Environmental, Familial, and Personal Factors That Affect
The Self-Actualization of Highly Gifted Adults: Case Studies

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

Giftedness implies an advanced ability to construct meaning in the context of experience, including an enhanced capacity to think abstractly and to respond emotionally to abstract concepts used in the interpretation of experiential phenomena. Giftedness permeates the whole of one’s intellectual, social and emotional reality (Columbus Group, Morelock, 1993, p.16).

This dissertation examines factors related to the adjustment of highly intelligent adults between the ages of 40 and 60 years old who have tested at least at the 99th percentile on tests of intellectual ability. Although it appears reasonable to assume highly intelligent people have advantages in making their lives highly satisfying, such is not always the case. Similarly, even though highly intelligent people are more likely to achieve wealth or noteworthy accomplishment, (Terman & Oden, 1959, Herrnstein & Murray, 1994) again, such is not always the case. The purpose of this study is to uncover factors that may explain the different outcomes seen in people of similarly high intellect.

Foster (1983) proposed that a secure and healthy self-concept is a necessary condition for the development of the drive to excel. Feldhusen and Hoover (1986) proposed that an inter-linkage of intelligence, self-concept, and self-esteem may engender the strong motivational force essential for high level production. Greenspon points out, however, that “Gifted people are different from those around them, which poses an immediate problem of self-identity” (1998, p. 164). It is possible that difficulties attaining a clear self-identity may contribute to additional problems in the development of high self-esteem and a strong self-concept in highly gifted individuals. Even though some people recognize their talents, they have low feelings of self-worth, and the study will examine the extent to which that inter-linkage affects adult productivity and utilization of talent.

The questions addressed by this dissertation examine how family, school and social background contribute to the self-identity and subsequent self-concept and self-esteem of highly gifted individuals in the study; what factors contribute to the development of individuals who are self-actualized, that is, fully utilizing their talents and abilities, either as achievers or in their personal lives; and, finally, which, if any, of these factors are related to the development of highly principled moral reasoning ability?

Daniel Goleman’s Emotional Intelligence (1995) specifically addresses what makes some people more satisfied with their lives than others. Although Goleman refers to a general rather than a specifically gifted population, he cites numerous studies on brain function and human behavior that likely apply also to gifted people. He ties brain function and human behavior together in an effort to explain why people’s behavior is often counter-productive for them. Goleman gives evidence that many of our life-long patterns of behaviors are formed during infancy and early childhood. These life-long patterns affect satisfaction and achievement.

Greenspon further asserts, “Comparisons to others and evaluations by others lead to judgments of relative worth” (p. 162). Early perceptions of our experiences become part of the fabric of our self-identities, self-concept, and self-esteem. These childhood perceptions, unless changed or reframed, affect our reactions and behaviors as adults toward people and events around us.

One’s earliest experiences, most specifically within the family environment, significantly mold even the exceptionally gifted into unproductive patterns that they may need to address.
before they can maximize use of their intelligence so as to make concrete accomplishments and to achieve satisfaction with their lives. Although all people need to direct their own personal journey, those who are significantly different from the norm encounter feedback and circumstances that can have confusing, and sometimes detrimental, effect on the direction of their journey.

This study examines various elements in the backgrounds of exceptionally gifted adults and seeks to uncover explanations for levels of life satisfaction, achievement, and self-actualization in people of unusually high abilities. The findings should be useful to educators, parents, and psychologists, all of whom need answers to the question of how to inspire and ensure positive self-esteem, maturity, and general social and emotional adjustment, i.e., good mental and emotional health, of highly capable children so that these children can attain their full potential as adults.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

**Statement of the Problem**

Research on the gifted has focused on two main areas of concern: first, the identification and description of the gifted individual in the context of experiences in both home and school, and second, the context of feedback to the gifted child both by parents and schools specifically related to intellectual achievement.

Identification is important primarily when it results in appropriate educational and emotional treatment of the child. The higher the intellectual level of the individual, the more problematic the indicated treatment. Research on topics including ability grouping, cooperative learning, curriculum compacting, self-esteem, and so on, rarely, if ever, touch upon the wide range of intellectual functioning among the gifted themselves.

The problem addressed in this study is the lack of information on adult highly gifted individuals regarding their perceptions of what was significant in their home and school environments toward encouraging or thwarting their emotional and intellectual development. Also, is it possible to isolate factors that enable highly gifted individuals to reach the highest levels of principled reasoning and self-actualization?

**Specific Objectives**

The objectives of the study are:

1. to study the family and educational backgrounds of exceptionally gifted adults
2. to assess the subjects’ perceptions of their own personal value and success
3. to isolate specific factors that are present in the backgrounds of the most self-actualized individuals
4. to isolate specific factors that are present in the backgrounds of individuals who are highly principled moral reasoners as measured by the DIT

**Theoretical Rationale**

The present study seeks to identify the presence or absence of self-actualization in highly gifted adults. An integral aspect of the research is to uncover possible background information that may contribute to self-actualization in adults. This study investigates how highly gifted adults perceive their childhoods in relation to their family, school, and social backgrounds. According to Falk and Miller, (1998),
Research shows that the perceived appraisal of other people (perception of another person’s response) has a direct effect on the self-image while the actual response of other people has an indirect effect, i.e. through perceptions (p. 151).

The investigation also seeks to record the subjects’ assignment of relevance of background experiences to their adult lives, e.g., their own sense of accomplishment, fulfillment and satisfaction with their lives. The researcher is looking for common markers among subjects that may connect specific childhood circumstances to specific adult outcomes. In particular, has their unusually high general intelligence affected other aspects of their backgrounds, and, if so, how? A theoretical framework was derived in response to themes that emerged during the course of the data analysis. It provides the structure for examining in the results section emotional growth in highly gifted individuals.

Self-actualization, a term specifically used by Maslow, Dabrowski and Piechowski, is often equated with the idea of living up to one’s potential. Although the current research was undertaken with the rather narrow view that “living up to one’s potential” means people have achieved intellectual and career success while also achieving inner satisfaction and emotional well-being, it became apparent that some people achieve inner satisfaction and a sense of emotional well-being without achieving overt career or financial success. Some attain career, intellectual, or financial success but never find a sense of inner satisfaction and emotional well-being. A primary goal of this paper is to elucidate the many sides of self-actualization, and the process of their attainment, in highly gifted adults.

SIGNIFICANCE

When addressing the needs of the highly gifted, the ongoing debate involves identifying the primary or most important needs that the highly gifted have. Do highly gifted children need to learn to fit into the world as it is? Does that mean that they should always be grouped and paced with an intellectual cross-section of people throughout their school years? Does “being a kid” require being exposed to and learning only what other people their age are learning despite an ability to learn faster and in more depth? Is it possible that highly gifted children often seem odd, pushy, intolerant, or unreasonable, only because they are intellectually so different from classmates that it affects their social, moral, intellectual and emotional reasoning and thus sets them apart from age-mates?

Background experiences of the highly gifted adults are examined in the hope of finding answers for future generations. Will it help the social and emotional adjustment of highly gifted children if we as a society facilitate their progress through school at their own pace even though they may have little contact with either age-mates or people of significantly different abilities? Will it help parents and teachers of highly gifted children to raise socially and emotionally well-adjusted children if the adults understand and know about high giftedness? To whom do the advantages accrue if recognition and adjustment is made to high giftedness, and who should do the adjusting? Should highly gifted children be taught, guided, forced, or encouraged to be more like everyone else their age despite their seemingly natural tendency to do otherwise? Are there identifiable reasons for why, and how, we as parents, educators, and society in general, should guide highly gifted children to be their own fullest selves?

FORMAT

Because qualitative research, particularly case study qualitative research, is largely exploratory in nature, the final structure of the data depends upon both what is discovered and
what is perceived by the researcher to be most salient. Data analysis is iterative, that is, each time the files and notes are read, themes emerge. The first two years of the analysis were spent making charts in an effort to spot trends. Rudimentary statistical analyses were employed to determine which factors correlated most with other factors. The final organization is a result of these efforts.

CHAPTER I: Introduction and Overview.

CHAPTER II: Review of the Literature is divided into four sections based on the topics that emerged as most important in the study. The first section deals with high giftedness: its description, its rarity, its treatment, and some of its outcomes. Researchers Terman, Hollingworth, and Gross not only describe different levels and characteristics of highly gifted people, they touch upon educational and psychological issues, as well. Each of these studies is longitudinal in design and involved close interaction between the researcher and the subjects and their families.

The second section addresses talent development. All three of the included studies are retrospective in design in that the subjects had all achieved eminence in a field in order to qualify for the different studies by Cox, Goertzel and Goertzel, and Bloom. Only Bloom’s study involved the researcher directly with the study subjects. These three studies are particularly useful for the present study because they personalize high giftedness by discussing people we have either heard of or read about.

The contents of the final two literature review sections had not been established when the research began. They emerged as the research process progressed on both human development and generational cohort effects. The initial interest was in conducting research on highly gifted people with the expectation of new insights into how to educate them better in the schools. Early reviews of the case study material disconfirmed a preliminary hypothesis that the school program plays a significant role in gifted children’s development. It became clear that issues related to human development played a large role in how highly gifted people grow and develop. The focus shifted to the interplay of cognitive, emotional, and moral development within the highly gifted subjects. The third literature section, therefore, touches on the cognitive developmental theories of Erikson and Maslow. It moves on to the emotional developmental theories of Dabrowski and Piechowski, and ends with moral development theorists Kohlberg, Rest, and Gilligan.

The fourth and final literature review section deals specifically with the findings of Strauss and Howe (1991) as they describe viewpoints and behaviors that run consistently through generational cohorts. The effects of generational experiences, and the historical experiences of the parental generation, sometimes have a greater impact on people than their particular school program or family make-up.

CHAPTER III: Methodology describes the research approach. It is a case study approach, primarily qualitative in design, using those aspects of qualitative research design that include exploring for themes, devising theories, searching the data for confirming and disconfirming evidence, developing new theories, testing them, and drawing and presenting conclusions.

CHAPTER IV: “Levels of Emotional Development in Highly Gifted Adults” combines case study information and anecdotes to illustrate the different levels and kinds of emotional development, from the very straightforward and concrete to the more complex and abstract reasoning that is often associated with self-actualization. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the different reasoning strategies or approaches that the subjects employ when they regard past and present events in their lives. Quotations from subjects are used in order to
illustrate the reasoning and viewpoints of people in different developmental patterns.

CHAPTER V: “Significant Life Issues in the Highly Gifted” compares such life issues as childhood emotional or physical abuse, and adult religiosity, suicide, marriage, divorce, and sexual preference to the subjects’ levels of emotional development as identified in this study.

CHAPTER VI: “Perceptions of Self Based on Feedback from Others” is a summary of themes that emerged as confusing or hurtful feedback that study participants received during their school years. This section most clearly illustrates the difficulties highly gifted subjects had, due to feedback they received related to their differentness as highly gifted, in developing their own sense of who they are and how they fit into the world.

CHAPTER VII: “Conclusions and Implications” summarizes the research approach and the findings, presents implications and limitations, and makes recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

**High Giftedness**

**Background**

More than 125 years of research on eminence, giftedness, and talent development have yielded a wealth of consistent findings regarding commonalities among highly gifted children and adults. Being highly gifted is associated with interests and behaviors, not just a faster ability to go through schoolwork or a higher likelihood of meeting with financial success. Being highly gifted leaves those who are highly gifted vulnerable to mixed messages from people who recognize their brightness but do not understand the other accompanying differences within the gifted individual.

The study of gifted children and adults first began in earnest in the 1860s with Francis Galton. After Francis Galton’s *Hereditary Genius* (1869), no scientific investigations were conducted as to the nature of high intellectual ability until Terman’s work. Galton surmised that genius runs in families, is hereditary. He sought men of accomplishment in order to discern whether or not they came from families full of eminent men. In the society of Britain’s 1860s, however, it would be difficult to distinguish between the connections and opportunities of social class and raw, innate, inherited intelligence, something Galton did not attempt to do. Also, Galton’s study did not address the incidence of unsuccessful members of the same families, and logically, he did not attempt to ascertain the different precursors to success or failure of members of the same family.

What makes Galton’s work important is that he was the first to attempt to quantify characteristics of intelligence. He measured people’s heads; had them perform various tasks of speed, dexterity, and memory; and asked for educational and family background information. In other words, he looked for patterns and similarities, found some and discarded others. He found that cranial size and finger tapping speed are not correlated with intelligence, for example.

Binet, in the late 19th century, developed a measure for assessing “feeble-mindedness,” basically, the first intelligence test, later modified by Louis Terman at Stanford, and Terman, in so doing, also engendered interest in identifying for special educational treatment individuals who were at the high end of the intellectual continuum. The United States government became interested in the study of intelligence and had psychometricians and psychologists from the early part of this century develop the Army Alpha and Army Beta intelligence measures so that the Army could establish effective training procedures based on people’s ability to learn and use information. The government also utilized these new tests to screen immigrants.

One thing became clear: ability to learn new material and put new learning to later use could be measured by these tests. But, the tests were not perfect. Background, motivation, language and culture all impacted an individual’s performance at both testing and training. Controversy arose. Much study has been done over the years to determine why certain groups out-perform other groups on intelligence measures. The measurement instruments fell into disrepute. Either the tests were flawed or our thinking about the importance of what they measure was incorrect. To many people it did not seem fair that people would be naturally created unequal; so many assumed the tests must be wrong.

Nevertheless, individual subjects in the current study presented all their available test scores; and the various scores are included on charts throughout the paper. The family
backgrounds, the school experiences, the reactions and treatments of others to the subjects, as well as the subjects’ reactions to their schooling and other people are all presented. The pattern of experience in the schools, schools that were throughout the United States, seems remarkably similar for the 41 subjects in this study. Whether or not their test scores pinpoint precisely their level of intellectual capability is not the point of the current research. The point is that on a wide variety of tests, these subjects scored at the 99th percentile or higher; these subjects were all unusually capable of reading, assimilating, and acquiring knowledge throughout their school years and adult lives. Under most definitions, 98th percentile scorers are considered “gifted,” unusually intelligent. When precise scores are unavailable, intellectual level can be estimated based on standard deviations from other submitted scores and by comparing subject biographical data to normative information (Cox, 1926). All the subjects are near or above 140 IQ.

Several subjects in the present study are near 190 IQ. There is much evidence that the difference between a 140 IQ and an IQ of 190 is huge (Terman, 1925; Burks, Jensen, & Terman, 1930; Hollingworth, 1926, 1942; Webb, Meckstrom, & Tolan, 1982). The ability tests taken by the subjects had varying standard deviations but for the purpose of this study are assumed to be 15 to 16 points on the IQ scale. That means there is a minimum 3 standard deviation intellectual difference between the highest and lowest subjects in the study. In fact, the lowest measured subjects are nearly 3 standard deviations from the general population average themselves. A perspective is needed in order to understand the impact of the rarity of finding similar individuals at ever-increasing IQ levels. Because of the nature of the bell curve, the likelihood of a child meeting someone else in class who is of similar intellectual level decreases as the IQ goes up. Children in the 105-125 IQ range are usually capable of doing the normal grade level coursework, but as most teachers know, children with IQs in the 120s are on average considerably quicker at learning and performing than the children below 110. There is a very noticeable difference within this IQ span of only 20 IQ points. Even though brighter than average, all of these children are likely to have at least a few classmates who are similarly intelligent and who will have similar interests, humor, values, etc. of children their age.

As one travels up the IQ scale another 20 points to 145, the difference in learning speed and ability is similarly different. The child at 145 learns faster, more thoroughly, and with fewer repetitions than the child at 125 IQ. But, because the child of 145 IQ may be alone in the class with that IQ level, neither the classwork nor the play, reading, and value issues, as shall be shown in the literature review, will be common for that child with most of the other children in the class. It follows that the farther up the scale the children’s ability places them, the more isolated they will be, the more difficult their task of becoming involved in the learning and the play and the friendships of their age-mates.

As a result of the increased disparity between highly gifted subjects and most classmates, even if the measurement instruments are not precise, the case study information provided in this paper gives example after example of the very real differences these subjects experienced in their classrooms growing up. The majority of them did not know their IQs. They were not learning to read early and developing interests in topics that did not attract the interest of their classmates because they were being groomed for intellectual greatness. They were simply being themselves.

The Terman Studies

The longitudinal study of approximately 1500 gifted California school children by Lewis Terman and his colleagues is perhaps the most publicly recognized research on high ability anywhere (Burks, Jensen, & Terman, 1930; Oden, 1968; Terman, 1925; Terman & Oden, 1947, 1959). Many of our popular notions of gifted people emanate from the work of Terman, notions that are good and bad, correct and incorrect.

Lewis Terman began his famous longitudinal research on gifted children in the 1920s.
The first volume of the series basically sets up how the research for the longitudinal study is to be performed. It identifies the study group selection process, the instrumentation, and so on. Terman’s study group came almost entirely from two large California metropolitan areas, were from middle to upper class two parent homes with most fathers in the professional class. Asians and other minorities were rarely included in the sample. In addition, children were nominated for screening by their teachers. Later research by Pegnato and Birch underscored the basic problem with Terman’s subject selection approach. Unless specifically trained to identify gifted children, teachers are likely to over-identify moderately gifted and miss highly gifted entirely (Pegnato & Birch, 1959).

A frequently quoted summary of more than fifty years of research on the gifted group is from Oden (1968), one of Terman’s research team members: “all the evidence indicates that with few exceptions the superior child becomes the superior adult” (p.50). It is true that gifted children turn into gifted adults; their superiority in any but the intellectual realm, however, is far from assured. In Terman’s group, the children who were studied not only were all identified to their teachers and their parents as being gifted, they were given that information themselves. This is quite a different circumstance than for the subjects in the present study.

Aside from the educational and probable psychological advantages of being identified and treated for their differences, the Terman subjects attended school during a time when bright children were routinely grade-skipped, as well. Another problem with the findings of Terman’s research, as interpreted by educators today, is that 33 of the 35 most gifted children in the cohort had been grade-skipped. As Gross (1993) so aptly points out:

> The generally positive academic and social adjustment reported for this group may not have characterized children of similar levels of ability whose talents were not recognized by their teachers and who consequently were not selected for participation in the study (p. 23).

In the present study, parents as well as teachers were usually unaware of the high giftedness of the children. Past research into how well adjusted highly and profoundly gifted children are is probably more a statement of how well-adjusted they can be when their giftedness is recognized and treated both at home and in school, and when they receive appropriate educational and social placement in school.

Volumes IV: The Gifted Child Grows Up (1947) and V: The Gifted Group At Mid-Life (1959) hold particular relevance to the current study as pertains to social and play interests of gifted children compared to unselected, or randomly selected average children. From Volume IV, “First, a masculinity index was computed for each of the 90 plays and games on the basis of the amount and direction of sex difference in the preference scores of the control [nongifted, or unselected, random group]. If a given activity had a high preference score for boys and a low one for girls, the activity in question was considered masculine (p. 34)...the ninety play activities were rated by several judges for the amount of social participation and social organization they involve (p. 36)...”

The interests of gifted children are many-sided and spontaneous. The members of our group learned to read easily and read many more and also better books than the average child. At the same time, they engaged in a wide range of childhood activities and acquired far more knowledge of plays [activities] and games than the average child of their years. Their preferences among plays and games closely follow the normal sex trends with regards to masculinity and femininity of interests, although gifted girls tend to be somewhat more masculine in their play
life than the average girls. Both sexes show a degree of interest maturity two or three years beyond the age norm (1959, pp. 15-16).

The summary of the findings on sociability found in Volume V (1959) is also of particular interest to the current study:

Comparisons on sociability indices showed gifted subjects of both sexes significantly below control subjects at all ages; i.e., age for age the control subjects had somewhat more interest than gifted subjects in plays that involve social participation. Much of the difference can be accounted for by the fact that the gifted child is more self-sufficient and thus more able to amuse himself (p. 10).

Terman had noted in an earlier work that,

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 (1931, p. 579).

The combined information from these two volumes provides an interpretation that is in line with the observations of Leta Hollingworth (1942), discussed in the next section of this literature review. Again, in Volume IV, the authors make the following observation about the different ways gifted and nongifted rate some specific play interests:

...several of the very mildly social games which appeal to gifted children are unpopular with average children because of the demands they make on intelligence (e.g., authors, anagrams, puzzles, checkers, chess) (p. 37).

When children with different interests, reading background, and preferences are placed together for the majority of their school time, it can appear that the gifted are not as social, indeed are "more self-sufficient," than typical children. In fact, it is possible the gifted tire of playing games they lost interest in, or never developed interest in, two to four years earlier. It is also a double-bind of sorts to be so capable in an activity that it ceases to be fun for the other children who can rarely win.

It is also in Volume IV: The Gifted Child Grows Up (1947) that Terman notes that his subgroup of over 170 IQ did not earn appreciably different grades in school than the total gifted group. In fact, 25 percent of the extremely gifted college men had grades that were fair to poor. This information is relevant to the highly gifted throughout the last 50 years, as well, as the current research shows. It was also reported that the most highly gifted young people were described as "poor mixers" by their teachers and parents. Although they were not isolated by their classmates, many of the exceptionally gifted isolated themselves due, Terman conjectured, to issues of salience (Burks, Jensen and Terman, 1930). The previous information on play interests helps provide an explanation as to why this is so.

Qualities of character also interested Terman. He reported that on tests of "trustworthiness" and "moral stability" his average gifted child of 9 years old scored comparably to typical 14 year olds (1925). His subjects also exhibited high standards of truth and honesty, a
trait that often caused them problems related to appearing tactless. This tendency toward frankness in the highly gifted is evident in this paper’s case studies, as well.

**Leta Hollingworth**

Leta Hollingworth’s (1942) descriptive research is based on observational records of children whom she identified as scoring above 180 IQ on the Stanford-Binet intelligence test. She began her career working for the City of New York as a social worker and psychologist screening both infants and inmates. It was during her role on the faculty of Teachers College, Columbia University, where she taught a course on exceptional children, that she first became interested in profoundly gifted children. After her experience with thousands of people at the low end of the intelligence scale, she chose to demonstrate for her Teachers College students the use of the Stanford-Binet by testing a student of one of her teacher college students. She had requested that a teacher select a “bright” child. The child tested at 187 IQ, and Dr. Hollingworth proceeded to screen and find first 4 more children above 180, and then an additional 7. She published one volume, *Gifted Children: Their Nature and Nurture* (1926), that included intensive case studies of the first five children. Her husband posthumously published her second volume, *Children Above 180 IQ* (1942), which included the additional 7 children, as well.

After the aforementioned experience, Hollingworth devoted her time and attention to the establishment of four special classes for gifted children as well as the classes for average children at The Speyer School. She supervised her teachers as they tried different methods of pacing, individualization, and social activities for the different intellectual and age levels of the children. Tolan (1990) summarized several of Hollingworth’s conclusions that are pertinent to the current research as regards highly gifted children in a typical classroom:

> The highly gifted cannot readily learn to value intellectual challenge and hard work (or gain solid work habits) when they have little or nothing to do in the classroom...Gifted children usually don’t perceive themselves as especially able. They assume they’re normal. Therefore, anyone who can’t see what they see or do what they do must be dumb. It is vital to help highly gifted children to understand their differences from others, and to see, as well, other people’s strengths...Too often the authorities in the highly gifted child’s world insist on rules that appear irrational or incomprehensible to the child...a 6-year old who reads at a 12th grade level is not likely to respect school authorities who insist upon filling in a phonics workbook day after day (p. 205).

Hollingworth wrote,

> It is especially unfortunate, therefore, that so many gifted children have in authority over them persons of no special fitness for the task, who cannot gain or keep the respect of these good thinkers (1942, p. 261).

In a number of case studies that are presented in this paper, subjects voice anger and hostility toward authority figures. Silverman provides an excellent summary of Hollingworth’s findings regarding issues of authority:

> In some cases, gifted children may rebel against all persons in authority because of earlier negative experiences. If they are mishandled in their youth, some gifted individuals become incapable of dealing with insubordination of any kind.
Because some form of subordination usually precedes leadership positions, their contentiousness might render them ineffectual in the work world. Negativism and cynicism can seriously hamper one’s career goals (1990, p. 175).

Hollingworth was the first to point out that highly gifted children are often easier to discipline than less gifted children (1931). They also have a great love of and need for “exactness in all mental performances” (1927, p. 4), and as Silverman notes, “They cannot resist the temptation to set someone straight if they perceive the slightest loophole in a statement. This tendency appears to increase with higher levels of intelligence” (1990, p. 176). All of these observations dovetail into the issue of problems with authority. The case studies are replete with examples of the study subjects feeling unheard, not respected, baffled, hostile, and angry over the treatment they experienced at the hands of their parents, teachers, and many others. Hollingworth suggested a program of emotional education to deal with the tendencies particular to highly gifted children.

Terman’s writings often contained references to some gifted children’s bad attitudes and habits of laziness. Hollingworth, however, concluded that gifted children were not lazy, but bored and unmotivated. She noted that gifted children received “daily practice in habits of idleness and daydreaming” (1942, p. 258) when they were given classwork that they had mastered much earlier, sometimes years earlier, than classmates. She also observed that gifted children became so accustomed to low or little effort at learning and schoolwork that they expected an “effortless existence” (1930, p. 442), something borne out by the experiences of a number of my highest IQ subjects. In fact, highly gifted children are often perceived as being inattentive, unable to attend to classwork, and socially immature when they are, in fact, simply intellectually misplaced. Hollingworth gave a representative example in the following quotation:

A case in point is that of a six-year-old boy of IQ 187, who was reported as too immature for the work of the first grade, because he would not attend to the lessons given, but would “go off by himself, lie down on his back, and look up at the ceiling.” This child’s mental age was twelve. He could read as well as sixth grade children ordinarily can, according to standard tests. He could perform all the fundamental processes of arithmetic, could square numbers and could read numbers to the billions. Bored with the material being presented to beginners, yet not knowing how to formulate his difficulty, he simply drifted away from the teacher and the group, as his childish solution of the situation (1930, p. 443).

Hollingworth found, as Terman had, that highly gifted girls show less interest in traditional female play interests (1931, 1942). She also developed a theory that there is an optimal intelligence level of between 130 and 150 IQ wherein the individual “comprehends more clearly, but not too much more clearly” (1940, p.274) than most children so is more likely to become a leader and be accepted by the group. As vocabulary and interests diverge, however, the highly gifted are less interested in other children their age and isolation is likely to increase. A concomitant problem is the perception by others that the highly gifted are bossy when, in fact, they are simply interested in making sure everything runs in what they perceive to be the most interesting and complex fashion (1931).

In the area of moral reasoning Hollingworth’s 180+ IQ children exhibited an unusually passionate concern for issues of life and death, man’s relationship with God, and questions about the origins of life (1942).
Gross

Gross has been an outspoken advocate in Australia for the needs of highly gifted children. She is in the process of conducting an extensive longitudinal study of 40 highly gifted children, 15 of whom form the basis for her book, *Exceptionally Gifted Children* (1993). She describes in depth the characteristics of these children and of their families’ efforts to find them the best possible school matches. When she began her work the Australian schools were no more hospitable to effective education for highly gifted children than most schools in the United States (Ruf, 1986). Australia has a much smaller population than the United States, however, and her work has had more influence than the work of gifted specialists in the United States, in turn leading to governmental and attitudinal changes in Australia during the 1990s.

Particularly pertinent to the current study are Gross’s findings on the play interests of her subjects. As with other researchers (Benbow, 1985; VanTassel-Baska, 1983), Gross found that reading was far and away the most popular leisure time activity for her subjects. In fact, the majority of the homes in her study had over 500 books in them. The 1982 Midwest Talent Search Finalists (VanTassel-Baska, 1983) had similar high numbers of books, and avid readers, in their homes. Interestingly, Benbow (as cited in Gross, 1993) compared the number of books in the homes of moderately gifted compared to the “extremely gifted mathematical and verbal reasoners” and found the extremely gifted homes had more than 500 books by a 5 to 1 ratio to the moderately gifted homes. This finding indicates that highly gifted individuals, apparently as part of their nature, demand large supplies of reading material. The diversity of reading material and topics among highly gifted stands out as quite different from nongifted to moderately gifted, as well.

The type of information background that highly gifted, avid reading, children take with them to school and the playground sets them apart in many ways from their same age classmates. Science fiction is the most common type of reading preferred by the young exceptionally gifted child (Gross, 1993; Terman, 1925; VanTassel-Baska, 1983; Witty & Lehman, as cited in Gross, 1993).

Gross gave the *Defining Issues Test*, used in the current study, and Coopersmith *Self-Esteem Inventory* to eight of her highly gifted subjects who were over age 10. The *DIT* is not normally used with elementary school children because the necessary reading level is not reached by most children until they are 12-13 years old. Gross compared the scores of her subjects with those of American children at the junior high, high school, and college levels. All the study children had mental ages of at least 16 at the time of testing but all were below the age mean of the junior high norm group. As a result, all eight scored above the junior high mean, four scored above the high school mean, and two scored above the college mean.

Gross compared the *DIT* results to the Coopersmith *SEI* results and discovered that three children who scored above the junior high mean but who had not been accelerated beyond age peers in school all had seriously depressed self-esteem scores. The child with the highest *DIT* score also had the highest *SEI* score and had, not coincidentally, according to Gross, been radically accelerated in school and was working with children averaging five years older than he. In other words, the mental age of his classmates as well as their general developmental level, was more aligned with this child’s than for the other study subjects. As Gross concluded:

It may be that, where exceptionally gifted children have not been accelerated to be with children at similar levels of intellectual and social development, significantly elevated levels of moral development may intensify their awareness of thinking and feeling in ways that set them apart from their age peers. The loneliness and bewilderment of [her non-accelerated subject who scored low on the *SEI*] is more readily understood when one considers that at age 10 he was capable of moral
reasoning at levels which characterize Kohlberg’s postconventional stages, while his classmates may well have been functioning within Stages 1 and 2, where rules are followed not from an appreciation of their value, but simply to avoid punishment. (1993, p. 255)

The young exceptionally gifted subjects in Gross’s study indicated play interests similar to those in the studies of Hollingworth (1936, 1942) and Terman (1925), that is, both interests were age advanced and of a more intellectual nature than for their age-mates.

Others on Gifted

Many findings of the present study support earlier findings. For example, Tannenbaum (1962) found that when adolescents show talent in sports, music or art, they are the recipients of less hostility from their classmates than students who are simply academically brilliant. Kincaid (1969) studied 561 children who scored at or above 150 IQ and found that their play interests centered around activities and games requiring the intellect rather than the predominantly sensori-motor activities of their age-mates. Among their interests were museum visits, discussions, and puzzles.

Numerous researchers have noted the advanced moral reasoning and early emergence of ethical concerns among the highly gifted. Carroll summarized his observations of children over 170 IQ as follows:

Nothing to them is ever wholly white, or wholly black, wholly right or wholly wrong...The really great humanists are found not among bigots of limited intelligence, but among those who have sufficient intellectual capacity to realize that all values are relative (Carroll, 1940, p. 123).

Janos, Robinson and Sather (1983) used the Defining Issues Test to compare a group of radically accelerated university students who were aged 11-18, and two groups of college age National Merit Finalists who had not been accelerated, to a group of typical college students. All three gifted groups exhibited significantly higher moral judgment, as measured by the DIT than did the typical university students.

Selected Biographies of Highly Gifted

The study subjects in the current paper have measured IQs between 140 and 190. Thirty-two percent of the 41 subjects test above 160 IQ. None of them is unusually wealthy or famous, but none lives in poverty, either. The intimate nature of their open-ended survey answers may give the impression that the subjects are unusually depressed and unsuccessful, and the reader is left wondering whether or not this sample is representative of highly gifted people and whether they are simply less gifted than people who achieve eminence. The biographical descriptions of the lives of four men of genius, three successful, one not, serve to illustrate the background similarities between them and the 41 subjects of the current study. The descriptions of Edison, Einstein, Feynman and Sidis pay particular attention to the personal factors which seem to accompany high giftedness. Furthermore, the educational and familial ramifications of high giftedness are also underscored.

Thomas Alva Edison is well known as an inventive, intelligent man. Edison’s biographies portray him as a person who painstakingly plodded his way through countless experiments until he finally found a filament that worked in his light bulb. Edison is often quoted for his own
definition of genius: “One percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration.” Yet, everything about Edison’s life and work behavior indicate he worked from a base of high intelligence, immense curiosity, and obvious intrinsic motivation. Money, to him, was for funding his research. Biographies and encyclopedia entries on Edison, list characteristic after characteristic that are uniformly descriptive of an exceptionally or profoundly gifted man of probable intelligence quotient in excess of 170 or 180. (Dyer, Martin, & Meadowcroft, 1929; Josephson, 1959; Encyclopedia Britannica, 1974; World Book, 1990).

Edison’s family background is important to understanding his clear use of his abilities during his life time of invention. Edison, born in 1847, was raised primarily in Ohio and Michigan. His first public school reacted poorly to him and labeled him “retarded.” Edison did not fit in and was blamed for his lack of conformity and his endless questioning. His mother removed him from school and taught him at home for the next three years. It was not unusual for most American school children to attend only 8 years of grammar school at that period of history, and many children attended far less. After three years of instruction by his mother, Edison taught himself, primarily by reading and experimenting on his own. His primary teacher and supporter was his mother. He did not get along well with his father, and Edison left home in his early teens to both support himself and continue his independent learning. Although he married twice (the first wife died) and had children, he was not close to either wife or his children. He also had few close friends, again, not unusual for a profoundly gifted person due to scarcity of intellectually compatible, or interested in common subjects, individuals.

Edison was not a religious man, but he did believe in a supreme being that he referred to as a Supreme Intelligence. He was aware that his reputation as a great inventor was nothing compared to the ability to create life forms. He was especially attuned to the question and possibility of life after death. The present study’s case studies illustrate the same tremendous bent toward such philosophical issues.

Albert Einstein is known as one of the greatest scientists of all time. He was born in 1879 and raised in Germany and Switzerland where rigid schooling was normal for the children of the times depending upon their ability to learn. Einstein showed little scholastic ability and appears to have suffered from his school years. It is clear from the later research of Hollingworth (1926, 1942) that Einstein’s probable IQ of 180+ rendered him a poor fit with the more normative education to which he was exposed. There is less anecdotal and personal information available on Einstein compared to Edison dealing with his childhood.

Einstein, too, was married twice. His first marriage was to his university sweetheart. He enjoyed his marriage and his children. Unlike Edison, Einstein appears to have married someone with whom he was intellectually compatible. The marriage ended in divorce, however, after several years of enforced separation that was due to the political turmoil in Europe. Like Edison, Einstein was not motivated by money but by ideas and, in Einstein’s case in particular, ideals. Ultimately, Einstein suffered greatly as his ideals were one by one crushed by the realities of the world during the tumultuous history of his time.

The famous stories about the great genius “wasting his time in obscurity” working in a patent office are clarified by his biographers (Clark, 1971; Pais, 1982). The patent office job gave Einstein time to think and develop his theories. His early, important publications brought him offers from universities and institutes which enabled him to support himself and his family, and he did finally accept those offers. His connections with universities, and the fame that came with his theories, brought him into regular contact with other great minds from around the world. He had many friendships and associations that were satisfying and stimulating.

According to Pais (1982), Einstein was not associated with an orthodox religion but had a very spiritual nature. Although he felt that belief in a personal God was too specific to fit what was transpiring in the universe, he did not believe the universe was one of chaos or chance,
either. He once said, “God may be sophisticated, but He is not malicious.” Until the end of his
days Einstein explored human nature, the nature of the universe, and matters of purpose and
existentialism.

Richard Feynman was an American theoretical physicist, born in 1918 to an immigrant
couple. Unquestionably as bright as both Edison and Einstein, loosely lumping them into the
profoundly gifted category of 180+ IQ, Feynman grew up in a stable home where both parents
were loving and tolerant toward Richard and his interests in scientific experimentation. He was
entirely singular in his interests in that literature and writing held no interest for him either at
home or in school. His parents were never unduly concerned about his poor marks in non math
and science courses and let him pursue his interests. He was largely self-taught until he went to
college, although he did go through the usual public schooling in a Long Island community in
New York.

Feynman’s success was primarily manifested through his interactions with others. He
rarely published his work but instead shared clearly with colleagues and students who passed on
the information. He was a workaholic, like Edison, who spent large amounts of time on projects
and topics that interested him. He taught at MIT and Stanford and was one of the youngest
members of The Manhattan Project. Shortly before he died of cancer, quite possibly caused by
exposure to atomic bomb testing, he sat on the panel reviewing the Challenger Shuttle disaster.
Feynman quickly concurred with some of the scientists who had uncovered the problem with the
infamous “O-rings” but whose findings were ignored. Never one to mince words, Feynman
illustrated the finding with simple materials, a glass of ice water and water faucet rubber washer,
at an investigative conference. Prior to Feynman’s involvement, the other committee members
and representatives from the various aerospace industries were busily defending themselves.
Feynman left them exposed and without excuses.

Two elements that are probably key to Feynman’s realizing his potential were his
supportive parents and a strong, loving connection with a childhood girlfriend who became his
first wife. The young woman, Arline, was compatible with Richard in intellect, humor, and
temperament. Although she died of tuberculosis while they were still in their twenties, her love
and support had a profound effect on Feynman. Feynman married two more times, first badly,
and the third time to have children. He was a devoted father and, although the marriage was less
than intellectually or temperamentally ideal, he worked to make a good family environment for
his adored children.

William James Sidis was estimated to have had an intelligence quotient near 250. There
is no disputing that he was a child prodigy; he is, however, often cited as an example of “early
burnout.” His parents were so proud of their son’s talents that the mother devoted herself entirely
to the educating of her unusual son. She directed and accompanied him everywhere, and little
William had little to no say in the matter. His parents seemed primarily interested in showing off
their talented son.

Sidis presented his first scientific and mathematical paper at a conference of learned
mathematicians in 1910 when he was 12 years old. He eloquently and expertly predicted the
existence of black holes in a book published in 1925 under a pseudonym; and he supported his
beliefs with mathematical proofs that eventually proved to be largely correct. The press covered
his every move. Sidis felt used by his parents and the media and began to withdraw from
intellectual and public life. He eventually would accept no jobs that were more than ordinary,
and when asked, told people that his early precocity had disappeared. There is evidence that his
brain power was not at all diminished, however; he simply refused to be used and shown off by
others.

At one time Sidis had a strong interest in a woman whom he had met through a social
concern group. She was not interested in him, however, and he never found a suitable partner. By
the time he was an adult, he refused to have anything to do with his mother, something she never understood after all her sacrifice on his behalf. Because he had been taken out of normal schools and escorted by his mother to college classes early in his teens, Sidis never developed friendships and social skills. Norbert Weiner experienced similar radical acceleration, but his family gave him opportunities to develop normal social activities and relationships at the same time. It has been suggested that a key difference between the success of Norbert Weiner and his contemporary child prodigy, William James Sidis, was in the former’s ability to make a good marriage connection. Sidis died a solitary, lonely man in his forties. Weiner went on to be the father of cybernetics as well as a happily married husband and father.

**Talent Development**

Three resources are presented here to underscore the similarity between the subjects in the current study, who are highly gifted but not particularly rich, famous or eminent, and other highly intelligent, talented people who have achieved eminence.

All of the subjects in *The Early Mental Traits of Three Hundred Geniuses* (C. Cox, 1926) and *Cradles of Eminence* (Goertzel & Goertzel, 1962) achieved eminence, unlike the majority of the subjects in the current study. The similarity between the eminent and non-eminent subject groups, however, is clear. High intelligence affects one’s environment, viewpoint, and interactions. Interestingly, the majority of eminent subjects were either pushed or strongly facilitated by their mothers. The mother’s role, nonetheless, often did not result in either appreciation or a good relationship between the mother and eminent child (Goertzel & Goertzel, 1962). A number of the subjects in the current study, 17%, had rejecting or hostile mothers or step-mothers, but most had ineffectual or decidedly non-pushy parents who worked primarily to make their highly gifted children fit into the social and educational order as it existed.

**Catherine Cox, Terman Series**

*Volume II: The Early Mental Traits of Three Hundred Geniuses* (Cox, 1926) is a useful resource for those interested in estimating intellectual levels. The case studies provide anecdotal descriptions of early childhood behavior as well as the home and educational lives of the subjects. Cox and her research team gathered background information on approximately 300 people of eminence throughout history.

Final subjects were included in the Cox volume, part of the Terman research series (*Volume II*), for whom the researchers had significant early childhood information. Cox developed a system for estimating the Stanford-Binet intelligence level of the subjects based upon the age at which they began doing common childhood activities. In other words, she and her team used a ratio IQ estimate, e.g., if the average child talks at 2.5 years and the subject talked at 1.5 years, the ratio IQ would be 167. The researchers used a combination of accomplishments and activities found in biographical writings for making their estimates.

After combing the biographical material on each subject, the team quantified the ability level and grouped subjects by ability level. In the book, Cox explains when there were difficulties, due to conflicting or missing information, in making the estimates. Then, a case study of each subject was presented that concentrated on the activities and behaviors of the eminent person during his earliest years. Interestingly, the estimated IQs fell into identifiable career groupings, groupings that are still reflected by score report tables today, e.g. Graduate Record Exam, Miller Analogies Test Score Results booklets. The results of the Cox work are especially important for those who are concerned about the validity of an IQ measure and its importance in describing basic characteristics of individuals at different intelligence levels.
People with high IQs are not just “smart.” They are different in many, many ways, and Volume II describes these differences in ascending order.

An overwhelming difference between the early, lower IQ subjects in Volume II and the later, higher IQ subjects, is in their levels of intrinsic motivation to learn. Although all the subjects who became eminent tended to perform well when caring adults were an integral part of their lives, the subjects in the highest IQ categories studied and learned not only what their parents and teachers presented, but they continued to follow their own interests passionately. The eminent individuals covered by the book usually required the facilitation of adults more than instruction from adults. Cox and her team made it evident that the children who were pushed the most by their parents were pushed in response to the child’s high capacity to learn.

Most of the individuals who had the highest IQ estimates and grew to be eminent in their fields were tutored at home or given highly individualized training. The generally negative descriptions of their schools and classroom teachers are similar to the complaints of Hollingworth’s students before they entered her program, Gross’s non-accelerated students, Goertzel and Goertzel’s subjects, and the subjects in the current study. In fact, the subject of schooling, and the disdain, difficulties, and outright failure connected to regular schooling, appears to be the most common of all elements linking the highly gifted from one generation to another.

An additional common link between the generations of highly intelligent people is the difficulties they presented to their families. Some families simply adapted to their child’s talents and arranged whatever seemed to work best. The children of such families generally grew to have the fewest impediments, among highly gifted subjects, to bringing their talents to eminent fruition. Talent has never been enough, though. For every eminent individual, Cox is able to identify some experiences or people who gave the individual the necessary support.

Goertzel and Goertzel

In their book Cradles of Eminence (1962), Goertzel and Goertzel explore the backgrounds of more than 400 “Famous twentieth century men and women” (book cover description). Whereas Cox grouped her subjects by estimated IQ levels, the Goertzels combed their biographical data for similarities in background vis-a-vis family life, childhood problems such as poverty, death of parents, etc.

The eminent subjects of Cradles of Eminence, and the leaders in their field described in Bloom’s Nurturing Talent in Young People (1985), described in the next section, shared one primary background factor: at least one parent, and usually the entire family, facilitated the growth of the talent area by providing opportunity. Opportunity most often came through access to books, materials, high level tutoring, coaching, or other instruction, and either modification of, or relief from, normal schooling. Famous examples of “losers” who dropped out of school, but did well anyway, are almost uniformly highly gifted people who had no patience for the normal school set-up. Steven Spielberg, as a modern-day example, routinely skipped school to work on home movie productions (personal conversation, 1991). His mother wrote his excuses. As the Goertzels point out:

Rejection of the classroom is an international phenomenon and has little to do with whether the schools are public or private, secular or clerical, or with the philosophy of teaching employed in the various schools” (p. 242).

The Goertzels also note that “A strong drive toward intellectual or creative achievement is present in one or both parents of almost all of the four hundred men and women of the twentieth
century investigated here...by conventional standards the attitude of the family toward formal schooling is often careless or negative” (pp. 3-4). Additionally,

In homes which cradle eminence there are strong tendencies to build directly on personal strengths, talents, and aims rather than to assume that there is a large, specific body of knowledge that everyone should possess (p. 6).

The other children [the 2 out of 5 who did not complain about school] are those who, recognized by their teachers as having unusual abilities, were given special guidance and encouragement and were accelerated...There is an acute need in the Four Hundred for direct and frequent communication with intelligent adults. When this need is met to a reasonable degree in the school, the school rebellion is much lessened. The tutor, who is after all a teacher, does not draw upon himself the usual venom which the classroom teacher often elicits from the Four Hundred (p. 256-257).

The actual family interactions, hardships, social and emotional characteristics outlined by the Goertzels largely coincide with those of the subjects in the present study. In fact, if someone were to read *Cradles of Eminence* without knowing that each subject grew to become eminent, the case histories, the difficulties, school experiences, the talents, and the interests look much the same as the subjects in the current study.

The Goertzels reference a study by Dael Wolfe wherein Wolfe estimates that approximately “half the gifted students who graduate from high school in the United States each year come from homes where the parents have no particular interest in schooling or in learning and that this half tends to become wasted” (p. 7). Given that every study cited here concludes that the regular educational process has not worked for the majority of highly gifted subjects, it becomes clearer how pivotal the parental role is in eventual eminence or successful use of high potential.

