

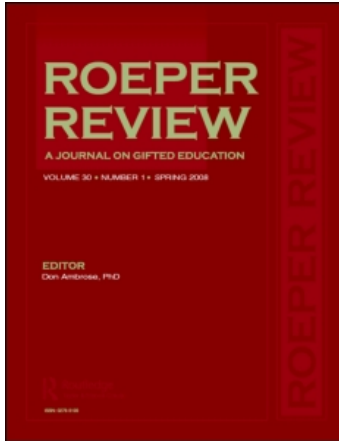
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Through the lens of giftedness

Linda Kreger Silverman^a

^a Licensed psychologist and Director of the Institute for the Study of Advanced Development, Gifted Development Center, Denver, Colorado

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Through the Lens of Giftedness

Linda Kreger Silverman

Linda Kreger Silverman is a licensed psychologist and Director of the Institute for the Study of Advanced Development and its subsidiary, the Gifted Development Center, in Denver, Colorado. Editor of *Advanced Development Journal*, she also edited the popular textbook, *Counseling the Gifted and Talented*.

Giftedness creates a different organization of the Self. Impossible dreams are realized, unrealistic goals achieved, insurmountable obstacles surmounted by Selves whose vision is a more powerful reality than the limitations that most of the world accepts as real. Peak experiences and devastating lows often come with the territory. Rushes of energy at unpredictable times drive gifted adults until they find *that note*, as Dustin Hoffman so aptly described it during the 1996 Golden Globe awards. Annemarie Roeper (1991) eloquently explains this drive:

Gifted adults are often driven by their giftedness. *Gifted individuals do not know what creates the drive, the energy, the absolute necessity to act. They may have no choice but to explore, compose, write, paint, develop theories...or do whatever else it is that has become uppermost in their minds. They need to know; they need to learn; they must climb the mountain because it is there. This "driveness," this one-track-mindedness, may keep them from sleeping or eating, from engaging in sex or any other normal behavior, for the duration of their specific involvement. (Roeper, 1991, p. 90)*

Is this a drive to achieve? Not necessarily. "They need to know; they need to learn; they must climb the mountain because it is there." The gifted Self is driven by both curiosity and the need for expression—in words, art, music, dance, visual models, mathematical formulas, whatever. Sometimes this drivenness results in accomplishments that everyone admires, but more often it concentrates on activities that have significance only for the individual: an exquisite flower arrangement, a brilliantly executed chess move, a fabulous idea, a to-die-for chocolate sauce... The elation that comes from finding "that note," that word, that move, that brush stroke, that solution, is indescribable. It is pure magic. At that moment, no external

rewards matter. There is only the delicious appreciation of *now*. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) calls it "flow."

Cognitive complexity, emotional sensitivity, heightened imagination, and magnified sensations combine to create "a different quality of experiencing: vivid, absorbing, penetrating, encompassing, complex, commanding—a way of being quiveringly alive" (Piechowski, 1992, p. 181). An unusual mind coupled with unusual emotions leads to unusual life experiences throughout the life cycle. A gifted mind is a relentless idea generator that creates more things to do than there are hours in the day. Controlling an unmercifully creative mind is like trying to lasso a bull in an open field: it basically goes wherever it wants! It rarely stops to listen to what it already knows. However, when engaged, it has the capacity to observe or reflect with profound concentration. And the emotions of the gifted person are just as unruly. Anything worth feeling is worth feeling *intensely*. The lens through which the gifted Self sees the world is at once complex and vividly intense. Nothing is simple, bland, or colorless. Everything is electrically charged with rich, multicolored layers of meaning.

Definitions of Giftedness and their Impact on the Self

How giftedness is seen by the world and by one's Self has a dramatic impact on the Self. It is currently fashionable to define high ability in terms of "potential" to become "critically acclaimed performers or exemplary producers of ideas" in adult life (Tannenbaum, 1983, p. 86). In *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent* (Office of Educational Research and Improvement [OERI], 1993), America was officially notified that the term "gifted" is out and "talented" is in: "The term 'gifted' connotes a mature power rather than a developing ability and, therefore, is antithetic to recent research findings about children" (p. 26). Yet, "mature power," while possibly applying to prodigies, has never been the accepted meaning of the term. The dictionary definition of gifted—"endowed with a natural ability or aptitude; talented" (Webster, 1979, p. 770)—matches the connotation espoused by those who initiated the field, such as Whipple (1913;

1919), Terman (1916), Hollingworth (Garrison, Burke & Hollingworth, 1917), and Witty (1930). They believed that giftedness is innate and that it affects all aspects of functioning. When we look for talents instead of giftedness, the lens is focused on what individuals can *do* rather than on who they *are* in their totality. This perspective diminishes our capacity to grasp the dynamic inner experience of the gifted Self.

