

Adjustment of Gifted Adults

Gifted adults cannot wait until society develops a more accepting view of them before they are willing to "come out of the closet." They must actively revise the opinion society holds by being open, whole, and unashamed. To do this, the gifted must accept each other, with their problems, and help each other. They will not succeed by pretending to be normal. Professionals can help them by recognizing and clarifying the issues and helping them develop communication and coping skills. As Dabrowski (1964) urged, we must not humiliate humanity by depriving it of its exemplary individuals, regardless of whether the rest of humanity is ready to accept them.

REFERENCES

- Albert, R. S. (Ed.) (1983). *Genius and eminence: The social psychology of creativity and exceptional achievement*. Elmsford, NY: Pergamon Press.
- Alvarado, N. (1986). Our emotional handicap, *Mensa Bulletin*, 300, 14-15.
- Betts, G., & Neihart, M. (1988). Profiles of the gifted and talented. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 32, 248-253.
- Brim, O. G., Jr., Glass, D. C., Neulinger, J., Firestone, I. J., & Lerner, S. C. (1969). *American beliefs about intelligence*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Conarton, S., & Silverman, L. K. (in press). Feminine development through the life cycle. In M. A. Douglas & L. E. Walker (Eds.), *Feminist psychotherapies: Integration of therapeutic and feminist systems* (pp.37-67), Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Dabrowski, K. (1964). *Positive disintegration*. London: Gryf.
- Foster, W. (1986a). The application of single subject research methods to the study of exceptional ability and extraordinary achievements. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 30, 33-37.
- Foster, W. (1986b). Giftedness: The mistaken metaphor. In C. J. Maker (Ed.), *Critical issues in gifted education, Vol. 1: Defensible programs for the gifted* (pp.5-30). Rockville, MD: Aspen.
- Goertzel, V., & Goertzel, M. (1962). *Cradles of eminence*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Grinder, R. (1985). The gifted in our midst: By their divine deeds, neuroses, and mental test scores we have known them. In F. Horowitz & M. O'Brien (Eds.), *The gifted and talented: Developmental perspectives* (pp. 5-35). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Hollingsworth, L. S. (1942). *Children above 180 IQ. Stanford-Binet: Origin and development*. Yonkers, NY: World Book Co.
- Jones, E. (1963). *The life and work of Sigmund Freud* (abridged, L. Trilling & S. Marcus, Eds.). Garden City, NY: Anchor Books. (Original work published 1953)
- London, J. (1970). *Martin Eden*. New York: Airmont Publishing. (Original work published 1909)
- Lovecky, D. (1986). Can you hear the flowers singing? Issues for gifted adults. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 64, 572-575.
- Piechowski, M., & Tyska, C. (1982). Self-actualization profile of Eleanor Roosevelt, a presumed nontranscender. *Genetic Psychology Monographs*, 105, 95-153.
- Piechowski, M. (1979). Developmental potential. In N. Colangelo & R. Zaffrann (Eds.), *New voices in counseling the gifted* (pp. 25-57). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.
- Polkinghorne, D. (1983). *Methodology for the human sciences: Systems of inquiry*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Silverman, L. K. (1986). What happens to the gifted girl? In C. J. Maker (Ed.), *Critical issues in gifted education: Vol. 1. Defensible programs for the gifted* (pp. 43-89). Rockville, MD: Aspen.
- Sternberg, R. J., & Davidson, J. E. (1985). Cognitive development in the gifted and talented. In F. Horowitz & M. O'Brien (Eds.), *The gifted and talented: Developmental perspectives* (pp. 37-74). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- Webb, J. T., Meckstroth, E. A., & Tolan, S. S. (1982). *Guiding the gifted child*. Columbus, OH: Ohio Psychology Publishing Co.
- Willings, D. (1980). *The creatively gifted: Recognizing and developing the creative personality*. Cambridge: Woodhead-Faulkner.