Benjamin Bloom

In the book, *Developing Talent in Young People*, edited by Bloom (1985), talent areas are explored via exceptionally high achievers in a number of talent fields. Particularly relevant to the current study is that talent is rarely discovered and fostered by the schools as much as it is by parents, early tutors, coaches, and private lesson instructors. In fact, in the cases of various artists and athletes, regular schooling had to be dropped as the maturing star needed more and more time for practice and competitions. In fact, in most cases, the talent becomes evident only after the child has been exposed to the talent area.

Only rarely were the individuals in our study given their initial instruction in the talent field because the parents or teachers saw in the child unusual gifts to be developed more fully. They were given the initial instruction and encouragement to learn because their parents placed high value on one of the talent areas--music and the arts, sports, or intellectual activities. The parents wanted all their children to have a good opportunity to learn in the talent area they preferred (p. 544).

Although the authors conclude that far more people could achieve at much higher levels if their environments were as positive as those in *Developing Talent in Young People*, they write
that, “Another general quality that was noted in each of the talent fields was the ability to learn rapidly and well” (p. 545). Bloom’s study is important to the current study because all of the participants in the current study clearly have high natural ability to learn rapidly and well; and yet they may appear to the reader to be relatively unsuccessful compared to the subjects of Bloom’s book. It is significant to contrast the backgrounds of highly capable people in order to determine possible explanations for high or low achievement as well as different life choices. Furthermore, Bloom’s study is about talent development, whereas the current study deals more specifically with emotional growth.

In the more intellectual pursuits covered in Bloom’s study, research neurology and mathematics, the subjects were mostly good students whose background descriptions are quite similar to those of the present study participants. Nearly all the mathematicians and scientists observed that school was more incidental than useful for learning, and they believed their real learning took place outside of school. The exceptions were with excellent, intelligent teachers who knew their subjects well and made high demands on their students. School did successfully serve the purpose of providing interesting and enjoyable extracurricular activities and sports.

Again, there is a significant difference between the family background experiences of the Bloom subjects and the participants in the current study. The research neurologists and mathematicians came from very stable and supportive homes that modeled a strong work and achievement ethic. The parents were uniformly supportive of each other and their children. In the current study it is clear that support versus neglect or emotional abuse makes a considerable difference in highly gifted people’s ability to use their intellectual powers to best advantage.

**Human Development**

**Cognitive Development Theorists: Erikson and Maslow**

Erikson, a high school drop-out who studied on his own by traveling, reading, and carefully observing, developed a humanistic theory of human development after he studied for a while with Freud. He believed that neither Freud’s theories nor behaviorism could fully explain the intricate course of human development. In *Identity, Youth, and Crises* (1968), Erikson described a series of eight, interdependent developmental crises that all individuals face. How each crises is resolved has lasting effect on the person’s self-image and view of society. Chart 1 describing Erikson’s stages of psychosocial development, borrowed from Lefton (as cited in Woolfolk, 1995), is presented here.

Marcia, and his colleagues Schiedel and Archer, expanded on Erikson’s work. Crucial to the present study concerning the road to self-actualization for highly gifted adults is the suggestion by Marcia that adolescents face four possible alternatives when solving the crisis of “who am I?” (Marcia, 1980; Schiedel & Marcia, 1985). Woolfolk (1995) offers a clear description:

The first is **identity achievement**. This means that after considering the realistic options, the individual has made choices and is pursuing them. It appears that few students achieve this status by the end of high school. Most are not firm in their choices for several more years; students who attend college may take a bit longer to decide (Archer, 1982). **Identity foreclosure** describes the situation of adolescents who do not experiment with different identities or consider a range of options, but simply commit themselves to the goals, values, and lifestyles of others, usually their parents. **Identity diffusion**, on the other hand, occurs when individuals reach no conclusions about who they are or what they want to do with their lives; they have no firm direction (p. 70.)
Chart 1       Erikson’s Eight Stages of Psychosocial Development¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Basic trust versus mistrust</td>
<td>Birth to 12-18</td>
<td>Feeding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>months</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Autonomy versus shame/doubt</td>
<td>18 months to 3</td>
<td>Toilet training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Initiative versus guilt</td>
<td>3 to 6 years</td>
<td>Independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Industry versus inferiority</td>
<td>6 to 12 years</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Identity versus role confusion</td>
<td>Adolescence</td>
<td>Peer relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Intimacy versus isolation</td>
<td>Young Adulthood</td>
<td>Love relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Generativity versus stagnation</td>
<td>Middle Adulthood</td>
<td>Parenting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Ego integrity versus despair</td>
<td>Late Adulthood</td>
<td>Reflection on and acceptance of one’s life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The infant must form a first, loving, trusting relationship with the caregiver or develop a sense of mistrust.

The child's energies are directed toward the development of physical skills, including walking, grasping, controlling the sphincter. The child learns control but may develop doubt and shame if not handled well.

The child continues to become more assertive and to take more initiative but may be too forceful, which can lead to guilt feelings.

The child must deal with demands to learn new skills or risk a sense of inferiority, failure, and incompetence.

The teenager must achieve identity in occupation, gender roles, politics, and religion.

The young adult must develop intimate relationships or suffer feelings of isolation.

Each adult must find some way to satisfy and support the next generation.

The culmination is a sense of acceptance of oneself as one is and a sense of fulfillment.

¹ Source: From Lester A. Lefton, Psychology, 5/e. Copyright © 1994 Allen and Bacon.
The final alternative is called a moratorium because it is a form of break from the task of deciding who one really is and what one ought to do. Although Erikson describes identity formation as a task of adolescence, it appears likely, especially when considered in the context of the findings of the present study, that growth for some people includes reassessments of who one is at different times in life.

Maslow, like Erikson, was concerned that both behaviorism and Freudian theories left out motivational factors, personal volition, for example, and the deep impact of the human ability to think and reason, not just react. Both theorists emphasized the role that an individual’s own perceptions of the world and society played. Maslow proposed a psychosocial theory of development that focuses on the emergence of self, the search for identity, and the individual’s relationships with others throughout life. He developed a hierarchy of needs to illustrate his theory of how human beings are motivated. (See Figure 1).

Maslow posited that until humans have their physiological needs of hunger, thirst, shelter, and rest met, they cannot concern themselves with safety (1954). Humans will be more strongly motivated by a need to feel safe than they will care about belongingness and love needs, and so on. In fact, initial analysis of the current case study materials was driven by an assumption that Maslow’s hierarchy is correct. As increasing amounts of disconfirming data accumulated in the current study analysis, however, the order of Maslow’s hierarchy proved an inadequate explanation of the maturation process within the present study group. The investigative use of items listed on the hierarchy was nonetheless helpful.

Figure 1  
Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-actualization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Esteem (including self-respect and feelings of success)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belongingness and Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety (security, order, stability)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physiological needs (satisfaction of hunger, thirst, and sex)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Maslow’s description of self-actualization remained useful primarily because it helped add structure to the present study’s assessment of self-actualization and the recognition of its presence or absence in study participants. His hierarchical precursors, however, did not prove to be predictive of eventual achievement of self-actualization. Maslow’s description as presented here in Table 1 is taken from Turner and Helms (1986).

Table 1  
Maslow’s Characteristics of Self-Actualizers

In order to study the self-actualizing personality, Maslow selected 48 individuals who appeared to be making full use of their talents and were at the height of humanness. His subjects were students and personal acquaintances, as well as historical figures. In the final analysis, he described 12 “probable,” 10 “partial,” and 26 “potential or possible” self-actualizers. His analysis of these individuals revealed fifteen traits that he felt were characteristic of the self-actualizing personality.
1. More efficient perception of reality.
Many self-actualizing persons are able to perceive people and events realistically. They are objective in their analysis of the environment, and are able to detect that which is dishonest or false.

2. Acceptance of self and others.
People with self-actualizing personalities lack such negative characteristics as guilt, shame, doubt, and anxiety--characteristics that sometimes interfere with the perception of reality. Individuals with healthy personalities are capable of accepting themselves for what they are and know their strengths and weaknesses without being guilty or defensive.

Self-actualizing people are relatively spontaneous in their overt behavior as well as in their inner thought and impulses. Although they may conform to societal standards, there are those who are concerned about the roles society expects them to play. Maslow discovered that some self-actualizing people develop their own values and do not accept everything just because others do. While others may accept the status quo, self-actualizers perceive each person, event, or object as it really is and weigh it.

4. Problem centering.
Unlike the ego-centered personality, who spends much time in such activities as introspection or self-evaluation, problem-centered individuals direct their energies toward tasks or problems. Problem-centered persons are also likely to consider their goals important.

5. Detachment.
Maslow discovered that his subjects needed more solitude than the average person. The average person needs to be with others and soon seeks the presence of other people when left alone. (This reflects the need for belongingness and esteem derived from others.) Self-actualizers, on the other hand, enjoy privacy and do not mind being alone.

6. Autonomy.
As can be inferred from nearly all the characteristics of the self-actualized personality, such people have a certain independence of spirit. Individuals are propelled by growth motivation more than by deficiency motivation and are self-contained personalities:
They [self-actualizers] are dependent on their own development and continued growth on their own potentialities and latent resources. Just as the tree needs sunshine and water and food, so do most people need love, safety, and other basic need gratifications that can come only from without. But once these external satisfiers are obtained, once these inner deficiencies are satiated by outside satisfiers, the true problem of individual human development begins, e.g. self-actualization.

7. Continued freshness of appreciation.
Self-actualizing people have the capacity to continually appreciate nature and life. There is a naiveté, a pleasure, even an ecstasy about experiences that have become stale to others. For some of the subjects studied, these feelings are inspired by nature; for others the stimulus may be music; for still others, it may be children. But, regardless of the source, these occasional ecstatic feelings are very much a part of the self-actualizing personality.

8. The mystic experience.
Self-actualizers are not religious in the sense of attendance at formal worship, but they do have periodic peaks of experience that Maslow describes as limitless horizons opening up to the vision, the feeling of being simultaneously more powerful and also more helpless than one ever was before, the feeling of great ecstasy and wonder and awe, the loss of placing time and space with, finally the conviction that something extremely important and valuable had happened, so that the subject is to some extent transformed and strengthened even in his daily life by such experiences.

This German word, first coined by Alfred Adler, is used by Maslow to describe the feelings toward mankind that self-actualizing persons experience. This emotion, which might loosely be described as “the love of an older brother,” is an expression of affection, sympathy, and identification.

10. Unique interpersonal relations.
Self-actualizers have fewer “friends” than others, but they do have profound relationships with those friends they do have. Outside of these friendships, they tend to be kind and patient with all whom they meet. An exception is the harsh way they sometimes speak to hypocritical, pretentious, or pompous people. For the most part, however, what little hostility they exhibit is based not on character but on situation.

11. Democratic character structure.
Maslow found that without exception, the self-actualizing people he studied were democratic, being
tolerant of others with suitable character regardless of their social class, race, education, religion, or political belief.

12. Discrimination between means and ends.
Unlike the average person, who make decisions on expedient grounds, self-actualizing people have a highly developed ethical sense. Even though they cannot always verbalize their moral positions, their actions frequently take “the higher road.” Self-actualizers distinguish means from ends and will not pursue even a highly desirable end by means that are not morally correct.

13. Philosophical, unhostile sense of humor.
The humor of self-actualizers is not the ordinary type. As Maslow (1970) describes it:
They do not consider funny what the average man considers to be funny. Thus they do not laugh at hostile humor (making people laugh by hurting someone) or superiority humor (laughing at someone else’s inferiority) or authority-rebellion humor (the unfunny, Oedipal, or smutty joke). Characteristically what they consider humor is more closely allied to philosophy than to anything else. It may also be called the humor of the real because it consists in large part of poking fun at human beings in general when they are foolish, or forget their place in the universe, or try to be big when they are actually small. This can take the form of poking fun at themselves, but this is not done in any masochistic or clownlike way. Lincoln’s humor can serve as a suitable example. Probably Lincoln never made a joke that hurt anybody else; it is also likely that many or even most of his jokes had something to say, had a function beyond just producing a laugh. They often seemed to be education in a more palatable form, akin to parables or fables.

Without exception, every self-actualizing person that Maslow studied was creative in some way. This creativity is not to be equated with genius of a Mozart or an Einstein, since the dynamics of that type of creativity are still not understood. Rather it is what Maslow calls “the naive and universal creativeness of unspoiled children.” He believed that creativity in this sense is possibly a fundamental characteristic that we are all born with but lose as we become enculturated. It is linked to being spontaneous and less inhibited than others, and it expresses itself in every day activities. Described quite simply, it is a freshness of thought, ideas, and actions.

15. Resistance to enculturation.
Self-actualizers accept their culture in most ways, but they still, in a profound sense, resist becoming enculturated. Many desire social change but are not rebellious in the adolescent sense. Rather they are generally independent of their culture and manage to exhibit tolerant acceptance of the behavior expected of their society. This, however, must not be construed as a lack of interest in making changes they believe in. If they feel that an important change is possible, their resolution and courage put them at the forefront of the battle. Maslow believes that the self-actualizers he describes are not revolutionaries, but they very easily could be. He further states that they are not against fighting for social change; rather, they are very against ineffective fighting.

The subjects studied by Maslow were for the most part highly intelligent and possessed several or even many of the characteristics so far presented. This does not mean, however, that they were perfect. In fact, Maslow noted a number of human failings associated with self-actualized people. Some can be boring, stubborn, or vain, have thoughtless habits, be wasteful or falsely proud. They may have enormous emotions of guilt, anxiety or strife, and may experience inner conflicts. They are also ‘occasionally capable of an extraordinary and unexpected ruthlessness.’ This ruthlessness may be seen when they feel they have been deceived by a friend or if someone has been dishonest with them. They might, with a surgical coldness, cut the person verbally or abruptly sever the relationship.

Emotional Development Theorists: Dabrowski and Piechowski

Like both Erikson and Maslow, Dabrowski felt that behaviorism and Freudianism cannot adequately explain the course of human behavior and the differing outcomes among people who appear to be experiencing similarly handicapping life conditions. He concluded that some individuals must be born with a higher ability to transcend life’s difficulties and evolve into mature, wise, “evolved” human beings than other people.
Dabrowski was a Polish psychiatrist who witnessed the terrible affects of both World Wars. He himself gave asylum to Jews during World War II, suffered imprisonment and torture, and was forbidden to continue his work. Through his observation of self-sacrifice and noble behavior of some people alongside inconceivable inhumanity on the part of others, he began to study how both could exist. He studied the histories of the eminent and searched for examples of the “authentically real, saturated with immutable values, those who represented ‘what ought to be’ against ‘what is’” (Dabrowski, as cited in Piechowski, 1975, p. 234).

According to Silverman, many of the people attracted to the work of Dabrowski recognized their own struggles described in his work. Rather than simply accepting life as it is, such people

...could not reconcile themselves to concrete reality; instead, they clung to their creative visions of what ought to be. They searched for “a reality of a higher level. And often they were able to find it unaided' (Dabrowski, in Piechowski, p. 236). These clients experienced intense inner conflict, self-criticism, anxiety, and feelings of inferiority toward their own ideals. The medical community labeled these conflicts as “psychoneurotic” and attempted to “cure” the clients by eliminating their symptoms. Dabrowski saw these same symptoms as an inseparable part of the quest for higher level development. He fervently desired to convince the profession that inner conflict is a developmental rather than degenerative sign (Silverman, 1993, p. 11). [italics mine]

Dabrowski developed a theory of positive disintegration in which he proposed that advanced development requires a breakdown of existing psychological structures in order to form higher, more evolved structures (Silverman, 1993, p. 11). Piechowski has been the principle translator of Dabrowski’s work, and he has continued his own research into issues involving positive disintegration and emotional overexcitabilities (sensitivities in a number of areas of a person’s emotional, intellectual, and physical being that may contribute, according to Dabrowski and Piechowski, to an increased potential for higher level inner growth). The current paper does not specifically address subjects’ overexcitabilities. The use of the term “growth” in the context of the present research is intended to indicate inner change rather than a precise judgment of emotional maturity.

Dabrowski speculated that there are five fairly distinctive levels of emotional development. A summary by Piechowski and Silverman (1993), included in Chart 2, describes apparent characteristics and motivations of people at each level of emotional development. Theoretically, emotional growth, as indicated by the characteristics described in Chart 2, beyond Level II is uncommon. Evidence from the current research and in numerous assessments of Erikson’s theories of identity development (Josselson, 1991; Levinson, 1978; Sheehy, 1976), indicate that the type of advanced growth described by Dabrowski is probably not found in identity foreclosure or identity diffusion, is experienced only briefly in pre-mid-life identity achievement, and most probably present when a moratorium-type crisis is experienced in mid-life. In other words, there is a great amount of evidence that few people experience their day-to-day lives in a fashion described by Dabrowski’s Levels III, IV, and V.
### Chart 2

#### Kohlberg's Levels of Moral Development

**Preconventional:** (Typically attainable between ages 7-11+)
- **Stage 1 - Fear of Punishment**
- **Stage 2 - Self-Aggrandizement**

**Conventional:** (Typically attainable between ages 11 to adult)
- **Stage 3 - Desire for Approval**
- **Stage 4 - Maintains Social Order**

**Postconventional** (Ages 21+, not typically attained by most adults)
- **Stage 5 - Democratic Values**
- **Stage 6 - Universal Ethics**
- **Stage 7 - Cosmic Consciousness**

#### Moral and Emotional Development Schemes

**Approximate Moral Development Levels by DIT P-Score**

- **Low:** Subjects who are described as fitting the study's first levels of emotional development generally scored below 40 (*40 is the average score for American adults) on the DIT P-score. Chart 3 details the stage scores attained by each subject on the DIT.

- **Medium:** Scores between 40-65 were found among subjects who fit the study's description of conventional or stereotypical normal adult development. (57.67 is the average for the current study's subjects).

- **High:** Scores of approximately 65 (the average score for moral philosophy and political science students is 65.2) and higher coincided with the study subjects whose viewpoints, as found in their case study writing, corresponded most with high scorers on the DIT, moral philosophers.

Theoretically, scores would close in on 100

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#### Dabrowski's Levels of Emotional Development

**Level I:** Self-Interest, Self-Preservation (Characterized by egocentrism, desire for material gains, goals of success, power, fame, competitive with others, external conflicts, little self-reflection, lack of empathy, rigid psychological structure).

**Level II:** Stereotypical Roles (Highly influenced by others, values introjected from parents, church, etc., relativistic, situational values, conflicted feelings, contradictory actions, desire for acceptance, feelings of inadequacy compared to others, lack of hierarchy of values).

**Level III:** Personality Transformation (Inner conflict, hierarchy of values, positive maladjustments, inferiority toward one's ideals, feelings of guilt and shame, independent thinker, moral framework believed but inconsistently applied).

**Level IV:** Self-Actualization (conscious direction of development, commitment to one's values, acceptance, objectivity, responsibility and service to self and others, philosophical, unhostile sense of humor)

**Level V:** Attainment of the Personality Ideal (Inner peace and harmony, altruism, universal compassion, devotion to service).

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*Norms from Rest, 1994 +from Piechowski & Silverman, Lake Geneva, WI, 1993
In one of his investigations, Michael Piechowski did research on gifted adolescents that examined the subjects’ potential for personal growth. He found two main patterns of development. The first “resembles Peck and Havighurst’s (1960) rational-altruistic type...[and] is in some ways akin to the foreclosure identity [from E. Erikson]. These individuals establish their identity without going through a developmental crisis” (1989, p. 90). According to Peck and Havighurst, such a person is “rational” because he assesses each new action and its effects realistically, in the light of internalized moral principles derived from social experience; and he is “altruistic,” because he is ultimately interested in the welfare of others, as well as himself...He wants everyone to work constructively in some area and produce results useful to everyone. He sees relations with others as pleasant, cooperative effort toward mutual goals...As an adult, he assumes an appropriate share of responsibility in his role as a member of a family, community, nation...He reacts with emotion appropriate to the occasion. This does not mean he is unemotional, for he is enthusiastic about promoting what is good and aroused to prevent what is bad. (p. 8).

The preceding description corresponds most closely with Dabrowski’s Level II. Piechowski identified a second type of personal growth that is more likely to be both troubling and transforming to the individual. Referring again to Chart 2, Piechowski appears to be describing Dabrowski’s Level III and a movement into Levels IV and V. As he summarizes,

The other kind of development is personal growth guided by powerful ideals. It is characterized by moral questioning, existential concerns, and methodical self-judgment that guides the individual on the work of inner psychic transformation. This type of development, especially when intense and sustained, produces self-actualizing growth of the kind observed in spiritual leaders and other individuals of high moral character--The growth of self is a process by which a person finds an inner direction to his or her life and deliberately takes up the work of inner transformation (1989, p. 89).

After extensive analysis of the case study files, themes and patterns emerged that indicated subjects can, for ease of description, be classified by Dabrowski levels. Although Dabrowski’s levels are arranged hierarchically, as an emotional maturity progression, results of the current study indicate that low, medium, or high levels, *per se*, are not necessarily good or bad, better or worse. The subjects in the current study are grouped and described within a description of the different Dabrowski levels so that the reader can grasp the different characteristics of people at each developmental level. It is theorized in the present research that how a person will respond to different situations in life can be predicted by their emotional characteristics.

Dabrowski went one step further than either Kohlberg or Maslow in conceptualizing his levels of emotional development; he envisioned an attainment of a personality ideal. In effect, once people are self-actualized, they aspire to define and meet their own personal goals for the kind of people they really ought to and want to be. Although such a pursuit may seem familiar to people at all the described emotional levels, the reality of the infrequency of Dabrowski’s top level will become apparent in later sections of the paper.

A more recent article in *Roeper Review* addresses the topic of self-actualizing (Hall & Hansen, 20:1, pp. 22-27). The authors refer to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs: “The highest and
most evolved motive is self-actualization, a healthy desire to be the best one can be.” The subjects they identified as being the most self-actualized “were intent upon doing things to make a better world, they volunteered, tutored, and gave of themselves without much concern for financial gain” (p. 24).

According to Nelson, “Dabrowski observed that the most gifted and creative individuals with whom he worked seemed to exhibit higher levels of empathy, sensitivity, moral responsibility, self-reflection, and autonomy of thought than the general population” (1989, p. 5). Although the current investigation’s results indicate that subjects exhibited a wide range of emotional maturity, almost all the subjects in the study exhibited the majority of these qualities. The one quality that was more commonly exhibited by subjects categorized in Dabrowski’s “advanced” levels of emotional maturity, and concomitant indications of high-level moral reasoning as illustrated on Chart 2, is that of “autonomy of thought.”

Moral Developmental Theorists: Kohlberg, Gilligan, and Rest

The first to take a cognitive-developmental approach to the issue of moral reasoning was Piaget. Piaget, although more well-known for his cognitive-developmental stage theories of how children learn, worked on morality research in the 1930s. Prior to his work, few had considered moral reasoning as a cognitive function but as a function of socialization. It had been assumed that “moral development was a matter of learning the norms of one’s culture, of accepting and internalizing them, and of behaving in conformity with them” (Rest, 1994, p. 2). Kohlberg began to study moral reasoning in the 1950s and 1960s. He recognized the validity of Piaget’s research and later argued that sometimes conformity to social norms is morally wrong, as when dutiful soldiers commit atrocities, or slavery is condoned, or entire racial or gender groups are given fewer rights by government sanction.

Kohlberg’s approach is relevant for the current study in that he focused on cognition—“the thinking process and the representations by which people construct reality and meaning” (Rest, p.3). He developed a stage theory of his own that included preconventional thinking, conventional, and post-conventional, all three of which contained two levels. Chart 2, on page 42, includes a summary description of Kohlberg’s moral reasoning stages. He tested his theories longitudinally at three year intervals on a group of men by giving them a screening inventory that posed moral dilemmas. If the stages behaved as a staircase, going up and not down, it would indicate that each stage was a higher level than the previous one. Kohlberg’s initial interest was to uncover major markers in life-span development. It was always assumed that the measurement device would be accurate and appropriate if people scored higher as they matured.

Early results indicated that more men reached high conventional levels than women, and the longitudinal study was on men only. Gilligan (1982) interpreted the findings as indicative of a primary difference between the reasoning of men and women. She believed that Kohlberg’s higher levels depicted a progressive separation of the individual from other people. She argued that women come from an ethic of care, and that women move from a focus on self-interests to moral reasoning based on commitment to specific individuals and relationships, and then to the highest level of morality based on the principles of responsibility and care for all people. As more and more research with Kohlberg’s theory emerged, however, it became evident that women as a group score slightly higher than men on Kohlberg’s Moral Judgment Interview (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987; Rest, 1994). They also score higher on Rest’s Defining Issues Test (Rest, 1994), a moral reasoning inventory.

The Defining Issues Test (DIT) was taken by all subjects in the present study. It’s P-score, for “principled” thinking, has emerged in this study as an important indicator of potential for more abstract, complex emotional reasoning. Often referred to as emotional growth or maturity, in the context of this study, use of the terms emotional growth and maturity does not
imply good or bad, but instead indicates a propensity or openness to change, particularly *inner* change. As can be seen from Chart 2, page 42, Kohlberg’s moral development stages have been placed, for the purpose of the current study, alongside Dabrowski’s emotional development levels. As the data analysis evolved, DIT scores that appeared to be reflective of the different stages and levels were placed between the two schemas. Subjects do not fall perfectly into the depicted DIT score ranges and Dabrowski levels; these are general ranges based on results of this study only; however, characteristics described in the different Dabrowski levels are usually present in the case studies of subjects who score within the different ranges on the DIT.

Tables 2 and 3 add perspective to the discussions of DIT scores in relation to emotional change potential. Table 1 details the group results for the current study. Table 2 lists specific group averages for the DIT accumulated from previous studies.

**Table 2**

**Highly Gifted Study DIT Summary**

39/41 subjects have valid DIT scores

- **Range** 30 to 83.3  
  6 women below the average, 13 above

- **Average** 57.67  
  13 men below the average, 6 above

- **Median** 56.7  
  1 F/M above the average

- **Standard Deviation** 13.78

**Table 3**  

**Norms for Selected Groups on the DIT-P Score**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>Moral philosophy and political science graduate students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59.8</td>
<td>Liberal Protestant seminarians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>Law students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>Medical students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>Practicing physicians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>Dental students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>Staff nurses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>Graduate students in business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>College senior business and education majors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>Navy enlisted men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>Adults in general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>Senior high school students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>Prison inmates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>Junior high school students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>Institutionalized delinquents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rest designed the *Defining Issues Test*, a machine-scorable inventory based on Kohlberg’s moral reasoning stages. He counters Gilligan as he explains Kohlberg’s stage theory: “I think that the best short description of the six stages is to view them in terms of six

---

2 Rest, 1994
conceptions of how to organize cooperation. Accordingly, the key conception that develops over time is people’s understanding of how it is possible to organize cooperation” (p. 5). “The stages do not depict the progressive separation and isolation of individuals from each other (as Gilligan said), but rather how each individual can become interconnected with other individuals” (Rest, 1994, p. 8).

The first four stages of Kohlberg’s moral development scale are detailed in Chart 2. The reason it is often difficult to adequately define and describe the postconventional levels of stages 5 and 6 is that the majority of people never attain that level of reasoning themselves. Research indicates that the stages do indeed comprise a hierarchical structure where higher is better (Rest, 1994; Rest, Turiel & Kohlberg, 1969; Walker, deVries, & Bichard, 1984). The tasks in these studies of the DIT involved asking subjects to paraphrase arguments from each of the stages. Subjects were always able to paraphrase levels lower than their own but not above their own. Also, when asked, subjects could describe moral reasoning lower than their own level as immature, the way they once were, or simple-minded. Another approach to assessing the validity of a progressive stage theory was tested through a series of tasks with volunteers who were asked to “fake bad” and “fake good” on the MJI or DIT (McGeorge, 1975). Subjects are able to fake bad because they understand the thinking that they have outgrown. They were unable to fake good.

Past research into the scoring levels on the Defining Issues Test have indicated that adults with low scores or scores that do not continue to climb with age lack intellectual stimulation in their lives (Rest, 1979). The factor most consistently found to correlate with DIT scores, furthermore, is years of education. Nonetheless, an interesting study on high achieving 8th graders, conducted by Narvaez (1993), showed that high achievement scores were necessary but not sufficient for high scores on the DIT. None of the low achievement scores were related to high DIT P-scores, but only some of the high achievement scores were. In other words, high ability to achieve in school is necessary but not enough for high DIT scores. In an additional aspect of her study, Narvaez compared the 8th grade scores to college scores collected from a previous study, and she found that the highest DIT scores came from the identified high achievers from the 8th grade group, although the college men had the highest score average, followed by female 8th graders, then female college, and finally 8th grade males. The choice of highly gifted, well-educated, middle-aged adults was purposive in that factors other than educational level might be more easily extracted as contributors to moral reasoning growth.

**Generational Cohort Effect**

* Strauss and Howe

The current study can most easily be compared to that of Terman, and somewhat, of Hollingworth. As the current research progressed it became evident that there might be generational and historical aspects to consider that explain some of the differences found between the study groups. It is for that reason that a rather detailed summary of Strauss and Howe’s work in *Generations* (1991) is presented. The subjects selected for the final analysis in this paper were raised by Strauss and Howe’s “G.I.” generation and early “Silent” generation. The cohort studied by Terman and his colleagues was primarily from the G.I. generation. Strauss and Howe described the G.I. generation as a “civic” generation.

Throughout their lives, these G.I.s [the generation born between 1901 and 1924] have been America’s confident and rational problem-solvers (p. 261). Such a generation has had little thirst for spiritual conversion, no need for transcending new consciousness...valuing outer life over inner, G.I.s came of age preferring crisp sex-role definitions...G.I.s matured into a father-worshipping and heavily
male-fixated generation. As rising adults, they came to disdain womanish influences on public life...The G.I.’s rift with their own children arose, in substantial part, from the refusal of the Boomer youths to accept the exaggerated masculinity of G.I. fathers (p. 264).

Throughout the G.I. lifecycle, the federal government has directed its attention to whatever age bracket the G.I.s have occupied...produced by far the largest one-generation jump in educational achievement in American history... 1930s forward...the only generation to support the winning candidate in every election...experienced the “American dream” of upward mobility and rising homeownership more than any other generation in this century...Relative to younger generations...have been by far the most affluent elders...Recent polls show people over age 65 comprising America’s “happiest” age bracket (pp. 266-269).

Although different reporting methods could affect the fact that higher numbers of people from the current study have received counseling than Terman’s subjects, it may be due more to generational viewpoints regarding personal growth and inner change. The transition in attitudes regarding self-improvement and self-development seemed to begin with the next generation.

The “Silent” generation, born between 1925 and 1942, most of whom experienced both the Great Depression and World War II as children, is considered an “adaptive” group of people. Strauss and Howe give considerable insight into this generation that seems “sandwiched” between their elders and their children:

...*Fortune* magazine’s editors wrote of the “gray flannel mentality” of [college class of 1949], “They are interested in the system rather than individual enterprise.” Only 2 percent wished to be self-employed. Most of the rest wanted to work in big corporations offering job security ... possessing an “outer-directed” personality and taking cues from others...facilitators and technocrats--a consummate help-mate generation which has so far produced three decades of top Presidential aides...*But no presidents*...The Silent widely realize that they are the generational stuffings of a sandwich between the get-it-done G.I. and the self-absorbed Boom...the Silent have enjoyed a lifetime of steadily rising affluence, have suffered relatively few war casualties, and have shown the twentieth century’s lowest rates for almost every social pathology of youth (pp. 279-281).

Lacking an independent voice, they have adopted the moral relativism of the skilled arbitrator, mediating arguments between others--and reaching out to people of all cultures, races, ages, and handicaps...America’s greatest generation of comedians, psychiatrists, and songwriters. Yet this very malleability has left the Silent with badly checkered family lives...a significant number of divorced women who never remarried...the Silent lifecycle has been an escalator of prosperity, offering the maximum reward for the minimum initiative...earliest-marrying and earliest babying...in American history...biggest age-bracket jump in the divorce rate...From 1969 through 1975, as the Silents surged into state legislatures, the number of states with “no fault” divorce laws jumped from zero to forty-five...The era of Silent-dominated juries roughly coincided with the rise of huge demand awards in personal injury cases...Opinion rules, but the Silent hate to admit that any rule is final...lifelong bipartisan attraction to Presidential
underdogs...A 1985 study found the fiftyish Silent preferring “the twenties” over any other decade in life--fueling a market in dietary aids, exercise classes, cosmetic surgery, hair replacements, relaxation therapies, and psychiatric treatments (pp. 282-286).

In contrast, the “Boomer” generation born 1943 to 1960, is an “idealistic” group. More than half the subjects in the current study are from the first wave of the following generation.

...As Boomers have charted their life’s voyage, they have metamorphosed from Beaver Cleaver to hippie to bran eater to yuppie to what some are calling “Neopuritan”...Their first cohort, the 1943 “victory babies,” have thus far ranked among the most self-absorbed in American history...From VJ-Day forward, whatever age bracket Boomers have occupied has been the cultural and spiritual focal point for American society as a whole...Arriving as the inheritors of the G.I. triumph, Boomers have always seen their mission not as constructing a society, but of justifying, purifying, even sanctifying it...the G.I.s taught Boomers critical thinking...even in early childhood, Boomers showed an “orientation to principle”...This quest for “self”--what Gitlin has termed “the voyage to the interior” and Christopher Lasch (more critically) the “culture of narcissism”--was a central theme...manifested itself in that distinctly Boom sense of suspended animation, of resisting permanent linkages to mates, children, corporations, and professions (pp. 301-302).

Boomers have excelled at occupations calling for creative independence--the media, especially...Exalting individual conscience over duty to community (p. 303).

...in the late 1960s, Keniston encountered “an unusually strong tie between these young men and their mothers in the first years of life.” ...rates for every form of accidental death rose sharply--and the rates of drunk driving, suicide, illegitimate births, and teen unemployment all doubled or tripled...Crime rates also mounted...the effort to avoid service in Vietnam was a more pervasive generational bond than service in the war itself...migrated out of mainline “established” churches, but surged into New Age and evangelical sects...Were it not for dual-income households, Boomer family incomes...well below what the Silent earned at like age...Boomers evenly split over whether they are doing better or worse [than their parents]...they overwhelmingly consider their careers better (by a five-to-one ratio), their personal freedoms greater (by six to one), and their lives more meaningful (by nine to one) (pp. 305-307).

Summary

Rather than attempt to cover all the research literature on high giftedness, talent development, development in the areas of cognitive, emotional, and cognitive moral reasoning, and historical context, the review instead focused on the findings that either guided or helped explain the current research. The review of the literature has concentrated on those aspects of each conceptual framework that specifically underscore the research presented in this paper.

According to the research cited, high giftedness is primarily inborn and manifests itself as much as a personality characteristic as it does a learning ability. Highly gifted people think more complexly, learn new material faster, and are generally more successful at training for and
maintaining successful careers. Their high intelligence, however, does not make all gifted people more able than nongifted to solve their own emotional and social problems, as is amply borne out by analysis of the current subject pool. Furthermore, highly gifted people often experience considerable difficulty during their childhoods in finding compatible friendships and in developing a clear sense of who they are and how they fit in. This is consistent with Festinger’s social comparison theory (1954) which states that people construct their sense of who they are through comparing themselves to other people. An over-riding theme of the current study is this ongoing difficulty experienced by the highly gifted subjects in figuring out how they fit in.

Research on talent development underscores the need for even highly capable individuals to receive individual attention and practice in their talent areas, another theme strongly evident in the highly gifted study group. There is considerable evidence that high achievers in nearly every field had someone who guided them or provided opportunities for training and encouragement. Most often, these positive opportunities have come directly through the families of the high achievers.

High giftedness probably does move most individuals up any developmental scale sooner, and perhaps more often, than nongifted age-mates. There are factors other than giftedness, however, that are necessary for higher level growth in emotional and moral reasoning areas, and the eventual levels of openness and complexity that some individuals experience as self-actualization. The present research represents an effort to identify factors that may either sabotage or enhance higher level, that is, more complex, emotional and moral reasoning. Rest describes in detail the kind of people who score highest on the DIT. The description resonates with that of the self-actualized person described by Maslow, as well. Although it leaves out any hint of the torment of the positive disintegrations in Dabrowski’s theory, it gives a good picture of the goal:

The people who develop in moral judgment are those who love to learn, who seek new challenges, who enjoy intellectually stimulating environments, who are reflective, who make plans and set goals, who take risks, who see themselves in the larger social contexts of history and institutions and broad cultural trends, who take responsibility for themselves and their environs. On the environmental side of the equation, those who develop in moral judgment have an advantage in receiving encouragement to continue their education and their development. They profit from stimulating and challenging environments, and from social milieus that support their work, interest them, and reward their accomplishments. As young adults, the people who develop in moral judgment are more fulfilled in their career aspirations, have set a life direction of continued intellectual stimulation and challenge, are more involved in their communities, and take more interest in the larger societal issues. This pattern is one of general social/cognitive development (Rest, 1986, p. 57). [Italics mine]

Based on results of the current research, it can be argued that the self-actualized person, one with the personality or emotional characteristics described by Maslow, Dabrowski, and Rest, exhibits all of these strengths and tendencies after achieving advanced emotional growth. As shall be shown, not all subjects who are advanced emotional and moral reasoners experienced encouragement. Dabrowski noted that “they were often able to find it unaided” (Dabrowski in Piechowski, p. 236). The data in the current study support a theory that there are both internal and external factors that lead to advanced levels of emotional and moral reasoning. Furthermore, as the analysis of the case study material progressed, it became evident that there is reason to consider “advanced level” emotional and moral reasoning levels not necessarily “better” or
desirable for everyone. It is mentioned above that “higher is better”, but judging from the kinds of lives the different subjects are leading, and the happiness and contentment often reported by subjects at “lower” levels, it is important to keep an open mind about what advanced level emotional growth is and is not.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Methodology

A qualitative analysis implementing some of the research tools of an ethnographic approach to data gathering and analysis was selected. Ethnography as a research tool facilitates “strategic research,” according to Spradley (1979, p. 15).

Instead of beginning ethnographic projects from an interest in some particular culture, area of the world, or theoretical concern, strategic research begins with an interest in human problems. These problems suggest needed changes.

An ethnographic approach has the further advantage in that it seeks to discover the psychological reality of the informant’s world (Spradley, p. 175). Ethnography is by its nature qualitative rather than quantitative. According to Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 6-7) there are a number of features of qualitative research:

✓ Qualitative research is conducted through an intense or prolonged contact with a field or life situation.
✓ The researcher’s role is to gain a holistic overview of the context under study.
✓ The researcher attempts to capture data on the perceptions of the people being studied.
✓ Reading through these materials, the researcher may isolate certain themes.
✓ A main task is to explicate the ways people in particular settings, or circumstances, come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situations.
✓ Many interpretations of this material are possible, but some are more compelling for theoretical reasons or on grounds of internal consistency.
✓ Relatively little standardized instrumentation is used at the outset. The researcher is essentially the main “measurement device” in the study.
✓ Most analysis is done with words. Organization can be done to permit the researcher to contrast, compare, analyze, and recognize patterns.
✓

Past longitudinal and retrospective studies have utilized a similar framework for data gathering, e.g. what is the family like, and what is it like for the child in school? This study builds upon the findings of these past studies and further explores developmental outcomes related to the highly gifted subjects’ eventual life satisfaction and self-actualization.

Additionally, the present research methodology was designed to discover the structural reality of growing up highly gifted, a reality that does not necessarily coincide with the informants’ perceptions (Spradley, p. 175). Any findings or conclusions stated in this study have been subjected to an analysis strategy that includes multiple readings of the case studies in a search for themes. For example, charts and lists were made that included height and weight, age, years of education, childhood community (rural, urban, suburban), parental background (professional, immigrant, level of education, nuclear or extended family), right or left handed, number of siblings, deaths in the family, incidence of serious illness in self or family, quality of friendships with adults and other children, degree of experience in ability grouped classes, sexual
preference, parental emotional or physical abuse, number and quality of marriages, number of children, religious background and beliefs, involvement in sports or other extracurricular activities, volunteering, career satisfaction of self and parents, and defining moments.

The final analysis and presentation of results evolved as a result of iterative reviews of the individual subject files and resultant data reduction decisions. According to Miles and Huberman,

> Study design decisions...are a sort of anticipatory data reduction because they constrain later analysis by ruling out certain variables and relationships and attending to others (p.16). The conceptual framework should emerge from the field in the course of the study; the important research questions will come clear only gradually; meaningful settings and actors cannot be selected prior to fieldwork; instruments, if any, should be derived from the properties of the settings and its actors’ views of them (p.17).

Each reading of the case studies was in pursuit of confirming or disconfirming evidence of theories developed from previous readings of the same case studies. In other words, what common words, topics, or experiences were included in the case studies of subjects who stated that they were relatively happy and conflict free compared to subjects who described bitterness, regrets, or depression? The focusing question at all times was, “What makes some people who are highly gifted turn into contented, achieving adults compared to others who do not?”

As work progressed on the analysis it became apparent that “contented, achieving adults” still have underlying differences among them, and “contented” and “achieving” both mean different things to different people. It was at this point of discovery that human and emotional development theory was explored in the context of the subjects’ case studies’ answers. Since the subject pool and study focus is on highly gifted adults, it was never the intention of the present research to support or not support the theories of theorists whose terminology and frameworks are utilized (e.g., Dabrowski, Maslow, Kohlberg and Rest). There has been no attempt to strictly adhere to their work; it is simply helpful to borrow from their terminology and use it as a starting point for describing the emotional growth and development of the current subject pool.

Previous research on highly gifted subjects (Terman, Hollingworth, Gross) examined many of the same elements as the present study, i.e., family background, social background, and educational experiences, but each had a different purpose. Terman (1925, 1959), for example, seemed primarily to be searching for answers to questions about the levels of personal adjustment, career success, and differences between his subjects and people whose intelligence is closer to the population average. Hollingworth (1942), as noted above, studied children who were identified as profoundly gifted in a special school that she headed in New York City. She was especially concerned with what such children could do intellectually, socially, and emotionally when they were given appropriate intellectual, social, and emotional support. She discovered, for example, that exceptionally gifted children who were placed in ability-grouped classes developed good self-concepts, social skills, and friendships. In fact, exceptionally gifted children who were grouped and taught with other exceptionally gifted children for their school days adapted as easily to social routines and interactions as intellectually average children do when they are grouped with their intellectual peers. Gross (1993) is utilizing a longitudinal case study approach to assess the effects of appropriate educational experiences, radical acceleration in particular, on self-esteem, self-concept, and academic achievement of exceptionally gifted Australian children. The children are only now reaching early adulthood, but, like Piechowski’s subjects, moral reasoning levels higher than typical age-mates have been found in Gross’s subjects. Potential for self-actualizing inner growth seems evident in a number of the subjects, as
The critical difference between the Terman, Hollingworth, and Gross studies and the present study is the role of the researcher. During their childhoods, none of this study’s participants, their parents, or their teachers had any contact, assistance, or interference by the researcher. The process by which individuals develop a concept of themselves, as already mentioned, is highly contingent upon their perceptions of others’ reactions to them. When a researcher well-versed in aspects of high giftedness deals directly with the parents and teachers of the highly gifted child, the feedback from others that the child receives reflects an understanding of the child’s high giftedness. Although it is true that awareness of high giftedness does not necessarily mean the adults respond appropriately to the child, most of the subjects in the present study were never told that they are highly gifted. As a result, their identity formation was undertaken without benefit of that possibly critical factor.

Data Collection and Subject Selection

Research participants were all volunteers who responded to a call for gifted adults to participate in a blind research study. They contacted the researcher after seeing or hearing about the study and what it involved. Initial contact with potential participants was made by mail, using the Minnesota Counsel for Gifted and Talented mailing list to reach all state level gifted associations, high IQ organizations, university gifted programs, and numerous known experts in the field. Advertising also was done in America Online. Further, numerous highly intelligent adults were recommended by friends, relatives, colleagues, and associates.

The compensation offered to people for their participation is a cost-free synopsis of the study. Also, the researcher offered to repay participants who agreed to take the Miller Analogies Test, a test selected because it is readily available, differentiates at high intellectual levels, requires little to no preparation, and is recognized as a good measure of high intellectual functioning.

Approximately 700 potential subjects were mailed, during a two year period between 1992 and 1993, a description of the study and their role in it, a subjects’ consent form, a “Screening for Subjects” form. All remembered test scores were requested as corroboration of gifted intellect, but IQ scores were not required. The screening form follows in Table 4.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCREENING FOR SUBJECTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DIRECTIONS: Please fill out the inventory to the best of your ability. Any questions? Call me at 612-374-4826 or write to me at the address on the last page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year Born:_____________ Sex:_____________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right or left-handed?________ Height:_______ Weight:_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnic Background:______________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of education:________________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special training or skills:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Attach a resume or write a brief description of your professional attainments (I'm looking for diversity among subjects):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Describe special talents or skills which have been used in your profession, your writing, your volunteer work, your hobbying, your recreational time, etc. (again, diversity, and sometimes these are evidence of giftedness which we often underestimate in ourselves or our spouses):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Evidence of high or profound giftedness: (Please provide copies of test results, if you have them. Otherwise, best guesses or memory will have to suffice).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tests: (estimate year taken and your age at the time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College SAT: Verbal:_______ Math:_______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California Test of Mental Maturity (IQ):_________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California Test of Cognitive Skills:_________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Record Exam (GRE):_________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LSAT: __________
Miller Analogies Test - raw score: __________
Stanford-Binet (what form?): ________________
Wechsler Adult and Children Scales
   (WAIS, WAIS-R, WISC, WISC-R): ____________
Otis-Lennon Tests: ________________
Otis-Gamma Test: ________________
Any other remembered scores. Describe.