Defined as potential for recognized achievement, giftedness places a tremendous burden on the Self. "What if I don't fulfill my potential?" "Will I disappoint my parents? My teachers?" "Have I wasted my gifts?" "Am I unworthy if I fail to live up to my potential?" "Maybe they're wrong. Maybe I'm just a good test taker. Or maybe they switched the scores and have mine mixed up with somebody else's." "I couldn't possibly be gifted. I'm nowhere near as smart as..." This view of giftedness carries with it the angst of failure for all those who don't make it to the top. Moreover, attaining greatness may bring little in the way of personal satisfaction, as the biographies of eminent people often attest. A competitive society looks with envy at its heroes and is preoccupied with predicting who might have the potential for lasting recognition. It is less concerned with the well being of those it esteems.

It is little wonder that few children or adults—even the most brilliant—identify with the term "gifted." From the achievement perspective, giftedness brings with it pressure to succeed, anxiety about performance, despair at the odds against becoming famous, shame and guilt attendant with the fear of failure. To protect one's Self from the onslaught of such painful feelings, the path chosen by most children and adults is denial of their giftedness. This means denying an essential quality of the Self, which in turn produces Self-alienation. It also leaves the gifted bereft of any positive explanation for their differences and opens the door to a host of negative labels to fill the gap: *overachiever, perfectionist, workaholic, obsessive, teacher pleaser, nerd, weirdo, alien*, etc. Substituting the term *talented* for *gifted* without changing the context—the

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potential for public acclaim—may be more palatable for educators but it has the same effect on the Self.

The construct of giftedness as asynchronous development (Columbus Group, 1991) is an attempt to understand the phenomenon through the lens of the gifted Self, rather than from the perspective of society. It highlights the complexity of the individual's thought process, the intensity of sensation, emotion, and imagination, and the extraordinary awareness that results from this fusion. Asynchrony also involves uneven development and feeling out-of-step with societal norms. All of these factors contribute to the vulnerability of the Self.

Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counseling in order for them to develop optimally. (The Columbus Group, 1991).

This is a phenomenological rather than a utilitarian perspective; that is, it focuses on the conscious experience of the gifted rather than on their usefulness to society.

Giftedness in this sense implies an advanced ability to construct meaning in the context of experience, including the enhanced capacity to think abstractly and to respond emotionally to abstract concepts used in the interpretation of experiential phenomena. Importantly, giftedness pervades the whole of one's intellectual, social and emotional reality. (Morelock, in press, p. 3).

Asynchrony is gaining in popularity because it offers a pathway to understanding the inner experience of the gifted Self. It reminds us that gifted children are vulnerable and at-risk, and that we are obliged to respond to their differences with supportive parenting, teaching and counseling. Lost potential is not the issue here; the greater fear is loss of Self. A vulnerable Self, besieged by emotionally charged cognitions, struggles to find a place in the world:

We are not "normal" and we know it; it can be fun sometimes but not funny always. We tend to be much more sensitive than other people. Multiple meanings, innuendos, and self-consciousness plague us. Intensive self-analysis, self-criticism, and the inability to recognize that we have limits make us despondent. (American Association for Gifted Children, 1978, p. 9).

Sensitivity, self-consciousness, self-judgment, cognizance of multiple layers of meaning, refusal to accept limitations, intense feelings, and the ever-present awareness that the gifted Self is not normal are all captured in these few lines composed by a high school student. What does the realization that one is not normal do to the Self? Much depends on the environment in which that Self must function.

In a family and school in which individual differences are cherished, the gifted Self will be able to honor its uniqueness; in such an atmosphere, being ordinary is unappealing. "I'd rather die than be like everybody else," exclaims a highly gifted boy. On the other hand, when too much emphasis is placed on the child's fitting in with others, being normal is elevated to the number one goal in life. And the only alternative to normal appears to be abnormal. The dread of abnormality can be so overwhelming that the gifted may feign normalcy, deny their differences, and hide their rich inner worlds from ridicule. It is not safe to name their differences *giftedness*, because it is not permissible to say—even to one's Self—"I am gifted." Parents are told not to tell their children they are gifted for fear that they will feel superior to others, leaving children on their own to interpret their experiences: "I'm not like everybody else. I'm strange." "I must be crazy."