Giftedness as Multilevel Potential:

A Clinical Example

M. Kay Ogburn Colangelo

Kay Ogburn Colangelo, Ph.D. is an administrator at the University of Iowa College of Medicine. She was Sara's counselor when on the Counselor Education faculty of the University of Wisconsin—Oshkosh.

ABSTRACT: This article presents an example of the application within clinical counseling of the Theory of Positive Disintegration (TPD), a theory of emotional development. TPD offers a unique perspective that can be used to identify and counsel gifted individuals. When emphasis is placed on the individual's overall emotional development, counselors can take a new role in working with gifted. A tapescript is presented in which the counselor applies TPD principles to the client, Sara, a gifted college student. The tapescript is interrupted at points to explain how the counselor is utilizing the theory.

Identifying and counseling gifted individuals, like any other professional activity, requires a theory. Otherwise work is haphazard and data cannot be organized in a way to permit evaluation of outcomes. A theory tells us what deserves attention. We need a framework that suggests which behaviors are important and why. The Theory of Positive Disintegration (TPD) provides a framework that is particularly relevant for understanding the complex personalities of the gifted.

This theory was conceptualized by Kazimierz Dabrowski (1948; 1964), a Polish M.D. and clinical psychologist who taught for many years at the University of Alberta in Canada. His study of eminent and creative individuals played a major role in formulating the theory. Dabrowski (in Dabrowski, Kawczak, & Piechowski, 1970) maintained that the ultimate direction and control of behavior is located in the emotional, rather than the intellectual function. This new perspective leads us, then, to emphasize the strength and evolution of the emotional lives of gifted individuals if we want to affect their behavior and help them nourish their talents and their own development.

In the following tapescript, the counselor (C) applies the principles articulated by Dabrowski's theory to the situation of Sara (S), a gifted college sophomore seeking help. Familiarization with some of the basic principles of TPD outlined in Nelson's and Hague's articles in this journal will be helpful to

the reader. (See "Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration," page 1, and Hague's "State of the Art' Moral Development: Moral Development in the Post-Kohlbergian Age," page 15, in this issue).

Introduction to the Tapescript

The strategies the counselor employs in the tapescript are supporting and reframing. To *support* is to validate existing behaviors, attitudes, and emotions. Dabrowski's theory details which behaviors, attitudes, and emotions to support — namely, those that foster personal growth. To *reframe* is to assign a new meaning to existing behaviors, attitudes, and emotions—to help the client understand aspects of herself differently, in terms of the process of development. The theory details which behaviors, attitudes, and emotions to reframe and provides the rationale for reframing and the framework into which the behavior is placed.

Throughout the session, the counselor identifies client's strengths; that cannot be accomplished without a theory to suggest exactly what is to be considered a strength and why. According to Dabrowski's theory, the greater the intensity and variety of forms of overexcitabilities, the greater is the potential for development. In addition, the dynamisms are representative of emotional development. Therefore, both the overexcitabilities and the dynamisms are considered strengths. (Please see Nelson's article, page 10, for a description of overexcitabilities, and Hague's article, page 24, for an explanation of dynamisms).

Attaining a high level of emotional development is rare. Most individuals function at Level II or below. The example of Sara was chosen for this particular article because she evidences several multilevel dynamisms and imaginal and emotional overexcitabilities, all of which are necessary for a high level of emotional development. For these reasons (according to TPD), she may be considered gifted.

Sara comes from a small, rural town in Wisconsin. She is the youngest of six children. The family constellation is: girl, age 30; girl, 28; boy, 26; girl, 24; girl, 22; Sara, 20. At the time of her first interview, her 22-year-old sister had just married, leaving Sara as the only sibling still at home. Each of her sisters and her brother had left home at the "appropriate" time — right after high school — except the second oldest, who stayed until she was 22. As Sara put it: "I've had my parents alone for two years. They've let me see more of the people they are. I think I know them better than the other kids do." Sara revealed her present task and her relationship with her parents: "I try to be strong to get my independence. I have to be. But I know it's hard for them, so I'm gentle. They'll tell me their opinion. They have a right to tell me what they think. I know they have my good in mind."

