role models either do or do not exist in certain fields. Certain philosophies, myths, and belief systems characterize the ideological atmosphere in which the child is raised. (p.179)

This article will look at documented responses to developmental potential in two very different cultures. Although they are widely separated by time, geography and cultural values, both societies recognize and value the potential for higher level personality and spiritual development in the young, and both possess structures that support and assist such development. The first example to be considered will be that of Aboriginal Australia, in particular, the making of the "Medicine Men," the spiritual elite of that society. The second is Sufi culture in twelfth century Moorish Spain, which will be considered through the early life and spiritual development of the Andalusian mystic Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi, and the recognition and support he received from his familial and social environment.

The Aboriginal Medicine Man

Spirituality in Aboriginal Life

Anthropologist A. P. Elkin’s book, Aboriginal Men of High Degree (1980), is a study of the Aboriginal medicine man, based on an Australia-wide survey of the recorded knowledge of Aboriginal rituals, practices and beliefs. Elkin begins by placing the medicine man in the general context of Aboriginal life, which he describes as a "progress in knowledge" (Elkin, 1980, p. 3). Morphy (1992) writes that in this context it is difficult to separate the religion from everyday life as "religious experience is embedded in the very process of acquiring knowledge about people and the land" (p. 215). Part of this progress in knowledge for every young male involves the undergoing of initiation rituals:

He "dies" to the former life of childhood and of ignorance of esoteric knowledge, and "rises" or is "reborn" to a new life...of knowledge and power. At the end of the ritual journey, he can say, "Whereas previously I was blind to the significance of the seasons, of natural species, of heavenly bodies and of man himself, now I begin to see; and whereas before I did not understand the secret of life, now I begin to know." (Elkin, 1980, p. 3)

Elkin notes that every young male is expected to undergo initiation into this knowledge and cannot properly participate in Aboriginal society without having
done so (Elkin, 1980). Initiation is seen as an integral part of normal personality development, and elements of the ritual, such as scarification and circumcision, are seen as visible manifestations of inner change.

A Spiritual Elite

Within this society, which possesses rites for the spiritual development of all its members, is a special group. In traditional Aboriginal culture, the medicine men or "clever men" are the elite in spirituality and knowledge, who undergo specific processes of initiation and instruction beyond those of the normal initiated man (Elkin, 1980). While participating in normal family and social life, they attain a higher level of personality development and spiritual knowledge than others and they also have a specific role: "They are part of the means by which the community maintains its connections with the powers that created the world and which continue to sustain it" (Beckett, 1980, p. xii). Elkin (1980) describes them as men of special, and "often of outstanding, personality" (p. 12), "persons of special knowledge, self-assurance and initiative...They are men who have passed through a very striking ritual and experience of being 'made'...to face and to persist in [sic], this requires determination and courage" (Elkin, 1980, p. 10).

Through particular experiences and instruction, the medicine men gain insight into human nature and knowledge of the spiritual, psychic and natural worlds, which enables them to fulfil their functions in the community, such as healing and the interpretation of dreams and traditional law:

He is superior in knowledge, in experience, and in psychic power, and this must be reflected in his attitude and general bearing...Because of his 'making' and training and deeds, a special social personality is ascribed to him by his fellows: He is essential to their social well-being, and to the maintenance of satisfactory relations with the unseen. (Elkin, 1980, p. 12)

Elkin (1980) sees the medicine man as possessing the faculties of the normal initiated man, but: "in a developed degree, the result of being gifted, of having passed through an experience of 'making,' which gave him power and confidence, and of specialising and training" (p. 14).