Some gifted children learn very early in life to play the game. They reject their inner Selves and pretend to be someone they are not so that they are more acceptable to others. In Elizabeth Drews' (1972) words, "Our children are taught to don masks before they recognize their own faces. They are made to put their tender, pliable forms into prefabricated shells" (p. 3). The Self may appear to others as socially skilled, but it is a Soul-devastating experience to sacrifice one's authenticity in order to belong. Trying to fit in at the expense of the Self leads many gifted people to feel like aliens from a different planet (Wal-lach, 1995).

When I was little I used to stand and stare up at the stars and wonder which one of them held the solar system that was my real home... Hey, up there on Home Planet, time to beam me up! Joke's over. Experiment's done. I want to come home now. Do you hear me? (Tolan, 1996, p. 13)

For the gifted Self, life can be very lonely and complicated. But it need not be that way. With greater societal

awareness, understanding, and acceptance of the differences inherent in being developmentally advanced, much of the pain and isolation of being gifted can be healed.

Different Worlds at the Extremes of Intelligence

There are many lessons to be learned about giftedness from a close examination of the way we view the other end of the intellectual spectrum (Zigler & Farber, 1985). No one imagines that retardation affects only learning rate, but many believe that the gifted are just like everyone else except that they learn faster. No one suggests that children who are developmentally delayed are "children first," and that their delay is irrelevant. However, parents of children who are developmentally advanced are frequently admonished to remember that their children are "children first," as if the giftedness were tangential to parental decisions. No one assumes that people outgrow retardation. Yet, I've heard many adults say, "I used to be gifted."

Developmentally advanced and developmentally delayed children are both asynchronous; their development (e.g., cognitive vs. physical development) is markedly uneven, and they are out-of-sync with age-mates and expectations of society for their age group. The more they veer in either direction from the norm, the greater the asynchrony, both internally (in terms of the unevenness of their development) and externally (in terms of their ability to fit in with age-mates). Cognitive and emotional complexity also vary as a function of the degree of difference from the norm in either direction. This can be observed in how laborious it is for both profoundly gifted and severely retarded children to master the fine art of dissemblance.

Children with extreme developmental delays have insufficient cognitive complexity to pretend to be something they are not. Children with profound developmental advancement have so much cognitive complexity that they see the interconnection of all experience, and misrepresentations of the truth—even "white lies" to protect someone's feelings—radically disrupt the sense of order they have worked so hard to create. Their need for logical consistency and authenticity act as powerful forces that usually outweigh whatever would motivate the Self to purposefully engage in distortion. This is not to say that gifted children are always

truthful. But many gifted people, particularly the profoundly gifted, have a passionate attachment to the truth, they abhor inconsistency in themselves and others, and they find it hard to justify to their Selves any misrepresentation of the truth as they understand it. Because of this, gifted children who pretend to be interested in Barbies when they actually hate them, or who spin imaginative tales to see others' reactions, or who rationalize their behavior to avoid being wrong, often feel ashamed at their lack of authenticity. If they have intentionally lied, they often experience guilt at their dishonesty because they recognize that they have jeopardized a trust relationship. They also have difficulty incorporating their deception into their developing sense of Self. While others may decide not to lie because they know it is wrong, or because they are afraid of getting caught, a gifted child might say, "I am not a person who lies. I would hate myself if I were dishonest."

If giftedness were to be recognized as the mirror image of retardation it would provide an entirely new way of interpreting information used in identifying, diagnosing, and providing therapy for the gifted. Society recognizes retardation is an organizing principle—a unique trajectory of development with atypical characteristics. Few expect developmentally delayed individuals to behave exactly like everyone else. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)*, which establishes the criteria used by psychiatrists and psychologists to determine various mental disorders, provides ample demonstration of this. The criteria for many of the psychiatric diagnoses have the exclusionary clause, "If Mental Retardation...is present, the...difficulties are in excess of those usually associated with these problems" (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 1994, p. 58). Certain behaviors that would appear abnormal in an average person are part of the syndrome of retardation; therefore, they are attributed to retardation rather than to other categories. The diagnostic emphasis is on comparing the developmentally disabled *with their own group rather than with societal norms*.

This same principle needs to be applied in diagnosing problems in gifted individuals. However, since gifted individuals look like everyone else and can pretend to be like everyone else, they are usually judged by a set of standards based on norms for everyone else rather than compared with their own group.