A sophomore, Sara came to the University Counseling Center with her desire to pursue a career in song writing and singing in conflict with her need to earn enough money on which to live. Her stated interests were music, psychology,

and philosophy. A few minutes into the first interview it became apparent that her stated concern was a part of her need to gain more independence from her family of origin.

The Tapescript

Sara begins by expressing her concern that a career in music would pay too little to allow her to maintain her independence. Yet it is what she wants for herself. She is vague about choosing some "other job," unable to focus on this or to summon motivation for it. She talks at length about deciding which classes to take.

- C: I'm sensing you're shying away from something, and I'm not sure what's going on.
- S: From music? (pause) I think my parents don't really want me to get into it too much...You know, they have their reasons. They want me to be happy and everything.
- C: And they have the answer.
- S: That — and too, I do owe them quite a bit. They never expect anything, but I feel like I'm going to pay them back for what they've given me — I don't know — in money maybe....But in giving them trips and stuff — that's why I want to get money — to be able to give people I love something.
- C: What you're saying now is, "What I'm going to give them is that I'm going to give up something that I would like to do."

This is Sara's major concern; and she goes back to it several times during the interview. She is torn between her attachment to her parents and the need to make important decisions on her own. Her need to make her parents happy, to provide some service just for them, suggests the presence of emotional overexcitability.

At the same time, Sara is in the process of making some decisions for herself that should be based on her own assessment of her talents and values, not her parents' assessment. But she is experiencing a multilevel conflict because she may make decisions that will cause anxiety to those she loves — which also concerns her.

This does not mean that as counselors we should urge clients to do everything that their attachments want of them. It means that when a client demonstrates this conflict, it may be evidence of multilevel potential. Clinically, the counselor has to: (1) address Sara's need for validation for the strength of her attachment — her ability to experience relationship; (2) invite her to look

Giftedness as Multilevel Potential

within herself to discover her own internal pressures, talents, and "oughts"; and (3) recognize that, yes, these two might present a conflict.

So the counselor validates both sides of the conflict because (consistent with Dabrowski's theory) wanting to make those we love happy and ascertaining our own intrinsic values are both multilevel behaviors. In this case, the conflict exists without a trace of anger and hostility because Sara assumes full responsibility for feeling she wants to make her parents happy. This assumed responsibility is an important indication of an internal locus of control. What is important here is not that the client resolve the conflict but that the counselor value her because she has it. In this case, the counselor deals with the internal locus of control issue first.

S: I still...sing and that. I don't do it for the public, but probably for my own enjoyment. I would never stop. I mean, there's no way. Sometimes I just have the uncontrollable urge to write. You can't stop it, and if you don't write it down, you're just losing it. Sometimes I look back on it and it makes sense to me, you know. It helps me out later if I have a problem. It's my unconscious mind telling me.

C: You're really using it for your own self-growth. It's sort of your therapy.
S: Yeah, it helps. In speech class—I can't talk in front of people very well.

Sara goes on to mention her experiences in a speech class, where she felt belittled and pressured. She speaks of her shyness. Her anger at such treatment resulted in her composing a song about "people being different."

C: You really want to be your own person. That comes through so much in what you say.

S: But where it counts I can't make myself. Like with my parents I can't assert myself because I don't want to hurt them. They have sacrificed a lot for us kids, and I don't feel that it's right to turn my back on them.

C: So it's almost an IOU.

S: They don't feel that way. It's just me. I've always felt that way. They gave us the chance to travel with them and to explore whatever we wanted to do. It's such individuality, but then again it's...

C: You want to do something for them—to repay them for all they've done for you.

Sara goes back to the conflict that is crucial to her and, in so doing, again illustrates her emotional overexcitability. The strength and genuineness of her

M. Kay Ogburn Colangelo

fondness for her parents and her appreciation of the freedom of individuality and togetherness they have provided is becoming clear. She again implies an internal locus of control by restating that she owns the value. ("I don't feel that it's right to turn my back on them"). Later: "They don't feel that way. It's just me. I've always felt that way."