Answer the following questions only if you have no scores listed for any of the aforementioned tests.

- Did you ever skip a grade or grades? Describe.
- Were you accelerated by the schools in any subjects? Describe.
- Did you win any academic recognition or awards? Describe.
- Describe any other feedback you received which made you either wonder or know that you are gifted. Please describe any feedback indicating unusual levels of giftedness.
- Sometimes, instead of scores from standardized tests, you are told your percentile ranking. Name any testing situations you can remember where you earned a 99th percentile score or a 99+ percentile score.
- Preschool behavior is one of the most reliable indicators of high giftedness. If you still wonder why you were sent this questionnaire, try to find out from someone who knew you as a preschooler how you compared to other children your age. What did you do that others considered amazing or precocious? (Remember that giftedness runs in families and your behavior may have been more amazing to neighbors, sitters, more distant relatives).

Good grades in school are not necessarily an indication of giftedness. Lack of good grades doesn't rule out giftedness, either. Highly and profoundly gifted people do not necessarily know that they are gifted. Achievement is not necessarily a measure of giftedness. If you have been given this form, you are undoubtedly at least moderately gifted. If you are having trouble understanding what giftedness is and where you fit in, and you are still considering participating in this study, write some specific questions and I will mail you articles I have written which will perhaps clarify giftedness issues for you.

Nearly 200 people between the ages of 20 and 83 completed and returned the consent and “Screening for Subjects” forms. The next mailing included the Defining Issues Test, provided by The Center for the Study of Ethical Development at the University of Minnesota. The research plan included use of the DIT primarily because it was a widely normed moral reasoning inventory that would, at least theoretically, reveal different levels or viewpoints in reasoning among the subjects. An early expectation by the researcher was that all the subjects would score high due to their high intelligence and educational achievements; the results of the 160 completed DITs, however, revealed a result similar to that of Narvaez (1993), that high intelligence is apparently necessary but not sufficient for high scores on the DIT.

Author designed questionnaires served as the primary mode of data collection. “Gifted Inventory II” asked open-ended questions about many aspects of the participants’ childhood experiences and is presented as Table 5.

**TABLE 5**

**RESEARCH INVENTORY II**

Childhood Information

Directions: Please answer the questions using extra paper when needed. Reference any attached sheets by using the same number as on the inventory form. Leave anything blank that you do not want to answer or cannot answer. INVENTORY III will deal with adult issues and situations. (Call me with questions at 612-374-4826).

Birth year: _______ Gender: _______

**PART I: CHILDHOOD ENVIRONMENT**

1. Where were you born? (Be general, describe rather than name)
2. When someone asks you where you grew up, what is your answer?
   Describe the kind of community, or communities, in which you were raised. (Urban, rural, suburban; rich, poor; in the mountains, by a river, lake, or ocean, on the desert, or a farm, row houses, apartments, etc.)
3. How did your family compare to others in your community or neighborhood?
4. What is your racial and/or ethnic background?
5. How long have the different parts of your family (your ancestors) lived in the United States? Describe.
6. Describe your religious background and upbringing.
7. How many times did your family move during your childhood?
   Did you have feelings of “fitting in” or not?
8. Did you have hobbies or strong interests as a child? Explain.
9. Nickname(s) in childhood:
   How did you feel about this?
10. Were you adopted? (If pertinent, tell how this affected your life, how you were told, how you were treated by relatives, etc.)
11. Give the birth order, distance between births, and sex of your siblings.
12. How old were your parents when you were born?
   Mother
   Father
13. Was this your parents' first marriage? Describe situation.
14. What was the educational level of each of your parents? What kinds of schooling and/or training did they get? (Name colleges and degrees, be general, if necessary)
   Mother
   Father
15. What kinds of career work did each of your parents do while you were growing up?
   Mother
   Father
16. What were your parents' views on education?
17. Did your parents expect you to go to college and/or graduate school? Describe their attitudes and how they demonstrated these.
18. Did your parents pay for college? How did you feel about this?
19. What kinds of discipline were most common in your childhood household? (i.e., gentle guidance, shaming, physical punishment, high expectations, inconsistent, consistent, etc.)
Family Discipline Approach: none little often usually
gentleness
harshness
spanking
hitting
beating
soap/pepper in mouth
yelling
shaming
rewards, money, trips
rewards, hugs, praise
sent to room
firm expectations
clear rules
curfews
chores
grounding
20. Describe the level of affection and approval in your childhood home, i.e., were you hugged a lot, did people tell you they loved you?
21. How important do you think your parents' emotional support and guidance (or lack of) was (is) to your good or bad feelings about yourself?
   to your career choices?
   to your educational choices?
22. Did any of your close relatives die while you were growing up? Describe.
23. Were your parents divorced while you were growing up?
24. Anticipate any of the many questions I could ask here about number of times each of your parents were
married, how successful their marriage(s) were, the general quality of their marriage and parenting relationships, and anything else that may have effected your growing up years. (Use extra paper- this is the time to mention alcohol or drug abuse/addictions, criminal problems, physical abuse or violence, infidelities, neglect of each other or the children, etc.)

25. Did anyone in your immediate family become disabled or was anyone handicapped? Describe.
26. Did your parents have different expectations and levels of emotional and financial support for the boys or the girls in the family? How did they exhibit (if they did) any sexism along these lines?
27. In general, were you aware of any of the children in your family being favored by your parents? Describe.
   Yourself:
   Siblings:
28. Educationally, how did your siblings compare to you? Describe.
29. Career-wise, what are your siblings doing now?
30. Give your best effort at ranking your siblings, including yourself, on intelligence. Explain any hesitancies or difficulties in doing this. Include your analysis of your place in the extended family (cousins, other relatives).
31. If you could change anything about the way your parents treated you, what changes would you make?
32. To whom did you feel the closest during your childhood? Why?
33. Were there any important turning points that you can think of during your childhood? Describe them.

PART II: PHYSICAL and PERSONAL DATA IN CHILDHOOD
1. Height (now):  Weight (now):
   Add any related observations or comments about your particular situation regarding your weight at different times in your life.
2. Describe your overall situation regarding your height at different times in your life.
3. Describe your overall impression of your looks while growing up. Has the feedback you received from others been consistent with your own body image? Describe your feelings about this.
4. Have you ever suffered from an eating disorder; or, have you ever been compulsive about exercise, dieting, cosmetic surgery, etc.? Go into detail if you wish.
5. Race and/or ethnic background: (Add any observations or comments regarding your particular experiences related to your race or ethnic background).
6. Sexual Orientation: If you wish, give your views on gay/lesbian behavior and how, if at all, it may affect your life.
7. If you wish, comment on whether or not you were sexually abused or raped during your childhood. It would help to know your age at the time(s), if your parents ever knew, and whether or not any help, comfort, or counseling was available to you then or since.

PART III: SOCIAL ASPECTS OF YOUR CHILDHOOD
- Did you feel popular growing up? Describe.
- Did you enjoy spending time with other children your own age? Explain.
- Did you ever have a best friend while growing up?
- Were you ever bullied by siblings, classmates, neighbors? Describe.
- Were you ever a bully? Explain.
- Are you the peace-maker type or always finding yourself in arguments and debates? Describe.
- When, if ever, did you start dating? Describe your dating experience.
- Were you athletic growing up? Describe.
- Describe some of your favorite childhood pastimes both to do with others and to do alone.
- If you can, describe what others thought of you while you were growing up? What was your general reputation?
- Did people know you were smart? Describe the feedback.
- Name the people who influenced your career decisions, either positively or negatively, when you were growing up.

Family members:
Educators:
Community members:
Other role models:

PART IV: SCHOOL EXPERIENCES
1. Did you go to a public, private, or parochial school? For all grades? Describe.
2. Did you like elementary school? Why or why not? Describe.
3. When did you begin to read well? How did the school help or hinder you in reading and/or other subjects?
4. Which of your highest ability areas were best served in school? Describe.
5. What part of your school career was probably the best, happiest time and to what do you attribute this?
6. How did your teachers keep you busy? (grading papers, peer tutoring, reading, etc.)
7. Were you aware of being more intelligent than the other children? How did you feel about "fitting in" or not "fitting in"?
8. If you felt as though you did not fit in at some point in your early school years, did you attribute that feeling to being too far ahead of the other children, or were there other reasons for feeling different? Describe.
9. Did any of your teachers single you out for special (good or bad) attention due to your brightness or performance? How did you feel about this? Describe the situation(s).
10. Did any of your teachers treat you as teacher's pet? Describe the ramifications.
11. Did any of your teachers pick on you or seem to resent you? Describe.
12. Were any of your teachers especially helpful or detrimental in your feelings about yourself? in choosing a career path?
13. Were you given any options for acceleration, skipping, curriculum compacting or enrichment while in elementary school? Describe.
   in junior high school? Describe.
   in high school? Describe.
15. Were you known as "a genius"? How did you feel about this?
16. Have you experienced much uncertainty or confusion in your life regarding whether or not you really are smart compared to the majority of people? Explain.
17. How did you compare to your classmates at each of the three school levels? (Describe any comparative aspects including intellectual, family background, talent areas and interests, ambition, etc.)
   elementary:
   junior high:
   High school:
18. Were you truant from school much at any time? Describe the circumstances. Did your parents condone your truancy?
19. Generally, did you like school? Why or why not?
20. Did you ever experience physical symptoms related to school attendance? At what ages?
21. Were grades important to you? Why or why not?
22. Were you often satisfied with your school performance? Why or why not?
23. If you could change how your schools treated you, what would you change?
24. Did your school system and community support educational excellence? What was the community attitude in this regard? Was there any media coverage of city and school awards, quiz bowls, academic honors and contests, etc.? Compare the prestige of academic accomplishment to that of athletics and/or the arts in your community and school system? Who were the heroes?
25. Estimate, if you can, the percentage of people who graduated from high school in your community.
26. Estimate the percentage of people who went to college.
27. Do you feel you received a good start, a good education, from the schools you attended?

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS
Now is the time to give any further information about your schooling and school experiences which you feel will be of interest to me and the study results. Add any information or insights about your family, neighborhood, or school life which may shed some light on how you got to be the person you are today.

Approximately 75 people completed and returned the childhood questionnaire. “Gifted Inventory III,” the adult experiences questionnaire, is presented here as Table 6. As with the childhood questionnaire, participants were encouraged to use extra paper when needed, and approximately half the subjects did.

TABLE 6

RESEARCH INVENTORY III
ADULT EXPERIENCES OF SUBJECTS

Directions: Please answer the following questions using extra paper when necessary. This inventory deals with your adult experiences, values, and viewpoints. If you have any questions or concerns, please call me at (612)374-4826, or write to me at the address on the last page.
I. POST-HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION:
1. List, and if applicable, describe all post-high school training and education you have received. Name the institutions, your general subject focus, degrees obtained, and any extra continuing education you have received. (I am not interested in every last one of your non-degree classes; just give me the idea. You may omit names if you are concerned about my recognizing your identity. Information included on previous mailings need not be restated).

The following questions identify the circumstances under which you attended post-high school institutions.

2. Were you working full or part-time? Describe.
3. Were you a married student?
   a. Did your spouse work?
   b. or go to school?
4. Were you a parent while going to school?
   a. Did you provide more than half the child-care?
   b. Were the child-care arrangements detrimental to your schooling?
5. Were you emancipated?
6. Were your parents paying all the bills?
7. Were your parents checking grades, etc.?
8. Describe the kind of student you were at each post-high school step.
   a. What kind of grades did you get?
   b. How much time did you devote to studying?
   c. Were you dedicated to your school work and training?
   d. How significant was your social involvement?
   e. How significant was your extra-curricular involvement (sports, music, drama, newspaper, etc.)?
9. How do you feel about the education or training which you have received?
10. Would you change anything about where you went for your education, how well you did, the circumstances under which you studied, etc.?
11. Were the years after high school, the first 4 or so, happy years for you?
12. How emotionally mature do you think you were?
13. Did you have any (typical) preoccupation with dating, sex, marriage during your college years?
   a. Dating
   b. sex
   c. Marriage
14. How do you feel your dating, sex, and/or marriage feelings during college or soon thereafter affected your educational and career preparation and/or goals?
15. Did you have good friends during that period?
16. Are you still in contact with any of them?

II. WORK/CAREER EXPERIENCES:
1. Give a general description of your work/career experiences by decade. Include your approximate annual earnings' level by the end of each decade. (Some people feel financial success is a measure of success and have asked me to include this aspect in my comparison of subjects).
   a. 20's:
   b. 30's:
   c. 40's:
   d. 50's:
   e. 60's:
2. Which of the things you have worked at have given you the least satisfaction and why?
3. Which of the things you have worked at have given you the most satisfaction and why?
4. How much choice do you feel you had over the things you have done in your life, i.e., why did you spend time doing things that gave you little satisfaction?
5. Have you made any close friendship connections in your work environment? Describe.
6. Name any careers you think you might also have enjoyed. Tell why.
7. How did you choose your eventual career?
8. Do you feel that you are fulfilled by your career choices? Explain.
9. Do you feel that the associations (friendships, connections) you have made through your career are fulfilling or are you lonely? Describe.
10. Give, if you wish, any other insights into your feelings about your career.

III. FAMILY & MARRIAGE:
1. Give a summary of your marriage situation(s), i.e., how often, how long, how well, how young or old, etc.

2. How many children do you have?
   a. Give your age at times of their births.
   b. Describe your marriage situations during their raising, etc.
   c. How do you, or did you, feel about parenting?
   d. Describe any feelings about favoring any child, or disliking any child.
   e. Do you feel you were equipped to raise children?

3. Describe any significant aspects of your adult family life.
   a. Deaths
   b. Illnesses or handicaps
   c. Substance abuse
   d. Physical abuse or violence
   e. Other

4. Were there any special circumstances or opportunities which had an impact on the rest of the family?
   a. For yourself? Describe.
   b. For your spouse? Describe.
   c. For any of your children? Describe.

5. Describe the circumstances under which your children have been raised, i.e., by stay-at-home mother, nanny, stay-at-home dad, with great leniency, closely watched, public or private schools, typical sports activities, etc.
   a. Who has been the primary caretaker?
   b. Have your children gone to public or private schools?
   c. If money were no object, would you send your kids to a different school? Why?
   d. How have you participated in typical activities with your children and how often?
     1. Scout leader
     2. School volunteer
     3. School open houses and conferences
     4. Camping trips
     5. Coached a sports team
     6. Lots of driving
     7. Bike riding
     8. Watching TV together
     9. Reading to or with child
     10. Other

6. How have you balanced child raising and your career?
   a. Has it cut into your time with your children?
   b. Has it interfered with your career progress?
   c. What are your feelings about this?
   d. All things considered, would you change anything or accept the status quo?

7. Are you the same kind of parent that your parents were? Describe.

8. Assuming you want your children to be productive, emotionally healthy adults, what about your parenting style is leading (or lead) your children in that direction? Give a brief description of your parenting philosophy and behavior.

IV. PERSONAL INTELLECTUAL COMPARISONS:

1. Who in your present family would you estimate is gifted? Please rank your family members, including yourself, on general intelligence. Explain any difficulties. (Remember to recommend for the study any who you think are qualified).

2. Are you and your significant other (spouse, room-mate, etc.) intellectually compatible? Describe.

3. Do you relate well to your children? Describe.

4. Since you have been an adult, how has your relationship been with your parents? Describe.

5. How do you believe you compare intellectually with each of your parents?

V. BELIEFS & VALUES:

1. When asked to give an opinion on any of the following subjects, how do you answer?
   a. abortion:
   b. political party/politics:
   c. welfare:
d. military service:
e. taxes:
f. work ethic:
e. mixed marriages:
f. religion:
g. promiscuity/faithfulness:
h. environmental issues:
i. American educational system:
j. pre-marital sex:
k. drinking alcohol:
l. addictive, prescribed drugs:
m. illegal drugs:
n. rape:
o. cheating on taxes:
p. volunteer work:

VI. SOCIAL LIFE IN ADULTHOOD:
Again, break your descriptions down by decades or relevant time periods for each of the following questions.
1. What have you done for fun?
2. What kinds of activities have you engaged in primarily for the exercise and for keeping in shape?
3. Do you confide in your friends?
4. Have you usually had friends in whom you can confide?
5. Describe your preferred use of free time as concerns doing something alone or doing something with others.
6. Describe the importance of personal friend relationships in your life?
7. Have you had much trouble finding really good friends? Explain.
8. Do you feel that people like you and feel close to you? Explain.

VII. SATISFACTION WITH LIFE:
1. Please describe your overall satisfaction with your life, as regards...
   a. relationships:
   b. parenting:
   c. education/training:
   d. career choices:
   e. career successes:
   f. sense of being a worthwhile person:
   g. self-acceptance:
   h. sense of personal value:
2. Have there been any times in your life when you seriously questioned whether or not you could go on? Describe.
3. Have you ever considered suicide? How seriously? Can you explain the feelings you had which made you feel that way?
4. If you were given a chance to explain to a troubled, highly or profoundly gifted young person that life does matter and is worth it, what would you say?

VIII. ANCESTRY:
1. Past research indicates that high and profound giftedness does not spring from a vacuum. Please provide a "family tree", in whatever form and depth you wish, of your present and past relatives which includes honors and distinctions, special accomplishments, public and private offices and trusteeships, career, inventions, publications, artistic accomplishment, etc. (Remember, even if I figure out who you are in this blind study, no information would ever be reported or published which would jeopardize your privacy). Attach separate sheets.
2. In the past, popular opinion was that geniuses were often mentally ill. I believe that high intelligence does not predispose a person to quirky and insane behavior, but that lack of understanding, loneliness, and suppression of thoughts and abilities can lead to maladaptive behavior among the highly gifted. For that reason, I would like you to list, to the best of your ability, the incidence among past and presently living relatives of alcoholism, drug abuse, suicide, depression, manic-depression, schizophrenia, neuroses, etc. (Many experts believe these behaviors start as coping behaviors). Use extra paper for this, too.
A fourth questionnaire, “The Mother Inventory,” in Appendix B, was mailed to the primary caregivers of participants, usually the mothers, and covered many of the same questions that are on the “Childhood Information” questionnaire. Although most of the parents were still living, only a small number responded. Where parental comments are available and contribute to an understanding of the primary study participant, the parent is quoted or paraphrased in the subjects’ case studies.

As completed inventories arrived by mail, the researcher read them and compiled lists of factual information in an attempt to describe the group. Number of siblings, birth order, death or divorce of parents, type of schools attended (rural, urban, parochial, boarding), sex, handedness, years of schooling, test scores were compiled for the first lists. Successive passes added such information as “Does the subject mention ever receiving counseling?”, “Have subjects responded ‘yes’ to the question on sexual abuse?”, and “Did the subjects or their families know, during the subjects’ childhoods, that they were highly gifted?”

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), “Qualitative researchers usually work with small samples of people, nested in their context and studied in depth...Qualitative samples tend to be purposive, rather than random...conceptually driven” (p. 27).

The initial lists were compared to DIT and IQ results to see if there were any patterns. The questionnaire data were read and re-read for emerging themes and salient issues. It became evident that although school experiences and friendship patterns were similar across age-groups, attitudes and degree of positive or negative viewpoints varied considerably. As issues emerged, the files were read again in order to confirm or disconfirm the newly perceived trends among cases. As trends were identified, the subjects were grouped and regrouped for consistency of themes and any possible connections to DIT P-scores or intellectual levels.

Given the large number of case studies, it was desirable to draw a smaller sample that would be either representative of the files not selected for final inclusion or that would contain all the files from a group that had much in common. The themes that began to emerge clearly related to the age cohorts. The final choice of age range was made based upon the observation that most people beyond age 60 were upbeat and certain about their lives no matter what circumstances they reported; and as a group they scored lower on the DIT than people under about age 60. Additionally, the subjects under age 40, based on initial data analysis, showed a fairly consistently different tone and approach to their lives than the people older than they. Ultimately, the 40 to 60 age range was somewhat arbitrary as a “data reduction device” but resulted in covering an age group that appeared at that point to have much in common. It was decided to include all subjects who fit the age range. All the final subjects were born between 1933 and 1954 and are fairly closely identified with the generations described by Strauss and Howe (1991) as the last wave of the “Silent” generation and the first wave of the “Baby Boomer” generation.

Of the 31 subjects from the original subject pool of 109 who were older than 60, none of them mentioned that they sought counseling. Indeed, as a group they were upbeat and relatively problem-free. Their apparent lack of either introspection or complaint about their experiences and choices in life made it difficult to assess any emotional transitions in their case studies. It was an easy data reduction choice to leave further analysis of the age 60+ cohort for future research.

Parameters for final subject selection had three facets: 1) subjects had some evidence of 99th percentile test scores or performance; 2) subjects were in the 40 to 60 year old age range; and, 3) subjects completed and mailed back enough information to be analyzed. Two years after the initial mailings and data gathering, a follow-up request to finish the questionnaires was mailed to participants who fit the prescribed conditions for inclusion in the final analysis. An additional 10 subjects completed questionnaires as a result. A number of final subjects did not
complete the adult level inventory, but they provided enough overall information in their childhood inventories to make useful analysis possible.

There are 41 subjects who met the three parameters for inclusion. Five more women than men in this age group completed questionnaires, so in order to balance males with females, all of the women’s files that did not include strong evidence of 99th percentile test scores were compared for overall comparability. The researcher believes that the omitted female subjects are adequately represented by the selected female subjects. The result of this data reduction decision means that 20 of the subjects are male and 20 are female. One subject is a transgendered female. Although the intelligence range among the subjects appears quite large, 140 to 190+ IQs, no attempt was made to judge the accuracy and comparability of the different submitted test scores. Scores are provided in the body of the paper because “difference from others” is a self identity issue. For some subjects whose childhood homes were difficult, neglectful, or even chaotic, scores are missing or possibly deflated by circumstances. In any event, the data analysis indicates that precision of test scores is not a critical issue for this study.

Description of Subjects

A reasonable question arises: how representative of highly gifted people is this study’s sample? The case studies make it clear that the group represents considerable diversity of family composition, parenting styles, parental socio-economic background, educational type and quality, and adult career fields. The subjects originate from all over the United States, attended rural, suburban, and city schools, and came from families who had very little money or education to those who had much of both. All subjects are of western, middle, or eastern European, Caucasian ancestry, and two identified themselves as Jewish. The charts and case studies do not include specific geographic background in order to protect subject anonymity. The most consistent factor in the background of the subjects involves their educational experiences. The educational experiences did not appear to vary by geographic location; in fact, the biggest difference between rural and suburban schools appears to be the degree to which the neighborhoods and communities knew the students and teachers.

Factors of age, intelligence and education have been substantially reduced in this study by the subject selection process. All subjects in the current study have at least undergraduate college degrees, and nearly all the subjects continue their intellectual stimulation through their careers, continuing education, and reading. Nearly every subject listed reading first as a favorite pastime in both childhood and adulthood.

The subjects’ career experiences vary considerably. A researcher designed career categorization is utilized in order to provide a skill level description while hiding the specific career; anonymity is key to the openness of the subjects’ responses. It is important in the context of this study that readers be able to discern how subjects are using high intelligence, coupled with their educational and emotional backgrounds, to express their abilities as adults. The following list breaks down career fields by the type of training and skills required and used by the subjects.

Specifically, only one person has never done paid work outside the home; and there are two medical doctors, one small film maker, numerous university professors, psychologists, psychotherapists, attorneys, and engineers, several small business owners, two major business CEOs, and a number of social workers, writers, and classroom teachers. In the individual case studies, the subjects’ career fields are mentioned, and when it is possible to do so without jeopardizing anonymity, people’s work and recreation are described further by indicating when they are involved in corporate or independent entrepreneurial situations. A great many of the subjects do much of what they do alone. Interestingly, none of the subjects claims a career that involves management level work, although some are their own bosses.
Table 7

**Highly Gifted Subjects’ Career Areas**

The six major career areas represented by the study subjects are as follows:

1 - Volunteer: strong involvement in raising children, or considerable time devoted to volunteer work in church, community, special causes, the arts.
2 - Verbal: training or practice in the law, educational research or practice, psychological research or practice. Includes non-math and science teachers.
3 - Technical: training or practice in engineering, medicine, scientific invention. Includes math and science teachers.
4 - Computer: training or practice in computer programming, design, or computer utilization development areas.
5 - Creative Arts: training or practice in writing, journalism, the arts, creative or investigative, fiction or nonfiction.
6 - Business: training or practice in business, manufacturing, or product development

Although 39% are involved in only one career field, fully 46% have been involved strongly in two. An additional 12% of the study subjects have balanced three different career field areas. Of the 14 subjects who reported enough information to categorize them as Volunteers, all are women, and for the purposes of this study, many received the categorization for being mothers. Some men alluded to voluntarism as being important but did not give enough indication that it was a regular part of their schedules for years at a time to be included. Listed below is the breakdown of career participation by the subjects. A majority of the subjects have either balanced more than one career at a time or changed careers at least once.

Table 8

**Highly Gifted Subjects’ Career Participation**

- 14 Volunteer 34%
- 21 Verbal 51%
- 11 Technical 27%
- 8 Computer 19.5%
- 9 Creative Arts 22%
- 8 Business 19.5%

Percentages add to more than 100% due to multiple careers.

Chart 3 lists all 41 subjects by their ages in 1993-95, sex, qualifying test scores, educational background, and career fields. Code numbers are used both to identify the subjects’ information and case studies throughout the paper and to maintain anonymity.
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<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A great deal of time, effort, and thought was required of study participants. Subjects who wrote the least on their questionnaires probably spent a minimum of three hours on the project. A number of subjects mentioned spending in excess of 30 hours writing their answers. Most subjects spent about 12 hours writing about their lives. What kind of people are willing to go to so much trouble, and why would they do it? According to their own comments, that answer varies. The answers fall into the following groupings:

- “I’ve done research and know how difficult it is to get volunteers.”
- “My life has been difficult and I think the kind of research you’re doing will be helpful to people like me.”
- “I know some gifted people have had problems; I believe sharing my experiences might help them.”
- “I want to know more about myself and my giftedness. I’ll do this if you’ll give me some of the answers.”

Data Analysis: Primary Sorting Categories and Terminology

Qualitative research involves the search for and analysis of sorting categories. Just as a number of topics were added to the Review of the Literature as a result of the study findings, numerous themes and tentative theories developed related to data analysis, as well. As mentioned earlier, numerous childhood family factors, personal factors, and school experiences were looked for and counted to see if any developed as significant to adult outcome. Each time a new theme appeared to emerge, the case studies were re-read and checked for confirming or disconfirming evidence of significance to adult outcome.

The categories that showed usefulness in explaining levels of adult success, happiness, satisfaction, and levels of inner development are included in the following list and were used as the primary sorting categories in the analysis of case study data for the 41 subjects:

- childhood abuse
- Tone
- Searcher, Nonsearcher, Neutral
- Counseling or therapy
- DIT P-score

An early sorting category concerned emotional and physical abuse. In the present study, it was initially theorized that subjects who had been abused would have more difficulty self-actualizing. In the context of this study, abuse is meant to indicate any treatment, as perceived and reported by the study participants, that leads them to be to feel unloved, or unworthy of love, respect, or admiration. Although some abuse is intentional, it need not be intentional to cause harm. A description of abuse that is useful for this study is from Shannon (1998), who in his “Emotional Intelligence Seminar” outlines abuse as follows:

Table 9

Shannon’s Description of Abuse

1) Emotional - putting child down, critical statements, especially suggesting the child is unwanted
2) Physical - including excessive punishment
3) Sexual - including exposing child to sex inappropriately
4) Spiritual - using threat of God’s wrath
5) Neglect - parent caught up in own problems
6) Ignorance - good intentions but stupid actions that result in emotional harm

As data analysis continued, however, it became apparent that categorizing the case
studies based on emotionally and sexually abusive versus nonabusive backgrounds still did not explain apparent differences in adult level happiness or self-actualization. It also became apparent that the presence or absence of abuse was not verifiable by the written case study approach. For example, some subjects described abusive circumstances but denied that they were abused. Other subjects realized their treatment was not optimal but did not feel it damaged them because they always felt loved and supported. As a result, abuse as a category was assigned only when the subject clearly stated that he or she felt abused in one of the above-mentioned descriptions.

Due to the emerging possibility that attitude might be more significant than actual presence or absence of abuse, a new sorting category was developed called Tone (capitalized to indicate the word’s use in this study context). According to the 14th definition in the *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*, 1987, tone is “A particular mental state or disposition; spirit, character or tenor.” In the context of this study it is a shorthand for conveying the presence or absence of satisfaction and contentment in each subject’s life in an effort to enable the reader to compare subject tone with subject intellectual level, DIT result, and background experiences. The Tone definition and scale was modified several times during the iterative reviews of the case studies to allow for the many moods and viewpoints that the subjects exhibited.

**Table 10**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tone Score Scale Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>♦ Tone 1: subjects say they are happy, content, satisfied; have a positive outlook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Tone 2: same as Tone 1 but also reveals some sadness or disappointment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Tone 3: not possible to discern subject’s tone or the subject seemed to be in emotional limbo, neither content nor particularly discontent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Tone 4: made statements that they are not at all happy or content; filled with many unresolved feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Tone 5: subjects write that they are very angry or resentful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next analysis stage resulted in two subgroupings based on whether or not subjects mentioned receiving psychological therapy. It appeared possible that both DIT and Tone scores could be influenced by therapy. Continuing analysis of the data indicated that although counseling was associated with higher DIT scores, it did not seem to be associated with adult happiness to any strong degree. It became clearer that the search for precursors to inner growth was not the same as the search for happy adults. After it became clear that abuse and therapy were still not identifying the people whose complexity of viewpoint was evaluated as being higher level reasoning, an additional sorting category was invented and added: Searcher. The definition was refined during the process of re-searching the case studies for examples of Searcher behavior or viewpoint. In the process of looking for Searchers, the description of Dabrowski’s “positive disintegration” was also viewed as initial evidence of Searcher behavior.

**Searcher** - Searchers are still actively deciding who they are and who they want to be. Searchers tend to see many sides to many issues. Searchers examine and re-examine themselves, others, and issues and are open to changing their views if new, convincing information becomes available. Searchers may or may not be self-actualized in either their careers or intrapersonal (inner) lives. Such individuals may go through periods of emotional turmoil
called “positive disintegrations” as they strive, consciously or unconsciously, to reach their personality ideal, their best overall selves. Their case studies give many examples of their emotional and ideological struggles.

Positive Disintegration - A term coined by Kazimierz Dabrowski; an episode of emotional and intellectual breakdown precipitated by a severe cognitive dissonance that leads to new personal insights and viewpoints. The subject is presented with information or experiences that do not make sense in the context of presently held global views about the self and one’s role. The intellectual interference is so strong that the person’s resistance to change breaks down and causes strong, sometimes severe, emotional discomfort. If the person rationalizes, ignores as an aberration, or intellectualizes the incompatible data, emotional recovery may take place, but the person remains essentially unchanged, and according to Dabrowski’s developmental theory, at a low level of emotional development. If the person examines and internalizes the new data, incorporates it into the self, even takes time to feel the loss of old ideas and values, the emotional recovery is positive and growth-inducing. The event, the experience of tearing down old notions and building new, changes the person (A more thorough discussion of positive disintegration can be found in Volume 1 of Advanced Development: a Journal on Adult Giftedness, 1989).

Although many of the case studies either fit the definition of Searcher or did not, numerous cases were not clear. The resulting definitions were developed to sort the remaining cases.

Nonsearcher- Identity exploration is not reported by the subject as an active concern.

Nonsearchers give evidence of either identity foreclosure or identity achievement, as described by Erikson (1968). Marcia (1980), elaborating on Erikson’s work, described identity foreclosure as the situation when adolescents do not experiment with different identities or explore a range of options, but simply commit themselves to the goals, values, and lifestyles of others, usually their parents. Josselson (1987), in her study of women’s identity development, described Erikson’s identity achievement among her subjects as being a self-tested and self-selected identity independent of parental choices, but nonetheless quite stable. Some nonsearchers in the present study are people who may be self-actualized in a career sense in that they are productive people who live and work at a high level, presumably up to their potential. This is not the same as the inner emotional maturity that is normally achieved after extensive identity exploration and adaptations. Other subjects described as nonsearchers say they are underachieving but accept the status quo.

Neutral - Someone who is neither clearly a Searcher nor a Nonsearcher.

As a result of the present study’s findings, the meaning of self-actualization has been refined to reflect the distinction between happy, achieving adults who have closed off the possibility that there are any needs to make significant changes in themselves, and those adults who have found a complexity of viewpoint and thought that comes from inner growth that continues to allow for significant personal changes:

Self-Actualization - “high levels of responsibility, authenticity, reflective judgment, empathy for others, autonomy of thought and action, and self-awareness” (K. Nelson, p. 8, 1989).

In the present study, a distinction is made between two types:
1) The first involves an identity formation without going through a developmental crisis. Those who are “successful” people, those who fulfill the role of good, law-abiding, and socially responsible members of their society, meet the traditional description of self-actualized individuals.

2) The second type identified in the present study are those people who experience inner transformation after undergoing one or more developmental crises. They may or may not appear to be “successful” in a career or monetary sense. They meet Maslow’s description of self-actualized; and they meet Dabrowski’s Level IV description of emotional development.

The final sorting category was the DIT p-score itself. When the project began an assumption was made, despite direct contrary feedback from the developer of the Defining Issues Test, James Rest, that all of the highly gifted subjects would score well above the population average of the DIT. As is evident from TABLE 2 in Chapter II, the subjects’ score range was quite wide despite their uniformly high intellectual and educational levels. A score trend also became evident in one of the earlier charts where the subjects were listed by Searcher, Neutral, and Nonsearcher. The case studies were examined to determine whether the procedure for assessing emotional development was actually finding, by a more laborious route, the same thing the DIT was finding. It must be emphasized that the Center for Ethical Development at the University of Minnesota has never employed or recommended the use of the DIT p-scores to categorize people.

Clear score trends did emerge that showed a steady progression of DIT scores corresponding to the advancing complexity levels of moral and emotional reasoning as outlined by Kohlberg and Dabrowski. In fact, when the separate analysis of the case file yielded a result that was out of synch with this fairly linear progression, the file was reviewed again to see whether or not it was the DIT that missed the expected emotional level or the researcher. The difficulty was always related to the definition of the term Searcher. A final terminology distinction for clarifying this last issue was incorporated into the definition. It was decided that “searching for answers” is not the same as being open to new information that can totally transform one’s viewpoint. A Searcher continues to be open; someone who is not a Searcher will stop being open when the “answer” is found.

The description of whether or not subjects give evidence of being Searchers or Nonsearchers has proven to be the most salient factor in separating high emotional reasoning levels from the low. Positive disintegrations proved to be more difficult to count or verify; and there were some subjects who gave no detail describing positive disintegration-type episodes but who were still categorized at high emotional levels. In comparing the information on the Chart 2’s Moral and Emotional Development in Chapter II to Table 11’s Factors Related to Emotional Growth that follows on page 82, it can be seen that a DIT score below 65 indicates a person who is probably not a Searcher, although some scores above that level could only be categorized as Neutral. In line with the finding that Searchers are open to inner change, all of the subjects who are categorized as Searchers are placed at Dabrowski Level III or higher. There is also a consistent pattern in the DIT scores with low to high scores coinciding with the emotional development levels. The lowest DIT score received by a Searcher is 67.8.

All of the subjects who are categorized as Nonsearchers are placed in Levels I and II of Dabrowski’s Levels of Emotional Development, and the highest DIT score among Nonsearchers is a 55.9. There appear to be two types of Nonsearchers. One type gives evidence in the case study of trying hard to be a good person by being hard-working, responsible, nice. They generally sound optimistic and earned Tone scores of 1, 2, and 3. They often state directly or indirectly that they hope their behaviors and attitudes and accomplishments will change those
around them to be more accepting of and loving toward them. It is also common for them to work hard on finding meaning and value in their lives through avenues that others would find acceptable. The motivation seems to come from a desire for love and approval. It is as though they are saying, “I’ll know I’ve found it when others tell me I am good.” Often this first type of Nonsearcher discovered fairly early in life how to formulate and meet goals, and having been successful at meeting those goals, has remained with the original plan. Additionally, this first type of Nonsearcher usually finds career and financial success.

The second type of Nonsearcher is the person who states that life is the way it is, fine or otherwise, and there is no point in trying to change anything. These are the subjects who always have someone else or some circumstance to blame for their own short-comings or underachievement. Rather than being highly encouraged, motivated, or guided by outside people or institutions, as described in Level II’s stereotypical roles, these Nonsearcher subjects already have all their own answers. All the second type of Nonsearchers sound angry, cynical, or negative and earned Tone scores of 3, 4, and 5.

A viewpoint that resulted from and then guided further research analysis is that people who hold on hard to resentments, viewpoints, and their way of viewing life whether it makes them happy or not are highly resistant to positive disintegrations. Unless they examine the way they are and explore the possibility of discarding viewpoints and behaviors, real inner change is unlikely. It could be that change is frightening and disorienting, and to people who have already experienced abusive and confusing treatment, whether they personally recognize it or not, losing control is too frightening to consider.

Table 11 shows the order of the subjects as they are presented in Chapter IV. Within each Dabrowski level group, the subjects were sorted by DIT ascending scores. Furthermore, their age at the time of taking the DIT, the Tone score designation, and whether or not they reported that they were abused in any way or received therapy are also included. The final column lists whether the subjects appeared from their questionnaire responses to be Searchers, Neutral, or Nonsearchers. The categorization is based on the descriptions given in the Definitions section and the present chapter.

LIMITATIONS

Case study analysis is a form of naturalistic research. By its very nature it has limitations. The trade-off for rich, descriptive, exploratory, and open-ended data is the lack of replicability and the potential for researcher bias. It would be virtually impossible to match the unique characteristics of the present study cohort with a future study group, for example. Also, there is no opportunity for assessing inter-rater reliability when there is only one researcher. A final but equally important consideration, the data are more understandable if they are grouped according to discovered themes, but the researcher runs the risk of over-interpreting when developing the themes.

The nature of the study group also limits generalizability of results to the general population. The attainment of principled moral reasoning and career or intrapersonal self-actualization may be different for people who are not highly gifted. Furthermore, the reasons why this attainment differs could be only indirectly related to intellectual level. If self-identity and self-concept are an integral first step toward self-actualization, people not so different from those around them might attain a strong and accurate perception of themselves sooner than highly gifted individuals. Although a sufficient level of intelligence may be necessary to ponder the questions and issues that lead to self-actualization, no studies were found that quantify that level.
Table 11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Dabrowski Level</th>
<th>DIT</th>
<th>Tone</th>
<th>Abuse/Therapy</th>
<th>Searcher</th>
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<td>I</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td>Non</td>
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<td>Non</td>
</tr>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>Non</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
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CHAPTER IV
LEVELS OF EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT
IN HIGHLY GIFTED ADULTS

We have seen that intellect and achievement are far from perfectly correlated. Why this is so, what circumstances affect the fruition of human talent, are questions of such transcendent importance that they should be investigated by every method that promises the slightest reduction in our present ignorance (Terman & Oden, 1947, p. 351).

Introduction

In the current chapter, examples were taken from the case studies to elucidate increasingly complex and open levels of moral reasoning and emotional development. To call such development inner growth, or maturing, belies the fact that it does not always happen with age and experience. To call one 45 year old mature and another immature can be viewed as insulting and judgmental. Instead, for the purposes of this study, it makes more sense to talk about a progression through stages, each one more open and complex, less fixed or rigid, than the one before it. Dabrowski’s Levels of Emotional Development are utilized as a structural framework, and references are also made to any evidence of Maslow’s description of inner self-actualization. This chapter is not intended as a psychological analysis of the subjects; it instead is an attempt to describe how people’s viewpoints and ways of dealing with their lives and problems is manifested within increasingly complex emotional levels.

The purpose of this chapter is to show how the iterative analysis of the case studies isolated factors that consistently identify different levels of reasoning and viewpoints and can be supported by examples from the case studies. The factors are the sorting categories identified and defined in the previous chapter: childhood abuse, Tone, Searcher (or Nonsearcher or Neutral), counseling, and DIT score. Within each described emotional development level is a chart detailing how each subject scored or was categorized. Selected excerpts and quotations were chosen as good illustrations of the ways people at a certain level viewed themselves and others, their roles in life, and how they might address issues that arise that require ethical, moral, or philosophical reasoning. Additionally, wherever possible, stated viewpoints were contrasted to Maslow’s definition of inner self-actualization.

The first two sections of this chapter deal with people who have reached fairly average, quite typical and familiar, levels of emotional development for American adults. According to Rest’s norm table on page 47, 40 is the average DIT score for American adults, and 56.67 is the average for this study. Analysis of the case studies and Defining Issues Test (DIT) indicated a cut-off of about 65 on the DIT between subjects presented in the first two sections who exhibited characteristics of Dabrowski’s Level I and Level II and those who exhibited characteristics of Level III and above.

Dabrowski Level I

Five subjects, 12% of the highly gifted adults in the study group, were classified as fitting the description of Dabrowski’s Level I:

**Self-Interest, Self-Preservation**
Characterized by egocentrism, desire for material gains, goals of success, power, fame, competitive with others, external conflicts, little self-reflection,
lack of empathy, rigid psychological structure.

How can a highly intelligent adult who is articulate and perhaps successful and competent in a career fall into the description of Dabrowski’s lowest level of emotional development? All five subjects gave many answers on their questionnaires that indicated non-reflective, egocentric viewpoints. Subjects who scored below about 65 on the DIT indicated a tendency to deny problems in their past or present lives, or they exhibited strong anger, resentment, and blaming behavior. A tendency to blame others was apparent in the case studies of four of these subjects, but not #10M who had no complaints at all. A feature common to all five subjects was that they were all Nonsearchers.

Two of the group members were the only study subjects whose DIT scores were invalid; therefore, in their cases it was not their scores but the things they wrote that lead to their classification as Nonsearchers and Dabrowski’s Level I. #26F’s DIT score of 30 indicated the earliest reasoning stages of Kohlberg, Rest, and Dabrowski, and her case study report was consistent with lower stages, as well. Subject #10M actually scored in Kohlberg’s “Conventional” stage on his DIT* but his case study indicated a level of self-interest and self-aggrandizement that stood out so clearly that his DIT score may be an example of profound giftedness inflating the score while not changing the behavior of the subject. There were not enough profoundly gifted subjects who functioned at lower emotional levels to test that theory in the current study. All of the five Level I subjects stated clearly that they have no use personally for religion; none of them gave any indication, either, that they thought at all about the meaning of life or spiritual matters.

The group was diverse in both their backgrounds and their outlooks. Both men, #10M and #12M, reported that they were not abused and never needed therapy. The man who received a Tone score of 1, #10M, had a completely positive and upbeat attitude toward himself, his parents, and his life. In contrast, #12M was rated a 3 Tone score due to difficulties with dyslexia and schools, although he described his parents as wonderful and supportive. #26F wrote about emotional abuse but has never sought therapy. #41F experienced a cold and hostile mother and a sexually abusive father; her life-long therapy appeared to be for emotional survival. Her low Tone score of 4 was due to her obvious unhappiness and lingering confusions. #30F experienced a non-nurturing home life but was one of the more creative and successful subjects in her career. A summary of the five subjects categorized at the first emotional level follows in Table 12.

Table 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>DIT</th>
<th>Tone</th>
<th>Abuse/Therapy</th>
<th>Search?</th>
<th>IQ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>168 WAIS-R</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Nonsearcher</td>
<td>184 CTMM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10M</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>no/no</td>
<td>Nonsearcher</td>
<td>180+ CTMM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first characteristic mentioned in Dabrowski’s Level I is egocentrism. The subject who scored the highest from this group on the DIT, and had a highly positive Tone score, presented the clearest example of both the egocentrism and lack of empathy described in Dabrowski’s Level I (Refer to Chart 2). #10M advised others to live for what they enjoy. In

*Score cut-offs have been selected for the present study only and are based on the frequency of subjects scoring at a score level who give evidence in their case studies for the relevant stage level reasoning.
writing advice to a troubled young person he would give this encouragement:

I would say that there is no other certain alternative to life. You must value something, enjoy something. Focus on that. Be yourself. Go where that takes you. You’ll feel fulfilled, and, most likely, find someone else will appreciate your abilities and interests.

In contrast to subjects presented later who are in higher stages of emotional development, #10M counted his life as good because he was happy and had everything he wanted. There was nothing in his writing that indicated he looked for any deeper meaning or purpose.

#10M married in his late twenties, and reported in his adult level inventory that he had two children whom he loved raising and loved dearly, and as he approached his 25th anniversary wrote, “I couldn’t be happier.” However, a post-script arrived on #10M: before he reached his happy 25th wedding anniversary; he left his wife and moved in with a former girlfriend from his college days. He divorced his wife and married the other woman. The entire meeting, affair, divorce and remarriage took place in under a year. He explained that it was the right thing for him to do; “It wouldn’t be fair to [first wife] to do otherwise because I would not be happy.”

The second group of characteristics at Level I include “desire for material gains, goals of success, power, and fame”.

Subject #10M denied an interest in material gains as in this example: #10M experienced moderate success in his field and desired no more; he wrote, “I didn’t want to work that hard.” His new wife, however, was relatively wealthy, and he expressed considerable pride and satisfaction in his attainment of a new financial level through the marriage. Emotions that are commonly found in people who have reached higher emotional levels, turmoil, regret or confusion, are not expressed over anything that he did or experienced in his life.