Some behaviors that would signify disorder in the rest of the population are typical characteristics for the gifted. Without the lens of giftedness, the gifted Self is in danger of being misunderstood, misdiagnosed and mistreated. "It is intensely bittersweet to find out that these traits that brought so much shame are normal for the gifted" (Wallach, 1995, p. 37).

Emotional highs and lows, for example, are part of the creative process (Gowan, 1980), but they may be mistaken for signs of manic depression. Gifted individuals are often empathic and feel the weight of the world on their shoulders. As teenagers, they can become depressed at the realization of their inability to make a difference in the condition of the world. This could be confused with endogenous depression, which is usually treated with medication.

Perfectionism is one of the most frequently misunderstood qualities of the gifted Self. Therapists often assume that perfectionism needs to be cured, since it appears to be a factor in several conditions, such as compulsive personality disorder, depression, and various eating disorders. However, perfectionism in the gifted has an entirely different significance. Perfectionism is a component of the drive for self-actualization (Maslow, 1970). The gifted Self envisions what could be instead of just what is, it longs to bring that vision into reality, and, often, it is capable of realizing its dreams. Without perfectionism, we would have no Olympic champions, no concert pianists, no brilliant surgeons, no great books or works of art, no dedicated teachers who work 60 hours a week at their craft. In a recent large-scale study of gifted and talented sixth graders, Parker (1997) found perfectionism to be correlated with conscientiousness rather than neurosis; he argued for appreciation of a healthy form of perfectionism. Therapists need to be able to distinguish between an unreachable, punitive set of standards of an average client and a level of excellence within the grasp of a gifted one.

Misdiagnosis can occur in both directions. It is possible to miss subtle signs of serious disorders because the gifted may exhibit *atypical* manifestations rather than textbook symptoms. For example, a highly able adult may experience only the lows without the highs and still have bipolar disorder. The manic phase may consist of periods of enthusiasm, less need for sleep, enormous creative energy, and the motiva-

tion to begin new projects. Then the depression sets in and the person is unable to complete the projects begun. And the cycle repeats itself. Or one manic episode can end a life that could have been saved with lithium. It is easier to extract the symptoms of disorder from the symptoms of giftedness when the gifted are compared with their own group. Currently, therapists receive no training in giftedness that would enable them to sort out these complex variables. The gifted Self experiences indescribable injury when its gifts are distorted into defects, and lives can be lost when serious disorders are masked by giftedness.

The Psychology of Exceptionality

Investigation of giftedness and retardation both originated in the field of psychology, as components of the study of individual differences. Binet, Stern, Goddard, Terman and Hollingworth all contributed knowledge in both areas and understood the wide-ranging psychological manifestations of both syndromes. The educational needs at the extremes stem directly from their developmental differences and psychological needs. The Self is a psychological entity. It should come as no surprise that so little is known or written about the gifted Self given the fact that there is little interface today between psychology and gifted education. An appreciation of the Self is part of the heritage of the psychology of giftedness that was lost along the way when gifted education severed its relationship with its psychological roots.

The definition of mental retardation in the *DSM-IV*, the methods of assessment, the behavioral manifestations, and the statistical criteria for this diagnosis—accepted throughout the fields of psychiatry, psychology and education—are instructive for those of us who work with the gifted. First of all, for obvious reasons, the determination of retardation is under the jurisdiction of trained professionals. It takes years of specialized education to become certified as a school psychologist, clinical psychologist or psychiatrist—the individuals who are qualified to judge if a child is developmentally delayed. Twenty-five years ago, the identification of giftedness was taken just as seriously. In 1972, Public Law 91-230 stated that "gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons..." In 1978, "professionally qualified persons" was removed from the law, and in the 1993 *National Excel-*

lence report (OERI, 1993), while a new definition was proposed, discussion of methods of identification was conspicuously absent. Imagine what would happen if professionally qualified persons were no longer considered necessary in identifying developmental disabilities!

In the *DSM-IV*, retardation is defined according to degree of difference from the mean on a standardized, individual intelligence scale.