Until this point, the counselor has been validating Sara's need to make an autonomous decision about her possible career in music. Each counselor response dealing with the attachment/separation issue has been a confrontive attempt to isolate the client's knowledge of her own talents and discount the external environment, even if that environment involves an important relationship. When the client pursued other topics, the counselor, for the most part, practiced reflection, which leads the client into herself, into her own autonomy (Rogers, 1951). Now the counselor validates the other side of the multilevel conflict—Sara's desire to give of herself to those she cares about and who care for her. In effect, the counselor has planted some seeds. She has made the point, "Listen to the voice within you." Now other seeds can be planted.

S: I don't think they would mind, but they want something that I can be happy in. Sometimes I can be unstable. I mean, sometimes I go into myself for awhile....I had a broken leg and was out of school for a long time. I was by myself, so I learned to be comfortable with being by myself. Whenever I want to be alone, I just do that usually. So they think I'm sensitive. They don't want me to lose reality or whatever. I do have that tendency.

C: So the message from your parents is, "Sara be careful, because you're unstable." So you need to be in a profession that can pull you back to earth.

S: To keep me here, yeah. I think strangely.

C: You think strangely. Tell me about that.

S: I do. It's not erratic or anything, but to me it's very logical thinking. To me, things come in a progression right through, but to other people it's just strange.

Sara reveals two aspects of herself that suggest multilevel developmental potential:

1. Sara says she "goes into" herself, suggesting the ability to allow an *internal locus of control*. Her need for solitude is related to this tendency to allow her autonomous inner forces to influence her present behavior and future attitudes.

2. Sara reveals her *imaginational overexcitability*, the ability to transcend ordinary reality and to think differently than others. Sara labels herself as therefore unstable and sensitive and also communicates that her family is worried about her. We can assume that Sara herself may be afraid of these behaviors. Traditional medical-model psychiatry would raise an eyebrow at these behaviors, too, and consider them indications of possible psychosis. But TPD offers a different perspective by interpreting the behavior Sara describes here as indicative of emotional development. So the counselor labels the client's thinking process as "special," not "strange," thus reframing it or interpreting it differently. This allows the client more freedom to appreciate what she says is true about herself.

C: I'm getting a flavor so far of a very special person. And I hear you putting that special person down when you say, "I'm unstable; I go into myself." I hear the positive in all that. That's what I'm thinking as I listen to you. I'm not listening to you say you're a woman who is mentally ill, because I'm thinking of a very special thing going on with you.

S: See, that's what I'm thinking. I think that I could think too much or whatever and probably go insane or whatever or lose reality—touch with it. It would be very easy, I'm sure. A lot of things around me I don't like. It upsets me, but I can't do anything about it.

C: To me, that doesn't sound insane. It sounds like you're one of the few people who realizes that this society is insane!

This is an example of the multilevel dynamism *positive maladjustment*—being unable to adjust oneself to injustices and cruelties in the world, however insignificant to others, and becoming annoyed and often angry about them. In contrast, the unilevel process is referred to as *negative adjustment*. This means accepting and conforming to the norms prevailing in the environment without independent critical evaluation of them.

Now Sara begins talking about how she cannot show physical affection to her parents but can express it to them in writing. Inhibition in a relationship is thought to be indicative of an emotional overexcitability (Dabrowski, 1964). Consistent with this, Sara revealed in the first interview that she was painfully shy around males who could be possible companions.

S: I write to them [her parents]. I can't say it to them. So I always write it to them....My mother—it upsets her.

C: Your expression of caring for her upsets her?

S: Well, maybe so. I can't show it otherwise. I can't give her a hug. I can, but I don't. I refrain from things like that because I don't feel comfortable doing it. So I write. That's where I put my emotions usually. She probably doesn't realize, that I'm...