The third combination of characteristics at Level I includes “competitive with others” and “external conflicts”.

Sometimes the competitive nature reveals itself in judgmental or superior attitudes. In a response to a question about ethnic background, #12M proudly described his family, which lived in a rural, hilly, eastern area, as “white, Christian, leaders, one of the top old families,” and described his parents’ parenting style as “consistent Christian approach with a touch of class.”

Sometimes external conflicts and competitive attitudes are intertwined. #12M had and confided in friends, and he felt very compatible in both interests and intellect with his third wife. Despite this claim, when asked to list earnings by decade, he responded, “If I won’t tell my wife, why would I tell you?”

In describing her extended family, #41F explained, “Among my cousins I was considered to be the younger beauty and intellectual. I was considered to be gifted intellectually and artistically. My older male cousins and I flirted a lot. My cousins’ wives loathed me. They still do. I had crushes on my older male cousins.” There was nothing to indicate that she understood both the competitive and possibly inappropriate nature of her behavior.

The next excerpt shows how time has not dimmed the anger and resentment of a subject, #30F, who is still primarily in Level I. Other subjects who have achieved more advanced emotional development and are categorized at higher Dabrowski levels wrote about episodes in school that were similar to this one; but they were more philosophical about it by the time they reached their middle years.

I had a 5th grade teacher that I liked very much but she had her pets and I was not one of them. She almost destroyed me. She had a special library of books that she would let us check out. She would let us pick numbers to see who got the new
ones. I figured out what her thinking was in picking the numbers so I could pick and get one. She didn’t like the fact that I got to read new books first and said so in front of the entire class. I gave the book back and refused to ever pick another number or read another book of hers. I felt like I was punished for being able to figure out the game when no one else could. I didn’t like her after that. That time haunted me for years to come.

“Lack of empathy” and “rigid psychological structure” end the description of Dabrowski’s Level I.

#10M, of course, showed a definite lack of empathy for the needs and feelings of his first wife and their children when he abruptly divorced his first wife.

#26F was an example of someone who remained stuck in a rigid psychological structure. She moved frequently and had difficulty staying in contact with friends because she was “hiding” from her brother. He was granted executorship of their father’s estate and proceeded to bilk his sister and his own children out of their inheritances, and he kept his mother on a small allowance until her death six years later. #26F was to inherit about 1.5 million dollars, half the estate, when their mother died. After six years she had received nothing.

In her early thirties #26F was in an automobile accident where a drunk driver hit her car. She was partially physically disabled since that time and still waiting for damages in that case. She home-schooled her younger daughter for the most recent four years, which took a great deal of time, and her disabilities were the reason she gave for not pursuing her writing or her art as a career.

#26F was a Nonsearcher. She blamed her own financial insecurity on her accident, her need to travel and spend time with her daughter, her older brother who has cheated her out of her inheritance, and the difficulties gifted females have. All of these are real issues but they kept her in a dependent position, still victimized by others. The subjects with the higher DIT scores did not have a list of other people or circumstances to blame for their unhappiness or lack of progress. “If only...” was not a phrase the higher scorers used. Her DIT score was the lowest in the final group, at about the same level as typical high school seniors, a score that, within the analysis context of this study, consistently aligned with both fear of punishment and self-aggrandizement in Kohlberg’s developmental scale.

The following excerpt is an example of how stubbornness is a part of a Level I rigid psychological structure and serves to keep feelings and fears at bay:

#30F’s father left the state when the subject was only 3 years old. She saw him only once after that, at age 12, when he came to retrieve the body of his father and take it back to their home state for burial. She wanted desperately “for him to stay; he would not. I wanted him to write; he did not. I have not seen him since.” Her father’s two subsequent wives apparently wanted him to stay in touch with his daughters but were unsuccessful in motivating him. #30F was seriously ill a few years ago and received a loving phone call from him. “I was very sick and almost died. When I was home from the hospital he called me. First time in 31 years. He said that he loved me and that we should talk more and become closer. I kept his phone number but have not and will not call him. It is too late.”

There are numerous examples among the Level I subjects that they did not possess “a more efficient perception of reality”, Maslow’s first characteristic of self-actualizers.

#10M, for example, wrote about a clear problem in his household, but minimized it: “My father probably drank too much but it was not a problem except for the occasional driving citation.”

Difficulties perceiving reality were frequently manifested through answer inconsistencies. For example, #41F wrote,
My father spoiled me. My mother was very strict and would have tantrums, shout and throw things at me if I didn’t take a nap every afternoon. My mother was cold and distant although she liked to talk to me about her youth. My father was very affectionate. He molested me when I was a child. When I was a teenager he embraced me and told me he loved me. He also made sexual advances towards me and was jealous of any young man that I liked.

The two highly conflicted statements were left in their original context but are italicized to underscore how confused the subject was when she wrote them at nearly 60 years old. She still thought of her sexually abusive and inappropriate father as “affectionate”.

Subjects who had low DIT scores often wrote contradictory descriptions of their childhood experiences. As mentioned, #41F did not pass the internal validity part of the DIT so received no valid score. She mentioned repeatedly that she was not told by anyone that she was gifted. She is quite contradictory, however, in her reporting. For instance, she mentioned being known in the family as “intellectually and artistically” gifted. She skipped second grade because she was so advanced in reading. Her poetry and art were published in school and local papers. Yet she mentioned in three different places that she did not know she was gifted because no one ever praised her or told her that she was. There were gifted programs in her schools, but, according to her questionnaires, she was never tested for or put into them.

#26F described her early childhood treatment by her “very romantically in love” parents as fairly idyllic:

Without knowing they had gifted kids, my parents ‘camped’ us all over the USA... took us to tons of museums, U.S. battlegrounds, etc. (My Dad loved history). He’d ask the elementary school what part of history we’d study ‘next fall’...then he’d take us there that summer...Williamsburg, Mesa Verde, Dead Horse Gulch, Anaheim, you name it! My Mom took us to the library weekly...and the librarian told us we could check out as ‘many books as we could carry’...I spent lots of hours discovering new ways to carry more books at one time.

She described her parents as unusually supportive of her and her interests. As with other subjects who earned low DIT scores, however, there was inconsistency in her description. In some parts of her writing she wrote as above. Other sections of her paper, however, told a different story.

My parents seemed to lose all interest in me when my brother got his girlfriend pregnant, and I was left alone pretty much from 7th grade on. I immersed myself in figure skating year around. Looking back I think I felt pretty abandoned.

According to Maslow, self-actualizers have fewer but deeper friendships than others. Someone who operates on a more superficial level wrote as #12M did, that he had friends while growing up, “15 to 25 depending on who was counting.” #10M wrote that he enjoyed a number of friendships but admitted to keeping the conversation light; he did not confide in others.

#30F was among the more profoundly gifted people in the study group. She experienced terrible rejection when her father left the family and she received hostile, unloving treatment from her grandmother. Her mother was basically ineffectual.

#30F rated a Tone score of 4 because she was so angry about many things in her life. Hostility and constant, underlying anger are not found in self-actualized people. She was a
Nonsearcher, as well, due to her self-professed conclusion that she could handle anything and everything. Such an assertion was viewed as fairly good evidence that a subject was emotionally unavailable to a positive disintegration. She held on tightly to being in control of her own actions and behaviors.

#30F’s brilliance enabled her to perform and contribute at a high level; but, her brilliance did not help her deal with a terrible childhood. She stated that adversity made her strong. It is possible that her perceived strength kept her from seeking or going through therapy. She provided a clear example of the Nonsearcher, and a person who was emotionally non-actualized, when she stated the following:

I always knew I was different. Yes, sometimes I felt bad about it, I wanted to fit in. Most of the time I just knew that I was different, sort of further ahead than the rest of the kids that I knew. I figured that it would always be like that and there was nothing I could do about it so why try.

#30F had her share of adult disappointments, too. Her husband decided he was gay, left her, and had since died of AIDS.

I went through all the anger you can imagine. For a time I wanted him to be dead and then he was dead. Now I don’t care. I just don’t want to be involved. I have a cousin that is gay. I didn’t want anything to do with him after my dead ex. Now it’s fine. I see him often.

Ultimately, #30F was categorized at an early emotional level despite her level of career success. To the detached observer, the levels of activity, voluntarism, and productivity can mask emotional need. Some might say that #30F “turned out fine” or that she was highly resilient. Her inventory responses regarding her public activity conceal the fact that she was unhappy and angry emotionally. By the time she was in her fifties her protective shell was strong.

The behavior of subjects who were categorized at both Dabrowski Levels I and II supports a pattern that people who keep themselves very busy effectively prevent themselves from experiencing the combination of intellectual and emotional activity necessary for a positive disintegration. To quote a famous literary heroine, Scarlet O’Hara, “I won’t think about that today. I can’t think about it or I’ll go crazy. I’ll think about it tomorrow.”

**Dabrowski Level II**

Nineteen subjects, about 46% of the highly gifted group, fell solidly into Level II:

**Stereotypical Roles**

Highly influenced by others, values introjected from parents, church, etc., relativistic, situational values, conflicted feelings, contradictory actions, desire for acceptance, feelings of inadequacy compared to others, lack of hierarchy of values.

Societal norms are needed to guide the lives of most people. In general, there is nothing wrong with having a country full of law-abiding, conventional citizens who are responsible to the norms of their society. It is not unreasonable to assume that the intellectually gifted, who have the potential to think and reason in a manner which can advance life for all of us, might also be able to deal with the advances that are constantly falling upon us. Medical and technical
advances alone need to be addressed by people who possess advanced moral and emotional reasoning. Despite their high intellectual ability, however, 24 of the subjects in this study, 58.5%, appeared to reason and operate at stages that are conventional or lower (Levels I and II).

Level II people tend to function well in society. They understand and generally abide by the rules, stated and unstated. They understand the culture of their society and try to fit in and show pride and pleasure when they do. Positive feedback that they have succeeded to meet or exceed society’s norms is often important and encouraging to Level II people.

Some of the subjects who did not receive sufficient emotional support tried first, both morally and emotionally, to please others and receive positive emotional feedback. Such a need was perhaps the impetus for high career success in a number of the subjects. As highly and profoundly gifted people, these subjects could almost always do whatever needed to be done better than most of the people they knew. Many of the subjects in the section on Level II emotional development were outwardly successful. They achieved self-actualization in their careers without undergoing the inner changes equated with inner self-actualization. As can be seen from the Tone scores, however, many of the subjects categorized at Level II were happy with their lives.

### Table 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>DIT</th>
<th>Tone</th>
<th>Abuse/Therapy</th>
<th>Search?</th>
<th>IQ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>school group 145</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Stanford-Binet 155</td>
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<td>51.7</td>
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<td>Stanford-Binet 158</td>
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<tr>
<td>9M</td>
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<td>56</td>
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<td>Neutral</td>
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<tr>
<td>39F</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>yes/yes</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
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<td>yes/no</td>
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<td>44</td>
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<tr>
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<td>61.7</td>
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<td>yes/yes</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Stanford-Binet 158</td>
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<tr>
<td>3F</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>no/no</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>school group 145+</td>
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</table>

All of the subjects in this section were Nonsearchers or Neutral. Nonsearchers made statements that indicated their need to be in control of their environments and particularly themselves. Neutral people did not clearly indicate as strong a need for self control as Nonsearchers, but the difference between them and Searchers becomes clear in the later sections of the chapter.

Because there were so many subjects at Dabrowski’s Level II, they were organized so as to facilitate the formation of an overall picture of what a Level II person looks like. First, specific characteristics were pinpointed through the use of various subjects’ questionnaire responses. Second, numerous Level II case studies were synthesized to highlight attitude and behavior patterns of typical Level II people.
People who operated at the level of stereotypical roles demonstrated that they were highly influenced by others. “Others” included not only their parents and church but societal rules, laws, and possible rewards. For categorization purposes, they needed to demonstrate that they were motivated by positive feedback from others about their actions and accomplishments more than people at higher emotionally developed levels.

There were many people in #31F’s career field who strongly encouraged her. She won numerous community, state, and even national awards for her work. By her own account, all of these contributed to her drive to succeed, contribute, and make a difference.

#2F, raised in an alcoholic family, admitted to having a great need to please others and to be accepted by others, distinctly Level II issues.

#28M spent time doing things that gave him little satisfaction because, “I thought I had to.” He was typical of people who, according to his questionnaire responses, received so little feedback in childhood that religion finally gave him a firm, secure base. He recently converted to fundamentalist Christianity and said his religion gave him his answer to everything.

Another subject who was raised firmly in a religion, #14M wrote, “Religion is necessary to an orderly society. Collective rights as espoused by religious thought are important.” At no time did he mention any religious or spiritual beliefs of his own.

Relativistic, situational values, conflicted feelings, contradictory actions, desire for acceptance, and feelings of inadequacy all lead to a tendency toward self-justifying, defensive behavior. It is difficult for people who define themselves primarily through the feedback from others to be constantly sure that they are acceptable. The following quotes help illustrate how this uncertainty can lead to sometimes judgmental and defensive behavior.

#27M described classmates: “With people like that, I didn’t want to fit in. The few smart ones didn’t have time for me, I guess.” This subject, abused emotionally, variously attributed his unpopularity to being too smart, too short, or not rich enough.

#28M listed, and speculated about, one sadness after another and then dismissed it. He seemed unable to squarely face the pain his childhood caused him. There was little affection in their home. He wrote, “There was a certain benign neglect--but it was very happy.” As a divorced adult he is as happy as he has ever been now that he has become a Christian.

As with subjects still at Level I, Level II subjects demonstrated difficulty with a Clear perception of reality, as shown in the following excerpts.

A nonabused subject categorized as Neutral, #8M wrote glowingly of the way he was raised, but referred to a learning disabled brother as “a royal pain,” and said one sister’s career and whereabouts were unknown due to estrangement. He would change the way he was raised somewhat: “A more open and warm father; a more resolute mother.” This attitude indicated a problem with “clear perception of reality” in that although he described problems, he did not actually label them as such.

The contradictory interpretations and actions of Level II reasoners was one of the most outstanding occurrences gleaned from the case study materials. Note the inconsistencies from the next two subjects.

According to #11M, the deep devotion of his mother and for his mother placed him in an odd position to his parents’ marriage. Although he reported it fairly clearly, he minimized the affect the situation had on him.

The marriage was a poor one. My mother wanted a divorce when I was about 10 - my crying stopped it - they never divorced - I regret that they stayed together. Father was a heavy drinker, a man of very low self-esteem - often an embarrassment to me (and everyone else). His love for me became ambivalence then later envy. He and mother fought - mother was the power, however -
although she would never say so, she despised him - the effect on me was slight - I became quickly independent - they often sent me outside to play.

#15F was clearly contradictory in her descriptions of her idyllic childhood, and yet she seemed to have difficulty seeing it herself. For example,

When I was 4 years old I went to another city by myself (unbeknownst to my parents) to visit my father who was working for awhile at a UN hospital. They just thought what I did was charming! They valued my independence and emotional strength. They never tried to limit me.

Yet, later in the inventory, when asked whether or not she was ever sexually abused during childhood, subject #15F wrote, “I was always protected, shielded and nurtured emotionally and physically.”

For some readers it may be difficult to believe that the “good” homes which give us highly gifted children could breed in those same children overwhelming feelings of insecurity and need for acceptance and approval. Experiences of the next two subjects were actually typical for many subjects who have advanced to every Dabrowski Level, but the continuing internalization of the negative messages was characteristic of only the first two Dabrowski Levels.

#27M showed his awareness of the damage his home life caused him when he said,

As I remember, there was no affection, little indication of approval (but much disapproval), no hugging, and absolutely no indication anybody loved me.” [If I could change anything] “I would like to have had a mother who was not hostile to me, who would not tell me I was an oddball and a misfit who’d never amount to anything.

#31F wrote, “My mother actually told me several times she didn’t want me.”

Even highly gifted individuals can have feelings of inadequacy compared to others, as was evident in the following excerpts: #27M said,

“The other kids avoided me because I was a ‘brain...The only good time I can remember was a few days in 9th grade algebra when the girl mentioned above would save a seat for me, before she discovered I wasn’t rich and dumped me. I nearly had a girlfriend...I thought I was intellectually peerless, from an average family and therefore shunned by the elite, untalented in art or athletics, interested in books and math that others didn’t care about, and lacking ambition. How can one have ambition to become rich, for example, without self-confidence?

#27M as an adult was so negative about himself and his life that he gave evidence of being stuck in a cycle that kept him blaming everyone and everything else for his unhappiness. Although #2F found friends and acceptance in a number of ability grouped classes, a number of students, according to her report, who were “not as motivated to try hard,” picked on her, teased her, and seemed to resent her. Even as an adult she interpreted her classmates’ behavior as being due to their low motivation to try hard and their resentment of her for being more motivated. Subjects who scored higher on the DIT and who were categorized at higher Dabrowski levels did not give such negative interpretations to the motivations of others but
tended to look at a broader picture.

People at Level II lack a hierarchy of values except that imposed or chosen for them by parents, church, and society. People at higher Dabrowski levels may eventually choose traditional and standard values for themselves, but it was after they reviewed and examined the ideas for themselves. Also, considering the developmental nature of emotional growth, the subjects usually discarded old ideas before they developed new ones.

#27M wrote about religion, “Between a mother who was a lapsed Roman Catholic and a father who came from a Methodist background, I was exposed to some Methodist influence but soon became an atheist...Religion may be defined as a set of beliefs based on faith rather than proof. I don’t care how people delude themselves as long as they don’t try to force their beliefs on me.”

Level II reasoners often talked about other people in a critical, unempathetic manner. The tone of their complaints indicated both a disapproval of others and an apparent belief that others could easily change if they would only try.

#11M noted, for example, “I regard myself as ‘normal’--this created (and creates) a problem in that I became disillusioned with people around me who constantly fell short of what I regarded as ‘their potential’--teachers could not, or would not, attempt to answer complex questions--people who seemed to have no passion, people who took the beauty of life for granted.” Unfortunately, his refusal or inability to accept that he was different, and highly intelligent and capable compared to the norm, made him depressed and intolerant of others.

#25M had a father who disdained non-educated people and anyone who had a career in anything but the hard sciences. The father’s attitude made a deep impression on him in that he felt a lack of approval. He originally dropped out of college and worked at minimum wage jobs for a number of years. #25M returned to college in his early 40s to major in computer science.

His comment on his career success was quite similar to many of the subjects in the study who fit Levels I and II: “I have generally been good at my jobs, but I have not been very successful because I am not particularly good at the ‘people’ part of any job.” In a section of the questionnaire on values, the subject’s were asked about their attitude toward a work ethic.

As one who has been continually self-supporting for 21 years, I don’t have a lot of use for people who seem to be able to get but unable to hold a job. I am also offended by those who hold jobs, but put more effort into avoiding doing anything productive than they do into their duties.

His DIT score, as well as what he wrote, indicated he is at Kohlberg’s Conventional Moral Development level. In his adult inventory #25M wrote that he is finishing college. He wrote that he was currently re-assessing his career, his parenting, and himself, all signs that he wanted to do better in his life. But, that is not the same as a willingness to grow and change. He contacted the Study a year and a half after completing the surveys to say he had been asked not to return to his new position of high school science teacher. He held firmly to his conviction that he should teach to the top students in the class and the other students should go elsewhere. Schools are not set up that way, and although his intentions were good, his inflexible approach cost him his job.

A good connectedness to others was missing in most Level I and II people. #6M is representative of Level II in that he did not confide in others. Indiscriminate openness is not emotionally healthy, but neither is a complete inability to disclose thoughts and feelings. He kept in close contact with good friends from his [professional school] days, but did not confide in anyone. He had no close friends at work, but he felt he was liked by co-workers.

A number of subjects had no real friends, but had regular correspondence and contact
with strangers through e-mail. #27M was an example in that he had some e-mail friends and a number of female friends, but never any “significant others”.

#14M claimed to be satisfied with most aspects of his life, but he admitted to being lonely. He married his high school sweetheart and they had two children he loved very much. He made no friendship connections at work and wrote, “It’s too difficult and it can be dangerous...I’m lonely. I love my wife and she is my best friend - she’s also my only friend. When I was young I remember other friends - I miss that.”

#28M had good friends, confided in them, and thought friendships were “pretty important.” He preferred time alone, though, to time with friends. Subjects were asked if they had trouble finding really good friends, “Yes--everyone does.” His assumption that everyone had this problem was an indication of a degree of adolescent level ego-centrism.

In adulthood #31F had one woman in whom she occasionally confided, but generally she preferred time alone. “I realize I should have [friends] in my life, but I just don’t make very much time to do it...I believe most people like me, but don’t necessarily feel close to me. I think I am ‘too much’ for most people. They’re afraid I’ll judge them, although I’m not very judgmental.”

As mentioned in Chapter III, people who are not Searchers have attitudes that maintain a perception of control in their lives while protecting them from the pain or turmoil that feelings of helplessness or rejection can bring. People who have not progressed beyond Level II tend not to be emotional risk-takers. #31F said,

I can’t say that I’ve ever seriously contemplated suicide. I feel I do have control over my life and what happens to me and I have enough smarts to overcome any hurdles put up by others.

As with many emotionally abused people, particularly those who fit the Nonsearcher description, subject #31F wrote as though she had convinced herself that the negative treatment she received contributed to her growth and strength. “I think I have continued to grow in adulthood, and a great deal of my growth may be in reaction to a husband who sees the downside of everything I accomplish.” She continued to hope that her marriage would improve.

#31F “I don’t think I would be as strong as I am today if I hadn’t had the lack of positive family support I have had. I’ve enjoyed the hurdles, if only for their character-building. BUT, I would never do what was done to me to others!

#29F described the way her parents disciplined as both gentle and harsh, and “emotional support was implied, and seemed conditional. It’s taken me years to feel better about myself.” Her parents bickered frequently and this bothered the children greatly. She would change her parents: “Remake the perfectionist mold of expected behavior. However, I wonder if I would have fought so hard to demand their respect if they’d been different.” This subject’s pattern was to complain about something that hurt her and then rationalize it as probably for the better. This pattern of reasoning seems to accompany lower DIT scores. Her 46.6 Dit score is in the low moderate range for the group.

#11M was satisfied with his school performance, “especially after I decided to ‘forget’ the rules and assignments and learn what I wished.” If he could, he would change, “The tight structure that forced me, or tried to, to learn what they believed was important--I was best at educating myself.” This was another example of how Nonsearchers, and the lower DIT scorers, showed pride in their self-sufficiency and control of their environment.

#29F wrote that kids, “even gifted kids, need to be allowed to just be kids.” It is difficult
to know what she meant by the observation, except that in the context of this research it implied that the way schools are set up for kids, gifted or not, is the best way to “let kids be kids.” Her observation was one that accepts the status quo and avoids positive disintegrations, i.e., turmoil. A Nonsearcher decides there is no problem because then there is no need to solve anything or thereby cause upheaval.

#14M said that he may drink too much, and also mentioned that his family almost broke up a number of years ago, “But my wife saved me.” Evidence that he was not a Searcher came from the following responses: “I’m resigned to it,” was in reference to difficulty balancing work and child rearing; and “Accept the status quo,” was his response to what he would change if he could. He admitted to getting migraines when he is stressed and said he had a lot of migraines. He was also bored and unchallenged in school but “wouldn’t change” anything.

#14M had loving, nurturing parents who believed in his ability to succeed. He graduated from among the country’s most competitive schools, was a successful leader in his chosen field, had a long-term, successful marriage, had healthy children whose sports teams he coached, and by all appearances was a self-actualized, successful individual certainly “living up to his potential.” After agreeing to participate in this research study, however, #14M wrote things about himself and how he felt about his life that he had not, and felt he could not, share with anyone else. He admitted that he was holding it all together so that he could continue to succeed in his career position. But, he also admitted to feeling stifled and trapped.

#15F mentioned no religious or spiritual issues, no angers, no concerns, and no changes she would make in anything. Her DIT score was an average, for the entire study group, of 55.9. In another section of the paper she was quoted for her reaction to the issue of not “fitting in”: “It was good for me. I never felt I had to fit in. Still don’t!” This attitude was common among people who did not experience active self-doubt but demonstrated that they believed in their own power to make their lives go correctly. The sort of severe emotional turmoil of positive disintegrations was not apparent in Level II people. Subject #15F, although she scored fairly high on the DIT, did not appear to have passed through the necessary turmoil of growth-inducing positive disintegrations.

#9M showed a common trait of non-actualizers when he described both his relationship with others and his conviction that it was better to take care of things himself. He had many acquaintances but few friends. He was happily married and said he was not lonely or unfulfilled.” He had at least one close friend at different stages of his childhood, but was never one to confide much in friends. He was content, as well, to do things on his own. “Used alcohol to excess until 2 years ago, when I stopped voluntarily and without support group help.” Alcoholism is known to retard emotional development, and its abuse was mentioned by a number of male subjects, all of whom scored in the average to below average range for the group on the DIT. Like most moderate to low DIT scorers, #9M had never felt suicidal. His advice to a troubled young person further demonstrated his conviction that it is good to manage your life yourself without the help of others.

Would talk about relative values; need to exist for self, not others; need to establish goals, expand interest, rely on self. Would provide alternatives and assistance, to get into ‘healthy’ frame of mind. (All this after listening and providing empathy).

His attitude demonstrated a lack of Gemeinschaftsgefuhl, or brotherly love, and a lack of a sense of responsibility and service to self and others found in Level IV subjects. It is not bad or wrong but it is disconnected. A person who counts so completely on himself will not be comfortable if somehow disabled in any way.
#20M was never been married because he was gay. “Not ‘in the closet’ because there’s nothing to be ‘in the closet’ about. Celibate. Have no ‘second life.’ Am OK with this.” He had no life partner but did have numerous satisfying relationships with adults and students. He enjoyed concerts, travel, “civilized conversation”, and a strong and satisfying Catholic faith. At the time of his last correspondence with the study, he wrote, “Have terminal cancer (liver) now. But, it’s OK. My religious convictions--of lifelong standing--make it possible to cope well enough.”

#20M never felt suicidal himself but gave this advice for a troubled young person”

The largest questions are the best, not the worst, indicators of the value of life. Religious values are the ultimate ones. There are reasons for things, however unimportant they are from time to time. Things become clearer after one believes, because then one understands.

#20M’s 58.3 DIT score placed him with the descriptions of other similarly scoring subjects at Kohlberg’s Stage 4 of “Maintain Social Order.” This fit well, too, with Dabrowski’s Level II: Stereotypical Roles for a number of reasons. Although he was gay, he did not act on it. He did not describe going through emotional or developmental crises over this issue or any other. His strong faith gave him the answers. As the Developmental chart at the beginning of the paper says of Dabrowski’s Level II: “Highly influenced by others, values introjected from parents, church, etc.” His homosexuality and his pending death from liver cancer were not faced with a “Why me?” but with the conclusion that there was an answer even if he did not know it personally. He was at peace and loved life, but he loved it at the calm Level II rather than at the level of internal self-actualization that is described in Dabrowski Levels IV and V.

The DIT score for #2F, 61.7, was high for someone at Level II and quite high for adults in general. She was like a number of people categorized as Neutral because she talked a great deal about solving relationship and career situations through “trying hard,” but her overall approach seemed quite open and suggested potential for emotional growth and change.

The emotional abuse that a number of subjects in this section experienced was detailed in the appendix case studies. A number of subjects who did not seek counseling have instead personally tried hard to learn all they can about themselves and psychology. It is possible that the degree of abuse these subjects experienced led them to hold on tightly to self-control. Too much control makes it difficult to “let go” of familiar notions or behavioral tactics whether or not they appear to work. The very process of positive disintegration, a Level III experience, requires a letting go of old notions.

The DIT score for subject #22M was 46.7, which was in the low moderate range for the group. He took the DIT twice. The first time he tried to “fake good” and scored a 70, but the score was rated invalid by internal consistency checks. He admitted that he had tried to “beat” the test, and he agreed to take the test again giving his most direct answers. His high concern with looking good was a Level II giveaway. His DIT score was also consistent with people who indicate Level II traits.

Subject #22M described his childhood in great detail and seemed proud of his clear ability to interpret both events and motivations. Subjects who were categorized at later Dabrowski levels did not show the certainty described as follows:

Perhaps [my brother] was favored, because he was an easy child to rear. I, the INTJ, [a personality profile] seemed to rub everybody the wrong way. I maintained inwardly that I was not going to become the ‘black sheep’ and fought for dignity and respect, although this approach backfired frequently. I think it was an attitude of feeling my brothers were ‘better than me’ (translation: easier to
rear) that I remember most.

In adulthood, #22M earned numerous degrees and availed himself of every possible inventory to help him understand himself better. He referred, several times, to being an ISTJ or INTJ [personality types] and attributed his parents’ mishandling of him to the rarity of his personality type. He definitely spent a great deal of time and effort searching for answers to his place and purpose in life, but his assessment of himself seemed “finished,” as though he had himself figured out. This type of searching does not indicate the openness to actual change attributed to Searchers. This does not mean he will never change, however.

When describing school, he most enjoyed the interaction with his teachers. He loved being helpful and being recognized for being helpful. “I tried not to be labeled ‘teacher’s pet’ because it always had a heavy price tag attached to it.” His focus was on being recognized and appreciated by his teachers. He also did not say that he used to feel that way when he was a child. It was clear such positive feedback and acceptance was still a prime motivator for him, again a Level II attribute.

There are a number of unresolved problems in #22M’s life, but he showed reluctance to deal with them. He alluded to his “dark side,” being released from a parochial school principalship (fired) and having to change churches, school for his children, and living arrangements, and oblique references, in his adult level inventory, to “Who would like me, a homo?” after making no mention at all of this problem in his childhood inventory.

Claims of happiness to the contrary, #22M lead a secretive double life. “Thought I would remain a bachelor all my life. I eventually ‘saw the light’ as regards married status and attaining a good job/position/reputation in the community. Also thought marriage would ‘cure’ dysfunctional homo perspectives.”

His advice to a troubled young person was consistent with his overall tone, which was deliberately upbeat and positive:

Life is work. You must invest yourself. Don’t expect life to give up its riches just because you’re bright, rich, etc. Explore yourself and find out what makes you unique. Perhaps it is both marketable and enjoyable. Find a mission in life. Dedicate yourself to self improvement and to the uplifting of social consciousness.

Subject #23M had a childhood home where there was not a lot of affection or guidance. In his 50s at the time of the study, he told the story with anger and hostility: “Except for meals, we all tried to avoid each other as much as possible (passing messages through Mom). This was true for others than me, as far as I could see. Mommy used food in place of love, and didn’t want any of it going to waste.” He described the level and demonstration of affection as follows: “Low, none, what’s a hug?, and I wouldn’t have believed it anyway.” He repeated twice in his questionnaires that, “My mother does not recall telling 4-1/2 year old me that ‘you are very smart, but you mustn’t let anybody know.’ I didn’t realize what an effect those words had on me, but it lasted thirty years.”

In reference to school he wrote: “I did OK in the first two grades, thought I had found a friend in a third grade teacher, who, for reasons known only to herself (probably involving her realization that being a nun was not the way to satisfy life’s needs) undertook to quite effectively mock me for trying to color-code a chart. Thereafter, I did what it took to get by, and get grades of about B-level, which wasn’t hard at all.” When asked what he would do to change the schools, he answered, “Eliminate them.”

He had experiences that were good and appeared to see the good, and its benefits, clearly.
He had three different close friends at different times, all of whom contributed differently to his experiences. He was bullied badly once, told those in authority, and it never happened again. He said that the appropriate response from the adults was empowering to him.

#23M summed up his dating experience in adolescence by writing, “The only date I remember was a picnic with a telephone friend (or so I thought) girl who then had little to say to me, and wasn’t particularly friendly. She took religious vows a week later.”

He was unsatisfactorily married for 15 years and had one grown child who was raised by her mother. He enjoyed parenting and resented how his ex-wife came between him and his daughter.

#23M read voraciously. His reading and activity behavior, described in his case study, all indicated that he is searching for answers, but his hostility and resentments indicate that he still blamed others and believed he had all the answers. He was not a Nonsearcher because he is too restlessly trying to figure things out. He still held on quite tightly to self-control, though, and seemed unwilling to really change himself. He was categorized as Neutral rather than Searcher for that reason.

#39F was raised under circumstances that were probably the most obviously abusive of any in this study. Her mother committed suicide at age 26 when the subject was 3 years old. The children were sent to live in an orphanage and with various relatives for the next 6 years until the father married a woman who was a physically and emotionally abusive alcoholic.

She did not begin to question her past until her late thirties “when my then-husband began training as a family social worker. I have to say...that it came as a shock to me as an adult to read about child abuse and neglect and see my siblings and myself in the stories I read.”

#39F wrote mostly glowingly about school, “It was all good for me. In 6th grade, I helped other kids, graded papers, read to the class at rest time. My friends and I were even permitted to put together some plays, unsupervised. High school was probably the very best, because I knew it would end soon and so enjoyed the time. That was the time I really began to catch on that my friends and I were smart. Also, home was so awful that school was wonderful.”

She met her first husband, who was studying for the ministry, through a Pentecostal Christian church. They were married for about 10 years and had three children before he revealed that he was gay and asked to end the marriage. This event was probably the major turning point in her life in that it began her questioning everything about life. She began long term therapy, changed churches, and then recognized that she needed to change. Having had no good parenting role models, she discovered a need to learn how to parent her own children, as well.

A number of her observations indicated that #39F still concentrated more on changing her environment than herself, however. In fact, about to remarry, she had just reached an opportunity to experience a conventional lifestyle, perhaps for the first time. Her changes, to that point, were mostly external, and that was why she was classified at Level II. Her general resilience, and willingness to seek help through therapy, indicated she was at least a Neutral regarding inner growth potential.

**Dabrowski Level II/III**

Three subjects exhibited attitudes and behaviors found in both Levels II and III. Level III people are described in the Silverman-Piechowski summary as follows:

**Level III: Personality Transformation**

Inner conflict, hierarchy of values, positive maladjustments, inferiority toward one’s ideals, feelings of guilt and shame, independent thinker,
moral framework believed but inconsistently applied.

The behaviors, attitudes, and written thoughts of subjects in this section indicated that they were leading fairly stereotypical, society-approved lives but were entering a mid-life reassessment.

Table 14

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Age</th>
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<th>Tone</th>
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Although #21F did not mention receiving therapy for herself, she had extensive background in counseling psychology. She wrote that she wanted to grow and find meaning in her life and seemed determined to figure it all out for herself. She was much like #22M and #23M, from the previous group, in her level of effort toward inner growth and finding purpose in her life. Her educational background was a clear example of an intensive and extensive search for answers: she studied history in undergraduate school, earned masters degrees in counseling psychology, social work, and biblical studies, and completed all but her dissertation for a doctorate in counseling psychology. Following the definition of Searcher, however, means more than just looking for the answers; it means being open to change. Intellectually knowing an answer does not automatically translate into an emotional, internalized acceptance.

#21F admitted to being somewhat lonely.

I feel people like me - but I think I may in some sense be hard to get close to. I never thought about that before just this moment. I think I’m pretty guarded in respects - even while being superficially friendly and outgoing. I’m afraid, I think, of intimacy, while at the same time I very much want it. I often feel very alone in the world.

She belonged to a church and had a considerable spiritual life that was highly important to her. She wrote of her spiritual journey:

I see the need to be God-centered as opposed to centered on man as the single most important issue there is. And I’ve not said one thousandth of what I’d like to convey - because it is not something that can be explained in a few words or understood in a short time. It’s an understanding that requires years to even begin to acquire.

Her DIT score was in line with other subjects who indicate a belief that there are correct answers to life’s questions. Her advice to a troubled young gifted person reflected that she still had many open issues on her agenda, an indication of her Level III understanding:

I think I’d have trouble with this one. I’m often so close to not feeling it’s worth it myself. When I focus on growing, self-perfection...then I don’t worry about
whether it [life] is worth it. I think we have to accept it, do the best we can and trust that there’s a greater meaning to our lives than we can understand.

Like subject #21F, subject #37M followed an extensive path to search for answers and help working out past problems. He said that although his father was affectionate, he drank too much and eventually turned into an alcoholic. His mother was harsh, cold, and tender only to her infants, and developed an addiction to prescription drugs.

In his adult survey #37M mentioned being more spiritual than religious. Before entering [career area education], he spent 3-1/2 years studying at a Catholic seminary, a similar life course to a number of emotionally abused subjects including #21F, #22M, and #23M.

#37M came from a home with feuding parents, little positive reinforcement emotionally, and he was sexually abused as a young boy by his grandfather. He still seemed to be searching for meaning and satisfaction in his life but wrote that he feels good about everything, career, family, marriage, self-acceptance and self worth. There were inconsistencies more typical of Level II behavior, though, when he also wrote that he had difficulty relating to one of his children and wished he had more patience for parenting in general; he and his wife were not intellectually compatible; he had few friends and no one really to confide in; and he said he was lonely. On Dabrowski’s schema, this subject was on the line between Levels II and III. His low Tone possibly indicated that he is not emotionally ready to abandon the relative safety of Stereotypical Roles in order to experience the positive disintegrations of Personality Transformation.

#38F had a Tone score of 4 because she was depressed and unhappy about her past and lonely in her adult life. She earned a 64.4 on the DIT which put her well above the mean and the mode for the study group. She was categorized as Neutral because although she had clearly analyzed her background and was clearly introspective, she wrote one tell-tale sentence: “I’m trying to learn to be happy with what people will give and not to want or need more.” Such a viewpoint indicated Level II thinking in that she felt she could control her wants, needs, and feelings more so than people who are Searchers or self-actualized.

She had not resolved her childhood anger. The subject was in her late forties when she wrote the following painful descriptions:

My father mostly yelled, criticized harshly and disapproved. My mother was quite harsh with me and used physical punishment and disparagement, too. Both were somewhat inconsistent and moody and both had high expectations for perfect obedience and no expression of anger or protest from me. I never felt loved or approved of. I often felt that if I’d only been a bit more perfect or good, then they’d love me, but they never did.

Graduate school was the happiest time of her life. She met many people with whom she became friends and is still in touch with some of them. Her views on both her career and the state of education in our country was summed up in this observation:

I hate all the wasted time and stupid things people demand that use them and me up. It’s hard when I can foresee how disastrous some new reform is going to be and knowing I can do nothing about it. I think we like to jump on bandwagons of bright ideas for reform that no one looks at the long term or actually sees why a program works for one group. There’s too much going with the latest fad and no real thought. I’m in despair that it can change.
#38F felt suicidal throughout her life. She associated the beginning of those feelings with the onset of sexual abuse when she was seven years old. Her feelings of “disconnection and desolation, a weight and a heaviness in my body, a sense of despair things can ever be different” did not take away her desire to help and encourage others. Here, and in several other places, she outlined a plan for change that indicated the beginning of Level III thinking.

I’d probably tell him or her [a troubled young person] that I’ve had similar feelings when I was their age and that a lot of very gifted feel like this because they see so much more than most other people and have trouble with standing [handling] the fact that others who can’t see are in charge of the world. I’d say that things do change slowly and they can work to make them change and that even small changes are worthwhile for the people involved. Eventually they can become bigger changes. I’d give some examples of civil rights and world hunger changes. I’d also discuss the problem of relationships because a troubled young person also feels disconnected from people and needs to find some ways to feel a part of something.

Although some of her intellectual reasoning showed the openness to change that was part of the criteria for categorization at Level III, #1F listed a number of inconsistencies in her questionnaires, behavior that more typical of Level II. She wrote that there were several factors in her life that helped her feel both a connection and a place in the world. Although she mentioned numerous times that nothing she did as a child ever seemed to be good enough, she also said, “I was very fortunate. I never had a doubt that I was loved and wanted in my home. I don’t remember if anyone actually told me they loved me but I knew they did.” Subjects who reported feeling loved by their parents tended to show a general lack of resentment in their questionnaire responses.

#1F described her family household as being like “Donna Reed’s family” [a 1950’s era television program]. She was aware that her mother sometimes felt constrained by her housewife and mother role, but took it seriously and did it well. The parents were very much devoted to each other and their children. The subject was the oldest child and active in helping with younger siblings. She was expected to “set a good example,” and her high abilities were frequently minimized so as not to make anyone else feel bad. She was also aware that her mother was suffering from an increasing depression that was slowly making the household a less happy place for the younger children.

#1F responded to the “Did you feel loved?” question by writing,

It is strange but, as I think about it, there was a dichotomy of sorts. At the core, I always felt loved, but I seldom felt that anything I did was quite good enough. My parents bent over backwards not to over-praise my accomplishments so that none of my siblings were hurt. They explained it to me and I understood it intellectually, but still felt bad when there was much more fuss made over someone else’s three “A’s” than my card full. Looking back, I don’t know how they [the parents] could have done any better, but it did feed my perfectionist tendencies. Overall, I did know they believed in me, which was terribly important.

Subject #1F was one of a handful of subjects who was in a full-time gifted program through most of her schooling. She was so unremittingly humble that it clouded her perceptions regarding herself. In answer to the question “Have you experienced much confusion or uncertainty in life regarding whether or not you really are smart compared to the majority of people?”
Absolutely. I’ve always felt above average but not exceptional. This was probably exacerbated by the need to go to a local, state college. I did well (it was much easier than our advanced high school programs had been) but I assumed it was because all the really smart people were at better schools. If I’d gone to Vassar, surely I would have been average at best. It is only recently that I have begun to realize I probably would have done well at Vassar, too. While you will likely look at my highest score [for this study], I still assume that the lowest score of any of my tests probably reflects my true ability and anything else is astute test-taking or good luck. I wonder which is true?

As a Level III reasoning adult #1F more correctly interpreted past events and herself than subjects categorized at lower, less developed levels. She finally understood her unusual intellectual ability, for example. She wrote,

Perhaps because I spent my growing up years surrounded by very bright people [over 135 IQ ability grouped classes throughout school for her], I never really thought of myself as unusually bright. Smart, yes--exceptional, no. I assumed I was successful because I worked hard (which I did, much of the time). It was not until graduate school when I figured out that, no, this was not going to be the place when finally everyone was smarter than I was, that I became consciously aware that my abilities were quite unusual. Even now it makes me extremely uncomfortable to write that. I wonder why?

A reflection of Level II thinking, values that came from outside herself, were described by her in the following description:

My religion is an extremely important influence in my life. It shapes how I view myself, my family, my students, my life. My belief in the eternal nature and infinite potential of human beings is probably the most important factor in my priorities and decision making.

Her survey answers indicated that she was holding on tightly to self-control, perhaps necessary due some tremendous hurts she experienced. She endured two major grief issues, the death of a loved one through suicide and the inability to have children. Her response to the question about helping a troubled young person showed how generally advanced her perspective was, a perspective indicated by her fairly high DIT score of 65. She said she would first find out the issues, but then explain her own philosophy:

I think one of the dangers of intellectual strength is that it fits the old saying about the man with a hammer treating everything around him as a nail. People with great intellectual strength easily become accustomed to using it to solve the problems around them. The problem is, intellect is only one part of what makes us human. Sometimes it isn’t the tool we need. If we expect the world to make sense, using here-and-now judgments as our guide, we are bound to be disappointed. Sometimes we don’t need intellectual understanding. Sometimes we need empathy, or courage, or wisdom or aesthetic appreciation or spirituality. I believe (as you can tell) that it helps enormously to have a perspective that encompasses more than this life. Even without that, I think it is possible to come to understand that the world has many dimensions. Cognitive processes are only one small piece
of it. As we come to appreciate and value things that can bring joy without necessarily being understandable or highly rewarded (a colored leaf, a loving friend, the opportunity to help) life is much richer.

Subject #1F was a good example of someone who sees the big picture of advanced emotional development but was still quite careful not to rock her own world with too much questioning. Her apparent caution was the primary reason for placing her below Level III in the current study.

**Dabrowski Level III**

There are four subjects, not quite 10% of the highly gifted group, who fit the description of Dabrowski’s Level III.

**Personality Transformation:** Inner conflict, hierarchy of values, positive maladjustments, inferiority toward one’s ideals, feelings of guilt and shame, independent thinker, moral framework believed but inconsistently applied.

**Table 15**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>DIT</th>
<th>Tone</th>
<th>Abuse/Therapy</th>
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<td>Lorge-Thorndike 142</td>
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</table>

A categorization of Level III: Personality Transformation required subjects to give evidence that they could open themselves up to the possibility that not only could their lives be different, but they could be different. Life is not about someone else giving us the answers, even if their answers are good. Values and goals must come from inside the person for emotional self-actualization to occur. The first steps involve the realization that no one else can give anyone else their purpose or their life’s course. When that realization occurs to the adult, it can be unsettling, even terrifying. People at Level II development may have these thoughts, but suppress or ignore them. When someone experiences positive disintegration, it is life-changing. The subjects in this section of the paper reveal the processes people in Level III experience.

The DIT score and initial childhood information that I have for #36M comes from his first participation in the study. He did not appear to become a Searcher until after he completed his first survey and DIT. He quit the Study, but returned after two years. He began receiving counseling between the Childhood and Adulthood Inventories. His clear change from probable Nonsearcher to Searcher indicates the possibility that self-actualizers do not necessarily begin life as natural Searchers. If they did not begin life, or even their adulthoods, as Searchers, that means something can happen to turn a person into a Searcher and increase the likelihood of self-actualization.

#36M was profoundly gifted. Lack of understanding on the part of school personnel and his parents contributed to his feelings of being different. He was nearly 50 years old before he took matters into his own hands, after a near nervous breakdown, and started to try to figure out who he really is.
In response to the question concerning emotional support and guidance, #36M responded,

It is painful to think about this. The environment in my home was one in which one did not talk about feelings, except anger. This has carried over into my adult life; I confide in no one. I have no friendships outside my family, except one friend with whom I correspond who lives a ‘safe’ distance away from me. I have never discussed most of the topics in this survey with anyone.