Selection of Potential Medicine Men

Elkin describes how traditional Aboriginal culture is able to respond to those who show giftedness or enhanced potential for a higher level of development in knowledge than most initiates. The selection of those with suitable potential also fulfils one of the responsibilities of the "order" of medicine men to pass on "the knowledge, psychic insight, mystic experience and personality authority which distinguish the order [and thus ensure] an unbroken succession of qualified persons" (Elkin, 1980, p. 137). He describes three ways in which an individual is selected to be a doctor or clever man, a candidate for higher development. One, particularly relevant to the theme of this paper, involves recognition by the elders of an individual's aptitude, sometimes even in childhood:
The elders, and especially the medicine-men, will have noticed that from the postulant's earliest years, or from his youth, he was gifted and had leanings towards the profession. He was a thoughtful child, who liked being with the elders and the medicine men. He had probably shown a great interest in tribal-lore, and may even have had some psychic experiences... Such early manifestation of fitness and association with medicine-men, while still a child, seem to have been a necessary pre-requisite in south-east Australia. In the Wiradjuri tribe, for example, the lad's powers of interpretation were tested by the use of specially constructed sentences in conversation with him; and he was given intensive training in tribal mythology. (Elkin, 1980, p. 15)

The other two methods of selection are inheritance, and a desire or "inner experience" of being called (Elkin, 1980, pp. 15-16). Whatever method is used, the postulant must be selected or accepted by a number of members of the profession, and must pass through "a special psychic experience" (p. 17).

The "Making" of a Medicine Man

Elkin (1980) states that mystic experience is an "essential qualification" for men of high degree (p. 137). These experiences include trances and visions, either spontaneous or arising from initiatory rites, and nights in isolation facing experiences so terrifying that some postulants "flee from the ritual of making" (Elkin, 1980, p. 138). Elkin quotes Professor T. G. H. Strehlow's description of a Western Aranda medicine man who:

...as a young man had a strange visionary experience after which he "sat about in a state of trance for some time. ...He was then deemed a fit candidate for admission to the order of medicine men and was put through the whole ritual in spite of once running away in terror from the grimness of his ordeal." He was a man of high degree. (Elkin, 1980, pp. 137-38)

In the initiatory rituals of the medicine men, Elkin sees the clever men using isolation, suggestion, and fear to ready and condition the postulant for what he should see and experience: "Thus his 'conversion' or transformation was effected" (p. 139). Stanner (1992), discussing Aboriginal initiation rites in general, notes that:

The initiatory rites all rose to a tense crisis that brought about, or was supposed to bring about, a physical-moral-spiritual change in the initiates...the rites of initiation existed as disciplines. They both fashioned an uncompleted man, and transformed him into a being of higher worth. (p. 131)

The importance of some sort of psychic crisis in the process of higher level development exists both in Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration (Lysy & Piechowski, 1983; Piechowski, 1991), and in descriptions of mystical growth in general. According to Evelyn Underhill, as quoted by Nixon, the beginning of mystical life "is a disturbance of the equilibrium of the self, which results in the..."
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shifting of the field of consciousness from lower to higher levels” (Nixon, 1994, p. 61). It appears that traditional Aboriginal culture actually sets up structures that bring about short-term, often traumatic psychic crises, but which also contain the resolution of those crises. For the postulant medicine man in particular, such structures may work on selected sensitive personalities, to bring about the crises that are essential for the further development of knowledge and personality.

**Boxer**

Swain (1993) writes of one of these medicine men, called Boxer, suggesting he may be “the most influential, individual religious reformer Aboriginal Australia has seen” (p. 233). Drawing on recollections from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century of both Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals, Swain notes that “he is remembered as the greatest of all ‘clever men’” (p. 234). He exhibited all the signs of the spiritually evolved, being introspective and contemplative but at the same time a leader and an excellent stockman, abstemious, interested in higher things, and acknowledged by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal as an innovator in religion. He was regarded as having unparalleled skills in magic and healing, and Swain also calls him a “perfect social and symbolic mediator” between white and Aboriginal Australia. Conflicting values were characteristic of the history of contact between the Aboriginal inhabitants and Europeans who sought to establish agricultural enterprises such as cattle stations on traditional tribal lands. The Aboriginals held a sense of obligation to the land which was integral to all aspects of their life, a life ordered by seasons and cycles, while the European ideal was productive use of the land through consistent and regular labor (Rose, 1992; Swain, 1993). According to Swain, however:

> Boxer drew two worlds together... bridged rather than separated universes... On the one hand, against all the odds, he held determinedly to his place, clinging to the moral order derived from the land; on the other, he was equally capable of co-operating within the “moral order of rationed work.” (Swain, 1993, p. 237)

We can see that the young Aboriginal male with the potential for higher psychological and spiritual development lives in a society that not only expects all its young males to be initiated into a degree of esoteric knowledge, but one that is also likely to acknowledge and encourage “giftedness” in this area. For such a society, the esoteric and the spiritual are part of normal development, and Elkin (1980) emphasizes that the medicine man is a man of “high degree”: “As such he is a more complete exponent of normal life than those with less appreciation and understanding of the background of that life—a background which is mystical and psychic, magical and animistic” (p. 14).
Muhyi-d-din Ibn ‘Arabi

Background
Muhyi-d-din Ibn ‘Arabi is considered by many to be one of the greatest mystics of any age. He is known as "al-Shaikh al-Akbar" or the greatest teacher, and his writings were numerous and influential. Ibn ‘Arabi was born in Moorish Spain in 1165, into a society remarkable for the degree of interaction and exchange of ideas between its Christian, Jewish and Arab populations (Shah, 1971; Wolfson, 1976). He came from a well-to-do family, and was provided with the best possible education. From early on he displayed great intellectual capacity (Austin, 1988; Shah, 1971), and Shah notes that he displayed qualities of intellect "far beyond that which distinguished his contemporaries, even though they were drawn from the scholastic elite in whose families such intellectual capacity was proverbial in the Middle Ages" (1971, p. 156).

Ibn ‘Arabi grew up in a milieu steeped in spirituality, in particular the practice of Sufism, and there is evidence that a number of members of Ibn ‘Arabi’s family, including his mother and father and several uncles, shared his proclivity for advanced spirituality (Addas, 1993). His parents had many Sufis and mystics among their friends (Addas, 1993; Culme-Seymour, 1975), and in later life, Ibn ‘Arabi talked of studying the Qur’an as a child with "a man of the Peth," who was a role model and inspiration for him (Addas, 1993, p.30). Although they were extremely supportive of his spiritual development, it appears that even Ibn ‘Arabi’s family, on occasion, could misunderstand his extremely high spiritual capacity. Addas (1993) notes the words spoken to Ibn ‘Arabi by his father, who was on his deathbed: "...everything I heard you say and which I did not know and at times reproved you for..." (p. 19).

On his own admission, Muhyi l-Din’s father did not always share his son’s sense of religious vocation or his certainty in matters of doctrine. None the less he felt a certain pride in the face of spiritual talents which were so remarkable that they attracted the praise of his friends—for example of Averroës [the philosopher], who requested that he arrange a meeting with the exceptional child. (p. 20)

Early Spiritual Development
Although Ibn ‘Arabi left no systematic account of his early spiritual life, Addas (1993) has collected biographical details provided by Ibn ‘Arabi himself, his disciples and biographers, to build up a picture of the first stages of his spiritual development. She describes his easy and materially comfortable life as an adolescent, destined to follow his father into a high-ranking government position:

But the teenager felt drawn in a different direction. He had a presentiment of certain inner spiritual needs, but still hesitated to take the crucial step. This was the period of his jahiliyya [ignorance]; the period in which the young Ibn ‘Arabi remained divided between his desire to enjoy the good things of this low world and his desire for God; the period when he...
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had a vague apprehension of the Truth but did not yet know it in its fulness. It was not that he really disobeyed God, he simply gave Him the minimum. (Addas, 1993, p. 31)

This inner conflict of desire between the "higher" and the "lower" is found in the lives of other mystics (Nixon, 1994), and corresponds with Dabrowski's Spontaneous Multilevel Disintegration (Level 3), as described by Nixon (1994) and Piechowski (1991).

