

that adolescents are by far the biggest consumers of popular music. Music is significant in the lives of young people, gifted or otherwise, not only for its entertainment value but also as a means of establishing a social identity.

A recent study, conducted by the National Academy of Gifted and Talented Youth, explored the musical preferences of more than 1,000 gifted adolescents in the United Kingdom. Six percent of these students ranked heavy metal as their first choice from the nine categories presented, and approximately 30 percent of the students ranked it in their top five. The researchers' findings seem to contradict the stereotypical negative images of the heavy metal fan and links that have often been made between this genre and rebelliousness, poor academic performance, and negative attitudes to school. The researchers then looked at the young people who had ranked heavy metal in their top five and found that they had slightly lower self-esteem and spent more time listening to music and playing computer games than those who did not rank heavy metal in their top five choices. In follow-up Web-based interviews, the research team explored the reasons that the gifted youth were attracted to heavy metal music. The students predominantly described it as a means to relieve stress and to work off their frustrations. Other students indicated that they appreciated the content of the lyrics in heavy metal songs, which provided cynical social and political commentary.

### Future Directions

There is a strong need for further research into popular culture and giftedness. Although further research into the impact on gifted girls of popular culture is desirable, similar analyses of the treatment of gifted boys are particularly important. Finally, additional research is needed into popular culture forms other than television. Given the place of music in young people's lives, this would be a particularly fruitful area for additional investigation.

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See also Attitudes Toward Gifted; Eminent Women; Film and Film-Making Gifted; Girls, Gifted; Women, Gifted

### Further Readings

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## POSITIVE DISINTEGRATION

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The *theory of positive disintegration* (TPD) is Kazimierz Dabrowski's theory of individual personality development. According to Dabrowski, personality is shaped and created by each individual. The process of this development is called *positive disintegration*. It describes how people transform themselves from conforming and self-serving to introspective and self-directed individuals. Growth and development occur as a person moves from a lower level of integration to a higher level of integration through a series of psychological disintegrations and reintegrations that change one's view of self and the world. Dabrowski placed emotions more than intelligence at the heart of personality development and believed some individuals, especially gifted and highly creative people, possess higher levels of developmental potential. Overexcitabilities, the heightened sensitivity of the nervous system resulting in above-average responsiveness to stimuli, and dynamisms, the autonomous inner forces that control behavior and development, are key elements of developmental potential. According to this theory, these elements predispose gifted and highly creative people to experience life at a more intense level, resulting in frequent and often severe crisis or disintegrations.

Educators and administrators in gifted education have embraced Dabrowski's theory as a way to provide insight into the intense experiences of gifted students. The theory is difficult to study, given the problems with objectively assessing levels, investigating claims of neuropsychological bases of behavior, and empirically establishing links between Dabrowski's levels of functioning and giftedness. It is, therefore, the compelling metaphor and the explanatory power of the theory for gifted people that seem to account for the theory's popularity among educators of the gifted. This entry discusses the theory of positive disintegration, the stages and levels of positive disintegration, and the implications for gifted and creative individuals.

### Personality Development

TPD believes that the journey from lower levels of mental functioning to higher levels comes as result of experiencing inner conflict. Therefore, negative emotions are an essential part of advanced personality development and should be welcomed as a sign of positive growth and development. The first part of the positive disintegration process is the dissolving of existing mental structures. Intense external and internal conflicts arise as one becomes aware of discrepancies between the world that is and the world that ought to be. The dynamisms of self-awareness and self-direction force the creation of a new higher-level and more-integrated mental structure that resolves the inner conflict.

### Levels

Dabrowski grouped the disintegration/reintegration process into five levels. He cautions against treating levels as stages. A person can be at one level in one aspect of life and at a different level in another area of life. These levels are not universal. In fact, only a few individuals actually reach the last level of development. The five levels represent a general movement from egocentric, motivated by basic human drives, to altruistic, motivated by inner values and autonomy.

#### *Level I. Primary Integration*

A person at this level is focused on self-gratification, self-interest, and survival. There is

little inner conflict. People at this level experience challenges and crises but are not transformed by them. They spend energy gaining advantage over others and quickly turn to the victim mentality of blame if something goes wrong. The two factors of biological impulse and social convention guide behavior.