C: That you care that much.

S: Yeah, I show it, but I don't. I'm trying to get over that. Since the last time I talked to you, I've changed a few things.

C: Please tell me about that.

S: When you said I had in my own mind all the answers and then sorting them out and trying to—it really did help, to talk to someone. You're very easy to talk to. It was very nice.

C: Thank you. That felt good. You know how to reach out.

S: Sometimes, well—it's just good....

C: But you're saying a really positive thing about yourself. You're saying that you sat here and talked to me for an hour, and let that make a difference in your life.

Sara illustrates her emotional overexcitability again in this portion of the interview. She is relationship-oriented. She shows this as she discloses her feelings for her parents. Now she demonstrates a regard for her relationship with her counselor by reaching out to her in thankfulness and genuine appreciation. This calls for the counselor to validate and respond to the client's ability to trust and respect others within a relationship because, according to the theory, this is indicative of multilevel potential and is therefore considered a strength.

Sara's statements also weakly suggest the presence of the multilevel dynamism *inner psychic transformation*, the ability to allow for and seek changes in emotional functioning. Sara simply states that she has "changed a few things" in that she is aware of having in her "own mind all the answers." This is not a strong indication of inner psychic transformation, but the presence of this dynamism is extremely important because it is evidence that the emotional structure is non-rigid and therefore capable of development. Multilevel development could not occur without this factor. Because it is so important, we want to pay attention to any hint of its presence. If we were to make use of the concept of inner psychic transformation in describing giftedness, we would say that gifted individuals are able to benefit more from counseling and teaching because they effectively use opportunities to develop their inner lives and improve their talents.

- S:** Now I know if I really want something, I can do it. I've always known that if I put my mind to it, I can do it. Like tests and things. If I finally make up my mind that I want to pass the course with [whatever grade], then I can do it. It's just getting the motivation there. I tend to let things go and do other things I enjoy.
- C:** I think I'm understanding your life dilemma. It seems that you know a lot about yourself, and you know what it is in the world that you are upset with. And you know that you can be carried away by that....
- S:** Yeah. And I don't want to let myself be because I don't want to lose reality. I mean it would be easy to—I don't want to block out all the other. I don't think I'm ready to accept...
- C:** I guess what I'm hoping is that you never accept it.
- S:** But if you don't, it's...
- C:** I think your reality is probably much more beautiful than what's out there.
- S:** No one else would think that. I mean...
- C:** People misunderstand you.
- S:** Yeah. It's like everybody wants you to be the same. And you can't be. Like that song I wrote. I can't be a carbon copy of someone just because they are... I have to be myself. Yet people try to put their image of what they want me to be onto me—what they expect of me. Sometimes I can't live up to it, and it bothers me that I can't—I suppose with my parents. I want to make them happy, but then again, is it worth my sanity to do that? I don't want to alienate them. I want them to be proud of me.
- C:** The way I see it is that all your strengths—the way they are combining—you have so many strengths: your caring for your parents, your wanting them to be happy and your knowing that you can have something to do with that, but yet wanting to be your own person, and your talent in seeing different aspects of the world that other people miss...that these strengths don't exactly fit together. But I see them all as real strengths.

Again Sara goes back to the conflict that is most important to her: She wants to bring happiness to her parents, and at the same time she wants to live up to her own standard of success and not someone else's. Sara does not believe in copying others or being who they tell her to be. But she also believes in guarding against family estrangement, which, because of its relationship component, is evidence of an emotional overexcitability. The counselor must validate each side of the conflict because both are indicative of multilevel potential: Sara's need to