General intellectual functioning is defined by the intelligence quotient (IQ or IQ equivalent) obtained by assessment with one or more of the standardized, individually administered intelligence tests (e.g., Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised, Stanford-Binet, Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children). Significantly sub-average intellectual functioning is defined as an IQ of about 70 or below (approximately 2 standard deviations below the mean). (APA, 1994, p. 39)

If two standard deviations below the mean is sufficient to qualify a child or adult as significantly below average, then two standard deviations in the opposite direction should also be recognized as **significantly different** from the norm. Significant differences are not simply statistical artifacts; the life experience, the awareness, the Self of anyone who differs significantly from the norm will be qualitatively different from that of the average person. The *DSM-IV* indicates that differences of this magnitude can create "significant limitations in adaptive functioning, " in areas such as "communication,...home living, social/interpersonal skills..." (APA, 1994, p. 39). Adaptive difficulties must be present in at least two areas for positive diagnosis. The gifted Self also has difficulty adapting in these areas, particularly the highly gifted, who might be three, four or more standard deviations from the mean.

The pioneers in our field recognized the stumbling blocks gifted children encounter in communicating and developing interpersonal relations with their age peers. Lewis Terman (1931) wrote:

Precocity unavoidably complicates the problem of social adjustment. The child of eight years with a mentality of twelve or fourteen is faced with a situation almost inconceivably difficult. In order to adjust normally such a child has to have an exceptionally well-balanced personality and to be well nigh a social genius. The higher the IQ, the more acute the problem. (p. 579)

Hollingsworth (1939) found that children above 160 IQ played little with other children "because the difficulties of

social contact are almost insurmountable" (p. 588). In an article entitled "The Child of Very Superior Intelligence as a Special Problem in Social Adjustment," Hollingsworth (1931) reported that only one child in six above 180 IQ related well to other children. The other five "were unpopular with children of their own age because they always **wanted to organize the play** into a complicated pattern, with some remote and definite climax as the goal" (p. 7).

Home life is also radically affected by having an exceptional child in either direction. Ross (1979) suggested that adjustment depends on how the child's parents react to having a child with special needs.

Helping parents accept their child's difference and supporting them to accommodate family life and sibling relations to the presence of a gifted youngster can be as difficult a task as helping other parents adjust to having a [developmentally delayed] child and it requires and deserves no less time and effort. (p. 406)

Hollingsworth (1940) compared the psychological isolation of highly gifted children with that of children significantly below the norm. She noted that isolation occurs at both extremes of the IQ continuum, but not at the same degree of difference. It tends to occur at 30 points below the norm (about 70 IQ), but not until 50 or 60 points above the norm (about 150 IQ). Isolation occurs in developmentally delayed children at the point at which their differences are perceived by others; it does not begin to take effect on the gifted until it is experienced by the Self. Modern studies appear to confirm that social adjustment is more of a challenge for the highly gifted (Dauber & Benbow, 1990; Kerr, 1991; Silverman, Chitwood & Waters, 1986). Social rejection and the fear of social isolation play critical roles in the development of the Self. Gifted children and adults often try to repress the real needs of the Self in order to maintain connections with others (Lovecky, 1993). They feel they must choose between loneliness and the negation of the Self.

Assistance is available to children and to parents of children at the lower end of the spectrum to cope with the adaptive difficulties presented by their exceptionality. Similar support is needed for children and their families at the upper extreme of the curve to prevent loneliness and isolation of the Self.

Identification of Exceptionality

When should exceptional children be identified? There is no question as to the best time to identify a developmentally delayed child. The earlier the better. Early detection enables early intervention. That is why Child Find exists. It is abundantly clear that early intervention provides the best opportunity for optimal development. This is true for *all* children with special needs—including the gifted. Yet, in National Excellence, we are specifically told *not* to identify preschool and primary grade children as gifted:

These suggestions are not intended to imply that schools should label preschool and primary students as gifted and talented. They should not. Instead, preschools and primary schools should develop a curriculum for all that nurtures the strengths of children and encourages its staff to do the same. (OERI, 1993, p. 28)

The preschool and primary years are the most critical in the development of Self-concept. There is that moment of truth when the young gifted child discovers that he or she is different from other children. This is when the Self is most vulnerable and in need of support and guidance from adults. If the early detection of giftedness is banned, how do we help the Self come to terms with these differences?

How should exceptional children be identified? Before a child is labeled "disabled," a comprehensive case study is conducted, including a complete battery of individual tests administered by a team of professionals, an extensive series of interviews, and a staffing to determine the best means of serving the child. Emotional and social needs are taken into account, as well as cognitive and academic requirements. The test score on an intelligence scale is just one piece of data that is used in conjunction with many other sources of information about the functioning of the child. Judgments are made by an informed team. In assessing giftedness, too often a single test score—sometimes generated by a group test—is the determining factor in identification and program placement. When such a system fails, many advocate the abandonment of standardized tests—throwing the baby out with the bath water. A more thoughtful method of identifying the gifted, in concert with methods used with other exceptionalities, makes use of observation, interviews, case histories, and subjective evaluation, along with test data.