Although Ibn 'Arabi was not formally initiated into Sufism until twenty years of age (Austin, 1988), this inner conflict appears to have been resolved when, at about 13 years of age, Ibn 'Arabi "returned to God" and received spiritual illumination during a retreat (Addas, 1993). Ibn 'Arabi recalls that shortly after, while he was still a "beardless youth," word of his remarkable spiritual advancement reached Ibn Rushd (Averroes), who was then the foremost scholar and philosopher of the Western Islamic world (Addas, 1993; Corbin, 1969). Ibn Rushd expressed a desire to meet him, and this meeting was recounted by Ibn 'Arabi himself in his book al-Futuhat al-Makkiyyah. It is worth reproducing his description of their encounter to appreciate the serious and respectful manner in which the eminent scholar responded to the gifted youth:

As I entered the house the philosopher rose to greet me with all the signs of friendliness and affection, and embraced me. Then he said to me "Yes!" and showed pleasure on seeing that I had understood him. I, on the other hand, being aware of the motive for his pleasure, replied "No!" Upon this, Ibn Rushd drew back from me, his color changed and he seemed to doubt what he had thought of me. He then put to me the following question, "What solution have you found as a result of mystical illumination and divine inspiration? Does it coincide with what is arrived at by speculative thought?" I replied, "Yes and no. Between the Yes and the Nay the spirits take their flight beyond matter, and the necks detach themselves from their bodies." At this Ibn Rushd became pale and I saw him tremble as he muttered the formula, "There is no power save from God." This was because he had understood my allusion. (Austin, 1988, pp. 23-24)

Addas (1993) comments that "for an adolescent Muhyi l-Din seems indeed to have already been in possession of immense knowledge which confounded even the philosopher" (p. 37).

A Spiritually Supportive Environment

Piechowski (1991) speculates that spiritually evolved individuals act as their own teachers, or have some form of inner guidance. Nixon (1994), however, states that while according to Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration certain personality characteristics predispose a person to higher level development, environmental factors such as mentors or advisors can also play a role. He quotes Dabrowski: "Although self-education is the main method of development of the personality, aid in this development by a competent person is advisable, and often necessary" (Nixon, 1994, p. 58).
Ibn 'Arabi grew up in a spiritually supportive environment, and benefited from the teaching of a number of mentors or "shaikhs," including two elderly women. Nevertheless, Addas (1993) notes that his spiritual illumination in adolescence indicated he was "an exceptional case," in that it was not the result of a long period of initiatic discipline and external guidance within a Sufi order (p. 35). Evidently Ibn 'Arabi, from a young age, was gifted with inner guidance and became a spiritual innovator characterized by spiritual autonomy (Addas, 1993; Corbin, 1981). Corbin describes him as "one of those rare individuals who are the norm of their own orthodoxy" (1981, p. 5). But while Ibn 'Arabi himself saw spiritual autonomy and the capacity to receive true inner guidance as essential characteristics of the higher stages of spiritual life, he also believed that most spiritual aspirants required formal preparation and supports, such as offered by the Sufi discipline and the guidance of spiritual masters. Despite his own remarkable early spiritual advancement, Ibn 'Arabi himself sought out the guidance and support of various teachers:

As [Ibn 'Arabi] himself emphasises, spiritual graces received in the early stages are extremely dangerous for the novice who has not previously practised riyaḍa, initiatic discipline. This was precisely his own situation. In such a case the company of shaikhs, their advice and their protection are essential if the novice is to avoid the danger of backsliding or, even worse, of going astray. And as there was an abundance of saints in Seville, Ibn 'Arabi was to go knocking at their doors so as to derive benefit from their teaching and their baraka [blessing influence]. (Addas, 1993, p. 67)

Intellectual and Emotional Aspects of Higher Level Development

Intellectual and Emotional Needs

Consideration of the characteristics of gifted youth with the potential for higher level development, in particular the association of that potential with the emotional and intellectual overexcitabilities, indicates that processes of higher personality or spiritual development involve intellectual as well as emotional needs (Lysy & Piechowski, 1983; Piechowski, 1991). The emotional overexcitabilities manifest as intense feelings, strong attachments and empathy, as well as feelings of loneliness and anxiety (Lysy & Piechowski, 1983; Piechowski, 1991; Silverman, 1993a). They provide a motivating force for inner change and aspiration to higher ideals, as well as the intensities of feeling which can ultimately develop into compassion and universal love (Lysy & Piechowski, 1983). Such characteristics indicate a need for strong emotional supports such as role models, mentors, and others who understand their concerns and can provide guidance.