#36M wrote,

I feel that my career dissatisfaction has a start or a cause in growing up in an environment where I had no mentor to encourage me to make decisions and be accountable for them. Parents and schools seem to encourage dependency and letting others decide for you, encourage an authoritarian world view.

The following paragraph, written after #36M returned to the Study, excellently revealed the thought processes of someone who had entered Level III:

I would like to share with you some things that have happened since I dropped out of your study some years ago. I spent a year or so crying almost every day, then met with a psychologist for another year, but got frustrated with the psychologist because I felt he wasn’t doing anything, just listening. I started reading psychology books. I have now read about 30 books on psychology, ethics, and relationships. I do not feel depressed now. I am slowly changing my beliefs about personal responsibility, authenticity and tolerance, and integrating those changes into my life. I feel that forms of authoritarianism and intolerance have been a major problem for me. I would like to accelerate this change process, but I resist and take time to integrate one change before I take another step.

Love, intimacy and friendship are still a problem for #36M. Before he began Level III personality transformation, he kept himself socially isolated. His values changed to the extent that he realized relationships provide the principal joys and meaning in life.

I am lonely. I learned from my home situation and from the community where I grew up that intimacy was bad. Especially for men. If I can change myself, I can make friendships. I am the only one responsible for fixing the problem...I married my spouse when I was 20 years old, and we have been married for 29 years. This has been a very good thing for me. My spouse is my best friend. I have not been a very communicative, open disclosing partner and I am trying to improve that. For most of our years together, I have had a very authoritarian viewpoint of our relationship, and I have changed that recently.

#36M was an example of someone who received so little feedback and guidance, at home, in school, or from the community, that he felt confused about who he was and his role in life until recently.

I think that my irrational feelings, prejudices and sexual stereotypes distorted my view of the world. The taboo about discussing sex and my aversion to people meant that there were very few avenues open to changing my viewpoints and
beliefs...I feel that there has always been a great variety of choices available to me, but that I have rarely had the courage to make the choices. I have let events or other people decide for me. I chose not to choose. I am changing that now and I am going to keep changing it.

Although #36M attended a church regularly, he was integrating religious beliefs and his faith into a picture of spirituality that was compatible with his changing views, particularly his views on authoritarianism and personal responsibility. A changing view of religion was part of his overall changing world view.

#36M said that he never considered suicide. This was what he wrote about helping a troubled young person:

I would listen, I would ask them to talk, I would be present and be silent if that felt right. When it was appropriate, I would share parts of my own story of coming to understand personal responsibility and realizing that life is about caring for others. That each of us is a spiritual part of the universe. That the difficulties that we are experiencing are a gift which will develop up. That it is important to have courage. I would ask them to read a book on counseling and try to understand their problem from a counselor’s perspective.

It was in light of subject #36M’s changes that he was moved into Level III: Personality Transformation for the study. By his own account, participation in the present study and seeing his own thoughts on paper propelled him toward radical intrapersonal change and set him on his journey toward self-actualization. He was using his intelligence and training in his career, so would appear to be self-actualized there. But, one year after completing his Adult Inventory, he left his job. As the current study ended he was viewing his entire career, his position, and his priorities differently. Such a changed perspective seemed common among those who had started to change inside.

Subject #24M completed only his childhood questionnaire. He mentioned no mentors or people who influenced or guided him. There was not enough in his file to definitively label him a Searcher; however, his writing coupled with his Tone score lead to the conclusion he was in the midst of Level III: Personality Transformation. He was aware of the mistreatment from his childhood, he stated that the treatment was hurtful and unreasonable, and he appeared to be reaching out through his art, a pastime totally unrelated to his training and career.

#4M reported a high level of affection and approval with kisses goodnight and good-bye and “lots of hugging” from his parents when he was a child. His parents put a great deal of emphasis on his intelligence, which bothered him somewhat. They thought he should go into physics rather than [his father’s profession] because he had a strong interest in it from early childhood. He did not decide on his career until he was 22 years old. He made that point clearly in his questionnaires as though he was afraid it would look as though his parents pressured him. Now in his late 40s he realizes he might have found physics a more interesting career choice.

Early in adulthood he began transcendental meditation and practices it daily. He read widely, exercised by running, and thought he made an excellent marriage choice. He stated several times that he loved his three children and dedicated a lot of time to them, but wished he had more patience. His professional work was not intellectually challenging, but he felt stuck in it primarily due to obligation.

#4M earned a low tone score of 4 because he brought up several topics that indicated he felt unfulfilled and lonely. As a small town professional he was in a fairly solitary position with few intellectual peers. Although his wife would easily qualify for this study (with an IQ about 25
points below his, however), he said, “Wife - compatible, but do not share intellectual interest; she is less intellectually oriented.” Asked if he confided in friends, he answered, “No except 2 old friends and wife.” Asked if he usually has had friends in whom to confide, “Yes, until into present adult situation (profession and family).” In reference to the importance of friendships in his life: “Very important; I call and write to my old best friends once or twice a month; I miss having close.” According to his DIT score of 75, #4M was a highly principled moral reasoner at Kohlberg’s Stage 5 or possibly 6. The amount of inner strife expressed in his wish for more patience, a different career, and close friendships nearby all indicated Dabrowski’s Level III: Personality Transformation. Observers would credit him with having attained career and intellectual self-actualization; he would not agree, however. His writing indicated that he was actively developing new goals and ideals for himself and would not be happy until he both reached for and attained them.

#18F was a wonderful example of a person who consciously, actively pursued change in herself. She had a conventional job for a woman; and although her inventories had a strong current of unresolved rebelliousness, she did not seem angry or depressed. She was among the youngest of the final group, just approaching her forties at the time of the study. Her strong Searcher behavior was indicated by ongoing positive disintegrations as she continued to redefine her world.

In response to the question, “Did people know you were smart?” #18F reported,

Other kids thought I was smart, but I thought I did better and learned more because I worked harder than they were, and they were just lazy. It wasn’t ‘til I took nationally normed tests - the PSAT, ACT, and SAT - in high school that I realized I might have a natural advantage over some of my peers. But, I had other smart kids in my classes, and we’d always competed and compared our test scores on classroom subject tests.

Unlike subjects who are at Level II, #18F once interpreted her world one way, “I worked harder,” but changed her viewpoint to incorporate her new information that she “might have a natural advantage.” She became less judgmental, a hallmark of someone who has moved beyond Level II.

#18F credited a highly supportive, nurturing family that gave her the self-confidence to explore and re-explore her role in life. She was very clear on the steps of her own developmental journey.

I had my first developmental crisis at age 10 when I felt that my life had no meaning. I considered committing suicide with the shotgun Dad kept in the basement but decided not to because I thought that would make my parents sad. I resolved the crisis by deciding I had two self-chosen purposes in my life:

1) To help others.
2) To have pleasure myself.

Shallow and simplistic as these goals now seem, when I’ve had mid-life crises since then, I’ve continued to come up with these same very basic life goals.

My other major turning points were around religion and career choice. As I mentioned earlier, I “gave my life to Christ” during a Lay Witness Mission at my church at age 15. For a year I believed fundamentally, read the Bible nightly, and warned my parents they’d go to hell because they had not had a second birth in Christ and been saved.
About the time I turned 16, I decided it was unlikely and incompetent and cruel of an omnipotent god to create a world where people not properly introduced to Christ would go to hell. Since it was likewise idiotic of Him not to make clear which of the world’s religions was most accurate, and Demond Morris (anthropologist) in The Naked Ape at the library said that primates evolved in such fashion that their minds made room for a god notion, I became an atheist.

For awhile it bugged me that I’d go to hell if I was wrong. On the other hand, the fundamentalists said that once I’d given my life to Christ I was always saved. So I guessed I had all bases covered.

I guess I should comment on how becoming an atheist was a turning point. Once I decided there was no god, I had no foundation for my values, which was largely Judeo-Christian-based. So I had to rethink all my moral decisions from a basis I decided myself. I’m still doing this, and it’s hard.

As mentioned, she was in a traditional female career field and was having difficulty getting the job, guidance counselor, within that field that she wanted. #18F was unusually gifted for her career field. Combine that with her obvious questioning of everything, her constant striving for something better, more purposeful, and she probably did not make the people around her at work comfortable. Her emotional growth might have been jeopardized by a poor fit of her personality needs to her work environment. That may, in part, explain why she continued to be such an active Searcher and had not yet attained more of the serenity of Level IV in Dabrowski’s hierarchy.

**Dabrowski Level III/IV**

Four subjects achieved a degree of self-actualization, as described below, but still experienced enough uncertainty about themselves to be working at Level III emotionally, as well. Although some theorists might argue that people do not go back and forth in a hierarchy, it seems likely that people do not take one giant step into the next stage, either. So it appeared with these four people.

All four of these subjects were profoundly or exceptionally gifted. A look at their case studies, found in the appendix in their entirety, shows how the extremely high intelligence affected the person’s inner thoughts as well as the feedback he or she received from others. Unless profoundly embittered, and these subjects are not, their giftedness undoubtedly helped them reason at very high levels even when they still acted more similarly to people who scored at lower levels on the DIT. The case studies of the first two of these subjects looked more like Level II profiles; but they scored considerably higher, perhaps due to their intelligence and lack of overt emotional abuse, than the subjects in that category. The third subject appeared to be actively experiencing positive disintegrations and looked more like Level III subjects except, again, for his DIT score. The fourth subject who appeared to balance between Levels III and IV, subject #32F, indicated one or two unresolved areas but was otherwise fully at Level IV.

**Self-Actualization:** Conscious direction of development, commitment to one’s values, acceptance, objectivity, responsibility and service to self and others, philosophical, unhostile sense of humor.
Table 16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Age</th>
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<th>Tone</th>
<th>Abuse/Therapy</th>
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<td>Searcher</td>
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</table>

#7F earned a 65 on the DIT, a high moderate score for the group and well above the general adult average of 40. Her low 4 tone score was assigned because she sounded sad, even angry, with the way her childhood was handled. She loved her work, but she found little camaraderie or satisfaction from the people with whom she worked. Although she earned a Ph.D., and had great knowledge and experience concerning [her career field], she felt her career was not what it might have been had she had guidance and mentoring along the way. Although not the talk of a self-actualized person, she had a clear perception and acceptance of life’s shortcomings. She stayed with things that did not make her happy, and that was why she was categorized a Neutral instead of a Searcher.

#7F usually had at least one friend in whom she could confide. “Spend most free time with husband...We really do enjoy each other’s company.” She said that friendships were not “that important (outside of spouse),” although she had one life-long close friend and a number of others friends, as well.

At age 60 she had already passed through the typical mid-life crises and entered a calmer, more accepting stage of her life. There were some things she would change, and that still gave her reason to experience Level III inner conflict, but she was clearly operating into Level IV in most areas of her life.

Subject #5M described his childhood home as playful, loving, and supportive. An underlying current of sadness and loneliness earned him a tone score of 3. He said he “has a number of friends from my days in the [service] with whom I remain in contact and see as often as time and distance permits”, had a good marriage, and was as successful as he had hoped to be in his career, retired early and did what he enjoyed. Only 46 years old, he claimed to be leaving his options open as far as any future careers.

The preferred use of free time for #5M: “I prefer to use my free time for my own interests and they are best done alone.” The importance of personal friendships in life brought this response: “Not very important.” His response to “Have you had much trouble finding really good friends?” was “Yes. Most people are idiots.” His most mellow responses dealt with the sadness he and his wife shared over a stillborn child and their subsequent inability to be parents. He stated that his education and training were unsatisfactory. “I was never challenged to my full potential by any education or training.”

The attitude and responses of #5M indicated he felt fairly satisfied with his life and his place in it. The edginess of his responses indicated he was not fully operating at Level IV. His DIT score was very high, 73.3, but he exhibited hostility, even irreverence, which placed him at about the third level of Dabrowski’s developmental chart. The fact that he did not minimize the injustices in his past, specifically in reference to how schools mistreated profoundly gifted students, quoted liberally in his case study, was in line with a higher DIT result.

The next subject, #16M, was definitely a Searcher, a conclusion supported by the many quotations to follow that described his own search for meaning and substance in his life. He received a Tone score of 3 because he was in a state of flux emotionally, spiritually, and career-
wise. He began what appeared to be a serious positive disintegration in his mid-thirties:

When my daughter received a WISC-R score of 150 I began to explore this issue of giftedness. I had essentially discounted my own IQ [a CTMM of 172] as something in the past. As I studied I was confronted with my own life story, my own issues, my own giftedness. For a long time I was unable to discuss my own giftedness without crying.

#16M was barely forty when he completed his childhood inventory and Defining Issues Test. He earned a 74 on the DIT, very high for the group, but especially high for someone not yet 40 years old. Subjects who have emerged from a positive disintegration, and who have not yet fallen into another, had a buoyancy and excitement in their questionnaire responses. #16M had not emerged from his positive disintegration, but his responses indicated that he is no longer in the depths of it, either.

An example of his approach to life was in the second question of the childhood inventory, “When someone asks you where you grew up, what is your answer?” He wrote,

My answer is that I am still growing. The idea that a human creature grows up between time A and time B and then stops growing is a fascinating concept. Who started speaking of life in that fashion? It only really makes sense if time A is birth and time B is death. I know that it seems painfully obvious when stated so bluntly but listen to how we speak, look at how we really behave. Now, stepping down from my soapbox, I was raised by my parents and lived in [small upper midwest town] until I went away to college.

The attitude displayed by #16M as he pondered events from his past were indicative of higher emotional levels. He was not angry or bitter, nor was he blaming others. The following was an example of his process. In response to the question about any confusion over his giftedness, he wrote,

My wife has an IQ of approximately 130 [compared to his 172]. She was valedictorian of our high school class, she graduated from college with only one B, all the rest A’s. For a long time I could not distinguish between high academic achievement and giftedness. Why were my grades so much lower if I was really so much smarter? I realized that task commitment, or intrinsic motivation, or rebellion, or boredom, or defiance, or dutiful daughter syndrome can all play a part.

Subject #16M described his spiritual journey in a way that was common among Level III and Level IV reasoners. His religious background was Lutheran, but he became disenchanted with organized religion early in life for two reasons. He described his feelings as follows:

I found our church completely hollow. When I or anyone else asked good questions they either shamed us or gave absurd traditional, rote answers. I was placed in the Lutheran school at my church for 3rd and 4th grade and the teachers told my parents that they needed to teach the class at the rate of the slowest child or else it would not be fair. Somehow my parents seemed to be hoping that there was something to this religion business and that their children would benefit from a religious school. They were willing to sacrifice intellectual challenge to do the
'morally right' thing.

Although he did not complete an adult inventory, #16M mentioned working with a spiritual advisor in recent years to explore spiritual questions and their meaning for his own life. He studied the world’s religions as background for his spiritual issues study.

#16M married a woman who had been his favorite girlfriend during high school. They were married more than 25 years and, although he declined to send in his adult level inventory, he alluded to his wife with pride and reverence. He used his intellectual gifts to build a highly successful career, one in which he appeared to be self-actualized. He moved away from his career, however, to find a role that the thought might ultimately prove more intrinsically rewarding to him. #16M was in active transition, an early mid-life crisis. It was a “positive maladjustment” of Dabrowski’s Level III: Personality Transformation. His high DIT score was reflective of his approach to his life, that of Post-Conventional, highly principled moral reasoning. His life contained all the elements necessary for the eventual attainment of intrapersonal self-actualization: connections to other people, an openness and active search for spiritual answers and values, and a willingness to make changes. He already accepted that he might have to turn his back on his successful career in order to meet his internal emotional goals. The fact that he experienced a fairly supportive home life may have made it possible for him to reach some of these goals earlier than many of the other subjects.

Subject #32F earned a Tone score of 1 because she faced her life squarely and honestly, expressed anger appropriately, and yet had a positive and upbeat attitude toward her life. There was only one obvious area where she had yet to resolve some childhood issues, and that was in her frequent references to her father as “left-brained, rational and disciplined.” If his childhood dream was of being an artist, it was possible he chose to rein in or suppress his creative side to concentrate on a “responsible” career in order to support his family, typical of the G.I. and Silent generation cohorts (Strauss and Howe, 1991).

#32F’s DIT score was a 70, close to one standard deviation above the mean of the group and about 5 points above the average for the highest scoring normed group, moral philosophy and political science graduate students and at Kohlberg’s Postconventional level of Moral Development. Most of Dabrowski’s Level III was behind her as she appeared to function primarily at Level IV: Self-Actualization. Both Maslow’s and Dabrowski’s descriptions fit her. She was doing what she wanted and loved to do for her career; she wished it earned her a more substantial income, but again, she showed a strong, self-actualized commitment to her own values and goals. Although she expressed anger, she did not express hostility or significant resentment.

#32F wrote clearly regarding the impact of psychological therapy on her ability to redefine episodes and situations from her past. It was in light of her changed viewpoint that she framed many of her answers. She echoed the thoughts and observations of men and women alike who were still actively dealing with Level III: Personality Transformation. She wrote how she would change the way her parents treated her:

I’d have them express love and support rather than criticism and demands for achievement. I was motivated internally to do well and didn’t need the constant demands for perfection. An A- was a problem, a B a disaster. If I wasn’t first at something there was hardly any point in doing it. I wish I’d had more hugs and more play and fewer rules for good character. Good character meant being orderly, neat, respectful, quiet and unfailingly rational. I was messy, disorganized, challenging to authority, loud and emotional. I was also imaginative, funny, bright and loving, and if those traits had been recognized as much as the others were
criticized, I would have had a very different view of myself.

#32F seemed to have been a Searcher throughout her life. She mentioned no one traumatic episode, just a series of questions and concerns about the world and her role in it. She seemed to have experienced numerous positive disintegrations throughout her life. For example, she did not respond to demands for perfect grades by accepting that good grades were necessary; she considered her personal need for grades, or neat behavior, or a calm disposition, or anything else she was told to do, and decided for herself if such things had value for her or the place she wanted to inhabit in the world.

Although she did not say, it was likely #32F entered therapy in her 40s because she discovered she could get help finding the answers to her many questions. She was a good example of someone who scored high on the DIT not because of the therapy she received, but because of the series of positive disintegrations she experienced in her own search for herself. Therapy simply firmed up the boundaries of her self and helped her cope with the depressing, scary feelings of positive disintegration.

**Dabrowski Level IV**

Few subjects pointed out the defining moments in their lives, the moment they knew they had to change or what precipitated it. Therefore, a fairly complete profile of each of the final five subjects may elucidate how self-actualized people look and think. The final five subjects all appeared to be self-actualized, but the last three gave evidence of approaching Level V, as well, and are reviewed in the last section of the chapter.

Two subjects have case studies which appeared to be at Dabrowski’s Level IV of self-actualization. They largely left the turmoil of Level III behind, although they gave many indications that they were aware of always being in transition, changing, growing, and evolving.

**Self-Actualization:** Conscious direction of development, commitment to one’s values, acceptance, objectivity, responsibility and service to self and others, philosophical, unhostile sense of humor.

The subjects in this section and the next came from both supportive and unsupportive backgrounds. Although the full case studies generally showed that the subjects who emotionally mature the most are the same subjects who found some supportive connections in childhood, even despite abusive homes, sometimes a subject simply independently appeared to adopt an attitude that said, “I can only change me. If I’m not happy with the way my life is, I must be going about it wrong.”

**Table 17**

<table>
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<th>Tone</th>
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Subject #17F presented an interesting study because she as she described her childhood, she gave many examples of the good parenting she received. “When I was little my folks would
shame my behavior when my behavior was hurtful to another - but they never shamed me. Even shaming my behavior was a rare occurrence. She further explained,

Both parents used what you would call “gentle guidance,” I guess. I rarely had any doubts about what the rules, limits, or expectations were. They must have been instilled in me at such an early age that I wasn’t always conscious of them. I never felt like my folks expected too much. As I grew older and we were confronted with new types of expectations and situations - we discussed the rules and limits.

She wrote that her parents did not guide her toward any particular career, and she interpreted that as good. A number of people who scored lower on the DIT mentioned that they received no career guidance from their parents, either, but most of them viewed it as a lack of support and encouragement.

Friendships and learning opportunities were an important part of the adult life of #17F. She finished college younger than most and married a professional athlete immediately. The marriage ended in divorce. She chose a much different man for a second marriage, a psychologist, but it, too, ended in divorce. In the case of the first, the husband really was not ready to “settle down” and found life on the road too tempting. She concluded that the second husband actually had psychological problems, but her positive attitude made her believe, at the time, that she could “make things better.” He became emotionally and psychologically abusive, an experience that led her into psychological counseling and out of her second marriage. The difficulties may have been exacerbated by her inability to have children and his possible unwillingness to admit that it was a problem for him.

#17F married for a third time and was celebrating her tenth anniversary as she finished her study questionnaires. She was mellow and circumspect. After grieving the fact that she would never have children, she went on to grieve the fact that she would never have grandchildren, either. She also felt bad for her parents’ lack of grandchildren.

#17F once felt as though there was no point in living. “Only slightly seriously. I felt alone, purposeless, a sort of ‘out of body’ feeling. These feelings lasted about 4 hours.” She had a number of ways she would counsel a troubled young person:

I would ask them to tell me about themselves and why they feel the way they do. I would try and reinforce the positives that they mention. If they have no self-love, I cannot “fix” that, but I could help them pursue the resources that could help them develop it. I would also tell them that without any purpose (whether it be spiritual or materialistic) life probably won’t be of much value. The feelings of purpose and that life does matter must come from within to be sustained. No one but themselves can “make” their life worth something and they have to take some responsibility for their own happiness.

#17F was very much in Dabrowski’s Level III for a number of years, especially in her early 40s. She worked through it. According to her reports, counseling helped her cope with the lonely, unfamiliar and unsettled feelings that accompany giving up old ideas for new. It is interesting to note that the people who exemplify self-actualization are content and satisfied but only in the sense that their lives have purpose and must have purpose. They keep redefining their purpose and adding new goals. They are not stagnant in their contentment. In her career, she was good at what she did, “It pays the bills,” and she generally enjoyed the people and the purpose of the work. She was not famous or earning a high salary, but it was enough for her. She gardened,
went to flea markets and tournament bridge with her husband, and took time for friends and family.

In complete contrast to #17F, subject #35F came from an severely emotionally abusive background. Both parents had obvious personality and emotional problems and treated the subject with both anger and hostility. Despite those differences, the two women both traveled a course to eventual self-actualization.

#35F was a particularly interesting subject because she wrote literally volumes about her life and thoughts over a four year period. She actually had and wrote about episodes of positive disintegrations and showed tremendous attitude and inner changes over the course of the four years. She also freely admitted that being invited to participate in the study contributed tremendously to her new and better feelings about herself and her abilities.

Subject #35F had a great deal to be angry and sad about from her past, but she was clear and consistent about it, and reviewed it all with a sense of amazement at what she lived through. Her Tone actually improved during the four years that she kept mailing in inventory responses and went from a 3 to a 1. She took the DIT early in the process and earned a 71.7, quite high for the study group. A follow-up study might discover her score is now higher.

Here is just one example of the atmosphere in her childhood home. The most illustrative anecdote from #35F’s surveys regarded the celebration of birthdays in her family:

My parents did not like us children. They both vied competitively for the attention of my older sister. It was as if the other three didn’t exist. Only her birthday was remembered. Only her first sacraments were worth celebrating. My younger sister was lucky enough to be born on my grandfather’s birthday. While she never had her ‘own’ day, she also never had the pain of seeing it forgotten as my brother and I did.

#35F had numerous girlfriends her own age through Brownie troops, but each one moved away before a long term friendship could be established. No educators ever seemed to take any special interest in her. Her father’s father treated her with love and respect and she credits that relationship with salvaging a sense of self-worth in her. There was also a neighbor woman who was her mother’s age who befriended her. This woman was totally loving and accepting of her and their friendship continued into her adulthood. This kind of opportunity in the life of an abused child appeared to be critical to eventual resiliency.

#35F was a Searcher and had been at least since she turned 36 years old. She married in her early twenties, had one child, and worked and went to school throughout her first marriage. She became aware that “something was not right” with her and sought help from a psychiatrist. She learned that she was intellectually gifted and needed to increase her training and career aspirations. She learned that she had inappropriately turned her own child into her best friend, thus leaving her husband out of the family circle. She then left both her husband and child.

#35F left her child in the “loving and very capable hands” of her ex-husband, sent double the child support required, and learned everything she could about herself, life, spiritual issues, and the nuts and bolts of her career. After several years she married “the kindest man in the world” and after another year, her daughter moved back in with her. She had a wonderful relationship with her ex-husband, her daughter, and her second husband of 15 years.

During the period between marriages, #35F gave herself time to explore her own goals and needs. There was one man, a co-worker, who relentlessly “bullied” her into finding out for herself who she was. She saw a therapist, read widely, and decided she was the one person who could make her life the way she wanted it to be.

The tone of her adult level inventories was filled with observations of what can and
cannot be in life. The following was especially illustrative:

I have learned that I never really need to be lonely if I call upon my connections to participate. Most are glad to support me. My mistake early on was to believe that there were these special friends who were ‘kindred spirits,’ and I used to ‘throw people away’ when I discovered that they did not complete me in that fashion. I have learned that no one - no matter how close (even my dearest daughter and husband) can ever be the person who is you. So you invite people to participate at the level that they can. And if you feel continually depleted by an individual, you ask that person less often than someone who fulfills you.

Another area where she shared a viewpoint common in higher DIT scorers was in the area of personal accomplishment. It is an intrinsic motivation independent of credit or recognition. She wrote,

What is most important to me is to grow, change, and be part of something beyond my own little life. To contribute to the world, even if in some small unseeable way. It does not bother me, for instance, to have people not recognize me or know I was the founder of this association or on the founding board of that program. I am happy to see the thing take a shape of its own, independent of its beginnings.

In response to a question about what she wanted for her own children, #35F wrote, “I have raised her to understand that she is responsible for herself, and for the things that happen to her. I was 36 years old before I learned this and it was a shock to see that I could have prevented my own unhappiness and degradations by simply accepting responsibility for the things that happened to me.”

Raised Catholic, #35F believed strongly in God, but she has read widely on all the world’s religions and integrated the common threads into one spiritual picture for her own life. Her spiritual life was very important to her. She had many interests and hobbies, strong and well-developed opinions, and continually growing and changing goals for herself. She reported that she was very satisfied with her life, but added that does not mean she was done growing and changing.

#35F had a number of times in her life when she seriously considered suicide. There was an episode during her late thirties that involved heavy drinking and behavior that she thought she could never forgive. A sister and a couple friends helped her see that she could forgive herself and change herself. This was the most profound positive disintegration she experienced, and she almost did not make it through it. According to her, she had to be willing to face what she did not like and take an active role in changing herself.

What she wrote about what to tell a troubled young person is an excellent written summary of what the highest DIT scorers all said.

Learn to trust yourself--no matter who disagrees with you. What looks to your parents like craziness might be creativity, what looks like nonconformance might be individuality, what looks like anti-social isolation might be a need to reflect and contemplate. Always rely and depend on yourself, never on things outside yourself--like food, drugs, alcohol, movies, or friends. Friends are there to share a journey, share joy or sorrow, but they are not there to lead or follow. And always know that the answer to your problems, the answer to your questions is inside.
yourself, because as you develop knowledge to ask the question, so you are developing the power to answer it. You can do anything you want to do, and an academic grade no more reflects your interest or ability to succeed in a subject than your age reflects your maturity. A subject you understand poorly today may catch your imagination and prove your genius tomorrow. Never, never, never let anyone tell you who you are or what you can be, no matter what the evidence is to you. **You can change** yourself to be anything you focus on. What you think you are is what you are. What you dream about is what you become. Never turn your thoughts or dreams over to anyone else. And finally, forgive yourself, love yourself. Hatred and resentment will tear away at your creativity and imagination until nothing is left. Forgive others for what they do to you. Remember that everyone is doing the best job that they can with what they have to work with. Expect a miracle every day, and the world will unfold miraculously before you.

**Dabrowski Level IV/V**

Three subjects appeared to be comfortably self-actualized, so much so that they were closing in on their “personality ideal”.

**Attainment of Personality Ideal:** Inner peace and harmony, altruism, universal compassion, devotion to service.

Table 18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>DIT</th>
<th>Tone</th>
<th>Abuse/Therapy</th>
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<td>Searcher</td>
<td>WAIS 135+</td>
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<td>34F/M</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>yes/yes</td>
<td>Searcher</td>
<td>School grp. test 140+</td>
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</table>

#33F was raised as “an army brat” by her college graduate father, a lower-ranking officer, and her mother until she was 11 years old. Her mother died, her father remarried, and life changed drastically for her. Her background was filled with emotional and sexual abuse, abandonment, and even poverty. The details are in her complete case study in the appendix. She was one of a number of the subjects who found a need for extensive counseling.

Her survey answers were long and detailed. The following quote was one of many similar descriptions:

I felt like I was not worth anything for a long period of time, both as a teen and as an adult. My parents’ perceptions were a direct influence. I felt that I was unlovable as a person, especially since I was fat. I felt that I was only good for sex as every female was, but again my being fat decreased my value there. I was stupid on top of it from the expressed opinions. I could never do anything right, no matter what, and was raised with the idea that I had better be grateful for any crumbs that came my way.

In answer to the question about what she would change about the way her parents raised her, she wrote, “You mean besides a total overhaul and infused humanity? I do not think there is any one thing to fix. The errors were so hurtful, especially premeditated. If I could change
something, it would be not having my mother die, and growing up with someone who loved me to guide and help me.” She wrote many more suggestions, as well, all that would make a child feel loved, encouraged, and supported.

According to #33F, in the schools for military children there was always homework and the expectations and competition were high. The down side was that there was power and prestige based on the rank of the parent. She loved school anyway. It was safety and respite from a horrible home life. “It was an island of sanity for me.” She did not receive a great deal of encouragement or notice at school, especially since she deliberately tried to go unnoticed due to feeling different [from the abuse], but she did not receive much negative treatment, either, for which she was grateful.

I thought that I was the only one in the world that abuse was happening to, and kept others away from me so they would not ‘figure it out’ and blame me...I did not do much to take care of myself, including washing my hair, using deodorant, etc. for the first year of the abuse, and that didn’t help.

#33F married in her mid-twenties while still thinking it was her job to “take care of a man.” The marriage did not last long, although it did produce two children. She was raped after her marriage ended and she became pregnant. She already had two children and was struggling to go to school, raise her children, and work full time. She had an abortion, one of the hardest decisions she ever made. As her DIT score indicated, she had managed to rise to a high level in Kohlberg’s Moral Development hierarchy, something that may be related to a strong personality integration that enabled her, according to her own report, to be fulfilled by all elements of her life, as shown here:

I am not lonely. I used to be, before I was a whole person. Then I thought I had to have someone with me constantly, and could not tolerate being alone. Now I enjoy solitude as much as I do having company. I think the people I have known and still know have been good, solid connections, intimate friendships. I am an open and available person, or at least I try to be, and I have enough people to call when I need to talk. I share outlooks in common with people from work who I become friends with, and we can and do often express our support, empathy, affection, connections and concerns.

She added that the career or job she had was not very important for her fulfillment because “I look to be fulfilled by the person I am, and that has happened.” A key to her resiliency seemed to be that she understood early that she needed to change the way she viewed the world, not just try harder with the same remedies she had learned in her abusive past. She continued to have a network of supportive, diverse friends, and was seeing a man about whom she is quite serious as the study ended.

She did not practice a religion but explored different religions and philosophies throughout her adult life.

Religion is fine for people who want it. I would like to see our society more supportive of any spiritual expressions, not just those of recognized, organized faiths. I think there are some religions that are dangerous exactly because they stop the faithful from examining the changing world around them. Often too they relegate men and women to rigid roles, which I have as hard a time with as I do racism. I see fanatical religions able to turn people’s wills against the
community’s and their best interest. That scares me.

#33F wrote the Study asking about her DIT score. She was curious about whether or not high scores on the DIT could explain her social movement farther and farther away from others.

What I am finding is that the closer I get to being the person I want to be, the further I go in a direction that is so clearly ‘right’ to me, the further I get from being acceptable, understood and even in a place others find comprehensible. I have concerns that while my physical world gets larger as I grow to be me, my social world is getting rapidly smaller. I have fewer values and connections in common with people, see their choices as uninformed, often wrong for the world or our ecosystem and find people apparently unable to see limits, consequences and directions that are so clear to me.

The following excerpt showed that even someone with an extremely detrimental past can grow into an emotionally intact person. There were times when #33F wondered whether or not she could survive, especially when she was divorced and had two babies.

I was on welfare, had no financial resources, had been pulled into court by my newly divorced ex-husband over the visitation schedule that the child psychologist was recommending, had my ex-husband try to raise my sexual abuse issue in court, had my parents disown me when I said I felt unloved when they couldn’t cancel a dental appointment to make a promised visit, started having health problems that the doctor could not diagnose that turned out to be a stress related syndrome, was raped, got pregnant and had an abortion which I did not really want but felt was needed, got involved with a man only to find out he was a drug user and ended the relationship. I had several room-mate changes in the house I shared, my Great Aunt, my favorite relative, died, and I went back to work full time, then got laid off, called back and laid off again. I also started having counseling at this time for the incest issues and having a totally crazy life. There was no end to it, it seemed.

Her advice to a troubled young person would hinge on her own study of Dialectical Materialism.

I would try to start with how changes are so subtle that even while they are happening, it is hard to see them, but more and more happen, and when there are enough, there is a change that appears to be sudden and major. While life is often painful, especially for those who see more and don’t shut it out, all those pains add to the depth of our understanding and enrich our lives when the little changes build up to the big leap...I would add that every person fills a hole in history, that everyone affects the life of every person around him or her.

To summarize #33F, she came from past experiences that were clearly terrible, and yet she reached a point by her mid-forties where she loved and embraced life. Her DIT score was among the highest in the study group at 80. She had a fairly ordinary career but was using, and felt she was using, her talents and intelligence toward a useful and important end. She reasoned morally at Kohlberg’s highest stages, both in her DIT results and in the actions she described in her inventories. She was easily self-actualized intrapersonally, and she seemed to be struggling
Deborah L. Ruf, Ph.D. ©1998  Highly Gifted Adult Study

with Dabrowski’s Level V: Attainment of the Personality Ideal. She was trying to get her behaviors totally in line with her ideals for both herself and the world.

The second subject in this section is #19F. The analysis of her case study uncovered the example of an emotionally abused person who did not receive therapy, but who managed to evolve to high levels of principled thinking. This subject also offered some evidence that it is the openness to change that leads some people into therapy, just as it is openness to change that seems to precede the positive aspects of positive disintegrations which lead to internal growth. It does not necessarily follow that therapy leads to these changes.

#19F was a Searcher in that she seemed able to objectively analyze events past and present and work at making necessary adjustments to make life work better for her. For example, she dropped out of a master’s program when the school turned down her thesis proposal of “computers as mass media” because they disagreed in 1980 that computers were mass media. She moved on without them.

#19F scored 82 on her DIT, second highest in the study group. It was clear that the subject was emotionally abused during her childhood, and yet she progressed by her early 40s to a point of mature and good-humored interaction with the world. She was aware that she and her brothers were missing some important parental care, but she was able to understand, without justifying, where it came from. “I would say we were somewhat abandoned—not physically, but emotionally—particularly after mother went back to school. Both of my parents were raised by their fathers. Their mothers abandoned them...As far as supplying the emotional support I lacked, I think that they were incapable.”

That #19F possessed an early potential for self-actualization was not clear from her background descriptions. She had close friends before her family moved, her mother went back to school full time, and she was burdened with the care of her infant brother. It took her several years to make new friends. “Eighth grade was my nadir, socially and academically.” She did not feel popular growing up. “No, I was very shy. I hired my younger brother to answer the phone when I was baby-sitting so I wouldn’t have to.”

#19F had “a very odd sequence of fortuitous circumstances” that led her into her career experiences. She was interested in art, writing, and creative enterprises that turned her talents into needed products. Her former right-hand woman was her daughter’s godmother; and they were still good friends. She experienced good commercial and financial success before having children; sold her business and focused on raising her children. She experienced collaboration and friendship with many of the people with whom she worked. In the historic, quaint community in which she lived, “I have many affiliations now that I have settled here. I wish I had more as a child.”

“With the exception of my marriage, I’m growing more satisfied with relationships.” #19F married someone quite different from herself and found the marriage difficult. They agreed on the priority of raising their two children well, children they waited to have until their late 30s. One of the children is gifted and the other is intellectually handicapped, which created tremendous stress on the parents and the marriage. “I was lonely throughout my life until we settled here and I had children.” Having and raising her children after experiencing career success and satisfaction seemed to be the event that triggered a personal reassessment of this subject’s life view. She was active in the community, particularly outdoors, with her children, and with female friends. She did not confide much, “but I could...Trusting people has been difficult, but it is one I am learning...I think that my children and a few close friends [like and feel close to her], and I am learning to allow and enjoy closeness.”

Her views on religion and sexual relationships showed her general lack of judgmentalism, openness to deciding for herself what is wrong and right. #19F was a self-described Unitarian after being raised as a southern Baptist Christian. One of her issues with her
husband was their different views on religion. “I married a Roman Catholic perfectionist. Doesn’t match a Unitarian maniac artist.” In response to a specific survey question she wrote, “promiscuity complicates life,” but also said that she thought she would be bisexual if she were not so shy. “I think many people would.”

Both her DIT score and her Tone score were at the highest levels. Her intellectual level was average for the study group. It was clear that she was intrapersonally self-actualized and exhibited signs of eventually reaching Dabrowski’s Level V. She was self-analytical and open to change while maintaining an overall positive, although not unrealistic, outlook on life. Although it was still not clear what may cause the difference between intrapersonally self-actualized people and those who are not, a pattern emerged related to careers: those who attained internal Maslow and Dabrowski-type self-actualization were willing to alter their career paths as part of their overall willingness to change and adjust.

The final subject provided an excellent example of a person who struggled with many issues and was willing to grow and change despite negative feedback and pain.

Subject #34F/M was assigned a Tone score of 1 because she seemed blissfully content, open to every possibility, and absolutely without anger or resentment. She earned the highest score in the group on the DIT, an 83.3. She began life as a boy, but wrote that she knew by the time she was 10 that her true self was female. She had surgical sexual reassignment when she was in her thirties. The first 35 years of her life she attempted to live successfully as a male. #34F/M was referred to by the masculine or feminine according to the time in the subject’s own life. The details of her life are in her case study; her viewpoints as a self-actualized person who was refining her personality ideal are highlighted here.

#34F/M felt very lonely throughout his childhood. He was not interested or good at athletics and his main interests were solitary, like reading. His feminine mannerisms caused him severe problems by adolescence. He wishes the school had provided “intervention to prevent persecution and bullying.”

He was quite depressed and “lost” during his college years. He believed that he badly needed guidance or counseling, but did not actively seek it because he was afraid his gender identity issue would be too much of a problem. He acknowledged that his abusive childhood led him on a dedicated spiritual quest during his young adulthood; he explored many religions. The philosophical and spiritual journey that #34F/M took in adulthood held particular interest for this study because he had so many things cause difficulty for him. He was always good at math and sciences and stumbled into computer programming by chance. Although he was good at it, recognized for being a “troubleshooter,” and paid quite well, he found the work cold and unsatisfying.

By her mid-40s, she discarded her career as a computer programmer, left two marriages behind that she was legally in as a man, and entered into a “loving triad” relationship with two other lesbian women, at least one of whom was also surgically trans-gendered.

A number of illustrative quotes indicating where subject #34F/M was emotionally and philosophically came from the section on “Beliefs and Values.” Work ethic: “Replace with a happiness ethic.” Mixed marriages: “Wonderful. We’re only one people across this globe, anyway. Best hope for humanity.” Religion: “As a matter of taste, I prefer polytheist goddess religions or none at all. Ethics more important than form. Dogma is garbage.”

Promiscuity/faithfulness: “It is a matter of honor and honesty in love; I see it as an ethical good.”

American educational system: “Paraphrase Gore Vidal: ‘In Russia there’s no food...in America no culture.’ Educational system is out of step with the times owing to bureaucratic institutions.”

#34F/M wrote that friendships and relationships improved for her “in proportion to my own willingness to be open and ‘take risks.’” She confide in friends and followed her heart in most matters. There was only one reference to her new career as a beautician/cosmetologist, and
several more references that implied she was the primary cook in her triad and did not at that time work outside the home.

   #34F/M experienced thoughts of suicide “when agonizing over gender-related problems and ‘holding it all inside,’ but too passive to follow through. Hoping life would ‘get better’ in time. And, it did!” Her advice to a troubled young person was this:

   You must give destiny and meaning sufficient time to materialize potentialities.
   You can’t know of either without living it through, at least to satisfy curiosity.

   There was no rancor, no hostility, not even any anger from #34F/M, just honest opinions, values, and observations. She mentioned nothing positive about her childhood except a few supportive teachers who may have helped her to later deal with the gender issues, cruelty at school, rape, failed marriages, and finally coming to the decision to have surgical sexual realignment.

   It is ironic that the person who scored the highest on the DIT and chose a gender, home, and career lifestyle that worked for her was probably the one subject about whom many people would disapprove. The only hesitation in placing her emotional developmental level at Dabrowski’s Level V: Attainment of Personality Ideal, was that she admitted that her current “in love” status contributed greatly to her sense of harmony with the world. She was certainly intrapersonally self-actualized, however. Perhaps due to the high level of abuse from which she suffered, she had at least temporarily put career level self-actualization aside so that she could enjoy her “loving triad.” She was so young, early 40s, that it was too early to make definitive conclusions about her career actualization.

**Summary Comments**

   This chapter focused on the current emotional levels of the participants in this research. Excerpts from the case studies illustrate the broad range of emotional development as well as the characteristic viewpoints and approach to problem-solving at each level.

   A higher proportion of highly gifted adults in the sample reached postconventional levels of growth more often than the general population. By the very definitions presented, it is likely that such individuals would attend to issues that bothered them and seek therapeutic help in greater numbers than the general population. In fact, there was a high incidence of getting counseling in the study group.

   The most recent study of highly gifted adults of which I am aware is from the Terman cohort (Oden, 1968). Although clinical depression and serious mental health issues were reviewed, and reported to be low, the report did not otherwise parallel the current study in its main investigative points. The Strauss and Howe study in *Generations* (1991), however, makes it clear that an interest and willingness to seek counseling is higher in the Silent and Boomer generations, the focus of this study, than in the G.I. generation upon which the Terman study was focused.
CHAPTER V
SIGNIFICANT LIFE ISSUES IN THE HIGHLY GIFTED

Introduction

Issues of abuse, religiosity, suicide, marriage, divorce, and sexual preference were among a number of topics explored in the subject questionnaires. The Defining Issues Test (DIT) showed an association with both religiosity and suicide, and the abuse/nonabuse categories were revealing, as well. Subjects fell into different levels of religiosity and suicide ideation dependent solely on their self-reports in their questionnaires.

The 41 subjects profiled in the case studies revealed themselves to be a diverse group as regards background experiences, particularly abuse issues, despite their common experience of high giftedness. Both the definition of abuse and the method used to categorize subjects as abused are detailed in Table 9 on page 76. For the purpose of this study, all types of reported abuse were combined. They included neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and medical neglect. There was much overlap, and for comparison purposes, it was important to note that there was no reason to believe any of the abuse experienced and reported by subjects was ever reported to child welfare or police authorities. According to figures reported in 1994 for 1993 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, for all forms of substantiated abuse, about 1% of the population under age 18 was living in reportable, abusive conditions for which authorities were called to intervene.

Abuse and Intellectual Level

The IQ range for each subject is listed on page 74 on Chart 3: Summary of the Highly Gifted Group. Two pie charts are presented here to illustrate the proportion of subjects from each IQ range who wrote about either abuse or little to no abuse in their backgrounds.

Figure 2

It was initially confusing to see such a high proportion of subjects fall into the lowest IQ category, 11 of the 23, who also reported abuse. It was necessary to categorize a number of subjects at this IQ level because the only scores they had were group test scores from school, which are known to have low ceilings, or college board scores that were not unusually high. A judgment was made in these cases that their IQs were probably at least over 140. The backgrounds of abuse often included neglectful or hostile parents who showed so little interest in their child’s school progress that accurate ability scores were never secured. Also, it is possible that the abuse in many cases was so distressful and distracting that the children simply did not score as well as their actual intellectual ability warranted.
In contrast, the children from attentive homes, those that were deemed nonabusive by the subjects, had many more subjects whose parents found out the child’s IQ during the subject’s school years. There were, of course, a number of families who valued their children’s school performance but who were still abusive. The main reason for presenting the pie charts was to help the reader understand the intellectual configuration of the two groups, abused and nonabused, as well as possible. Of the reportedly nonabused subjects, the largest group, 6 of the 18, were in the highest IQ range. No conclusions as to why that was can be drawn from the data.

Abuse and DIT Scores

The subjects were half women and half men; nonetheless, of the 18 people who described themselves as nonabused, the majority, 61%, were men. The subjects’ identification numbers are 1-18 for subjects who reported or recognized no abuse, and 19-41 for those who reported abuse.

If DIT scores indicated inner or emotional growth as well as moral reasoning levels, subjects who recognized and reported their abuse had their emotional development more widely affected than the nonabused subjects. Among the subjects who claimed abusive treatment, the three lowest and three highest DIT scores came from their ranks. Chapter IV described how some subjects who experienced more inner development than other subjects, as measured by the DIT and analysis of case study material, were associated with an attitude of open “searching” as opposed to a protective or “settled” view of life and one’s role in it. Indeed, there were examples of subjects who experienced terrible background circumstances who developed into happy, self-actualized people, people who were as developed, and even more so, than people who apparently experienced more positive background experiences.