Subjective information about a child's abstract thought processes, intensity, complexity, sensitivity, and awareness is critical in a comprehensive assessment.

While ability testing fails to identify creative talents in many domains, it still remains the most unbiased method available for identifying the gifted (Gardner, 1984). Zigler and Farber (1985) elaborate on the situation:

Psychologists are still not in a position to assess reliably many of the concepts theorists like to include in definitions of giftedness, such as creativity, task commitment, and certain talents (Renzulli, 1978). Thus it may be that IQ is currently the most adequate tool for defining giftedness. Again, this does not mean that noncognitive aspects are unimportant, but only that their inclusion would seriously compromise a precise operational definition of the gifted classification. (p. 397)

Without clear definitions there is no way of calculating the prevalence of either retardation or giftedness, making it impossible to allocate resources fairly or to plan programs to serve these groups. (p. 392)

One or more standardized, individually administered intelligence tests is required for positive identification of developmental delay. It would be unthinkable to attempt to identify these children using achievement tests, group IQ tests, teacher recommendations, grades or portfolios, as is so often done with the gifted. Once a child is diagnosed with a developmental disability, that diagnosis accompanies him or her to every school district in the 50 states. Not so with the gifted, whose identification or lack thereof is at the whim of each local school board every school year. An administrator can say, "I don't believe in giftedness" and refuse to identify or serve this group. What does it do to the Self of the child to be told he or she is gifted one year but not the next, or in one school but not in another? Labels have psychological significance. They should not be attached lightly, nor should they be taken away without concern for the psychological damage caused to the Self.

School districts claim that comprehensive assessment and services for gifted students, such as those available for disabled children, are not affordable. But society allocates money to that which it values. Currently, our society demonstrates social responsibility to those who are disabled. Our laws protect and nurture disabled children in order to assure their optimal development. Why is the optimal development of gifted

children not deemed valuable? It is time that gifted children warranted sufficient protection and funding to support appropriate methods of identification and programming.

Misdiagnoses and Missed Diagnoses

The question of misdiagnosis of the gifted has come to the forefront because of the disconcerting numbers of gifted children who have been diagnosed as having Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD). Though many hypotheses have been offered, the reason for the high number of gifted children labeled AD/HD remains a mystery. Gifted children may exhibit AD/HD-like symptoms without actually having this disorder (Lind, 1993). Roedell (1988) refers to these children as "gifted but wiggly" (p. 9). The gifted Self absorbs more information, processes rapidly on many levels, has unusual energy, and often can do many things at once. Attention focused elsewhere—exploring the effects of a sunbeam or a mathematical relation or a fantasy world—may appear as inattention in the classroom. Some children are highly active, extraverted, exuberant learners who talk rapidly and are always on the go, but their behaviors do not interfere with learning or social interaction. Acceptance of these traits is in part culturally determined. Behavior that might brand a child as AD/HD in Billings, Montana, could be the norm in Brooklyn. When a child is inappropriately labeled AD/HD, the Self feels unacceptable.

However, separating out those behaviors related to giftedness from those associated with AD/HD has proven to be a daunting task. In their popular book, *Driven to Distraction*, Hallowell and Ratey (1994) explain the creativity of individuals with AD/HD in a manner uncomfortably descriptive of most gifted people:

A third element that favors creativity among people with ADD is...the ability to intensely focus or hyperfocus at times...the term "attention deficit" is a misnomer. It is a matter of attention inconsistency. While it is true that the ADD mind wanders when not engaged, it is also the case that the ADD mind fastens on to its subject fiercely when it is engaged. A child with ADD may sit for hours meticulously putting together a model airplane. An adult may work with amazing concentration when faced with a deadline. (p. 177)

This ability to hyperfocus heats up the furnace in the brain... The intensity of

the furnace when it heats up may help explain why it needs to cool down, to be distracted, when it is not heated up.