The intellectual overexcitabilities are characterized by strongly questioning, analytical minds, accompanied by a longing and capacity to search for knowledge and truth (Lysy & Piechowski, 1983; Piechowski, 1979; Piechowski, 1991; Silverman, 1993a). The presence of a strong intellect in an individual with the potential
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for advanced personality or spiritual development implies that intellect needs to find a role for itself in the process of higher level development. It needs to be satisfied but also to know its place, its positive capacities utilized and its limitations recognized. A strong intellect involved in the search for truth demands answers, it requires knowledge, and highlights the value of some sort of method or structure for the acquisition and transmission of that knowledge. Piechowski quotes a 16-year-old girl who clearly manifests this combination of intellectual and emotional need:

"Lots of times I wish I wouldn’t think so much…. And I always wish I could think up answers instead of just questions…. My parents and all my adult friends don’t understand. I wish I could talk to somebody who would have the same questions I do, and the answers to them. Maybe instead of somebody intelligent, I need somebody insane. (Piechowski, 1991, p. 302)

The simultaneous existence of these two overexcitabilities in those with developmental potential suggests that there needs to be a balance, and involvement of both emotional and intellectual capacities in the processes of higher level development. The existential anxieties cannot be assuaged, the emotional potentials fulfilled, if the intellectual questioning and searching is not satisfied and given direction.

The spiritual cultures of Aboriginal Australia and Sufism in Moorish Spain both appear to provide that balance. Structures and supports for higher level development are evident in both societies, with access to role models, teachers and mentors. Some of the more terrifying and crisis-inducing initiatory rituals of the medicine men may appear at first glance as the antithesis of emotional support, but they occur within established structures and under the guidance of elders. They involve recognition of the role of psychological crisis and disequilibrium in higher level development, making positive use of them in rites that Stannus (1992) describes as "disciplines" (p.151). The initiates receive support and guidance in developing their own higher capacities. Within Sufism, those who have advanced to higher levels, such as shaikhs, also provide this sort of support to those who are beginning what can be a difficult and dangerous path. Like the Aboriginal elders, their aim is to assist the development of the initiate’s own potential (Shah, 1971).

The two traditions also account for the intellectual capacities of their aspirants, with definite methods and teachings that offer, as the ultimate goal, the attainment of spiritual knowledge. But, as Burckhardt (1976) reminds us: "true knowledge or gnosis in no way implies an emphasis on the mind at the expense of the emotional faculties" (p.32). He notes that Ibn ‘Arabi, "an eminent representative of the way of knowledge, considers love to be the highest station of the soul and subordinates to it every human perfection" (p.34).

Intelllect and Perplexity

While the presence of the emotional overexcitabilities is a prime factor in the drive toward higher level development, the association of developmental potential with intellectual giftedness raises the particular issue of the place of intellect in higher level or spiritual development. Burckhardt (1976) notes that the word "mysticism"
originally referred to "knowledge of the mysteries" (p. 21). He describes the role of the intellect in contemplative spiritual traditions:

Every complete way of contemplation, such as the Sufi way or Christian mysticism (in the original meaning of that word), is distinct from a way of devotion, such as is wrongly called "mystical," in that it implies an active intellectual attitude. Such an attitude is by no means to be understood in the sense of a sort of individualism with an intellectual air to it: on the contrary it implies a disposition to open oneself to the essential Reality (al-haqiqah), which transcends discursive thought and so also a possibility of placing oneself intellectually beyond all individual subjectivity. (Burckhardt, 1976, p.22)

Paradoxically, for an individual possessing developmental potential, the greatest value of the intellect may be its capacity to recognize its own limitations. As Shah writes of Ibn 'Arabi:

*His intellectual powers were superior to those of almost all his more conventional contemporaries. Instead of making use of these abilities to carve a place in scholasticism, he claimed that when one has a powerful intellect, its ultimate function is to show that intellectuals is merely a prelude to something else.* (Shah, 1971, p.162)

As with writings in other mystical traditions (Cashford, 1979), Ibn 'Arabi's work makes use of paradox to push the reader towards 'perplexity' or 'astonishment' before that which surpasses the rational order" (Burckhardt, 1975, p.3). Like Dabrowski, and within his own framework of spiritual development, Ibn 'Arabi indicates the positive role of the sort of perturbation and unease that can accompany the struggle towards the realization of higher ideals: "The Divine guidance consists in the fact that man be brought to perplexity in the face of suprarational Reality" (Ibn 'Arabi, 1975, p.99). The existential questionings and anxieties of those young individuals with developmental potential can be seen as symptomatic of the early stages of a process which may, in time, lead to that elevated and inspired perplexity described by Ibn 'Arabi.

**Conclusion**

Nixon (1994) has demonstrated that Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegra tion "is an appropriate psychological model for analyzing the autobiographies of mystics, across time and culture" (p.73). I would also argue that analysis of spiritual lives and traditions, as manifested in various cultural contexts, can assist understanding of the needs and vulnerabilities of those who are identified as having developmental potential according to Dabrowski's theory. The societies of Aboriginal Australia and Sufism in Moorish Spain are just two examples of cultures that have displayed the capacity to respond to the potential for higher level personality development or spiritual giftedness in the young. But developmental potential is a phenomenon universal to all cultures, and Ibn 'Arabi, St Teresa of Avila, Buddha, the Aboriginal medicine man, and other people of spiritual advancement, have
something to teach us, from whatever cultural context they speak. By acknowledging
the universality of this human potential, we can access their wisdom across time and
place, looking past the distractions of superficial differences to the unity of their
essential message, a message that is always relevant to the here and now.

Afterword
Because of the particular focus of this paper and the references available, the
examples of higher level development I have focused on are predominantly mascu-
line. However, within both Aboriginal culture and the spiritual milieu of Ibn 'Arabi,
there is ample evidence of such development in women. Bell (1992) writes that
because of factors such as observer bias, and the theoretical and philosophical
assumptions of academic anthropologists, women have been seen to be peripheral
to Aboriginal religious culture. She is able to refer, however, to a number of writers
who provide evidence of the importance of Aboriginal women's religious life.
Deborah Bird Rose (1992), in her anthropological study of the Yarralin people of the
Victoria River Downs Station, notes that in the "Dreaming" women originally had
most of the "Law," and were:

...fully independent in ways that nobody is now...in the end, men appro-
priated or were given some of women's knowledge...but women today
still hold their own Law and ritual which has been handed down to them
from Dreaming women. (Rose, 1992, pp. 50-51)

Ibn 'Arabi mentions with admiration a number of spiritually evolved women he
encountered during his life. They included several who had a significant influence
on his own spiritual development, including two elderly women shaikhs (teachers),
his wife Maryam, and the beautiful young girl, Nizam, who was the inspiration for
his collection of poems entitled "Tarjuman al-Ashwaq." He writes of her, "She was
religious, learned, ascetic, a sage among the sages of the Holy Places" (Austin, 1988,
p. 36).

Footnote
1 Ignorance (Addas, 1993, p. 344). This period of Ibn 'Arabi's life should be
regarded as one of ignorance of spiritual matters only in relation to the spiritual
illumination that was to follow. Already, in his childhood and youth, he had shown
remarkable spiritual aptitude, had studied the Quran, and fulfilled the religious duties
of Islam, such as fasting and five times daily prayer. Addas describes this period as
"no more than a phase of ghafla: of heedlessness or 'distraction'" (p. 32).

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Intelect as Prelude


Author Note

I would like to thank Dr. Martha Morelock and Philip Morrissey for their assistance in the preparation of this article. I would also like to thank Anne O'Mullane for her patience, help and advice during the editing process.