Figure 3

Figure 3 displays the range of DIT scores for the entire study group broken down by abuse/nonabuse backgrounds. The range in DIT score was larger in the abused group of subjects. The previous chapter explored some of the possible explanations for the differences in life’s views between apparently equally abused people who reached very different emotional growth positions and had very different DIT scores. It was especially interesting to note that a higher number of men than women identified themselves as nonabused, and yet a high percentage of these same men scored low on the DIT and were categorized into lower Dabrowski
developmental levels. The data analysis was not able to distinguish between possible explanations for this finding: were the men actually abused less, or were the men less able to recognize and admit when they had been abused; and did this group of men score lower on the DIT and show fewer signs as a group to openness and Searcher behavior than the women because these men were naturally less open or because the presence of abuse actually helped the women question life more?

Broken down by gender, Table 19 and Figure 3 show how the abused and nonabused groups compared on DIT scores.

Table 19  DIT Scores for Abused and Nonabused Subjects By Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean for entire group 57.67</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonabused</td>
<td>Range 40-75, mean 59.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 women - range 55.9-74.5, mean 64.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11 men - range 40-74, mean 55.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abused</td>
<td>Range 30-83.3, mean 56.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13 women - range 30-82, mean 57.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9 men - range 38.3-70, mean 51.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 F/M - 83.3 (transgendered male to female in early 30s)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Study Group DIT Scores by Gender and Educational Level

All nonabused subjects developed beyond the norm of 40 for adults in general. Some nonabused males scored as high as the nonabused females, but a number were considerably lower. There was the possibility that some of the reportedly nonabused men were actually raised in situations that were more detrimental to their development than they themselves recognized. Figure 4 illustrates the abused/nonabused DIT range.

Figure 4

DIT Score Spread by Gender
(1 male and 1 female each at median)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Below median:</th>
<th>Above median:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 female</td>
<td>12 female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 male</td>
<td>6 male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where X = male and O = female and X = gender change

As reported earlier, previous research has shown the highest factor correlation with DIT scores is educational attainment (Rest, 1994). Table 20 shows the educational attainment of subjects above and below the group median on the DIT. Precise scores and educational levels are on Chart 3: Summary of Highly Gifted Subjects on page 74.
Table 20  
**DIT and Educational Attainment**

**Above Median of 57.67**
- Male - 1 MD, 1 completed doctoral coursework, 1 MS, 2 MA, 1 MA+.
- Female - 1 JD, 4 Ph.D., 1 MA, 2 MA+, 1 M.Ed., 1 BS+, 1 Associate Arts, 1 B.A., 2 B.A.+

**Below Median of 57.76**
- Male - 1 MD, 2 JD, 2 Ph.D., 2 MA, 1 MA+, 1 Ph.D./DRE, 1 College Sr., 1 BSE, 1 BEE/MBA/JD, 1 BA.
- Female - 2 Ph.D., 1 MA (3 for same person), 1 BA, 1 BA+, 1 BFA.

**Tone Scores: Who Finds Happiness and Contentment?**
Happiness and contentment occurred at different maturity levels and were not necessarily synonymous with self-actualization, although the subjects judged to be the most advanced in their moral and emotional reasoning levels also had high Tone scores. In the context of this study, happiness and contentment were identified by the Tone score. As the following chart shows, subjects who were at the earliest two levels of emotional development, as categorized in this study, had the highest proportion of low Tone scores. Refer also to Table 11 on page 82. Although subjects who entered the difficult emotional times of the middle emotional levels showed their stress and strain through moderate rather than high Tone scores, all of the subjects who appeared self-actualized in their inner lives received high Tone scores and have happy, positive outlooks about life.

Table 21  
**Tone Scores by Emotional (Dabrowski) Levels**
*(number of subjects within each level)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tone</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>II/III</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>III/IV</th>
<th>IV+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Tone scores were assigned based on whether or not subjects seemed happy and content at the time they filled out their questionnaires in adulthood. The following Table 22 shows the relationship of childhood abuse to adult happiness as rated by Tone score. The numbers under abuse and nonabuse indicate the number of subjects. Note that a nonabusive situation leads to fewer low Tone scores.
Table 22

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tone</th>
<th>Abuse</th>
<th>% of 41</th>
<th>Nonabuse</th>
<th>% of 41</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Religiosity

The abuse/nonabuse categories indicated different adult levels of religiosity, that is, topics related to either religious or spiritual issues, among the study subjects, particularly in the subjects’ identification of themselves as having a strong “spiritual” rather than “religious” life. The questionnaires requested specific feedback on the religious training and attitude in the childhood home. The subjects were asked their view of religion, in the generic sense, on their adult inventory. For subjects who did not return an adult level inventory, a “DK” classification is used, meaning “Don’t Know” what they thought.

There were five categories of religious classification besides the “Don’t Know” group. If subjects mentioned their religion or active church participation, they were classified as “R” for religious. When subjects described a spiritual outlook or life that went beyond standard affiliation and belief in a denominational religious doctrine, but who still belonged to or participated in a church or standard religious organization, they were classified as “RS” for religious-spiritual. Subjects were classified as “S” for spiritual if they described a spiritual life and belief but did not affiliate with a specific religious doctrine or church.

When subjects did not mention their religious or spiritual life, made no reference to church membership or searching for meaning in a spiritual sense, they were classified as “None.” This did not mean they were atheists, although they may have been. It simply meant that the religious or spiritual part of their lives was not pivotal enough to be mentioned by them on some 26 pages of open-ended questions about their lives and views. For subjects to be classified as atheists, they had to write specifically that they are atheists. The breakdown is shown in Table 23.

Table 23

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects by Religiosity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>♦ 14 None 34.1% (said nothing about a belief system)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ 4 Don’t Know 9.7% (did not return adult questionnaire)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ 3 Atheist 7.3% (stated they are atheists)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ 5 Religious 12.2% (talked about religious affiliation, practice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ 5 Religious-Spiritual 12.2% (denominational and beyond doctrine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ 10 Spiritual 24.4% (nondenominational belief system)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When religiosity was considered in the context of reported background abuse or nonabuse, as in the preceding chart, a considerably larger proportion of nonabused subjects reported no particular spiritual or religious interests. Religious affiliation and practice was similar between the two groups, but the more open-ended, exploratory Religious-Spiritual and Spiritual combined to nearly twice as high for the abused subjects, for a combined total of 23% for nonabused subjects to 47.8% for those reporting abuse.

### Table 24

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religiosity by Nonabuse/Abuse</th>
<th>NONE</th>
<th>DK</th>
<th>ATHEIST</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>RS</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>TOTALS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NONABUSED</td>
<td>8: 44%</td>
<td>3: 17%</td>
<td>1: 5%</td>
<td>2: 11%</td>
<td>1: 5%</td>
<td>3: 17%</td>
<td>18: 99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABUSED</td>
<td>6: 26%</td>
<td>1: 4%</td>
<td>2: 8.6%</td>
<td>3: 13%</td>
<td>4: 17.4%</td>
<td>7: 30.4%</td>
<td>23: 99.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The number of subjects for each category is followed by the percent of their abused/nonabused group.

In view of the findings of Chapter IV regarding Dabrowski’s emotional development levels, it was interesting to consider religiosity and Dabrowski levels for the study group. No attempt to count and group subjects by religiosity while looking for evidence of self-actualization was made prior to the analysis of the case study material. In other words, the assignment to a Dabrowski level was entirely separate from the examination of religiosity. Nonetheless, the breakdown was striking.

A pattern emerged regarding religiosity and emotional development. The lowest Dabrowski level, I - “Self-Interest and Self-Preservation,” had subjects who talked about no religious or spiritual issues at all, the None group. Next, Dabrowski’s Level II, “Stereotypical Roles,” coincided with the “Conventional” stages of Kohlberg’s moral development scale. About 44% of the highly gifted adult subjects of the current study fell into this category level. People who described themselves as having a spiritual life were the only subjects not represented at the

### Table 25

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RELIGIOSITY AND DABROWSKI LEVEL</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>II/III</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>III/IV</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>IV/ V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>3*, 2</td>
<td>4*, 4</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atheist</td>
<td>2*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>2*, 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious-Spiritual</td>
<td>2*</td>
<td>1*, 1</td>
<td>1*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>1*</td>
<td>1*, 1</td>
<td>1*, 1</td>
<td>1*, 1</td>
<td>3*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Denotes subjects who reported that they were physically or emotionally abused.
Conventional level.

Finally, the majority of people who entered Level III or beyond, “Personality Transformation” to “Self-Actualization,” gave evidence of exploring spiritual issues along with other emotional, ethical, personality, and individual issues in their lives. Refer to Table 26 for a break-down of Searcher, Neutral, Nonsearcher designation along with abuse/nonabuse and the presence or absence of therapy. For ease of interpretation, subject numbers, age, DIT and Tone scores were included.

Table 27 lists all 41 subjects and was sorted by additional personal factors including presence or absence of sexual abuse, the “have you ever considered suicide?” response, number and status of marriages, sexual preference, and IQ range. The subjects numbered 1-18 wrote that they were not emotionally abused; subjects 19-41 wrote that they experienced emotional abuse.
Table 26

Highly Gifted Subjects Sorted By Dabrowski Level, Searcher Status, and Abuse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>DIT</th>
<th>Religiosity</th>
<th>Dabrowski Level</th>
<th>Searcher</th>
<th>Abuse/Therapy</th>
<th>Tone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23M</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>Atheist</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27M</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>Atheist</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Non</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18F</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td>Atheist</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>no/yes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2F</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>DK</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>no/no</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3F</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>DK</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>no/no</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24M</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>DK</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13M</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>DK</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Non</td>
<td>no/no</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8M</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>no/no</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9M</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>56.0</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>no/no</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25M</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40F</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>yes/yes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7F</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>III/IV</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>no/no</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12M</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Non</td>
<td>no/no</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10M</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Non</td>
<td>no/no</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26F</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Non</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30F</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Non</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41F</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Non</td>
<td>yes/yes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11M</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Non</td>
<td>no/no</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15F</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>55.9</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Non</td>
<td>no/no</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31F</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Non</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14M</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Non</td>
<td>no/no</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5M</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>III/IV</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>no/no</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6M</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>no/no</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20M</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28M</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Non</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29F</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Non</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22M</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>RS</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39F</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>RS</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>yes/yes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1F</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>RS</td>
<td>II/III</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>no/no</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21F</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>RS</td>
<td>II/III</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36M</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>RS</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>yes/yes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37M</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>59.6</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>II/III</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>yes/yes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38F</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>II/III</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>yes/yes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4M</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>no/no</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16M</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>74.0</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>III/IV</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>no/yes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32F</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>III/IV</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>yes/yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17F</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>74.5</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>no/yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35F</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>IV</td>
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<td>yes/yes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19F</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>82.0</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>IV/V</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33F</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>IV/V</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>yes/yes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34F/M</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>IV/V</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>yes/yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Denotes subjects for whom no valid DIT score was available.

DK=Don't Know; N=None mentioned; R=Religious; RS=Religious-Spiritual; S=Spiritual.
### Table 27

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subj #</th>
<th>RELIG.</th>
<th>DIT</th>
<th>Sex Abuse</th>
<th>Dabrowski Level</th>
<th>SUICIDE</th>
<th>Marriage Status</th>
<th>Sex Preference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1F</td>
<td>RS</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>II/III</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2F</td>
<td>DK</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>DK</td>
<td>DK</td>
<td>DK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3F</td>
<td>DK</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>Yes, I do</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5M</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>III/IV</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6M</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7F</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>NEVER</td>
<td>2, now div.</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8M</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9M</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>MINOR</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10M</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11M</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>DK</td>
<td>DK</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12M</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>BAD</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13M</td>
<td>DK</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>DK</td>
<td>DK</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14M</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15M</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>55.9</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>III/IV</td>
<td>DK</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17F</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>74.5</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>ONCE</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18F</td>
<td>ATHEIST</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>bisex wish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19F</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>IV/V</td>
<td>No longer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>bisex wish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20M</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>gay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21F</td>
<td>RS</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>II/III</td>
<td>Yes, I do</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22M</td>
<td>RS</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>No longer</td>
<td>1, now div.</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23M</td>
<td>ATHEIST</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>No longer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24M</td>
<td>DK</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>DK</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25M</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Yes, I do</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26F</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>2, now div.</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27M</td>
<td>ATHEIST</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Yes, I do</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28M</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Yes, I do</td>
<td>1, now div.</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29F</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>MINOR</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>DK</td>
<td>DK</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30F</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>DK</td>
<td>1, now div.</td>
<td>husb. gay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31F</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>MINOR</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32F</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>III/IV</td>
<td>No longer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33F</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>IV/V</td>
<td>No longer</td>
<td>1, now div.</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34F/M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>IV/V</td>
<td>No longer</td>
<td>2, now div.</td>
<td>lesbian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35F</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>MINOR</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>No longer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36M</td>
<td>RS</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37F</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>59.6</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>II/III</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38F</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>Yes, I do</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>lesbian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39F</td>
<td>RS</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>DK</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>DK</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>husb. gay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40F</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>MINOR</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>No longer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41F</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>BAD</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>DK</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>hetero</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Suicide Ideation

The contrast between the nonabused and abused groups was most vivid in respect to suicide ideation. For the entire group, 39% were at risk for suicide during at least one time in their lives. Among the 18 nonabused subjects, 16% were at risk at least once during their lives. More startling, however, 57% of the 23 highly gifted, abused subjects reported that they considered suicide at least once in their lives. Tables 28 and 29 list the answers to the question of whether or not the subject ever considered suicide. The responses were broken down by nonabused/abused and emotional levels.

Table 28

**Suicide Ideation Between Abused and Nonabused Subjects**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nonabused Subjects</th>
<th>Abused Subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>♦ 4 Don’t Know</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ 11 Never</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ 0 No longer</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ 2 Once</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ 1 Yes, I still do</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 29

**SUICIDE IDEATION AND DABROWSKI LEVEL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dabrowski Level</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>II/III</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>III/IV</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>IV/V</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>2*</td>
<td>3*</td>
<td>2*</td>
<td>1*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>2, 1*</td>
<td>5, 2*</td>
<td>1, 1*</td>
<td>2, 1*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No longer</td>
<td>3*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1*</td>
<td>1*</td>
<td>3*</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At one time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, I do</td>
<td>3*</td>
<td>1*</td>
<td>1*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Denotes subjects who reported physical or emotional abuse 41

No subjects who were suicidal at the time of completing their questionnaires were considered to be Dabrowski Level IV subjects. One suicidal subject had a DIT score of 75, an IQ in the 170+ range, and was the only person who reported no abuse in his background who claimed to be suicidal. Nonetheless, despite the high DIT score, it made no logical sense to categorize him above Level III, “Personality Transformation”. It did seem logical, however, to categorize people who had experienced suicidal feelings, but who no longer did, as having attained Level IV, “Self-Actualization”.

Marriage, Sexual Preference, Family Composition, and Sexual Abuse

Table 22 is a summary of the highly gifted group’s marital status as of 1993 compared to the general American population over 15 years of age (U.S. Bureau of the Census).
Table 30

**Highly Gifted Group Marital Status**

(Compared to American Census Data for 1993)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highly Gifted Adults (41)</th>
<th>General Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 don’t know status</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 currently married</td>
<td>70.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 currently divorced</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 divorced at least once and remarried</td>
<td>unavailable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 never married</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again, it was instructive to break down this significant life issue by abused or nonabused background. Of the 18 nonabused subjects, there were 3 whose marital status was unknown. Of the remaining 15, nine were married to their first spouse; four had divorced and remarried, and one had divorced again. Two more had divorced twice and married a third time. The following figures are for 1993.

Table 31 **Abused/Nonabused Marital Status**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nonabused Gifted Adults (18)</th>
<th>Abused Gifted Adults (23)</th>
<th>General Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 don’t know status</td>
<td>1 don’t know status</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 currently married</td>
<td>12 currently married</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 divorced at least once and remarried</td>
<td>2 divorced at least once and remarried</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 23 subjects who reported abuse presented a slightly different profile. There was no information on the marital status of one abused subject. There were 14 who married only once, but four were divorced and not remarried. That was only 43% of the abused group who had married and not divorced. Four married twice, and two later divorced again. Four of the abused subjects never married. All four of them reported childhood abuse, including one who had some minor sexual interference and another who experienced sexual abuse and wrote that she was a lesbian. One of the men, not sexually abused, reported that he was gay and never married.

There were a number of interesting factors related to sexual preference. Aside from two of the never-married people who identified themselves as a lesbian and a gay, two women who were still married to their first husbands wrote that they would be bisexual if it were socially acceptable. One married man admitted to leading a double life; he was married but had affairs with men. Two of the female subjects got divorced when their husbands decided they were gay and could not stay married to them. And finally, one of the subjects was married twice as a man before accepting the fact that he had always lived and felt like a woman. He underwent sexual reassignment surgery when in his early 30s and lived as a lesbian woman. She experienced sexual abuse, rape, when she was an adolescent boy.

Sexual abuse and sexual interference each have numerous gray areas because victims sometimes do not know that what happened was abusive and because sometimes victims only have a sense that something wrong happened. Traumatic memories, especially ones where no one was available to corroborate one’s experience, might have been repressed or only confusedly remembered. For those reasons, subjects who reported clear memories of sexual abuse were classified as sexually abused. Subjects who either thought something may have happened or who
remembered an uncomfortable encounter of a sexual nature were categorized in the study as “minor” abuse.

There were 8 victims of sexual abuse among the highly gifted subjects. An additional 5 reported sexual interference or “minor” sexual abuse. As can be seen from Table 27, the sexual abuse had varying effects on the victims; their DIT scores and Dabrowski levels covered the entire range among the study subjects.

Most of the subjects were parents. There was no information for 6 of the subjects pertaining to parenthood. Including one who adopted a child and one who was a step-parent, 25 subjects, or 61%, have children. Five people, 12%, were unable to have children and expressed great sadness and regret over the loss. An additional woman decided while in her teens that she would never have children and did not regret the decision. The four who never married also did not have children.

**Summary of Abuse Issues**

In order to make sense of the information in the preceding Chapter IV, it was necessary to address the issue of the subjects’ outlook. Part of the description of Maslow’s self-actualization includes “a more efficient perception of reality.” When that definition was combined with the fact that the majority of subjects who identified themselves as nonabused were also the same people who scored below the mean on the DIT and failed to fit the Dabrowski description of self-actualized, it seems reasonable to consider that a rigidity of thought that precludes emotional openness and exploration may be at the base. In other words, a failure to recognize that their childhoods could not possibly have been perfect may be a signal that people are unwilling or unable to change themselves. For whatever reason, the majority, although not all, of the subjects who fit this description were men.

Of the subjects who claimed no childhood abuse, 10 out of 18 rose no further than Dabrowski’s Level II: Stereotypical Roles. Although 8 gave evidence of being in Dabrowski’s Level III and IV, only one, at this point in life, appeared to have reached self-actualization. Again, the majority of the “Nonabused” subjects either had no religious or spiritual lives or were fairly traditional in their religious views. Stereotypical Roles included either following a traditional path or avoiding thinking about the choices at all. The latter reasoning helps explain the high number of “None” subjects within the reportedly nonabused group.

In contrast, of the subjects who reported abuse, many ventured into religious and spiritual territories that were not traditional or stereotypical. The point here is not that abuse makes people more adventuresome and spiritual. Indeed, it is possible that people who were abused needed to go to extraordinary lengths to get beyond self-blame and feelings of inadequacy. The group who recognized and wrote about their abusive background experiences had a larger proportion reach the higher Dabrowski levels.

Some of the more seriously abused subjects, those who experienced overt neglect, harsh, rejecting parents, sexual abuse...these subjects manifested emotional thought processes more in line with the subjects who denied experiencing any abuse. The abuse was bad enough they could not deny it; but the abuse was apparently so destructive that some of these subjects were the low-scoring, low Dabrowski level subjects who gave strong indication that they must hold onto self control for their own sense of well-being.

Of the 10 subjects who were identified as Searchers, four came from the nonabused group, that is 22.2% of the nonabused subjects. Six Searchers came from the abused group, which is 26% of that group. It became evident that abuse or nonabuse alone, or the report of abuse or nonabuse, could not adequately predict or explain a person’s ability to be open to emotional growth. The case studies made it exceptionally clear that similarly good and bad backgrounds were present in both Searchers and Nonsearchers as well as high and low DIT
scorers.

As was discussed in Chapter IV, a willingness to seek therapy showed a positive relationship to higher DIT scores. It appears likely that the openness to change that was required for one to first seek therapy and then benefit from therapy was at the root of the higher emotional development as measured by the DIT and the fit with higher Dabrowski levels.

Where suicide ideation was concerned, it appeared at first glance that nonabused subjects were less likely than abused subjects to ever consider suicide. In fact, it is probably true. The connection may be the same as with religiosity and potential for change that was associated with higher DIT scores. The higher incidence, 11 out of 16, of subjects who never considered suicide was in the nonabused group. It is possible again, however, that people who were unwilling or unable to face reality (of a less than idyllic childhood) were also unwilling to explore such radical options as ending their own lives. There appeared to be a pattern, fear or reluctance to consider change, in the subjects’ approach to these disparate issues.

Therefore, where suicide ideation was concerned, it follows that none of the “Never” answerers fell into Dabrowski’s Level IV, although 1 gave evidence of being between stages III and IV. All four of the “abused” subjects who were in Level IV and above admitted to feeling suicidal at least once in their lives. The six subjects, five from the “abused” category who still felt suicidal, wrote about severe parental rejection; four of them were actively working on growing beyond their painful backgrounds, as was evidenced by their Dabrowski Levels II/III and III.

Finally, there was a slightly higher incidence of divorce and multiple marriages in the group that reported abuse. Of the subjects who reported nontraditional sexual preferences, all but one fell into the abused subject category.

All of the conclusions related to the distinction between reported abuse versus nonabuse were unexpected and came late in the data analysis. It appears likely that the Defining Issues Test was a good tool for discerning the difference between people who accurately perceive and relate the realities of their lives and those who do not. When subjects said they had no abuse in their backgrounds but scored low for their educational or intellectual level on the DIT, it is possible they had unrecognized problems that they were currently unwilling or unable to address.
CHAPTER VI

PERCEPTIONS OF SELF BASED ON FEEDBACK FROM OTHERS

Introduction

Perceptions of self, our view of who we are, develop in the context of the words, behaviors, reactions, and treatment of our selves by those around us (Morgaine, 1994; Falk & Miller, 1998; Gross, 1998). Our “essential others,” the people we both care about and want to care about us, play a large role in reflecting, mirroring, and defining our image of ourselves (Greenspon, 1998). As we mirror the behavior and reactions of others toward us, we build an image of who we are. It follows that if we feel loved, admired, and accepted, we gain the confidence to experiment with the different parts of ourselves until we are comfortable that who we are, the whole of us, is a good thing. Conversely it follows that if the people we care about, under whose care we are, do not understand us, have time for us, like, love, accept and enjoy us, for whatever reason, we may struggle to find a self that will be loved and accepted, we may stop experimenting and growing at the point that seems to cause the least irritation or reproach in our essential others, or we may grow the way they want us to grow.

Even though degree of giftedness is significantly related to social and emotional adjustment (Janos & Robinson, 1985; Gross, 1993; Hollingworth, 1942), the degree to which the individuals are different from the expected norm affects the way significant people, e.g., parents, teachers, age-mates, in the highly gifted people’s environments react to them. In other words, it is the gifted child’s perception of the acceptance, approval, or rejection that leads to the social and emotional adjustment. Regardless of intellectual level, some children are more fortunate than others to have accepting, understanding people around them.

This chapter provides examples of how essential others affected study participants’ development of their self-images, self-concept, and most importantly, self-esteem. Self-image and self-concept each have a highly intellectual component and can be affected by not-so-essential others in the form of feedback about the child’s skills, talents, abilities, and behavior. Examples given in the following sections appear to support the idea that self-esteem is more likely to flourish in individuals when they receive love, touch, and encouragement from the people who are important to them.

Based on analysis of the present data, it is clear that unusually high intelligence does not carry with it a concomitant ability to intuit one’s role in life. Furthermore, if being highly intelligent carries with it interests and concerns that differ noticeably from those of other children, highly gifted children need help figuring out if being different is acceptable. It follows that in cases where parents and teachers are not really aware that the highly gifted child is actually an amalgam of qualities that are inter-related with the high giftedness, these significant and influential adults may do a fair amount of emotional harm.

It is the purpose of the “Perceptions of Self” section of the paper to illustrate the following: 1) highly gifted children are often subjected to hurtful emotional treatment that is a direct result of not being understood as a different sort of child, i.e., one with high giftedness; 2) sensitivities common among the highly gifted may exacerbate their reactions and responses to such treatment—high giftedness does not make the highly gifted more capable than anyone else of understanding or dealing with people who say or do hurtful things; and 3) parents of highly gifted, although usually gifted themselves, need information and support as much as any parents—being smart does not make them immune from their own emotional neglect or abuse, nor does it turn them into automatically capable parents.

Many of the subjects reported receiving little to no clear feedback on their intellectual potential. Family, school, and community adults seldom discussed the impact their intellectual
configuration might have on their ways of thinking, feeling, creating, communicating, working, or being perceived by others. Among the issues mentioned most frequently were the subjects’ difficulty understanding why they felt different, why they seemed to learn and figure things out faster than others, and yet why, quite often, they were finding little satisfaction in their schooling.

There were some study participants who were told of their tremendous potential, but who did not receive concomitant information on the affective aspects of high intelligence. Neither their parents nor their teachers seemed to know or understand how unusual intellectual ability can affect the social and emotional life of the highly gifted individual.

For the uninformed observer it is hard to believe that a highly gifted person does not recognize his or her own level of intelligence. Most subjects reported confusion over their abilities compared to the abilities of others people. Based on the analysis of the study data, lack of accurate feedback regarding intellectual level is a leading factor in the development of self-identity problems for the subjects. When children who are highly gifted look for normal positive feedback, something all children do, they often appear to be showing off or “begging for compliments.” In people who are so obviously superior intellectually, the image is unflattering and often leads instead to negative feedback. A lack of confidence in a highly gifted person is offensive to many. “If you’re so smart...” indicates a lack of understanding and empathy on the part of the person asking the question, yet it has been the basis of much negative and oblique feedback for most of the subjects.

Exceptionally bright people become acutely aware early in their lives of how much they do not know. Perhaps due to their awareness of their own fallibility, many highly gifted find it incomprehensible that they could actually be smarter than most people. It also never occurs to them that others think their intelligence is so obvious that it would be odd to mention it. It is difficult for most people to believe that the most intellectually gifted among us do not intuitively know that they, the gifted, are intellectually superior. High giftedness appears to others to be such a big advantage that it is sometimes not discussed for fear of giving the intelligent persons a superior attitude and others around them feelings of inferiority or resentment.

Most of the subjects in the study “found out” they were gifted when someone else, usually a person in a position of authority, told them they were gifted. The parents of highly gifted, too, have generally waited to be told. The parents and children alike apparently assumed that if the child were unusually bright, someone would have specifically told them, explained it to them. It is the fact that highly gifted children are different, but that the difference is not acknowledged, understood, or supported that adds difficulty to the children’s task of figuring out who they are. Even when educational adjustments would not have been made anyway, most people assume the highly gifted will do well, so why deal with their giftedness at all? A 1971 survey of school superintendents, conducted as part of the Marland Report (Marland, 1972), found that about half the school administrators indicated they had no gifted students in their schools. Often it is not an overt callousness toward giftedness but a complete lack of awareness of the issue. The price of this ignorance, whatever its source, shows in the thwarted and damaged self-image and self-esteem of highly gifted individuals.

All of the people quoted in this chapter knew they were different but were not sure what it was about themselves that made them different. Nearly 71% of the subjects wrote about either feeling different from other people or receiving confusing, negative feedback from home or school about the way they were as children. Of the 12 who wrote nothing about such treatment or feelings, 7 of them are in the “Nonabused” subject category and score below 50 on the DIT. As mentioned in Chapter V, it is very possible that a number of subjects in the Nonabused category simply do not have as clear a perception of themselves and their backgrounds as the subjects who can describe the good along with the bad.
It’s Not Ok to Be Smarter

Sometimes the confusing treatment or messages are due to the adult’s wish that the unusually capable child not feel or act superior to others. Some adults express concern for the less able children’s feelings and may assume the highly gifted child understands that concern. As the following excerpts show, many of the subjects still do not grasp how different they were from most of their classmates. Subject #33F, careers in volunteer and verbal fields, wrote,

Some saw me as a person with rare insight, others thought I was crazy. It was very hard to see it clearly. I was often confused by the variety of responses. Even reading about giftedness and having my own children identified [as gifted] was confusing. I did not see them as any smarter than I was, so could not see how they would be gifted. Seeing a list of characteristics made it very clear that I was probably in the gifted range, yet it was hard to accept. It feels like I am boasting, or somehow trying to claim something I have not earned. There is something bad about claiming to be smart, it is arrogant and boastful. I have less confusion now, but there are still beliefs that make it hard to say I am anything but average. There is nothing wrong with being average, but somehow there is an idea that there is something wrong to see yourself as anything more than average.

According to #3F, involved in volunteer and verbal careers, “My mother never wanted me to feel superior, so she always told me that I was not terribly smart, just good at taking tests. Perhaps that explains why I had such a distorted view.”

“My mother told me, as an adult,” said #19F, in verbal and computer careers, “that she didn’t praise me [as a child] because she thought that it was obvious that I was outstanding and she didn’t want me to get a swelled head.”

#23M, in verbal and technical fields, expressed the frustration he felt during his school years:

I took the usual number of aptitude-type tests, and, from the reactions of teachers and principals, did extremely well. But, nobody would tell me how well I did, or who else did well, so I could see if there was anyone I could compete with, to add some amusement to my life. The stated grounds were that I would immediately change into someone with an insufferable ego. When my mother did mention a number, it was so low as to be unbelievable to me. That just made me feel angry. I suspect, and suspected, that I was the most intelligent in the class, and releasing proof of that would make it clear that this wonderful parochial school was a total failure as teaching a moderately intelligent person of not-outstanding abilities.

#22M, in a verbal career, learned somehow that it was important to play down his intellectual abilities. “People knew I had the smarts. I did not brag or flaunt my intelligence. I tended to hide it so that others would not be offended or made uncomfortable.”

#18F, in a verbal career, wrote, “In 8th grade after taking the Differential Aptitude Test, the high school counselor told me I was bright but ‘not a genius’.” In actuality, her counselor could not possibly make such a distinction based on her 99th percentile score results; his feedback was hurtful and confusing. There was even the subtle hint that she should feel shame for possibly presuming herself to be “a genius”.

#1F, who was active in volunteer and verbal fields, noted,
It is strange but, as I think about it, there was a dichotomy of sorts. At the core, I always felt loved, but I seldom felt that anything I did was quite good enough. My parents bent over backwards not to over-praise my accomplishments so that none of my siblings were hurt. They explained it to me and I understood it intellectually, but still felt bad when there was much more fuss made over someone else’s three “A’s” than my card full. Looking back, I don’t know how they [the parents] could have done any better, but it did feed my perfectionist tendencies. Overall, I did know they believed in me, which was terribly important.

#33F, in volunteer and verbal areas, came from a very emotionally abusive home. “I heard others think I was smart at school, but heard at home that I wasn’t that good, and not to get a fat head about it. The teachers, especially in English, encouraged me, but being raised in my family just taught me that I wasn’t anything special.”

Unfortunately, negative guidance has stayed with all too many of the subjects, as with #41F, who has never really worked in a career field, who wrote, “I wanted to get an MA in psychology but was told by educators that I was the artistic type and not suited for research. My high school advisor thought I should become a model. Another teacher wanted me to act. The older women that I met socially were primarily homemakers and mothers.”

#39F, in volunteer and technical careers, also badly abused at home, said,

I received lots of mixed messages, even from my extended family. As soon as my father would ‘brag’ about me in some way, grandmother or aunts would be quick to point out something one of the distant cousins had done. It was their attempt to keep me from getting a big head, I think.

Feeling Different

Almost 54% of the subjects described problems with feeling different from others, unacceptably odd, having interests that age-mates did not share, or just generally concluding that something was seriously wrong with them, even when they did not get specifically negative feedback. Although many subjects found ways to develop friendships, several specifically mentioned feeling quite lonely. Rarely did the subjects grasp that they were intellectually different and that the intellectual difference could be at the root of their problems.

#41F, a volunteer, mentioned repeatedly that she was not told by anyone that she was gifted. It was difficult for her to interpret the input she received from others.

When I was a preschooler I was always drawing stories and did not care to socialize with other children. My mother was told that I was a genius--she cried and said she just wanted a normal child--A friend of mine in the third grade thought I was weird because I skipped all over my books and read ahead in my assignments. In high school I was considered weird because I only listened to classical music and read extra books that were not required. I felt there was something wrong with me. I was not good looking enough, I was too tall, I was awkward, I was shy, I had a lousy personality, I was weird, I wore glasses.

It is true that many people suffer from similar feelings as they are growing up and learning about themselves. What made these stories particularly salient is that giftedness, even high giftedness, did not make these individuals better able to interpret their personal worlds.
“I was aware [of being more intelligent than others], but thought it more of a ‘strangeness’ than a qualitative difference,” wrote #9M, “thus thought of myself as not fitting in. Nevertheless, it was not an extreme isolation, just a sense of being ‘peripheral’ to mainstream.”

Subject #3F, in volunteer and verbal careers, wrote nearly identically to four other men and women when she said, “I was aware of being the smartest person in the class in first grade, but even then I suspected that it was not that I was really bright but that the others were very slow.” By the fourth grade she was so much more widely read than class-mates that her viewpoints and informational background were hugely out of synch with theirs. “I did not realize then why I felt left out and thought it was due to some personality flaw.”

#36M said, “I had interests that did not seem to match up with anyone else’s interests, I did not fit in, and I sometimes felt lonely.”

“To some extent, I always felt like a social outcast,” said #21F. “Felt I was just not liked by peers--something wrong with me.”

#20M, careers 2 and 5, had a “General feeling of being ‘different’ in several ways - interests, thoughts I thought only I was having.”

According to many of the subjects, among them three who specifically referred to “social rules” they did not “get,” there were a number of reasons why they identified themselves as actually being stupid. #3F, who was quoted earlier, wrote,

I often thought I was really stupid because I couldn’t understand why teachers taught things that I thought were obvious. I thought that other children were smarter because they saw complexities that I now know never existed. Instead of realizing that I had grasped the concepts quickly or knew them already, I thought I was missing some subtle point that confused others and I was too dense to even see it.

#4M, in a technical career, stated, “I did not understand the social issues in high school life--dressing choices, etc.”

A woman who was raised in a different part of the country echoes his sentiment: “I always thought being smart was an advantage,” wrote #19F, in volunteer and computer fields. “I didn’t know why I didn’t fit in. I always felt that there were social rules that everyone but I understood.”

**Tried to Fit In**

Most of the subjects who wrote about confusing or negative feedback initially interpreted their differences as undesirable, and they used various methods for coping. Although some became hostile, some others just gave up trying to fit in or be popular and retreated into their own interests. For those who took a positive approach, school activities were the main source of social acceptance. Many boys threw themselves into sports, 35% mentioned sports as being helpful, and a similar number of girls found acceptance and normalcy through music, drama, and other school activities. It is important to remember that the female subjects attended school prior to the passage of Title IX and did not have sports available as an option for social acceptability.

#32F, careers in volunteer, verbal, and creative arts, a subject who was aware she was brighter than others, explained how she dealt with her intellectual level while in elementary school:

It was clearly dangerous to be so bright, so I was “good” instead of bright. That meant I did all the work the way I was supposed to do it, and got good grades. Since the work was so stupid most of the time, it didn’t make me feel I had to be
bright to do it. I don’t know why I thought other kids didn’t always have good grades. It literally didn’t occur to me to think they couldn’t do that easy work.

#32F, like so many highly gifted adults, did not automatically figure out what had been askew in her childhood. Getting specific feedback in the form of a cogent explanation about their intellectual level might have helped a number of subjects.

A significant number mentioned sports and activities in school as being helpful. There were six women and five men who said that school activities or scouts helped them a great deal. An example of the benefits was described by #1F, who was active in volunteer and verbal fields:

When I was in high school, like all high schools, there were cliques. I, by virtue of my course schedule, was in the “brainy” group. But, throughout my high school years I became increasingly active in the music/theater group. I accompanied the chorus, acted in plays, played in the orchestra, etc. etc. During the awards assembly of my senior year I received a number of academic awards. But the high point of the day came when one of my music friends said in astonishment, ‘Hey, I didn’t know you were smart.’ I considered that a huge compliment and was delighted I had hidden it so well. She thought I was ‘normal.’

#2F, in verbal and computer fields, wrote that she always tried hard to be accepted and liked. In junior and senior high school she got involved in “drama, pompon, and journalism to try to dispel the ‘brain’ image--but I was successful in the other areas, too, which probably made things even worse.”

Not Enough Information

Another woman summarized the experience of approximately 1/4 of the study participants. “I wish I had been encouraged and praised and put into gifted programs. I never knew I was gifted,” wrote #41F, who worked in a volunteer career area.

Despite knowing that his IQ was above 140, #13M, in a technical career, underestimated his intelligence and was given no useful feedback on the meaning of his IQ results. He recalled an incident in elementary school where “I was recognized for my rhythm ability--bouncing a ball in gym class. Very proud.”

A number of subjects reported seemingly trivial compliments from teachers as standing out and being important to them. Highly capable children are often seen as not needing encouragement and tend to receive little in school. A compliment on his ball bouncing ability may have led him to believe that if he had some other outstanding ability, someone would mention it.

#3F, who worked in volunteer and verbal fields, told about the following:

The most important turning point in my life came in my first year of high school when I got hold of my school records and learned my IQ. That information explained for me why I felt so different from others, why I had different interests, and why I had trouble understanding other people. It was a great relief.

In response to a question about whether or not they were adopted, four people wrote as #38F, who worked in a verbal career, “No, but I thought I might be because I never seemed like the rest of the family.” It would be unusual for a highly gifted child to be completely unlike others in the family (Bouchard, 1981; Herrnstein & Murray, 1994; The Economist, 1998); however, many of the parents also received confusing and psychologically damaging feedback
regarding their own intelligence. Their own struggles to fit in and make sense of their lives could have contributed to their lack of compassion, empathy, or understanding of their child’s struggles.

**Issues With Authority**

High intelligence often placed the young person in an untenable position with those in authority. Most of the subjects read well before or early in their school lives. About half were allowed, and happy for the opportunity, to read independently; the other half were forced to stay with the group. Subjects reported that being allowed to read independently made sense; being denied the opportunity was frustrating, confusing and anger-provoking. When those in authority, teachers, for example, forced children to do things that make no sense, problems with authority arose.

For example, #19F, in volunteer and computer fields, dropped out of a master’s program. She explained, “I began a master’s thesis in mass communications, but quit when the mass media department, in 1980, refused my master’s thesis topic, “Computers as a Mass Medium”. The department contended that computers were not mass media. She showed considerable confidence and circumspection for someone so young to recognize that the authority figures at her school were wrong.

In many instances, a common result of the highly gifted children’s confusion over their own intellectual level was to become disillusioned with the adults in authority, a problem which often carried into their own adulthood. #11M, in a creative arts career, described how his own disillusionment came about:

> I regard myself as ‘normal’ - this created (and creates) a problem in that I became disillusioned with people around me who constantly fell short of what I regarded as ‘their potential’ - teachers who could not, or would not, attempt to answer complex questions - people who seemed to have no passion, people who took the beauty of life for granted. I have no desire to feel exceptional.

Unfortunately, his refusal to accept that he was different, and highly intelligent and capable compared to the norm, made him depressed and intolerant of others. Here is an example of authority issues from another subject, #21F, who was in volunteer and verbal careers:

> My biggest problems with jobs is when there is rigidity, stupidity and control on the part of those in charge--and, unfortunately, these are the very type of people who tend to rise to the top in my field. I quit, I come dangerously close to quitting, or get fired...because I speak up.

As a young child in elementary school, #32F, in volunteer, verbal, and creative arts fields, had two teachers who clearly resented their bright, rambunctious student. The behavior of the teachers made it fairly evident that they assumed more maturity and intention on the girl’s part than could have been possible for a young child. High intelligence in a young child is often confused with adult circumspection. It is difficult for uninformed adults to deal effectively with highly gifted children. The subject’s own narrative best described how asynchrony of emotional and intellectual development (Silverman, 1993) caused problems:

> I was often taken to the cloak room and shaken by my second grade teacher, who left fingernail marks in my arms every time; she lost no opportunity to catch me in a mistake and ridicule me in front of the class-- “and you think you’re so
That was the year, too, when I was not allowed to take eighth grade books out of the library till my mother had me read one out loud to the librarian and she relented. Finally, my sixth grade teacher framed me, accused me of stealing records from the nurse’s office when she'd sent me there to run spelling words with a slow student, and got an announcement made over the PA system that I was a thief and a liar and no one should play with me on the playground. What had I done to her? I think I had refused to respect her, though I wasn’t a kid who talked back. I did raise my hand and correct her when she said something that wasn’t true, which was often. And as my mother said, when she refused to take my part and go to the school to defend me “you let your eyes show how you feel about her and what she does--so what do you expect?”

A number of subjects experienced competitive parents or teachers who seemed to resent the brightness and outspoken nature of the highly gifted children. In some cases, the children were seen as rude and confrontational rather than bright and inquisitive. Approximately 30% of the male subjects and 15% of the female subjects admitted that they had believed they were stupid due to the negative feedback they received from parents and teachers. The following excerpt was illustrative of the problem experienced by several of the male subjects.

#27M, who worked in a technical field, described some of his situation with teachers by saying, “I think I got no special attention, except that I sometimes got into trouble for making comments in class. One woman told me she hated me, but I don’t know why.” His questionnaires were filled with examples of his pointing out mistakes they were making to his teachers. His writing made it clear that he still did not understand what was wrong with his approach.

#35F, active in volunteer, computer, and creative arts fields, found that life at home did not help her build a coherent or positive self-identity.

I was inquisitive, which both parents interpreted as rude and challenging their authority. I was smart so they confused my ability to learn with a capability for understanding my actions in a greater context. Therefore, they attached adult motivations to even the simplest questions of a 4-year old.

#32F, quoted earlier in reference to the way she tried to fit in at school by being good, vented her anger over the confusing feedback she got at home as a child, feedback that left her depressed and shamed.

I wish I’d had more hugs and more play and fewer rules for good character. Good character meant being orderly, neat, respectful, quiet and unfailingly rational. I was messy, disorganized, challenging to authority, loud and emotional. I was also imaginative, funny, bright and loving, and if those traits had been recognized as much as the others were criticized, I would have had a very different view of myself.

Directly Negative Feedback

There are more women than men who reported liking school, and fewer women reported feelings of isolation. This was consistent with the findings of other experts in the field of gifted, including Silverman (1993), Goertz & Goertz (1962), and Webb & Meckstroth (1982). The majority of the men stated or implied that school was a waste of time from the beginning. The women, however, frequently reported that they did not realize until many years later how much school had wasted their time. Many women were angry or saddened to realize that they could
have done much more with their school years if they had known then what was really possible.

In response to a question about whether or not educators were helpful or detrimental in choosing a career path, subject #8F, in a verbal career, said, “I chose a career path despite the nuns who would never have approved. They told girls we could be nuns, mothers, teachers, or nurses.” Fully 25% of women subjects had similar observations.

Math and science courses were specifically discouraged by teachers for almost half of the female subjects. A typical example was reported by #26F, in volunteer and verbal careers: “An old male math teacher (8th gr.) patted me on the head and said, ‘Honey, you should be a cheerleader - not in advanced math.’ I quit math after that.”

#39F, in volunteer and technical fields, noted, “When I expressed interest in the subject of biochemistry to my high school guidance counselor, she was condescending and patronizing, so I figured that maybe I was not as smart as I had thought. Why else would she not tell me to pursue the interest?”

#3F, in volunteer and verbal careers, thought that teachers discriminated between the girls and the boys: “In high school I felt my abilities were ignored, although boys having lesser academic abilities than I were praised and even fawned over by the teachers.”

A number of the subjects were hurt and confused when their parents decided against opportunities for special classes, schools, or acceleration for them. It seems the parents gave little explanation to their children. #37M, in a verbal career, noted that her “Oldest sister was accelerated several grades. My mother was opposed to it for me.”

As a girl with three brothers, #19F, in volunteer and computer careers, whose IQ was the highest in the family, said she experienced differential treatment.

My older brother was to study science and math and become a doctor. My younger brother was to take over my father’s business. I was supposed to finish college before I married. [This was a particular double bind because] My father seemed happy in his business. My mother seemed desperately unhappy as a housewife.

Subject #2F, in verbal and computer fields, mentioned her younger brother who had a terrible start in first grade “which affected his whole life and self-image.” Her parents were in bankruptcy that year and were not able to attend to their younger son’s needs. “It wasn’t until he was a senior in high school that his counselor gave him the same IQ test she had given my older brother and me.” He scored in the same high gifted range as his siblings. She further noted with some sadness;

He had always been overshadowed by us, but this knowledge, that he was as smart as we were, gave him tremendous confidence and he went on to do very well in college (although it was too late for him to get into a really competitive university).