- listen to and follow her own talents and her desire to keep from alienating those she loves.
- S:** It would be hard to combine them. I have to be realistic. You can't get everything you want. Although you can try.
- C:** You sure can. You can be as creative as you can be creative.
- S:** But I don't know if I want to put out that much effort.
- C:** That's something else.
- S:** But if you give it all you've got and someone says, "That's nothing," it doesn't mean anything. And...look at all this time you've spent. It's like an experiment. You put all this time in it and then come up with something that you didn't want to come up with...
- C:** I know you must feel the weight of your own life on your shoulders.
- S:** Yeah, because I don't know where I'm going. I don't have a clear path... I'm not ready to accept...(pause)
- C:** All the feelings.
- S:** Yeah, I think it scares me a little because I'm...
- C:** You're scared of the power of it.
- S:** Yeah, and I don't like erratic things, and I feel that I'm very erratic—thinking and things. Sometimes at night I can't sleep because...my mind is always thinking and working. I've never been able to sleep. I'm a light sleeper. I dream always, and it's just too erratic. I don't know.
- C:** That seems consistent with the way you talk about yourself—so much going on that you haven't got time to sleep because you want to let it go on.

Again Sara exhibits imaginal overexcitability: She says she dreams frequently and that her "mind is always thinking and working," so much so that this takes precedence over sleeping. The client worries that what she describes as "erratic" is abnormal. But the counselor, in reframing, is suggesting that having overpowering feelings and thoughts means that Sara is "powerful." Developmentally, this validation is crucial in the counseling process because the counselor is reinforcing much more than simply, "Trust your strong feelings. You are worthwhile because you have them." The counselor is validating the autonomous force as a whole entity. The message is: "Trust yourself—that part of you that is uniquely powerful and creative. Let that be your control center."

S: I waste so much time being idle and thinking about what I should be doing. That bothers me. I feel guilty about that. I should be doing something. I should make out a schedule and go by it sometimes.

C: You know that you're wasting some of that power.

The counselor makes an assumption here that Sara is experiencing guilt as a multilevel dynamism. This is guilt that the individual takes upon herself for not living up to an autonomously determined "ought." Unilevel guilt is when an individual feels remorse over not living up to a standard set by society, regardless of whether that is consistent with one's own standards. So the counselor responds by assuming that this guilt is useful to Sara's development because it beckons her to be true to her own standards of how she should spend her time. Sara also exhibits the multilevel dynamism of inferiority toward oneself or frustration with what is lacking (Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1977). She has feelings of inadequacy because she thinks she is not using her time creatively.

The counselor reframes Sara's dilemma of having to choose between a career and a second-rate job into a both/and choice. The job can be a sensible "pillow to fall back on" and need not preclude continuing with music. Sara is relieved but still somewhat uncertain. She suggests that marriage might be another solution to her problem. As the two discuss this, Sara realizes, "That wouldn't feel good. I want to find myself on my own and not be just an extension of him."

S: Sometimes I change. Marriage isn't that important. Well, it's important, but I figure that I should straighten out before I jump into it. There's no sense going on with this. I'm just telling you all my problems.

C: I think that you're giving me your strengths. I don't think you're giving me your problems. I hear that you haven't recognized them as strengths yet.

S: I do now. I really know. It'll be a long time coming. But that's all right because I think I have to put my mind straight before I can get a career. I have to know where I'm going first. It's been really helpful. I really appreciate it.

C: I was saying, "go on, be conceited," in here. "Let me know what your thinking or feeling can do."

S: I personally think I can sing. Writing, I don't know. Sometimes I don't even feel that it's my own; it just strikes you as being a little strange. This one story I wrote—it's about someone dying, but she didn't realize she was dead, you know....I understood it, and then again, I didn't. It always has something to do with God.

C: It was like you understood your own song, and then again you didn't.
S: Some of it I do. Some of it...just doesn't...make sense. But then again, where did it come from?

C: It came from you.
S: Well, maybe, yeah. I like to think of the supernatural.

C: Someone speaking through you?
S: Sometimes it feels like that. I know it's me, but it's part of the mind that's untapped, that wants to be let out.

C: It sounds like part of the mystery of you that you don't know about.
S: Yeah, there's a lot. That's why the mind fascinates me—and we only use 10% of it, and there's all that other part left. Uri Geller and bending metals. Did you see that thing on TV? Wasn't that good!