A fourth element contributing to creativity is what Russell Barkley has called the "hyperreactivity" of the ADD mind. Cousin to the traditional symptom of hyperactivity, hyperreactivity is more common among people with ADD than hyperactivity is. People with ADD are always reacting. Even when they look calm and sedate, they are usually churning inside, taking this piece of data and moving it there, pushing this thought through their emotional network, putting that idea on the fire to burn, exploding or subsiding, but always in motion. Such hyperreactivity enhances creativity because it increases the number of collisions in the brain. Each collision has the potential to emit new light, new matter, as when subatomic particles collide. (p. 178)

Inconsistent attention, the ability to "hyperfocus," and "hyperreactivity" of the mind, are just three of the many traits shared by both the gifted and AD/HD population. When do such traits become problems and when are they simply the experience of being a typical "gifted but wiggly" child? When problems appear at home as well as at school—such as engaging in dangerous activities, hurting others, destroying property, frequent uncontrollable outbursts; when inattention or lack of impulse control seriously interferes with learning, social interaction, and family dynamics; when the child is unhappy, it is important to determine the source of the problem. While AD/HD may seem to be the likely culprit, a complex array of emotional factors could cause the same symptoms. A thorough diagnosis is in order by a mental health professional who has worked with numerous gifted individuals. Sometimes a team approach is best—one who specializes in giftedness and another who specializes in AD/HD—to sort through the overlapping symptoms.

While overdiagnosis of AD/HD is a serious problem in some communities, lack of appropriate diagnosis of AD/HD among the gifted also occurs. Too many professionals dismiss the symptoms of AD/HD if a child can concentrate for long periods of time in areas of interest. Hallowell and Ratey's (1994) description of the hyperfocusing ability of individuals with AD/HD apparently is not common knowledge. Here is another situation in which the lens of giftedness is necessary. Creative children and adults who have AD/HD can focus exquisitely for long periods of time on their own

interest areas, but lack the ability to focus when they are not interested. This is important information for differential diagnosis.

One way to determine if a child's behavior is a function of giftedness or AD/HD is to observe the child in a situation in which his or her level of giftedness is being appropriately challenged. A child whose activity and distractibility level are beyond the norm of a group of gifted children in a special setting is more likely to be truly AD/HD than a child who exhibits symptoms of AD/HD within a heterogeneous classroom.

The gifted not only face greater risk of misdiagnosis, they also can have serious weaknesses that go undetected because of *the normative lens* diagnosticians use in test interpretation. The main question asked is, "How does this child's performance compare to the norm?" Again, the interpretation of test data for developmentally disabled in the *DSM-IV* is revealing:

When there is significant scatter in the subtest scores, the profile of strengths and weaknesses, rather than the mathematically derived full-scale IQ, will more accurately reflect the person's learning abilities. When there is a marked discrepancy across verbal and performance scores, averaging to obtain a full-scale IQ score can be misleading. (APA, 1994, p. 40) [italics added]

In diagnosing delayed children, it is recognized that the IQ test assesses discrete sets of abilities which need to be separately analyzed to derive a true understanding of the child. It is ironic that while gifted educators often subscribe to the view of multiple abilities, the various patterns of strengths that appear on IQ tests of gifted children are often ignored, and placement in programs is dependent upon Full Scale IQ scores—averages of those various abilities. Many gifted children with uneven patterns are denied differentiated programming due to this misapplication of IQ data. Averaging scores when they are extremely discrepant diminishes the Self's gifts by essentially subtracting the weaknesses from the strengths. If it is diagnostically inappropriate with children who are developmentally delayed, it should also be considered inappropriate with children who are developmentally advanced.

According to Kaufman (1994), the leading interpreter of the Wechsler tests, a discrepancy of 9 points between a child's highest and lowest subtest score

is suggestive of a learning disability. However, when a child's highest subtest score is 19 (at the ceiling of a Wechsler test) and lowest subtest score is 10 (50th percentile), the same 9 points do not appear significant through the normative lens. Diagnosticians think only scores significantly below the norm are problematic. Through the lens of giftedness, an entirely different question is raised: "To what extent does the discrepancy between this child's strengths and weaknesses cause frustration and interfere with the full development of the child's abilities?" This is an intrapersonal rather than normative view of test interpretation; it recognizes the importance of diagnosing the degree of asynchrony in the child's profile. It is a view that honors the Self of the child, since it is the child's strengths that represent the pathway to the full realization of the Self.

To view a child through the lens of giftedness requires being on the lookout for strengths and taking them seriously when they appear. Strengths provide a window into the child's abilities. This is the lens through which one should look at any child, but it is imperative in attempting to discover giftedness. Without this perspective, the most asynchronous children—gifted children with learning disabilities—suffer the greatest damage to their Selves. When their strengths and weaknesses are averaged, they cancel each other, and neither their gifts and nor their disabilities are detected. Their Selves feels unseen and unheard. "Am I smart or am I stupid?" "How come I understand so much more than everyone else but I can't write in such a way as to get A's?" Failing to qualify for services for either exceptionality, the Self is left to struggle with dramatic asynchrony without any support.