Two women specifically wrote about their parents being worried that they were too smart to find husbands. #2F, just quoted above, had an older and younger brother equally as bright as she, and “I had every opportunity my brothers did”, but her parents “were seriously worried that I was too smart and too independent to ever find a husband.” Married many years, she reported that it is a good marriage. Nonetheless, her parents’ feedback was hurtful and confusing, not helpful or illuminating.

In response to a question about whether or not any teachers seemed to pick on or resent him, subject #4M, in a technical field and who thinks he would like to be a teacher or a
philosopher instead, remembered that his “high school physics teacher down-graded me because I acted bored - I felt it was personal and unfair.” Many subjects reported similar difficulties with teachers. Even when the students knew the material before it was presented, they were expected to act interested and work hard.

“Only one [teacher picked on me],” reported #2F, in verbal and computer fields, “who never really had me in class--I learned from my counselor that this teacher tried to take some honors away from me, because I ‘already had too many’.”

In answering the Mother Inventory, the mother of #25M who was in a technical career, wrote that the schools told her year after year, “Your son is smart but lazy, and it’s your fault.” Feedback of this nature is still common in the 1990s for the families of highly gifted children (Ruf, 1990; Gross, 1994).

#23M, in verbal and technical careers, remembered his early school experiences: “I did OK in the first two grades, thought I had found a friend in a third grade teacher, who, for reasons known only to herself...undertook to quite effectively mock me for trying to color-code a chart. Thereafter, I did what it took to get by, and get grades of about B-level, which wasn’t hard at all.” Many highly gifted children refused to perform in school once they lost respect for the teachers or the coursework.

#16M, in a business career, reported this unfortunate incident:

When I was tested at the age of 9 and found to have an IQ of approximately 172 the psychologist told my parents that for me to talk to them was as frustrating as it would be for them to talk to an idiot. I think my mother was always very intimidated by this.

With the genetic component of intelligence being as strong as it is, it was first of all incorrect for the psychologist to assume the parents were significantly less intelligent than the child. Secondly, the psychologist gave the parents no significant information that could have helped them gain perspective on their son’s intellectual level and its possible personal and emotional ramifications.

#2F wrote, “When I was younger, I liked [the attention for doing well], but by high school, I felt like the other kids were tired of hearing it--I begged my math teacher not to announce during the honors assembly that I got a perfect score on my math SATs. It made me feel too much like a freak.”

The experience and attitude of the previous subject, #2F, mentioned several times earlier in the context of trying to fit in and being too smart for a husband, illustrates how difficult it is for the adults in the lives of highly gifted children to meet the needs of such children. Highly gifted children want to fit in and be accepted, they want their accomplishments recognized, but they want it done in a way that makes them feel good but not too different. The following section gives more examples of the delicate balance between praise and admiration of the child’s accomplishments, and the pressures of never being good enough. Again, these were the perceptions of the subjects.

The Pressure to Be Too Good

Nine subjects stated specifically that their obvious intelligence put them under pressure to achieve. Even though 22% of the group mentioned it as a problem with parents, nearly half the group alluded to teachers’ expectations of more common sense and maturity from them than classmates.

#14M, a businessman, said, “I never felt I could fail--sometimes I’d like to feel all right
about not being successful at everything.”

Subject #38F, in a verbal career, experienced tremendous parental pressure to achieve.

Despite the pressure to achieve high grades and be 1st in class, I also had the idea that my parents considered me smart enough to accomplish this. There were also comparisons to cousins and peers by my parents in which they saw me as better. I constantly compared myself to the peer with the highest grades and tried to beat her on the report card. I rarely did, but I still thought I was smart.

It seems her parents, and she, confused perfect grades with achievement.

In adult years, I asked [my parents] why they had set ever higher standards (I felt like I never measured up); they felt they should be providing incentive - I would have preferred more appreciation for completed accomplishments.

She added that “There were lots of hugs. Lots of ‘you’re a good girl’. Few ‘you did a good job’. Would hear their pride in my accomplishments when they reported/bragged to grandparents, etc.” She said that her parents’ emotional support seemed conditional.

I never felt loved or approved of. I often felt that if I’d only been a bit more perfect or good, then they[‘d] love me, but they never did. [The lack of parental support has been] very important - it’s caused years of depression and pain.

#7F, in volunteer, verbal, and creative arts careers, noted that “Even though I made good grades and won awards, I felt their reaction was, ‘Oh, that’s nice...’”

Echoing similar sentiments, #1F, volunteer and verbal careers, admitted she would change the way her parents treated her. “I guess I would have appreciated being told more enthusiastically that they recognized and appreciated my accomplishments. I didn’t need a big public show, but (especially during adolescence) it was hard when my achievements were downplayed.” She received more positive attention in school than most of the subjects, but her parents’ “opinions mattered most.”

#4M, in the same occupation as his father before him, a scientific/technical field, would change his childhood home by “Less emphasis on my intelligence and my potential future.” He liked elementary school “But, I got into trouble asking too many questions in second grade.”

“There was always tacit approval from father, but mother took my accomplishments for granted...” reported #31F, volunteer, verbal, and creative arts careers. The subject’s mother wrote in the Mother Inventory, in response to the question “Was there a lot of hugging, verbal expressions of love and approval?” as follows: “…approval, yes, when merited. I’m not much on physical contact even today.” This subject had a better relationship with her father than her mother. It is not clear whether the actual behavior of each parent was different in response to the subject’s accomplishments, but it is clear she perceived them differently. This is an example of the effect of an “essential other”, as explained by Greenspon (1998, p. 163):

It is not the comment itself that has the effect: a negative comment can be piercing to someone who fears it is right and tossed off by someone who knows it is not. The difference is determined by the relationship to an “essential other”: a person whose image is carried inside. Such a person provides key elements of a self-view and acts as an essential psychological nutrient. The experience of
mirroring with this person [developing one’s own self-image using feedback from another person], for example, leads to feelings of competence and self worth and the knowledge that negative comments are not likely to be true.

Because of the very intimate, close nature of the parent-child relationship, and in the context of Greenspon’s observations, it is easy to see how much of the feedback the highly gifted children received was confusing or hurtful, probably much more so than the adults involved could have expected.

Subjects from every category, abused and nonabused, remember an incident such as this written by #1F: “I recall one quarter I had an average of 100% in seventh grade science. The next quarter I had a 98%. My father asked why my science grade went down. Even though I knew he was trying to make a joke, all I could think was, ‘Nothing will ever be good enough.’”

#36M, in verbal, technical, and business careers, was a mediocre student despite his profound giftedness (IQ 185). He received no encouragement to achieve at home, in fact, his father was hostile toward higher education and school in general. Several of his high school teachers called his mother to tell her that he could have done better. Looking back, he wished his parents had encouraged him to do better, taken a stronger interest in his learning. His mother planned for him to be an engineer, recognized his talent, but was unable to encourage his school learning or the education he received in his rural community.

#7F, in volunteer, verbal, and creative arts careers, said,

My IQ (189) results led to a lot of publicity; mother often told me I was ‘different’ (read ‘better’) than other kids. My own kids, when they saw some of the old clippings asked, ‘What happened, Mom? How come you aren’t Einstein??’

#32F, volunteer, verbal, and creative arts careers, suffered from lack of approval from her parents. “Therapy made it clear that my mother’s low self-esteem (she felt ‘dumb’ compared to her oldest sister) [there was only enough money to send the oldest of the seven children to college] was visited on me and that there was nothing I did that was ever ‘good enough’.”

“I didn’t get the best grades.”

Almost 27% of the study group reported that they did not routinely earn good grades. Many highly gifted people who do not know their IQs refuse to believe they could be highly gifted because they did not get the highest grades and they found high school and college work to be difficult. One aspect of this problem is that highly gifted people learn to underachieve. They receive little to no challenging school work for 8 or more years; therefore, they do not learn and practice study skills, and they have an unrealistic expectation that if they were smart, everything would come easily to them.

A second facet of the grades-ability disparity involves more than study skills. There is a difference between teacher-made tests and professionally written, nationally normed tests. It is often the case that highly gifted children are not intellectually in sync with their teachers. Highly gifted children often do not really understand what is being asked of them. Highly gifted children continue to do well on the professionally written, nationally normed tests, however, and the teachers often assume that the highly gifted children are stubbornly refusing to “try hard” during their regular school work. The teachers may be correct, but they fail to recognize that it is difficult for a highly gifted child to “try hard” on something that is not hard. Nonetheless, effort, and attitude, is often part of a student’s final grade.

#23M, verbal and technical careers, said he did not like his parochial private high school,
but he did find his best friendships there. His experience there supported the interesting fact that valedictorians, and people who get good grades in general, are not necessarily the most innately intelligent students in a class (Subotnik & Arnold, 1994). #23M writes,

The inconveniently distant private high school I was sent to, with my aunt paying for it, had a competitive entrance examination. 600 took it, and the top 120 were admitted. I was number 3. Numbers 1 and 2 were dramatically more intelligent than me, but numbers 1,2,3,4,5 and 6 became school friends. Number 6 graduated as number 1, by dint of drudgery. I got a B average.

As with the majority of the male subjects, #23M was not challenged by his schoolwork and not cooperative enough with the teachers to get the best grades. He passed the time by reading, which also caused problems. “Being far ahead also meant that I was also far behind. I was chapters ahead in the book, but had no current memory of what the others were studying.”

Subject #9M, in a technical career, had an IQ 176, and was typical of many subjects who found school so easy in the early years that he never developed an effective study ethic. Ultimately, a lack of previously unnecessary organization and study skills catches up with even the most highly gifted and leads to a self-doubt regarding how smart or capable they really are. “Took Mensa test and for the first time knew my IQ (at age 25). That gave me confidence. I had previously experienced confusion about my abilities when I flunked out of Naval Academy, although I returned and finished the following year. Now I know why I’m ‘different’.”

He also wrote, “I got A’s in grade school; B’s in high school, so wasn’t one of the real nerdy scholars (because I didn’t push myself or have anyone else do so). I was regarded as smart but not brilliant; my own assessment, too.” Given his ISPE score and Graduate Record Exam combined score of 1540, it is highly unlikely #9M was less intellectually or academically able than any of his classmates, and yet his self-assessment, still, was lower than that. Asked how his teachers kept him busy, he replied, “They didn’t; they should!”

As a dyslexic, #12M, in technical and business careers, was treated very negatively by his teachers. “I all(sic) felt smarter than average but every day saw things that kept me from feeling extremely smart.” It was not until he reached adulthood that he was tested on the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS-R) and received an IQ score of 168. His school experience and grades gave him no clue that he was highly gifted.

#5M, in a verbal career, has a Terman Concept Mastery Test IQ of 188. He remembered an incident in second grade: “After receiving my report card, I was talking with a group of my friends when a girl came up and glanced at my report card. My grades throughout grade school can best be described as abysmal and the only thing the girl could find to say was ‘But, you’re so smart!’”

#7F, with careers in volunteer, verbal, and creative arts fields, and who was another profoundly gifted person with a Terman Record IQ of 189, said, “When I was in high school and college I ran into courses that were hard for me. I wondered if I could possibly be that smart if these courses were hard for me. Decided there had probably been a mistake, or else I’d lost the IQ somewhere along the way. Had to take Millers Analogies Test to get into [graduate school] and was pleased by the score--maybe I hadn’t lost it after all.”

I asked subjects how important their parents’ support and encouragement was to their school performance. #38F, in a verbal career, said, “Both were strict about grades--only perfect grades good enough. Both expected high achievement and motivation. A lot of pressure to be first, which I never was.” The pressure she received was much more than most of the subjects. To further explain the pressure she felt, she continued, “Mother [wanted] college for me. Father--medical school. Mother often focused on needs of the family now, and expense. I felt I could not
do more than she’d allow but also pressured by father to achieve--he’d often say education before anything including getting married or having a family.”

In high school, #11M, in a creative arts career, decided that “‘doing’ was what was important--grades were easy--but I decided to ‘do’ only what interested me--my grades fell.” He said this experience did not confuse him about his abilities, but it did lead the educators to underestimate his intellectual strengths. Again, most teachers estimate children’s intelligence based on the grades they earn. When teachers can tell that some children are highly intelligent but not earning the highest grades, the teachers’ assumption is often that the children have a bad attitude.

#36M, variously in verbal, technical and business fields, had one of the highest IQs, 185, in the study group, and eventually received an engineering, a business, and a juris doctor degree. None of the schools he attended were competitive. The only apparent positive feedback he received from his years in public schools in his community of 10,000 people was summarized by the following anecdote:

People knew that I had answers to lots of factual questions. I rarely said anything in classes, but did frequently correct science teachers when they said something that was wrong or incomplete. My eighth grade science teacher sat down a couple of times and had me finish his lectures on electricity because I would not stop correcting him. People brought me malfunctioning radios and TV’s to fix.

#36M never stood out for his grades. He received no encouragement at home to make good grades, although some teachers noticed his grade-making underachievement and expressed concern. Stated as succinctly as possible, mediocre to poor grades can confuse educators, parents, and the student. They think grades measure ability or achievement when, in fact, particularly for the highly gifted, grades often measure interest, focus, or obedience.

Lending further support to the intelligence versus grades problem were the following observations by #16M, who was in a business career:

Many of my friends were smart and there were other things to be involved in like sports and social activities. If anything, I think I was underchallenged and found an outlet in sports. This took the pressure off my parents and teachers so they didn’t push me intellectually. I don’t think many of them knew how or were too busy. I did fine (32nd out of a graduating class of 600) but nothing stunning.

In response to the question about any confusion over his giftedness, #16M wrote, “My wife has an IQ of approximately 130 [compared to his 172]. She was valedictorian of our high school class, she graduated from college with only one B, all the rest A’s. For a long time I could not distinguish between high academic achievement and giftedness. Why were my grades so much lower if I was really so much smarter? I realized that task commitment, or intrinsic motivation, or rebellion, or boredom, or defiance, or dutiful daughter syndrome can all play a part.”

#21F, in volunteer and verbal careers, had difficulty when she first went to college, like many of the other subjects. She did not question her own intelligence, but she did have to do some adjusting.

As a freshman, I rebelled (having been a high school nerd) and wound up at the end of the year with a .5 average and a loss of my out-of-state tuition scholarship. I dropped out for 1-1/2 years. When I went back my grades were mostly A’s. As a
grad student, I got more A’s than B’s.

She further noted that “I could do well with relatively less effort than I saw my classmates expending.”

**Study Habits**

The theme, “I thought I worked harder; its not that I am smarter”, was particularly common among women subjects. The theme, “He has a bad attitude”, was particularly common feedback among the male subjects.

In response to the question, “Did people know you were smart?” #18F, in a verbal career, reported,

Other kids thought I was smart, but I thought I did better and learned more because I worked harder than they were, and they were just lazy. It wasn’t ‘til I took nationally normed tests - the PSAT, ACT, and SAT - in high school that I realized I might have a natural advantage over some of my peers. But, I had other smart kids in my classes, and we’d always competed and compared our test scores on classroom subject tests.

Another woman interpreted her better school grades the same way. #33F, in volunteer and verbal fields, wrote,

I knew I was faster to pick things up, but again, I thought it was just luck. My parents made it very clear to me that I was not special in any way, and I rarely had any teachers who thought otherwise and expressed it to me. I was brainy by reputation, but I thought that was mostly because I cared about school work more than most. School was the one place where I was allowed out of the nightmare [of sexual and emotional abuse at home], and homework took me out of the way of a lot at home. My seriousness was unusual, and I was aware of that. I did not see it as being smarter than the other students, just more focused.

Often parents and teachers do not tell highly gifted children that they are smart because they do not want the child to feel or act superior. Sometimes, of course, the adults simply do not realize that the child does not know without being told. In the case of the two previous subjects, however, the conclusions they drew led them to believe they were superior due to their excellent study skills. It can be inferred that they may have felt disdainful of the other children for not working harder, when, in fact, the highly gifted children had a built in advantage. It becomes clear how difficult it is to acknowledge the child’s accomplishments and abilities and yet still teach tolerance and modesty. Sadly, children who are not given all the information often draw the wrong conclusions.

#1F, quoted numerous times earlier, wrote,

Perhaps because I spent my growing up years surrounded by very bright people [over 135 IQ ability grouped classes throughout school for her], I never really thought of myself as unusually bright. Smart, yes--exceptional, no. I assumed I was successful because I worked hard (which I did, much of the time). It was not until graduate school when I figured out that, no, this was not going to be the place when finally everyone was smarter than I was, that I became consciously aware that my abilities were quite unusual. Even now it makes me extremely
uncomfortable to write that. I wonder why?

#2F, in verbal and computer work, thought that “...the fitting in problem had more to do with a difference in motivation. I was strongly motivated to do my best in every area--most kids are not and I felt like a freak until college when I met other kids more like me.”

The difference in both attitude and behavior of the aforementioned women to the following men was clear. It is significant in that many teachers and parents have the same expectations for girls and boys. This may account for the fact that highly gifted boys are more frequently not identified for gifted programs than both highly gifted girls and moderately gifted boys and girls (Gross, 1993, pp. 263-264).

#5M, in technical and computer careers and profoundly gifted with an IQ of 188, had earnings and investments that enabled him to retire before he turned 40. Excerpts from his questionnaires could have been placed in several sections of this chapter including “Issues With Authority”, “Directly Negative Feedback”, and “I Didn’t Get the Best Grades.” He wrote,

In grade school, the teachers would constantly pick on me because I would put no effort into the assignments. The only time it had any effect was when one of the teachers decided to give me the lowest grade possible in mathematics to ‘get my attention’ and ‘convince’ me to do the assignments. The following grading period’s grade was to be based entirely upon a school system wide exam, so I aced it, and then went back to ignoring the assignments.

In high school, I was going along just fine getting poor grades in everything except science and math. Then I took a PSAT in my junior year. The school ‘discovered’ that I was ‘verbally gifted’ as well. They forced me to take Advanced Placement English in my senior year. The class was full of geeks (Yearbook Editor, Student Paper Editors and Writers, etc.) but it was the first time my English grades were above the low seventies (they had to be...the lowest grade you could get in AP English was 85).

“My teachers always resented,” continued #5M, “a ‘smart aleck’ or ‘wise guy.’ The use of these terms indicates the general attitude of my grade school teachers toward intelligence. It did not help that I took great pleasure in correcting their mistakes in as public a manner as possible.”

#5M filled his questionnaire with negative comments about school. The following story illustrated well how a misunderstanding of high giftedness can bring out the worst in teachers and leave the highly gifted young person angry, resentful, or hurt.

During my senior year in high school, my homeroom teacher and I did not get along. He had been my teacher in English in earlier years and, now that I had been unmasked as ‘verbally gifted,’ was resentful that I had never taken him or his class seriously and was approaching AP English with the same attitude. When the results of the statewide scholarship exams were released, he saw his chance to get back at me. This exam was very important to me. I was counting on the scholarship to pay for college and relieve my parents of the monetary burden. He announced the winners in class and my name was not among them. I was crushed. Following classes, I got an ‘unofficial’ copy of the test scores from the principal’s office to see what my actual score was and by how much I had missed getting the scholarship. The scores were in numerical order and I started at the bottom and
worked up. It wasn’t until I got through 600+ scores that I found my name with the third highest score in the school. I confronted him, in public, but he claimed that it was a simple oversight. I knew better. It was the closest I ever came to doing physical violence to a teacher.

Who Is Valuable to the School?
Subjects were asked about school system and community support of academic excellence. Several subjects said that there was effort made to promote each equally, although the athletes were still the heroes of students and the public in general. The vast majority, 90%, of the subjects’ responses can be summarized by quoting #30F, in volunteer and business careers: “I remember no community support or interest. Academic accomplishment was nothing compared to being on the football team. The arts were paid little attention.”

Conclusions
Highly gifted children are unusual because they are highly gifted. There are distinctive personality characteristics which accompany high giftedness, such as quick thinking and speaking, interests that are of a more intellectual nature than age-mates, and a strong need for things in their world to make sense. Highly gifted children have asynchronous development that contributes to difficulties that the adults in their lives have in knowing what to expect from the children’s behavior and understanding. Different levels of understanding and reasoning within the highly gifted children often make it difficult for them to relate to age-mates or be easily accepted by their age-mates. Highly gifted children do not automatically understand that they are different due to their high giftedness. The task of building their self-concept and identity is therefore complicated by their differences from others. The reactions and feedback from others that the highly gifted receive contribute to their perceptions of themselves and who they are, acceptable or not. The esteem in which they hold themselves is clearly affected by the way others perceive and react to them.

High giftedness is a real issue that needs to be understood by those who possess it and those who would nurture it.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Background

The backgrounds of 41 highly gifted adults were explored through analysis of case study self-reported, anonymous questionnaire responses. The primary purpose was to gain a better understanding of how the treatment and attitude from home, school, and community influence the overall developmental outcomes of highly gifted children. Specifically, was it possible to pinpoint factors critical to turning highly gifted children into productive, emotionally healthy adults?

The research was guided by an early assumption that the type of feedback the subjects receive from others is vital to their self-concept and self-esteem. For example, individuals learn about themselves, their self-concept, through their own comparisons of themselves to others and from the feedback and nurturing they receive from others. They learn whether or not to value themselves according to the feedback and nurturance they receive. It was further assumed that because high giftedness is not typical, many of the people closely involved with the subjects would be unprepared to provide them with feedback and explanations that would be helpful in guiding these children toward healthy self-concepts and self-worth.

A final consideration was the issue of how high intellectual level may inhibit or enhance the development of complex, high level emotional growth and moral reasoning. Was there evidence that the environmental effect of parents, family, school, and community contributes or detracts from the eventual achievement of good use of intellect while building an emotionally intelligent, emotionally healthy adult? As corollaries, how was emotional maturity related to either inner growth or moral reasoning growth, and if related, how was principled, high level, moral reasoning developed? How was it manifested? How common was high emotional and moral reasoning among highly gifted people?

A critical difference between this and other studies was the exploratory nature of the data gathering and analysis. According to Kram, “Theory is generated through new hypotheses and research questions that emerge as the primary data collection effort is proceeding” (p. 41). In other words, the research began with a working theory that highly gifted students need to be appropriately paced in school and placed with children who think at their own level. It was also assumed that highly gifted children need help figuring out who they are in the context of being different from so many around themselves due to their high giftedness. As the data collection and analysis proceeded, however, significant others in the child’s life, or as Greenspon calls it, “essential others” (p. 163), emerged and were considered as salient influences in the lives of the highly gifted, as well.

Conclusions and Discussion

School and Community Environment

School experiences, as emphasized in Chapter IV and detailed in the case studies, were the most similar experiences among the 41 subjects. When subjects had friends, and most of them did, their closest friends were also bright children. Many subjects had relationships with children not quite as bright as they, but with whom they shared extra-curricular interests such as athletics, music, scouts, or drama. The only subjects who listed considerable information about their problems with other students in school came from homes that were described as neglectful, hostile or rejecting. Not all students from troubled homes experienced difficulty with school friendships, however. Two subjects who came from rather positive homes, #3F and #5M, did well with other children but had some problems with teachers, both related to circumstances
where the teachers apparently resented the student.

Most subjects mentioned frustration with the academic offerings and pacing at their schools. No one experienced radical acceleration or grade skipping, and none expressed regret over it. Three girls were in full time gifted programming and a number of subjects participated in tracked classes by high school. All of those who experienced ability grouped classes enjoyed the challenge, the coursework, and fellow students. Only one woman said she regretted being in a gifted program, not due to the coursework but because she was average in the group, not a “star” anymore.

Of the several men and women who described very negative experiences at school, only one man and one woman wrote that they internalized the negative treatment and felt very bad about themselves. Both came from very negative home environments. The woman, #35F, eventually progressed emotionally away from the pain and bitterness of her past; the man, #27M, still has not.

Although there was a question on the Childhood Questionnaire for subjects to tell how their communities honored good students, most answered that it was mostly sports that received attention. Most also indicated that it did not really bother them one way or another.

The most common suggestions from the subjects for how to improve school experiences for people like themselves are as follows:

♦ There should be opportunities from kindergarten onward to work, play, and learn with other similarly advanced children. No one suggested this need be for every minute of every day.
♦ Intelligent teachers who love their subjects and students were mentioned often. Also, numerous subjects mentioned that teachers should not compete with or be hostile to bright students.
♦ A majority of the subjects mentioned a desire to be excused from subject matter that they already knew.

Family Environment

Although more than half the subjects, 56%, describe their own experiences in their childhood homes as emotionally abusive, only one subject reported that the abuse in her home drew attention from the authorities. For this reason, it is not possible to accurately compare the incidence of abuse in the homes of the highly gifted subjects to the incidence of abuse in a normative sample. In a few cases, subject childhoods included physical abuse.

The environmental and familial factors strongly affected the subjects’ sense of self-worth and general happiness in their early years. The subjects who entered their middle years as the most emotionally miserable generally came from strongly emotionally abusive backgrounds where one or both parents were hostile and rejecting. Nonetheless, there are several subjects, most notably #16M and #18F, who struggled with existentialist questions on their own despite generally supportive household environments. Of the subjects who eventually advanced to high emotional development levels, even those with background abuse, most could name at least one person who cared about them. Although a caring person from the past did not guarantee advanced emotional development, the lack of the subject’s perception of a caring person was a common factor among all subjects who exhibited great hostility and received low Tone scores. Few subjects give specific credit to any one person, group of people, or circumstances that gave them their sense of worth or happiness, although numerous people are credited with making the subject feel they must be worth something.

Career Success
The subjects were not selected for this study based on personal eminence or unusual achievement but simply by their intellectual level and age cohort. Because the subjects are all younger than 60 years old, eminence may still be in the future for a number of them. Therefore, a definitive assessment of subjects “living up to their potential” ended up being assessed primarily by whether or not the subjects themselves felt they were successful. The IQ levels of the current subjects are equivalent or superior to the mathematicians and neuro-researchers in Developing Talent in Young People (Bloom, 1985) and probably commensurate with or superior to the majority of people profiled in Cradles of Eminence (Goertzel & Goertzel, 1962) and The Early Mental Traits of Three Hundred Geniuses (Cox, 1926).

Despite the fact that 56% of the subjects experienced degrees of emotional mistreatment, or even negative, neglectful, hostile, or rejecting parents, every one of the subjects finished at least a four year college program, and all but one subject has worked at jobs requiring considerable competency. Subjects who experience educational and career success come from every type of parenting and every type of school, and also fall into all levels of emotional development. In other words, in the current study, a career choice need not preclude inner growth, and a nurturing positive childhood does not guarantee eventual inner growth.

Although all subjects in the present study who have not reached a recognizable degree of career success come from abusive backgrounds, there are many subjects categorized as abused who achieved career success. Subjects who fall into the low career success description are found at all emotional development levels. In other words, there are some formerly abused subjects who managed to grow and develop to higher emotional levels but who still are not obvious career achievers. In the context of this study it can be concluded that career success and inner self-actualization are not highly related, yet neither are they exclusive to one another.

Who Becomes Self-Actualized?

Fully 44% of the study subjects gave evidence that by their middle years they had moved at least somewhat past the developmental stage that can best be described, since most American adults are at that level, as “normal”. Most subjects who are past the normal, conventional level scored above 60 on the DIT. (Refer to Chart 2). According to Rest’s summary of group norms (see Table 3), the typical American adult averages 40 on the DIT. Both Maslow and Dabrowski postulated that most people do not progress past a conventional level of reasoning. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that the attainment of self-actualization levels by nine of the study subjects, 22%, is above the average for an unselected, random population. In fact, if the average for adults in general is 40, highly gifted, highly educated adults do more often reach higher levels of emotional and moral development than adults in general.

The most obvious conclusion of this research was that being highly gifted and over 40 years old does not guarantee high levels of emotional or moral reasoning growth. A recent article in Roeper Review addresses the topic of self-actualizing (Hall & Hansen, 20:1, pp. 22-27). The authors refer to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs: “The highest and most evolved motive is self-actualization, a healthy desire to be the best one can be.” The subjects they identified as being the most self-actualized “were intent upon doing things to make a better world; they volunteered, tutored, and gave of themselves without much concern for financial gain” (p. 24). Not often explained in conjunction with such definitions is that there is a subtle distinction between good behavior that is motivated by a need for approval, personal promotion or gain, and good behavior that is motivated by an intrinsic drive to improve things for people. For the emotionally self-actualized, receiving credit became less important than achieving results and positive change.

Analysis of the data revealed that the subtle distinction between good behavior that was motivated by a need for approval and recognition and that which was intrinsically motivated was largely identifiable by DIT score ranges. The career self-actualizers had a number of identifiable
characteristics. They had products and accomplishments, awards and busy schedules. People who were career actualizers without the inner transformation that was the hallmark of higher, more open and complex, emotional levels tended to score lower than the study group average, below about 60, on the DIT; and they also tended to be at the conventional or stereotypical stages of development, as described in Chapter IV. Their approach to making life choices and problem solving in general has been captured by this study’s terms “Nonsearcher” and “Neutral”. The data analysis looked for wording indicating that they find satisfaction and happiness in their accomplishments and tend to recognize their worth as achievers and doers. In fact, a large number of subjects at this level of development received Tone scores of 1 and 2 and led very stable lives. So, even without inner transformation, these were people who appeared to “live up to their potential.”

The self-actualizers who have experienced inner, emotional growth tended to score higher than the study group average on the DIT. The most satisfied and secure members of this group have case studies that support descriptions of Levels IV or V in Dabrowski’s emotional development schema. All such subjects gave evidence that they had not always been satisfied and secure, but that it was something they developed. High scores, generally scores over 65 on the DIT, appeared to indicate a strong potential for the highest Dabrowski levels; high DIT scorers fit the current study’s category of Searchers. When unhappiness and depression were present in high DIT scorers, it generally indicated the subject had not achieved inner, emotional self-actualization but was actively struggling with it. To use Dabrowski’s terminology, they were undergoing personality transformation and perhaps experiencing positive disintegration, as well. The unhappiness and depression should lift and become less common as the subjects move into a clearer sense of self and purpose, as in Dabrowski’s Level IV or Maslow’s final stage of emotional growth. Many call this advanced development or emotional maturity (Advanced Development Journal, 1989).

**Self-Actualization and the DIT**

The DIT was significantly correlated with Dabrowski levels in the study subjects at \( r = 0.851 \). Future research is needed to establish whether or not the DIT scores for a random group of subjects, not just highly gifted, would be indicative of the same developmental levels described in Chapter IV of this paper. The DIT scores were definitely higher for this highly gifted group than for most of the groups listed on page 47 normed for Rest’s (1993) table. The present research is the first to delve into descriptions of people who score at different levels on the DIT. Just as the scores were higher, the proportion of people who have moved beyond conventional levels was also unusually high. Based on these findings, it seems possible that advanced emotional and moral reasoning levels are more often accessible to the highly gifted than to a normal population. The fact that not all members of the study group made such progress, however, indicates that intelligence helps but does not guarantee such progress.

**Personal Factors**

Subjects who have grown emotionally beyond the normal, conventional levels of most American adults all described disappointment and confusion as a precursor to their inner changes. Apparently part of their “Personality Transformation” included a new perspective on other people, as well. Nearly all of the subjects who were described at Dabrowski Levels III/IV and above indicated good social/emotional intelligence. Analysis of the subject files and case studies indicated such emotional intelligence was deliberately and often painstakingly acquired later in life.

Only through future research can it be determined what personal, perhaps inherent, factors may contribute to eventual self-actualization in individual people. It is clear that there are identifiable characteristics present in people at different levels of development. How early they
reach a level, and whether or not they will continue to progress to the highest stages, cannot be concluded from the present study. Only one subject showed attitudes and behavior that differed significantly from his DIT results, subject #36M. He took a two year break before finishing the study and reported that he underwent significant internal changes. The questionnaire dealing with his childhood was completed at the same time as his first DIT, on which he received a 48.3.\(^3\) His clear change from probable Nonsearcher to Searcher by the time he completed the adult level inventory indicates that there are self-actualizers who did not begin life as natural Searchers. If they did not begin life, or even their adulthoods, as Searchers, that means something can happen to turn a person into a Searcher and increase the likelihood of self-actualization. What that something is did not become clear with the present data analysis.

**Why Inner Growth Matters: A Discussion**

Two considerations stand out as important when one evaluates emotional self-actualization. First, people who have reached levels of self-actualization feel good about themselves, their lives, and the world around them. They are generally hopeful and have positive attitudes toward others. They are not generally depressed and they have a natural drive to contribute through their efforts.

People who are at Kohlberg’s Level 6, “Universal Ethics,” and those who are self-actualized as in Maslow’s description, do not rely on rules or laws but recognize that most laws are good guidelines for general behavior. People trust and assume that our rules, mores and laws were designed by people who care about all of us. It is the people who fit the description of unselfish, that is, people who can look at what is truly good for and best for the most people, who fit the definition of self-actualized. They have reached a point where they intuitively know that they will be better off in life when everyone else is, too. These are the people who can say, “This is wrong,” and explain why. Something is not right or wrong because a god or a law-making body say so. It is right or wrong because of the effect it has on our lives, our relationships, our sense of security, health, and well-being. There are ripple effects to what is right and what is wrong, and self-actualized people can see them and articulate them more often and more clearly than non-self-actualized people.

**Limitations**

A number of issues limit the general usefulness of the current study. Included among them are the imprecision of the case study analysis approach, the lack of agreement in the wider community regarding what constitutes giftedness, the snapshot approach to the subjects’ assessments, the self-selection inherent in research taking volunteer subjects, and lack of more than one rater for a number of highly subjective evaluations.

The subjects in the current study participated through self-reported questionnaire responses and self-reported ability scores. The range in their intellectual levels, ages, and background experiences were large in comparison to the modest sample size. As a result, trends rather than definitive conclusions can be drawn from the present data analysis. Any attempts to categorize subjects by IQ was abandoned due to the range of testing instruments and the circumstances and ages at which the subjects were evaluated. It was assumed for the study that none of the subjects was substantially less intelligent than their submitted scores suggested; but it was further assumed that a significant number might be more intelligent than their scores suggest (Silverman, 1993).

A snapshot approach to subject analysis limits a study. Although the subjects filled out two lengthy questionnaires, most of the writing was done within a relatively short time period.

\(^3\) Subject #36M retook the *DIT* nearly 4 years after taking it the first time and after the body of this paper was completed. He scored 83.3.
Whatever stage of growth was present at the time of writing was likely reflected in the way the subjects described past and present experiences. In fact, the Tone of the subject’s writing was an assessment of the subject’s general approach and mood. The most obvious real loss in this snapshot approach is the inability to assess change, if and when it occurred, and perhaps, how it occurred.

Possibly the most critical limitation is the fact that there was only one rater analyzing huge amounts of data and selecting a qualitative, highly subjective, methodology. Additionally, the research is so very personal by nature that the reader may well question the objectivity of the researcher. In part to counter this last concern, the case studies have been included in the appendix; nonetheless, it is entirely possible some information which some would deem significant has been omitted in these summaries.

Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

Experience with this study cohort has shown me that a reasonable longitudinal study of emotional growth could begin at about age 30 and continue at five year intervals until 60 or 65 years of age. In the absence of a longitudinal study, the next best approach would be to analyze a separate younger highly gifted group and a separate older highly gifted group. The affects of historical context would likely jeopardize direct comparison, a problem that could be diminished by studying the same group longitudinally.

The current approach to advancing ethical reasoning development is through classes that include tackling dilemmas, similar to the DIT format. The current research shows that ethical development, at least as measured by the Defining Issues Test, is closely tied to emotional development. That being the case, what changes might benefit the parenting and educating of highly gifted children to maximize their emotional adjustment and growth? Also, does what works for highly gifted children work for all or most children?

A number of questions remain to be answered, and it will require further research to do so. What affects the development of the individual, not just the group? Is it possible that highly gifted children with moral and emotional development that is more advanced than their age-mates become so disillusioned with others that their own development is arrested? Also, smarter people tend to get more education than others. Why have more highly gifted women than men, at least in this study, attained advanced moral and emotional reasoning levels? Is there a minimum intellectual level associated with advanced levels of moral and emotional development? Is there a minimum age associated with advanced development?

In conclusion, to whom should the answers to these questions be presented? Who should teach and guide whom? The very nature of self-actualized growth and advanced moral reasoning may preclude either concept being understood well enough for teaching to children, young parents, or even teachers. Perhaps what parents, teachers, and children need to know is that there is the possibility of an emotional journey and it involves feelings of instability and struggle along the way. They can be taught what the typical milestones are, and what their life goals may be as well as the reasons for establishing those goals.
References


Genetic Psychology Monographs, 77, 71-86.


#1F, in both volunteer and verbal careers, was 43 when she joined the study. She earned a 3 for her tone score because, although there is no anger or bitterness, there is an underlying current of sadness. Her DIT score is 65 (group average is 57.67) and she was categorized as a Dabrowski Level II/III person, and a Neutral. She had no IQ scores but had an incredibly high Miller Analogy Test score of 97. For perspective, a 66 is considered 98th percentile by Mensa (the high IQ society).

Her mother was a housewife; her father an engineer. With five children, they were moderately comfortable. She reported no abuse and no therapy for herself. She is an introverted, private person, but as her questionnaires revealed, outgoing in her generosity and compassion toward others.

Love, acceptance, and support are crucial to the self-esteem of any child, and certainly no less for a sensitive, highly gifted child. As Silverman writes in *Counseling the Gifted and Talented* (1993, p.51), “Emotional development takes place through four external contexts - the home, the school, the community, and peer relations - as well as the internal context of the psychic milieu.”

#1F has several factors in her life that have helped her feel both a connection and a place in the world. Although she mentioned numerous times that nothing she did as a child ever seemed to be good enough, she also said, “I was very fortunate. I never had a doubt that I was loved and wanted in my home. I don’t remember if anyone actually told me they loved me but I knew they did.” Subjects who report feeling loved by their parents tend to show a general lack of resentment in their questionnaire responses.

#1F describes her family household as being like “Donna Reed’s family” [a 1950’s era television program]. She was aware that her mother sometimes felt constrained by her housewife and mother role, but took it seriously and did it well. The parents were very much devoted to each other and their children. The subject was the oldest child and active in helping with younger siblings. She was expected to “set a good example,” and she wrote that her high abilities were frequently minimized so as not to make anyone else feel bad. She was also aware that her mother was suffering from an increasing depression that was slowly making the household a less happy place for the younger children.

#1F responded to the question “Did you feel loved?” by writing,

It is strange but, as I think about it, there was a dichotomy of sorts. At the core, I always felt loved, but I seldom felt that anything I did was quite good enough. My parents bent over backwards not to over-praise my accomplishments so that none of my siblings were hurt. They explained it to me and I understood it intellectually, but still felt bad when there was much more fuss made over someone else’s three “A’s” than my card full. Looking back, I don’t know how they [the parents] could have done any better, but it did feed my perfectionist
tendencies. Overall, I did know they believed in me, which was terribly important.

Subjects from every category, abused and nonabused, remember an incident such as this written by #1F:

I recall one quarter I had an average of 100% in seventh grade science. The next quarter I had a 98%. My father asked why my science grade went down. Even though I knew he was trying to make a joke, all I could think was, ‘Nothing will ever be good enough.’

#1F admits she would change the way her parents treated her. “I guess I would have appreciated being told more enthusiastically that they recognized and appreciated my accomplishments. I didn’t need a big public show, but (especially during adolescence) it was hard when my achievements were down-played.” She received more positive attention in school than most of the subjects, but her parents’ “opinions mattered most.”

Normally mild-mannered #1F reported without hesitation that she

Despised first grade. The work was boring and I had to stand in the corner twice - once for reading books that were reserved for later in the year and once for playing the piano. Major sins, for sure! The next year our district implemented “enriched” class for high IQ students. My whole attitude toward school changed. I loved my class, loved my teacher. I remember being astonished when I (with great trepidation) asked my new teacher if she would allow me to write an extra story. I was astonished when she said she’d be delighted.

Ability grouping afforded her the opportunity to be with others during her childhood who were “on the same wavelength.” In adulthood she reports the same, “I have always had good friends. I feel very fortunate that this period of my life is the richest ever for friendships.”

I have always had close friends. Although there were some shifts during the years, I maintained many of the same friends from 2nd to 12th grade [she entered ability grouped, gifted programming in second grade]. I spent those years in advanced classes, surrounded by intellectual peers. While there were some disadvantages to the program, one key advantage was access to many interesting friends. I am still in touch with a few of them.

#1F was active in Brownies and Girl Scouts, and looking back on the experience realizes that all the girls were very bright, probably gifted. Her scouting experience had a deeper, more “real life” quality to it than school. Her school system had a strong ability grouping program during her years there, but it was disbanded shortly after her graduation. Although the quality of the classes was excellent, no teachers stand out as being particularly encouraging to their talented young students. Her parents did not interfere or offer significant guidance, a fact she referred to as “supportive.” #1F limited her own career choices by planning to meld a career with
motherhood. She was always at the top of her classes and scored highest on the group standardized tests.

While I was frequently told, ‘You can be anything you want,’ I was not pushed to explore diverse career options. I suspect everyone assumed I was smart enough to figure it out on my own, which certainly wasn’t true when I was an adolescent.

In answer to the question “Have you experienced much confusion or uncertainty in life regarding whether or not you really are smart compared to the majority of people?” #1F answered,

Absolutely. I’ve always felt above average but not exceptional. This was probably exacerbated by the need to go to a local, state college. I did well (it was much easier than our advanced high school programs had been) but I assumed it was because all the really smart people were at better schools. If I’d gone to Vassar, surely I would have been average at best. It is only recently that I have begun to realize I probably would have done well at Vassar, too. While you will likely look at my highest score [for this study], I still assume that the lowest score of any of my tests probably reflects my true ability and anything else is astute test-taking or good luck. I wonder which is true?

#1F was one of a handful of subjects who was in a full-time gifted program through most of her schooling.

There was a real difference in comfort level between friends who had come up through the advanced classes and other friends. Part of it was just longevity - - I’d known most of the people since second or third grade. Part of it, though, was safety. Those people already knew me so I could be myself--there was no point in trying to hide the fact that I was smart.

#1F added,

Perhaps because I spent my growing up years surrounded by very bright people [over 135 IQ ability grouped classes throughout school for her], I never really thought of myself as unusually bright. Smart, yes-- exceptional, no. I assumed I was successful because I worked hard (which I did, much of the time). It was not until graduate school when I figured out that, no, this was not going to be the place when finally everyone was smarter than I was, that I became consciously aware that my abilities were quite unusual. Even now it makes me extremely uncomfortable to write that. I wonder why?

After writing about whether or not she fit in or was popular in school, #1F remembered something else:

When I was in high school, like all high schools, there were cliques. I, by virtue of
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Highly Gifted Adult Study

my course schedule, was in the “brainy” group. But, throughout my high school years I became increasingly active in the music/theater group. I accompanied the chorus, acted in plays, played in the orchestra, etc. etc. During the awards assembly of my senior year I received a number of academic awards. But the high point of the day came when one of my music friends said in astonishment, ‘Hey, I didn’t know you were smart.’ I considered that a huge compliment and was delighted I had hidden it so well. She thought I was ‘normal.’

She found a strong, positive influence in her doctoral advisor.

When he first suggested that someone might publish something I’d written (much less that someone might want to read it), I thought he was crazy. I looked at my Ph.D. program as a route to [her career], never really thinking about making contributions to the field. His confidence in my abilities (and those of his other students) and his constant challenges to do things we felt were beyond our knowledge and skills were enormously influential.

#1F came from a family that had no women who had attended college. Nonetheless, her parents made it clear that they expected all their children to go to college after high school. An interesting twist in her family is that her parents paid more for their daughters and had their sons take out loans.

I discovered that my parents still had enough of the old world in them that they insisted their girls not have college loans. They did not want them bringing debts into a marriage (presumably to be paid off by their husbands!) It was OK for my brothers to have debts, apparently.

#1F exemplifies the thinking of many of the women subjects when she states, “I consciously chose a career (and eliminated others) based on my desire to be a good mother. While I was frequently told ‘you can be anything you want,’ I was not pushed to explore diverse career options.”

Subject #1F wanted to be a good mother like her own mother, but she also wanted to have the fulfilling career that her own mother seemed to have needed but missed. She and her husband, however, were unable to have children. This created terrible sadness, grief, and soul-searching for her. She expresses her need for generativity and contribution through volunteer and career work with children and young people.

My religion is an extremely important influence in my life. It shapes how I view myself, my family, my students, my life. My belief in the eternal nature and infinite potential of human beings is probably the most important factor in my priorities and decision making.

She repeatedly mentions her husband as one of her best friends, a great intellectual and emotional support to her, and her first choice for someone with whom to do things.

The final survey question asked subjects what they would tell a highly gifted young
person who thinks life may not matter or be worth living. #1F, whose other great loss in life was the suicide of someone she cared very much about, wrote eloquently. She said she would first find out the issues, but then explain her own philosophy:

I think one of the dangers of intellectual strength is that it fits the old saying about the man with a hammer treating everything around him as a nail. People with great intellectual strength easily become accustomed to using it to solve the problems around them. The problem is, intellect is only one part of what makes us human. Sometimes it isn’t the tool we need. If we expect the world to make sense, using here-and-now judgments as our guide, we are bound to be disappointed. Sometimes we don’t need intellectual understanding. Sometimes we need empathy, or courage, or wisdom or aesthetic appreciation or spirituality. I believe (as you can tell) that it helps enormously to have a perspective that encompasses more than this life. Even without that, I think it is possible to come to understand that the world has many dimensions. Cognitive processes are only one small piece of it. As we come to appreciate and value things that can bring joy without necessarily being understandable or highly rewarded (a colored leaf, a loving friend, the opportunity to help) life is much richer.