C: Yes, excellent.
S: I believe it because I think the mind can do anything you want it to do.

C: I can really sense that you're in awe of your own mind. Seems like you're really aware of the creative energy within you—and it comes out—and you're in awe.

S: Well, it bothers me, too....I don't know if I want it sometimes. It seems like I have to write it down, cause I feel like maybe it'll help me sometime or help someone else, you know, if they ever see it. Because otherwise it's just lost. I mean, I'm sure you can remember it, but the first impact is always the...

C: Something in you is always bugging you.
S: Yeah—to get out.

C: And so you have the responsibility to do that. But you get tired, so you don't want that responsibility all the time.

Here, Sara exhibits three developmental strengths. First, she is demonstrating *imaginational overexcitability*: She has interest in the supernatural; she perceives dimensions beyond the ordinary; she feels as if the story she wrote came from beyond her, that its mysterious source is stronger than she. These are not blind beliefs but, rather, a view of how she experiences her own creative propensities. Second, Sara displays the multilevel dynamism *astonishment with oneself*, shock over the discovery of one's own nature. She is surprised and awed by her own creation. Third, she reveals her *other-directedness* in her desire to help others, to play a part in their growth—another sign of emotional overexcitability.

The counselor takes the opportunity to invite Sara to see the imaginal and emotional overexcitabilities along with the multilevel process of astonishment with oneself as part of her autonomous force—to recognize that this pressure comes from within. The counselor validates her inner power.

- S: ...No, I don't think I do. I'd like to just be easy-going.
- C: I wonder what choice you have?
- S: Oh well, I don't think you do. See, if I would let it lay or let it die, I would feel very empty.
- C: So you sort of know your mission then?
- S: Yeah, I know I can't...
- C: You know that mission, and you're fighting it every day.
- S: I'd rather lie back and just be in a shell.
- C: Yes. Be ordinary.
- S: Well, I *am* ordinary. Everyone has their special talents. Everyone is special in their own way. They have things that are intact. They know things that maybe they don't want to, like maybe they don't want to go into.
- C: But your talents really put pressure on you. It's like being pressed from the inside.

The counselor bears down on Sara heavily here. Sara's comment about feeling empty if she lets her talents die unexpressed could be a good opportunity to show support because she recognizes the presence of an inner pressure to develop her talents. This suggests an active autonomous force. What the counselor does in this case is to attempt to make explicit Sara's inner struggle by assuming to be the voice within her that puts pressure on her to create. This strategy would not be helpful unless the client were to evidence the presence of this inner pressure. Otherwise, this same counselor response could be perceived as coming from an external, finger-wagging authority figure.

- S: Yeah, I feel like I should be doing more...but, then again, I don't want to because I don't want to get hurt. I don't want to be rejected, I guess.
- C: It's interesting, isn't it, that you're realizing that society—the world out there—is really kind of ugly and cruel, but you don't want to be rejected by those people out there. And you know they're fickle.

- S: Uh huh. Well, see, they're all the followers....Like their minds, they all have to think the same. And if I'm different, I feel that in time, and with enough leading, they're going to kill what's in me if I do show that I'm different—which I don't know if I am. There's just part of me that doesn't want to be—I don't want to show it, 'cause I'm afraid that it'll get stomped on and it'll become a hurt for me and that I won't be able to enjoy it. It'll take a lot of the beauty, for me, out of it.
- C: I'm just wondering if it necessarily has to be that way. I'm wondering if you present this product, this jewel, and they say—the followers say—"Phooey, we don't like it." I'm wondering if we can't prepare you for that?
- S: To be able to accept it?
- C: You know, I just had this image of you writing a song thinking it's really good and really wonderful and having people say, "That's nothing special."
- S: (Laughs) That's what would happen!
- C: It might. And then, instead of taking that and becoming bitter about it or kind of withdrawing and not creating any more, using the feelings that created in you to create another song.
- S: That'd be nice. I guess you just have to keep going.
- C: Uh huh! 'Cause there's a message in that. The message is: "I gave this, and you said no." You know, when you have the feelings like that, the way that the music comes and the words come—it's another message all in itself.
- S: Yeah, I suppose, maybe if they don't understand I should just go back, try to get it down—get it up to what they're thinking of.