#### *Level II. Unilevel Disintegration*

This is the beginning of disintegration, meaning development is occurring. Usually a milestone such as puberty, or a crisis such as a friendship ending trigger a sense of uncertainty, frustration, or despair. When a person does not have the mental structure in place to deal with the situation, the choice is reintegration back into the previous level or becoming motivated to find a solution and move to the next level. During Level II a person is pulled in many directions, becoming influenced by others and experiencing inner fragmentation and conflict. Level II is a transition phase. One cannot stay at this level for any length of time without dire consequences.

#### *Level III. Spontaneous Multilevel Disintegration*

The transition from Level II to Level III is a quantum leap that requires an extraordinary amount of energy. At this level, one spontaneously begins to examine beliefs, attitudes, and emotions and can see both higher- and lower-level alternatives. During this level, the vertical struggle between the "ideal" and the "real" changes the way one views the world and oneself. Instead of automatically adhering to social norms, one begins to develop a personal set of values to guide thinking and behavior. The dynamism of self-dissatisfaction dissolves as self-awareness increases. Level III is also a time of inner conflict.

#### *Level IV. Organized Multilevel Disintegration*

The conflict of Level III gives way to new dynamisms such as autonomy, self-education, and self-determination. People begin to make deliberate choices of higher values, pre-think actions, and exhibit a strong sense of responsibility for self and others. Social justice and empathic connections

guide their interactions with others. At this level, people actively seek out information and pursue learning, thereby developing the necessary tools to guide themselves through times of crisis. Behavior moves from reactive to deliberate.

#### *Level V. Secondary Integration*

This is the peak of human development. A person becomes at peace with him- or herself. Life is driven by a constructed hierarchy of values. There is no inner conflict because the motivations causing inner conflict at lower levels have been destroyed.

Dabrowski believed that, at the lower levels of development, a person operated at the mercy of biological impulses (factor one) and social pressures (factor two). Once a person moved into Level III, multilevel development, he or she became more autonomous and was driven by self-determination (factor three). The goal of development is for ideals and actions to become one and the same.

#### **Implications**

The first implication of TPD for gifted and highly creative people is to understand the role emotions play in development. Focusing on the cognitive aspect with little or no attention to the emotional aspect of development is inadequate. A second implication is acknowledging that gifted and highly creative people will, by definition, experience internal conflict and struggle over the gap between what is and what ought to be. This is not a negative experience, but rather a positive indication of growth and development.

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*See also* Meaning of Life; Overexcitabilities; Personality and Intelligence; Social-Emotional Issues

#### **Further Readings**

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## **POVERTY AND LOW-INCOME GIFTED**

Does being financially poor hurt creativity, talent, or giftedness? At first glance, one may immediately want to respond to this question negatively because of the belief that creativity, talent, and giftedness are innate, not something that can be taught. However, after consulting the literature and reflecting more carefully, one has to conclude that yes, in some ways being poor or living in a low-income family can hinder the complete development of an individual's abilities, talents, and skills. To quote Barbara Kerr when talking about women in her book, *Smart Girls Two*, "Another major barrier to achievement by gifted women is a lack of money" and the "scarcity of funds is the primary barrier between minority women and achievement" (p. 159).

According to the 2006 Census report, nearly 1 in 5 children under the age of 18, in the United States, live in poverty. Poverty can be defined not only as the deprivation of things such as food, clothing, safe drinking water, and shelter, but often individuals considered impoverished lack intangible items such as being educated, being properly socialized, being respected, and having opportunities for personal successes. Income level, for the purpose of this entry, is used as an indicator of whether a child lives in poverty. This entry discusses the impact of poverty on identification of gifted students; the difficulties of providing services to impoverished, gifted students; and the impact of poverty on career attainment, creativity, and personal strengths.

#### **Identification of Gifted**

This begs the question of whether the initial identification of giftedness and talent is related to family income. With such staggering numbers of children and adolescents living in poverty or below the median income level in the United States, it is important that educators look beyond the outward manifestations of income when identifying these special children. These outward manifestations may be related to poor hygiene, noncompletion of homework, and even acting-out behaviors that draw attention away from the