Gifted children use their abstract reasoning abilities to compensate for their weaknesses; however, compensation can mask visual and auditory problems. All diagnosticians who work with the gifted—audiologists, optometrists, occupational therapists, etc.—need to be aware of compensatory behaviors in the gifted and notice how the child's weaker areas compare with their stronger ones. Otherwise, when a child scores within the normal range on their assessments, they will fail to detect correctable deficits. For a child whose reasoning is advanced, scores in the normal range may actually indicate significant weaknesses.

Some perceived weaknesses may also be strengths. For example, a child who is deeply empathic and preoccupied with the problems of the world, such as homelessness, may appear weak in school-related skills because they are less important to the Self's development than the profound issues that occupy the child's awareness. And certain deficits, such as dyslexia, appear to produce unusual gifts, such as imagistic thinking, the ability to see from different angles, heightened intuition, creativity, mechanical aptitude, technological understanding and inventiveness (Davis, 1994; West, 1991). These kinds of gifts are becoming more and more precious in our technological era; yet, we still tend to view these asynchronous children through the lens of their deficiencies—many times overlooking their gifts. Looking for strengths means being tuned in to the whole child, not just academic performance.

Conclusion

Giftedness is a ground of experience that differs significantly from the norm. Just as developmental delay produces lifelong effects on social and emotional development, academic achievement, home life, response of the community, and career goals, developmental advancement exerts a profound impact on the Self, permeating *all* facets of a person's life in childhood and adulthood. Children with significant developmental differences in either direction require modifications in parenting, teaching and counseling in order for the Self to be fully realized.

Because their abstract reasoning abilities enable the gifted to compensate, true disabilities and disorders are often masked, while typical behaviors of the gifted may be misinterpreted. Diagnosticians, school psychologists, therapists and educators need to be aware of the characteristics of giftedness in order to recognize what is atypical for this population, rather than comparing gifted individuals with the general population. The caveat in the *DSM-IV*, "If Mental Retardation [etc.]... is present, the... difficulties are in excess of those usually associated with these problems" (p. 58, emphasis added) should be applied to the gifted population as well. Through the lens of giftedness traits that may be perceived as dysfunctional—such as intensity, sensitivity, perfectionism,

introversion-are seen as typical manifestations of this population (Silverman, 1994). The gifted Self is injured immeasurably when its strengths are perceived as defects. In the same vein, gifted families may be perceived as enmeshed, when they are often doing their best to meet the needs of exceptional children without sufficient societal support.

Through the lens of giftedness, we can discover many hidden gifted children, and we are able to recognize the subtle signs of disability when they are present. It is important for diagnosticians to be aware of the gifted Self's capacity for compensation which can mask real deficits. It takes in-depth analysis, and more time, energy and thought, to ferret through confusing symptoms and arrive at accurate diagnoses. And it is equally important for parents and teachers to appreciate the gifts that often attend disabilities. This perspective enables us to recognize and support strengths, while providing whatever assistance or modifications may be needed to enable a child to overcome weaknesses.

However, we must always keep in mind that the Self is a mysterious, complex unit that operates as a whole; it does not divide itself into strengths and weaknesses, abilities and deficiencies. The asynchrony weaves a distinctive pattern that creates the individuality of the Self. Or perhaps it is the other way around. Perhaps the individuality of the Self is displayed in a unique, asynchronous pattern that leads the gifted Self to find its own path.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

KUDOS

Tracy L. Cross was named new editor of the *Gifted Child Quarterly*. Tracy, is Executive Director of the Indiana Academy for Science, Mathematics, and Humanities in Muncie, a Trustee of The Roeper School, and Contributing Editor of this journal. Tracy was the editor of the *Journal of Secondary Gifted Education* and the recipient of the 1997 NAGC Early Scholar Award.

Paula Olszewski-Kubilius was named new co-editor of the *Journal of Secondary Gifted Education* with Rena Subotnik. Paula is Director of the Center for Talent Development, Northwestern, former Book Editor of the *Roeper Review* and now Contributing Editor for this journal. Rena is also a Contributing Editor for the *Roeper Review*.

Joyce VanTassel-Baska was named the recipient of the 1997 NAGC Distinguished Scholar award. She is also the new editor of *Gifted and Talented International*. Joyce is Professor at the College of William & Mary, Virginia and a member of the Editorial Advisory Board of the *Roeper Review*.