This segment seems to indicate that Sara perceives "the followers," instead of herself, as the appropriate evaluators of her work, which suggests that the autonomous force within her is not fully developed at this time. Note that her first impulse is to say "get it down to what they're thinking of." Recall earlier portions of the session when Sara says she writes and sings for her own enjoyment—not for the public. She doesn't want to copy others; she wonders if it is worth her sanity to make her parents happy. All of this adds up to her not wanting to write with the intent to have others accept it. Yet here she contradicts herself. Her need to gain acceptance from "the followers" will more than likely fade in importance as her development progresses. This is likely because multilevel dynamisms act to inhibit the unilevel process of an external locus of control.

In this portion of the session, the counselor has adopted a teaching role. She is attempting to stimulate Sara's internal pressure to create. The message of

Giftedness as Multilevel Potential

the lecturettes is, "Use the feelings of rejection to devise yet more songs." The session ends with Sara thanking the counselor and expressing how helpful the sessions have been for her — how much she has learned about herself.

Summary

Consistently, from beginning to end, Sara displays her emotional overexcitability. She seems to have an inborn talent to appropriately and warmly reach out to those she trusts. She shows a desire to offer affection. This desire appears to be quite strong when she feels another is giving of herself to Sara. Her nature is to return gifts of mutual appreciation.

This article has demonstrated how TPD can be applied clinically to a gifted client. That counselors apply theory, whether explicit or implicit, in clinical work is unavoidable, (Shoben, 1962). I hope this presentation makes counselors aware of the interesting possibilities for support and reframing offered by the Theory of Positive Disintegration in their work with the gifted.

REFERENCES

- Dabrowski, K. (1948). Dezyntegracja jako pozyty etap w rozwoju jednostki [Disintegration as a positive stage in the development of the individual]. *Zdrowie Psychiczne*, 3(4), 26-63.
- Dabrowski, K. (1964). *Positive disintegration*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Dabrowski, K., & Piechowski, M. M. (1977) *Theory of levels of emotional development. (Vol. 1)*. Oceanside, NY: Dabor Science Publications.
- Dabrowski, K., Kawczak, A., & Piechowski, M. M. (1970). *Mental growth through positive disintegration*. London: Gryf.
- Rogers, C. R. (1951). *Client-centered therapy*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.
- Shoben, E. J. (1962). The counselor's theory as personal trait. *Personnel & Guidance Journal* 40(7), 617-621.

This is an abridged version of the following chapter:

Ogburn Colangelo, M. K. (1979). Giftedness as multilevel potential: A clinical example. In N. Colangelo & R. T. Zaffran (Eds.), *New voices in counseling the gifted* (pp. 165-187). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.



THORNS

By: Deirdre V. Lovecky, Ph.D.

*The boy, seeing the emporer naked,
is praised for his perspicacity,
his bravery in telling the truth.
I am silent seeing the liar's nose lengthen,
the donkey's ears forming.
I feel the thorns in the rose sweet words,
pepper in the mellifluous tones,
watch the greedy reaching hands
about to stick to the golden goose.
I know the truth will not save
the emporer from his folly.
It's very hard to watch a friend
make the same mistake over and over
never seeing the thorns
until they pierce his skin,
and he cries at the pain, the blood
spilled onto whitened cloths.
Still he grasps roses with bare hands
and unprotected heart,
thinking each time
that this will be the perfect rose,
the one without thorns, and
once again he finds himself
naked in front of crowds
and blood is on his hands.*

Deirdre Lovecky is a psychologist in private practice in Providence, Rhode Island.