#2F, in verbal and computer related careers, was 44 when she began the study. She returned her childhood but not her adult level questionnaire; therefore, I had less information than usual for making categorization decisions. She qualified for the study with a California Test of Mental Maturity (CTMM) of 155 and several perfect or near-perfect SAT scores. Her DIT score is 61.7, a high Tone score of 1, and she is a Neutral categorized in Dabrowski’s Level II: Stereotypical Roles and Kohlberg’s Conventional Level. She reported no abuse and no therapy.

Although alcoholism affects an entire family, she is classified as not emotionally abused because she said she was not. There were a number of mitigating factors in her life. Her father was an active alcoholic until he joined AA when the subject was 12 years old. “My mother was a nervous wreck trying to deal with it--they went bankrupt because of it--my role was giving everyone something good to think about and cheering up my mom. Fortunately I had 4 involved grandparents who gave me the stability, security, love and affection that I needed.” She admits to having a great need to please others and to be accepted by others; these, however, are her only areas of sadness or concern.

Both parents graduated from college; her mother worked in real estate, and her father taught elementary school and was in real estate work, too. Her overall tone is completely positive. When growing up she had a number of close friends, received much physical and verbal affection from her mother, and a good amount from her father and all four grandparents. Her mother completed the parent inventory and took the DIT. The mother’s score is 33. She has an older and younger brother equally as bright as she, and “I had every opportunity my brothers did,” but her parents “were seriously worried that I was too smart and too independent to ever find a husband.” She has been married many years and reports that it is a good marriage. Nonetheless, her parents’ feedback was hurtful and confusing, not helpful or illuminating.

#2F feels that she was encouraged “to shoot for the stars” repeatedly by teachers during her school years. Family members, educators, even some community members were impressed
Subject #2F mentioned her younger brother who had a terrible start in first grade “which affected his whole life and self-image.” Her parents were in bankruptcy that year and were not able to attend to their younger son’s needs. “It wasn’t until he was a senior in high school that his counselor gave him the same IQ test she had given my older brother and me.” He scored in the same high gifted range as his siblings. She further noted with some sadness;

He had always been overshadowed by us, but this knowledge, that he was as smart as we were, gave him tremendous confidence and he went on to do very well in college (although it was too late for him to get into a really competitive university.)

#2F thinks that “…the fitting in problem had more to do with a difference in motivation. I was strongly motivated to do my best in every area--most kids are not and I felt like a freak until college when I met other kids more like me.”

Good friendships with similarly bright children have a noticeably positive affect on highly gifted children (Webb, Meckstroth & Tolan, 1985; Gross, 1993). #2F was in a number of honors and ability grouped classes during elementary and high school. She found friends and acceptance in a number of these classes. A number of students who were “not as motivated to try hard” picked on her, teased her, and seemed to resent her. Teachers were sometimes another matter. “Only one [teacher picked on me],” she reported, “who never really had me in class--I learned from my counselor that this teacher tried to take some honors away from me, because I ‘already had too many’.”

#2F wrote, “When I was younger, I liked [the attention for doing well], but by high school, I felt like the other kids were tired of hearing it--I begged my math teacher not to announce during the honors assembly that I got a perfect score on my math SATs. It made me feel too much like a freak.” She always tried hard to be accepted and liked. In junior and senior high school she got involved in “drama, pompon, and journalism to try to dispel the ‘brain’ image--but I was successful in the other areas, too, which probably made things even worse.”

Friends made high school bearable. In college I had different talents and interests, but most of us at [top-rated college] were highly motivated. I began to realize that I was also a fun person and that I could relax and be myself with these people - that finally, they understood me...

#2F did not submit an adult level inventory so it is difficult to surmise her views on any further topics such as life’s value.

#3F, with volunteer and verbal careers, earned both a 1 Tone score and a categorization of Neutral. She was 43 when she participated in the study. She submitted a school group test score result of 145+, putting her in the highly gifted range. Her 65 DIT score places her in Kohlberg’s Conventional stages, and her questionnaire answers indicate that she is operating at Dabrowski’s Level II at this point in her life. She claimed no abuse and says she has not sought therapy.
She grew up in a professional family in a poor, rural area in the southern United States. Although an 8 years older brother bullied her quite badly and she also felt left on her own by her parents, she says her parents were loving, kind, nurturing, and supportive. #3F was “hugged and kissed a lot by my parents. They frequently told me that they loved me. My sister [11 years older] was also fairly affectionate. My brother [8 years older, high school football star, and a mediocre student] was mean and competitive.”

Her older sister and a woman neighbor played a large role in her nurturing. Her mother was a full-time high school teacher and did not spend much time with the subject. The older sister shared her own learning with little sister and contributed greatly to her actual education. Her family was geographically isolated from any possible age-mate friends, although the subject always had at least one best friend in school. She described the importance of the neighbor and older sister.

From the time I was 4 or 5 years old I considered a neighbor who was my mother’s age to be a very special best friend; I still consider her a best friend and she has become a good friend to my children as well. I spent more time after school hours with her than with children until I reached high school.

Her sister, also, became a mentor to her. She said,

I wish my parents had been more alert to what was going on in my life and with my education. They generally had a “hands-off” parenting style and seemed to believe that it was impossible for their children to have problems. I could have used educational and career guidance. One thing that helped my reading was the fact that my sister was in college by the time I was 7. She brought home books she read for her literature classes and I read them (not that I understood everything!). She also took me to libraries, including her college library.

#3F wrote, “I read well in first grade. I think I read before that, but my mother had the idea that it was detrimental for children to read before first grade and she vigorously discouraged any attempts to read.” She described the lack of books available in her home, no book stores in town, and only comic books available to her. Even at school, the library in the small, rural southern town had few books. Even as an adult she is angry about being deprived of the opportunity to read when she was younger.

She described numerous things about her childhood that angered and confused her. According to #3F,

My mother never wanted me to feel superior, so she always told me that I was not terribly smart, just good at taking tests. Perhaps that explains why I had such a distorted view.

The most important turning point in my life came in my first year of high school when I got hold of my school records and learned my IQ. That information explained for me why I felt so different from others, why I had different interests, and why I had trouble understanding other people. It was a great relief.
Later #3F wrote that she snooped in her school files when she was in high school and learned her IQ, a ceiling score of 145+ on a group test. “When I told my mother, she immediately proclaimed me a genius and said that it was a horrible thing because everyone knew that geniuses became crazy. To date, I have been quite successful at staying out of mental institutions!”

#3F said that the best year of her life was when she was in 6th grade and her classes were ability grouped. The curriculum was still relatively unchallenging, but it was better. The other children in the class were more interesting to her, also. She also noted that “The only subject that school helped me with was math. In high school I did have two excellent math teachers. I would not have learned math on my own as I had learned reading and writing by reading good literature.”

Subject #3F had a great deal to say on her own confusion regarding where she fit. “I was aware of being the smartest person in the class in first grade, but even then I suspected that it was not that I was really bright but that the others were very slow.” By the fourth grade she was so widely read that “I did not realize then why I felt left out and thought it was due to some personality flaw.”

I often thought I was really stupid because I couldn’t understand why teachers taught things that I thought were obvious. I thought that other children were smarter because they saw complexities that I now know never existed. I had a difficult time understanding other children. It never occurred to me that I felt different because I was ahead of them intellectually. For example, in class they would ask questions about what the teacher was saying. I thought what the teacher was saying was so obvious that it needed no explanation - yet there were kids who kept asking for more explanations. Instead of realizing that I had grasped the concepts quickly or knew them already, I thought I was missing some subtle point that confused others and I was too dense to even see it.

#3F also said she thought that teachers discriminated between the girls and the boys: “In high school I felt my abilities were ignored, although boys having lesser academic abilities than I were praised and even fawned over by the teachers.” She gave great detail about her difficulties in high school.

In high school, I took matters into my own hands and decided that I would graduate early. You can’t imagine what resistance my idea was met with by the school. Every time the school officials had an opportunity to put me down, they did. I was not allowed to participate in certain honorary programs, such as Girls State; I was not allowed to take the PSAT; I was not presented my National Honor Society awards with the other students; I could not participate in the National Merit Exam. The school officials never once addressed my question of what worthwhile classes they would have for my fourth year in school. The only classes left for me were study hall, home economics, advanced bookkeeping, and intermediate typing. [She went to summer school two summers].
When it became evident to people that I would be graduating early and would be named salutatorian, no one congratulated me. On the contrary, people sought out my mother [a teacher in the high school] to tell her how horrible it was that I took the honor away from someone who ‘deserved’ it. My mother did not fail to point out that she thought I ‘deserved’ it.

Although contacted twice after sending her childhood inventory, #3F did not send an adult questionnaire. She mentioned marrying a wonderful man shortly after college graduation and said she is a full-time mother now. There is no further information.

Subject #4M, in a technical professional career, was 47 when he joined the study. He submitted a Stanford-Binet IQ test result of 178, putting him the exceptionally to profoundly gifted intelligence range. He has a low Tone score of 4 and a high DIT score of 75. He is a Searcher who has spent a great deal of time thinking about who he is and his place in the bigger picture of the world. He is categorized at Dabrowski Level III. He reported no abuse and no therapy for himself.

#4M has followed the same career path in the same small town as his father. His mother was a housewife and part-time bookkeeper. Both parents were first generation immigrants to the United States from Eastern Europe. Both of the parents were dedicated to each other and their children. His mother is 20 years younger than his father. Although the household was stereotypically patriarchal for both the times and the country of origin, the subject states that the children were treated equally and there was no sexism. #4M reported a high level of affection and approval with kisses goodnight and good-bye and “lots of hugging” from his parents when he was a child.

His parents put a great deal of emphasis on his intelligence, which bothered him somewhat. They thought he should go into physics rather than [his father’s profession] because he had a strong interest in it from early childhood. He did not decide on his career until he was 22 years old. He made that point clearly in his questionnaires as though he was afraid it would look as though his parents pressured him. Now in his late 40s he realizes he might have found physics a more interesting career choice.

“Yes [I liked school], but misunderstood sometimes what a teacher expected of me; I often followed my own interests,” answered #4M in reference to his feelings about elementary school. In his ungrouped elementary classes he felt “slightly superior, but felt “very similar in advanced accelerated classes in junior and senior high.” He says that even as an adult, “I have often felt uncertain if I am smarter than any particular individual I meet or deal with.”

#4M would change his childhood home by “Less emphasis on my intelligence and my potential future.” He liked elementary school “But, I got into trouble asking too many questions in second grade.”

In response to a question about whether or not any teachers seemed to pick on or resent him, #4M, who now thinks he would like to be a teacher or a philosopher instead of his current career, remembered that his “high school physics teacher down-graded me because I acted bored--I felt it was personal and unfair.” Many subjects reported similar difficulties with teachers. Even when the students knew the material, they were expected to act interested and work hard.

No school or community members stand out as being particularly helpful or influential in
the early years for #4M. He always had some friends in his own age group, participated in some tracked classes, but spent so much of his time reading what interested him that he often performed only slightly above average in school. Although he mentions no particular incidents, it is clear he has been introspective most of his life. He was raised in a church but does not mention religious or spiritual issues in any depth.

#4M thinks people thought he was a “nice guy but slightly odd.” He added specifically that “I did not understand the social issues in high school life--dressing choices, etc.”

Early in adulthood he began transcendental meditation and still practices it daily. He reads widely, exercises by running, and thinks he made an excellent marriage choice. He stated several times that he loves his three children and dedicates a lot of time to them, but wishes he had more patience. His professional work is not intellectually challenging, but he feels stuck in it primarily due to obligation.

#4M earned a low tone score of 4 because he brought up several topics that indicated he felt unfulfilled and lonely. As a small town professional he is in a fairly solitary position with few intellectual peers. Although his wife would easily qualify for this study (with an IQ about 25 points below his, however), he said, “Wife - compatible, but do not share intellectual interest; she is less intellectually oriented.” Asked if he confides in friends, he answered, “No except 2 old friends and wife.” Asked if he usually has had friends in whom to confide, “Yes, until into present adult situation (profession and family).” In reference to the importance of friendships in his life: “Very important; I call and write to my old best friends once or twice a month; I miss having close.” During college and professional school he had no difficulty finding good friends, “but since after training I have made no close friends.”

#4M, admitted to a family history of depression and added, “I often have suicidal feelings when I am frustrated but am ‘used to it’ - I keep going and the feeling resolves within hours.” His own advice to a highly gifted young person that life does matter and is worth it:

There is magic in the universe and in people; use your intellect to see and feel the magic and you will feel more alive --- this makes the doubts vanish as quickly water drops on the hot skillet.

#5M, in a technical and verbal career, was 46 when he participated in the study. An underlying current of sadness and loneliness earned him a tone score of 3. He submitted a Terman Concept Mastery Test score of 188. He is in the profoundly gifted range. He received a DIT score of 73.3, gave evidence of being a Searcher, and is placed in the Dabrowski III/IV Level. He, too, reported no abuse and no therapy.

#5M’s parents both graduated from high school. His mother was a housewife and a volunteer foster parent for all of the subject’s childhood. A number of the foster children were quite troublesome and the subject often resented their intrusion. His father worked as an office worker, salesman, security guard, etc. He has high confidence and a tone of playfulness, a key to which may be this statement, “I was the apple of my mother’s eye. My relationship with my father was good but not affectionate.” Through conservative spending and good investing, he retired from his main career, one with high technical responsibility, in his early 40s. Interestingly, he got the initial job by answering a newspaper ad. He did not bother to turn in a dissertation for his Ph.D. because he felt he was already done. People from nonabused
backgrounds show more of this type of confidence. There was sexism in the home that favored
him. His sister was not expected to go to college and did not. He believes she may be highly
gifted. He says, “I am fulfilled. I have never felt lonely (I can keep myself entertained). He also
says he “has a number of friends from my days in the Navy with whom I remain in contact and
see as often as time and distance permits.”

#5M felt loved and favored by his mother, has friends with whom he keeps in touch
regularly, has a good marriage, and was as successful as he had hoped to be in his career, retired
early and does what he enjoys. His preferred use of free time: “I prefer to use my free time for
my own interests and they are best done alone.” The importance of personal friendships in life
brought this response: “Not very important.” His response to “Have you had much trouble
finding really good friends?” was “Yes. Most people are idiots.” His most mellow responses deal
with the sadness he and his wife shared over a stillborn child and their subsequent inability to be
parents. He stated that his education and training were unsatisfactory. “I was never challenged to
my full potential by any education or training.”

He remembered an incident in second grade: “After receiving my report card, I was
talking with a group of my friends when a girl came up and glanced at my report card. My grades
throughout grade school can best be described as abysmal and the only thing the girl could find
to say was ‘But, you’re so smart!’”

#5M, experienced no ability grouped classes until late high school. By comparing him to
subjects in the profoundly gifted category described by Cox (1926) and Hollingworth (1942), it
appears certain this subject falls into that category, as well. Such high intelligence necessitates a
specialized program of pacing and materials as well as ability grouping. He got none, ever.

Subject #5M did not seem confused about school or his place in it. He seems to have
been born wise, albeit irreverent. For example, “I don’t think I ever seriously considered my
school performance in terms of ‘satisfied/not satisfied.’ School, especially grade school, was
irrelevant to my life. It was simply a place that wasted my time and prevented me from doing
those things that interested me.”

#5M wrote,

In grade school, the teachers would constantly pick on me because I would put no
effort into the assignments. The only time it had any effect was when one of the
teachers decided to give me the lowest grade possible in mathematics to ‘get my
attention’ and ‘convince’ me to do the assignments. The following grading
period’s grade was to be based entirely upon a school system wide exam, so I
aced it, and then went back to ignoring the assignments.

In high school, I was going along just fine getting poor grades in everything except science and math. Then I took a PSAT in my junior year. The school ‘discovered’ that I was ‘verbally gifted’ as well. They forced me to take Advanced Placement English in my senior year. The class was full of geeks (Yearbook Editor, Student Paper Editors and Writers, etc.) but it was the first time my English grades were above the low seventies (they had to be... the lowest grade you could get in AP English was 85).

My teachers always resented,” continued #5M, a ‘smart aleck’ or ‘wise guy.’ The use of these terms indicates the general attitude of my grade school teachers toward intelligence. It did not help that I took great pleasure in correcting their mistakes in as public a manner as possible.” #5M filled his questionnaire with negative comments about school. The following story illustrates well how a misunderstanding of high giftedness can bring out the worst in teachers and leave the highly gifted young person angry, resentful, or hurt.

During my senior year in high school, my homeroom teacher and I did not get along. He had been my teacher in English in earlier years and, now that I had been unmasked as ‘verbally gifted,’ was resentful that I had never taken him or his class seriously and was approaching AP English with the same attitude. When the results of the statewide scholarship exams were released, he saw his chance to get back at me. This exam was very important to me. I was counting on the scholarship to pay for college and relieve my parents of the monetary burden. He announced the winners in class and my name was not among them. I was crushed. Following classes, I got an ‘unofficial’ copy of the test scores from the principal’s office to see what my actual score was and by how much I had missed getting the scholarship. The scores were in numerical order and I started at the bottom and worked up. It wasn’t until I got through 600+ scores that I found my name with the third highest score in the school. I confronted him, in public, but he claimed that it was a simple oversight. I knew better. It was the closest I ever came to doing physical violence to a teacher.

He found that it was an advantage for his scientific future that none of his grade school teachers was capable of teaching science. “The major positive aspect of the experience was that no sciences were taught until the seventh or eighth grades. This allowed me to study the subjects on my own and I was not turned off to the material. In high school, the brothers [Catholic schools] actually enjoyed the sciences and so did I.”

Although #5M often sounds brusque, he gives evidence of being quite private and highly introspective. As with all the subjects in this study, he reads constantly and widely. He also seems to experience frequent, short-lived positive disintegrations as a normal part of his life. Retired by his early 40s, it would not be surprising to find he has already embarked on a totally new career in a totally new field. He said he is leaving his options open, certainly something one would expect to hear a Searcher say.
#5M, has never felt suicidal. His advice to a troubled young person would be: “There is no intrinsic value or worth to life, life just is. You must infuse life with value and meaning. If you don’t feel up to the job, resign.” Everything he wrote indicates that he fully understands that you must find your own answers to life’s big questions.

#6M, in verbal and business careers, was 42 when he joined the research study. He has with a 3 tone score for sounding “flat” affectively, and is a Neutral because although he never revealed strong feelings or opinions about anything, he also did not try to make things sound better than they are. Like the five previous subjects, he is listed as Nonabused and received no therapy. He is categorized at Dabrowski Level II, and with a DIT score of 51.7 falls into the Kohlberg Conventional Level, as well. He submitted a Stanford-Binet IQ score of 155, clearly in the highly gifted range.

He was raised in a suburban area of the northeast United States by his teacher mother and personnel/human relations manager father. He claims there was a high level of affection in the home but more harsh than gentle discipline. His father often drank to excess and was medically disabled by a heart attack when the subject was in high school. All of this information is written in two to three word phrases and the subject gives no elaboration.

#6M felt popular in school but never had a “best” friend. He was big and tall, athletic to the point of being all-state in two sports, and the smartest kid in school. He makes no complaints about school and enjoyed the sports and social activities. He said the best part of school was, “Athletics. Teamwork. Teammates. Working hard with folks toward a goal.” I asked how teachers kept him busy, and he said, “Let me read [in elementary]. In junior and senior high school the class was grouped in sections. I was always in the advanced college prep section.” Teachers allowed him to read when he finished school work before others; and he liked that. He keeps in close contact with good friends from his [professional school] days, but does not confide in anyone. He has no close friends at work, but he feels he is liked by co-workers.

He and his wife had been married nearly 10 years before they had children. He received a major promotion in his [professional field] recently, just as his second child started school. His love for his children seems to be precipitating a great deal of concern and discomfort for him regarding his work schedule, as he states that he has become dissatisfied with his career and feels he would enjoy coaching sports for children or even being a teacher more than being in his current demanding business profession.

#6M said that he has thought about suicide but not very seriously. His advice to young people? “Try to make a difference. You can help others.”

#7F, in volunteer, verbal, and creative arts careers. She earned a 65 on the DIT, a high moderate score for the group, and appears to operate between Kohlberg’s Conventional and Postconventional Levels, as well as Dabrowski’s Levels III/IV. She got a 4 tone score because even though she was nearly 60 when she filled out the surveys, she still sounds sad, even angry, with the way her childhood was handled. She is another subject whose IQ puts her in the profoundly gifted category, having qualified for the study with a Stanford-Binet deviation score of 189. She and her family were told the score, it was even publicized, but they never received helpful feedback as to its implications for her education or social life. She is classified as Neutral, and wrote that she does not come from an abused background and has not had therapy.

#7F was raised by her housewife mother, who had one year of college, and her father who worked as an engineer. Her parents were always gentle and affectionate, “as much as they
could be. In later years (adolescence) mother became an alcoholic and was seldom ‘there’ for me. Father was an only child and quite self-centered and needed attention.” #7F was the youngest of three so was alone with her parents by the time she entered adolescence. It seems her parents were free-thinkers where organized religion is concerned: “Nominally Methodist, but parents walked out of Congregational Church once when minister spoke against some parents letting their children play cards (I was the child). They never went back.”

Terman (1947) assessed, in *The Gifted Child Grows Up*, the play and learning interests of his large California study group. The play and activity interests of highly gifted children differ considerably from those of age-mates. The interests of highly gifted girls differ more from average girls than do the interests between average and gifted boys. This documented tendency can leave the profoundly gifted girl in a heterogeneously grouped classroom feeling quite alone and even odd. #7F observes,

> At both elementary and high school levels, I had different interests than classmates. I wasn’t always aware of being brighter, especially in elementary school. Ambition at age 11 was to be an archeologist, geologist, or astronomer - quite different from classmates. But, in high school, I had no plans...

She had teachers who left impressions on her, some good, some bad. Her high school French teacher was supportive and encouraging. There is no one else she credits with mentoring her or offering her guidance. “I was an extremely sensitive child, and so a harsh word made a deep impression. 3rd grade teacher scolded me for putting red handles on the pails in a black and white picture we were supposed to draw. 4th grade teacher scolded for going ahead in the reading book.” Common problems for gifted children; commonly misinformed behaviors on the part of the teachers.

She said, “Thinking back, I guess I went ‘underground’ fairly early. Felt different because my mother told me I was different. Also, was often the ‘new kid.’

#7F felt somewhat popular but never put down roots because her family moved about ten times before she was 12 years old. The moves did not affect her one way or another academically because she was misplaced at grade level no matter where she was. Her final move took her from an excellent school to one she considers substandard, though. Even with her incredibly high ability she found herself to be inadequately prepared when she attended the state university. The frequent moves made it impossible to form significant friendships, however, and added to her sense of being “different”. Happily, she did have a good friend, “One I still keep in touch with from 2nd grade! Had others, too, one at a time.”

#7F said that her “Father influenced me to go to his school [large state university when she felt she needed a small liberal arts college]. Kept asking me what I wanted to do, and when I didn’t know, kept asking, ‘Why don’t you know? I knew when I was 12 years old what I wanted to do!’” Many of the subjects noted that adults assumed such bright children do not need guidance.

She noted that “Even though I made good grades and won awards, I felt their reaction was, ‘Oh, that’s nice...’”

“When I was in high school and college I ran into courses that were hard for me. I wondered if I could possibly be that smart if these courses were hard for me. Decided there had
probably been a mistake, or else I’d lost the IQ somewhere along the way. Had to take Millers Analogies Test to get into [graduate school] and was pleased by the score--maybe I hadn’t lost it after all.”

Her description of the benign neglect she received from her family, and by inference, the schools and community as well, sums up her awareness and sadness at the many lost opportunities:

My parents didn’t seem to understand that, as a gifted child, I had needs. For example, when I was about 10, I wanted to be an archeologist, geologist, or astronomer. At the time we were living across the street from a college campus; my sister was a student there, and had many friends; but no one ever thought to take me to look through the telescope or see any of the archeological or geological exhibits that were available. Around the same time, I wanted a microscope, so they gave me an old one of my brother’s … which was broken and useless. I really regret that the family was so bound up in its own concerns they never thought to nourish my interests. Their attitude seemed to be “Oh, [she] will do just fine.”

#7F did not have many friends in college, and she has not made many friendship connections in her career position. “No, [fellow workers in career field] aren’t particularly intellectual - I’m on a different wavelength and subscribe to different values.” She writes that she is lonely. Although her first marriage ended after 9 years, she feels she is intellectually compatible with her second husband, whose IQ is 170+, “our talents neatly dovetail”, to whom she has been married for about 30 years.

#7F usually has at least one friend in whom she can confide. “Spend most free time with husband…we really do enjoy each other’s company.” She says that friendships have not been “that important (outside of spouse).”

She does not believe people feel close to her. “No. I went into group therapy about 20 years ago specifically to find out what about me put people off. I really wanted feedback, but I didn’t get any.” The second husband and she met in graduate school, and she describes the intellectual compatibility they have as a big plus in her life.

#7F has been in the same career for about 20 years. Although she likes it, “I had virtually no guidance in high school--or college--regarding career options so I really had no knowledge of what was possible or realistic. No knowledge led to no choice-. .” She also mentions, “My 50s sisters went to college to either 1) become a teacher or a nurse or 2) find a husband (or both). Marriage and children put me on the shelf for 10 years.”

She loves her work, but she finds little camaraderie or satisfaction from the people with whom she works. Although she has earned a Ph.D., and has great knowledge and experience concerning [her career field], she says she feels her career has not been what it might have been if she had guidance and mentoring along the way.

She is aware that she is “terrific” in her career field, but “status-wise, not much” success. She says “I guess I do -” in response to the survey question about self-acceptance. She does not write anything in the section reserved for “How would you explain life is worth it?” She did consider suicide in her late 20s “after parents died [within two months of each other] and I was separated from 1st husband, living in a run-down apartment with 3 little kids - I considered it - I
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Highly Gifted Adult Study

felt no one cared whether I lived or died. But, the kids needed me —”

#8M, in verbal and computer careers, who entered this study when he was 54, has a moderate DIT score of 51.7. The score coincides with what he writes of his approach to his life and is at Kohlberg’s Stage 3 at the Conventional Level. He has a 2 tone score because he seems enthusiastic and positive about himself and his life. The data analysis indicates he is at Dabrowski’s Level II. He denied any abuse in his past and has not personally sought therapy except for alcoholism treatment. He rated a Neutral categorization.

#8M is the oldest of four children raised by his mother, who had a master’s in zoology and taught at the college level before having children, and father, who was a surgeon. He was closest to his mother but felt encouraged toward a professional career and always doing his best by both parents. He writes glowingly of the way he was raised, but refers to a learning disabled brother as “a royal pain,” and one sister’s career and whereabouts are unknown due to estrangement. He would change the way he was raised somewhat: “A more open and warm father; a more resolute mother.”

#8M feels he received great guidance and support from his parents and from his high school math teacher. He found the guidance not only helpful; it also made him feel good about himself. As with many of the subjects, he liked to read on his own in school when the other students still had regular work to do. By late grade school he was openly recognized as the smartest and best student: “It seemed I could do no wrong.” He and a couple of his friends occasionally got into trouble for being disruptive “because we were so bored,” but he liked school anyway. The only time he was provided time and materials to do advanced work was in woodworking class.

He mentions several issues that have colored his life. First, he was sent away to boarding school for high school. He feels he was too immature to leave home; and he was unhappy at the boarding school. Also, he “hit bottom” in his mid-thirties and received successful treatment for alcoholism. He has been married and divorced twice but has a good relationship with both ex-wives. He remained involved in the raising of his two children, adores them, and still remains close now that they are adults. He has experienced considerable career upheaval because both his wives were professional women with active careers, and he was willing to move for their advancement.

His second divorce is recent, but he writes of having a new girlfriend already. People who spend little time between relationships may have less time for introspection, another factor that may contribute to low to moderate DIT results. He is not employed in work that he enjoys, although he has an advanced degree in the field, but is not sure what he wants to do next.

He has a few close friends in whom he confides, keeps in touch with old friends, and basically prefers time alone when he gets it. #8M admits that he was in deep depression before his treatment for alcoholism, but has never considered suicide. He would advise someone else as follows:

The present conditions are really and truly transitory and patience and hope are required. Life can be as much fun as you make it.

#9M, in a technical career, began the study at age 57 and received a 56, about average for the study group, on the DIT. His Tone score is a 2, and he is classified as Neutral at Dabrowski
Level II. He claimed to have experienced no abuse and has not sought therapy. He took the ISPE when he was an adult and received a score of 176; and he also took the Bloom Analogy Test scoring 194. He was unable to provide standard deviations for these tests that would aid in comparing them to more familiar tests of ability, but he was told they were 99.99 percentile results. He reports that he is nonabused and has not sought therapy.

#9M was raised by his parents, who each immigrated as adults from Europe before World War II, and lived on the east coast in ethnically mixed neighborhoods, mostly lower middle class. His mother stayed at home with him and his younger sister, and his father was a waiter. He describes his family life in childhood as very stable to the point of being “square.”

He does have things he would change about home:

...more time with father; more verbal interaction with both parents...Almost no parental verbal expression of love, but I was secure in knowing it was there and had no doubt as to their real feelings towards me. (non-expressiveness probably a(n) [ethnic] trait).

He also would make changes in his school life: “More one-on-one attention from teachers. More demands and stimulus. More feedback.” He received no recognition or encouragement, according to his inventories, from parents or schools regarding his very high ability. He wishes he had.

#9M experienced sexual interference during his youth. That means that incidents of a sexual nature took place that troubled him. He described it as follows:

No abuse. ‘Approached’ by adult males on 3 separate occasions in early teens, but evaded any follow-through. Somewhat traumatic at the time of each, but no lasting impact, except perhaps aversion to predatory homosexuals.

#9M made a number of observations about his relative intelligence and how it related to his school life and social life.

I was aware [of being more intelligent than others], but thought more of a ‘strangeness’ than a qualitative difference, thus thought of myself as not fitting in. Nevertheless, it was not an extreme isolation, just a sense of being ‘peripheral’ to mainstream...I got A’s in grade school; B’s in high school, so wasn’t one of the real nerdy scholars (because I didn’t push myself or have anyone else do so). I was regarded as smart but not brilliant; my own assessment, too.

Apparently the easiness of his early school work resulted in #9M not developing an effective study ethic. He did not do as well in school as the years went on and lead to a self-doubt regarding how smart he actually was.

Took Mensa test and for the first time knew my IQ (at age 25). That gave me confidence. I had previously experienced confusion about my abilities when I flunked out of Naval Academy, although I returned and finished the following
year. Now I know why I’m ‘different’.

Asked how his teachers kept him busy, he replied, “They didn’t; they should have!”

#9M attended the Naval Academy and feels good about his contribution to the “collapse of the Communist block” through the work he did. After retirement he worked in the civilian world in a career combining psychology, engineering, and industry. That, too, was rewarding, but he said of both careers, “Saw a lot, did a lot, but had a lot of terrible bosses. Career choice was limiting. Second field allowed more freedom and ability to fulfill self, but civilian world is frustrating for other reasons.” Many subjects said they felt the same way, that bosses were impediments to their work and that they wish they could have done many other things career-wise in addition to the careers they did.

He was married to his first wife for 23 years but acknowledges that she “had emotional problems” and the marriage was a mistake from the start. She was not unusually bright, whereas his second wife is highly intelligent. He feels they are exceptionally compatible. He, like a number of the subjects, met his second spouse at a high IQ society gathering. He and his first wife were unable to become parents. He mentions his disappointment and sense of loss numerous times in his inventories.

There is no anger or sadness, except for not having children, in the tone of #9M, which lead to a tone score of 2. He is unemployed now, at 56, and has found it difficult, even with his education and experience, to find appropriate work. “In hindsight, my intelligence may have gotten in the way to conforming/playing roles demanded of me. Not ambitious enough. - Need to earn a living.” A number of subjects referred to the need to earn a living as somewhat separate from doing what they like to do. Only than 5 of the 41 subjects earned money at the pastime they enjoyed most.

#9M has many acquaintances but few friends. He is happily married and says he is not lonely or unfulfilled, except “emptiness in my life, not having had kids.” He did have at least one close friend at each of different stages of his childhood, but has never been one to confide much in friends, “never part of the ‘in crowd.’ Somewhat of a loner, by choice.” He is content, as well, to do things on his own.

“Used alcohol to excess until 2 years ago, when I stopped voluntarily and without support group help.” Alcoholism is known to retard emotional development, but it is unclear whether his alcohol abuse was a developmental impediment to any degree. Comments about “I did it myself” were made by a number of subjects with DIT scores that were low to moderate for the study group.

In describing his extended family, #9M says he is the brightest but that all of his relatives seemed to be well above average. He notes that two uncles who were probably alcoholics were intelligent men who were under-employed and probably frustrated with their lives. Although not currently working, #9M is not depressed and has worked through previous depressions in his life. He has never felt suicidal, but would offer this advice:

Would talk about relative values; need to exist for self, not others; need to establish goals, expand interest, rely on self. Would provide alternatives and assistance, to get into ‘healthy’ frame of mind. (All this after listening and
providing empathy).

#10M, with a career in the creative arts, got a DIT score of 43.3 that puts him at the low end of Kohlberg’s Conventional Level. He was 51 at the start of the study and is profoundly gifted with a California Test of Mental Maturity result in excess of 180. A high Tone score of 1 is reflective of his very positive attitude toward his life and himself. He has the highest DIT score of anyone categorized at Dabrowski Level I. His inventory responses regarding his viewpoints and behaviors suggest that his DIT score is possibly elevated, although still not high, by his profound intelligence rather than his high moral or emotional development. He is, by his own report, nonabused and has never sought therapy. #10M is categorized as a Nonsearcher.

Subject #10M is the only child of a high school graduate homemaker and a 10th grade drop-out [to support his widowed mother] salesman and advertising painter.

I was made part of my parents’ group of adult friends, ‘performing’ often, especially musically with my father. There was a very high level of affection (though not physically) and approval. I always felt my parents were proud of me.

Always enjoying creative endeavors, #10M was encouraged by his father, in particular, to pursue a career in the arts, but discouraged from one in music. The guidance meant a great deal to him. He mentions that his father probably drank too much but that it was not a problem except for the occasional driving citation. Nonetheless, he was very close to and enjoyed his father in particular.

#10M was active in a professional music combo by his early teens, water-skied, played tennis, and was adept at intramural type sports. “I always had several friends from various ‘cliques’ within the neighborhood or school; there was always one I was closest to.” He claims to have been popular, always felt that he fit in, and received lots of positive attention and opportunities at school including some accelerated coursework and contests to represent the school. In adulthood he enjoys a number of friendships but admits to keeping the conversation light; he does not confide in others.

#10M has a high level of confidence and intrinsic motivation: “I am really not concerned about it [my intellectual level and how I fit in]. I am very concerned about the creativity of my professional work. I have my expectations unrelated to the judgment of others. This is not to say I’m not pleased when others appreciate what I do.” He worked for others until he figured out how to run his own business doing what he likes.

#10M married in his late twenties, has two children whom he loved raising and loves dearly, and as he approached his 25th anniversary wrote, “I couldn’t be happier.” Everything subject #10M wrote was positive, complimentary to others, and convincingly “fair.” For example, when asked to rate the intellectual levels of family members, he refused. “Sorry, I don’t do that. We are all gifted in different ways.” No other subject responded in this way.

At no time in either questionnaire does he mention wanting to change the past or experience life differently. The only time he mentions religion or spirituality is when asked directly: “I don’t practice one. I think they are all valuable in providing moral basis, and dangerous if exclusive, militant, or evangelical.”

A post-script on subject #10M: before he reached his happy 25th wedding anniversary, he
left his wife and moved in with a former girlfriend from his college days. He divorced his wife and married the other woman. The entire meeting, affair, divorce and remarriage took place in under a year. He explained that it was the right thing for him to do; “It wouldn’t be fair to [first wife] to do otherwise because I would not be happy.”

He has never felt suicidal himself, but would give this encouragement to someone who did:

I would say that there is no other certain alternative to life. You must value something, enjoy something. Focus on that. Be yourself. Go where that takes you. You’ll feel fulfilled, and, most likely, find someone else will appreciate your abilities and interests.

#11M is involved in an arts-related career. He has a relatively low 45 for a DIT score that puts him at Kohlberg’s low Conventional Level. He started the study at age 56. His case study analysis puts him at Dabrowski’s Level II: Stereotypical Roles. He has a Tone score of 2 because, although he wrote that he felt special and loved by his mother, he had a somewhat negative attitude toward almost everything else. Anything positive he mentioned had a belligerent tone to it. He reported a 162 IQ on the CTMM, in the exceptionally gifted intelligence range. He referred to himself as nonabused and has never sought therapy.

He is the only child of parents who “had to get married” before his mother finished high school. His mother worked as a bookkeeper and his father drove a coal truck before heading a paint department in a major store. A number of eminent people described by Goertzel and Goertzel were labeled “mother dominated;” they often had ineffectual fathers and devoted mothers whose main satisfaction in life came from their pride and devotion to their sons (1962, p. 80+). The Goertzels noted that this treatment was an impediment to the maturing process, especially regarding relationships, for the sons.

I felt absolute love from my mother - I never doubted her love and concern. I believed (and still do) that I was her primary source of joy and pride. She reveled in my existence and accomplishments. Grandparents, with whom we lived frequently, felt the same.

Friendships are another area where #11M is like the mother-dominated subjects in the book Cradles of Eminence (1962). He preferred adults and younger children rather than children his own age. His best friends were usually women. He is heterosexual and “grew up loving sex.” He was physically big during his school years and played in and enjoyed sports. He was recognized as smart but his athletic and artistic abilities “helped soften the smart image.” He claims to have been “a daredevil, one who would try anything,” again, almost word for word like the Goertzel’s subjects. His mother’s devotion gave him a sense of invincibility.

The deep devotion of his mother and for his mother placed #11M in an odd position with his parents’ marriage:

The marriage was a poor one. My mother wanted a divorce when I was about 10 - my crying stopped it - they never divorced - I regret that they stayed together.
Father was a heavy drinker, a man of very low self-esteem - often an embarrassment to me (and everyone else). His love for me became ambivalence then later envy. He and mother fought - mother was the power, however - although she would never say so, she despised him - the effect on me was slight - I became quickly independent - they often sent me outside to play.

#11M feels the guidance he received from his parents and grandparents was “vital.” “The family unit supported my passions, felt I was competent, acted as if I were ‘special’ - I agreed with the estimate. I don’t remember a day when anyone believed I would be anything but a [career 5].” Even though his family was relatively poor, there was never any question but that they would save and use the money for him to go to college.

#11M expressed confusion, and apparent disdain, related to his intellectual difference from most others.

I regard myself as ‘normal’--this created (and creates) a problem in that I became disillusioned with people around me who constantly fell short of what I regarded as ‘their potential’--teachers could not, or would not, attempt to answer complex questions--people who seemed to have no passion, people who took the beauty of life for granted. I have no desire to feel exceptional.

#11M was satisfied with his school performance, “especially after I decided to ‘forget’ the rules and assignments and learn what I wished.” If he could, he would change, “The tight structure that forced me, or tried to, to learn what they believed was important - I was best at educating myself.”

#11M was fortunate to have an art mentor, someone he knew from the time he was 10 until 16. This person “taught me art, world history, philosophy, etc. He was not a formal teacher-just a wise man with gifts and a love of life.”

#11M did not return an adult inventory; therefore his marriage experience or his view on the value of life is unavailable.

#12M, in technical and business careers, is included in the nonabused category because he reports quite positively on his childhood home life. Although he admits to no problems, he has an undercurrent of anger and hostility, earning a 3 Tone score. Aged 52 at the start of the study, he took the DIT twice and could not be scored either time due to answer inconsistencies and a refusal to rank order choices on the test. His questionnaire responses made it possible to classify him at Dabrowski Level I and as a Nonsearcher. His Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS) is 168, putting him in the exceptionally gifted category. He has never sought therapy.

#12M’s parents both graduated from college. His mother taught school and his father was an investor/farmer. In a response to a question about ethnic background, the subject proudly described his family, which lived in a rural, hilly, eastern area, as “white, Christian, leaders, one of the top old families.” He says “there was love but not overtly” in his family, and described his parents’ parenting style as “consistent Christian approach with a touch of class.” He believes his parents were good parents and has a positive attitude towards them.

#12M said he had friends while growing up, “15 to 25 depending on who was counting.” His overall description of his social situation in school makes him sound like an active, outgoing
child who had a reputation for being “wild.” Overall, he hated school and wished his parents could have found one that could handle both his dyslexia and high intellect. He wrote that he wishes he had been “sent to a ‘special school. School was for those at the 95 IQ level. This covers all the schools I attended. Today the matter may be worse...” [for other children].

He is the only subject who mentioned being dyslexic. #12M was treated very negatively by his teachers. He stated that it was primarily due to his dyslexia. “I all (sic) felt smarter than average but every day saw things that kept me from feeling extremely smart.” It was not until he reached adulthood that he was tested on the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS-R) and received an IQ score of 168. His school experience and grades gave him no clue that he was highly gifted.

“My biggest help came from interaction with adults, as a child, and working with adults from about age 6 on,” wrote subject #12M. According to his report, being dyslexic and highly gifted, in a school where teachers did not understand or know how to deal with dyslexia or giftedness, caused tremendous adjustment and identity problems for him.

It appears #12M is also a feisty adult. He writes that he intimidates most people and is not generally well-liked. He does have and confide in friends, and he feels very compatible in both interests and intellect with his third wife. Despite this claim, when asked to list earnings by decade, he responded, “If I won’t tell my wife, why would I tell you?” He thinks that the son he had by his second wife should live with him, but he did not get custody. That is the one sad point in his life that he mentioned. He believes that religion is a personal choice, and although he was raised Southern Baptist, he does not mention practicing religion or having a spiritual life of any kind.

#12M appeared to race through his questionnaires and had all answers at his disposal. The questions did not seem to elicit deep thought or any sort of musings on his part. He does keep busy and is quite productive in his field. He claims to be satisfied with his life, his career, his marriage, his sense of being a worthwhile person, and says he has never felt suicidal. When asked what he would say to a depressed or suicidal young person, he wrote, “A lot.”

#13M, in a technical career, has a 4 for Tone score and a relatively low DIT score of 41.7, which is moderately low for the study group. He reported a ceiling score of 145+ from a school group test, and he was 47 years old when the study began. He wrote that he experienced no childhood abuse of any kind and has never sought therapy. He is categorized as a Nonsearcher and placed in Dabrowski’s Level II.

#13M is from a Midwestern metropolitan area and was raised by parents who both graduated from high school and received some additional training. His mother worked as a clerk/typist and his father was a salesman and manager in industrial supplies. His father occasionally spanked him or “used a belt.” His observations about the level of affection in his home are quite typical of subjects in this age range: “By today’s standards, there was very little open affection, but I never felt that it wasn’t there. I don’t ever remember hearing the words ‘I love you’ until I was an adult--but I never doubted it.”

In response to the question on the childhood inventory about “what would you change about the way your parents treated you,” he answered, “Would not change it.” He wrote the response “No answer” when asked what he would change about the way his schools treated him. On many of his questionnaire responses he simply wrote, “I draw a blank.”

#13M remembers a few episodes of being “beat up” when he was a youngster. He
reacted by avoiding many of the children and backing out, even as an adult, of conflicts. He did not feel popular, although he had neighborhood pals and a best friend while growing up.

Despite knowing his IQ, #13M underestimated his intelligence and was given no useful feedback on the meaning of his IQ results.

Most of my closer friends were more motivated, innately more intelligent than I. I was usually one of the smartest kids in the class, but I do not remember being recognized as such until in accelerated classes in high school.

He recalled an incident in elementary school where “I was recognized for my rhythm ability--bouncing a ball in gym class. Very proud.”

It was during high school that the guidance counselor encouraged him to apply to an out-of-state college. As he looked back on his life in order to answer the questionnaire, he noticed that fitting in or not fitting in due to intelligence “was just not an issue--not recognized or rewarded.” At the time, he did not recognize his own intelligence as being unusual, either. “I remember very little guidance.”

#13M did not complete an adult level questionnaire, so there is no information on his marital status or satisfaction with life.

#14M, in a business career, submitted a Langdon Adult Intelligence Scale score of 147, placing him in the highly gifted group. Aged 48, his DIT score is 40, on a par with the average college senior education or business major (Rest, 1994) and among the lowest in this study group. He is at the low conventional and stereotypical levels of Kohlberg and Dabrowski. He has a Tone score of 3, reports no abuse, and has never sought therapy for himself.

#14M was raised in a large city in the northeastern United States by his parents who finished tenth grade. His mother was a homemaker and his father was a carpenter and firefighter. His parents granted a high level of approval and used consistent discipline, including some “minor physical.” The subject felt loved by his parents. “Some hugging. Always ‘I love you.’” He also said about his parents, “I never felt I could fail--sometimes I’d like to feel all right about not being successful at everything.”

#14M was bored and unchallenged in school but “wouldn’t change” anything. He said his senior year in high school was the best. “I read the textbooks in September and spent the rest of the year editing the Yearbook.” He also was pleased that his early grade teachers let him grade papers, tutor students, and then go to the library when he was done with his work. He routinely skipped 40 to 50 days a year because “I was often ‘ill’ to avoid having to go and be bored.” Five other subjects also mentioned this pattern of school avoidance.

#14M was always known as “the smartest kid in school” and “a brain” but he always had a feeling of “not fitting in, but because of my introverted personality.”

Before they moved from the big city to the suburbs he was “beat up” routinely by kids in school. He writes that moving was still very difficult for him and he had trouble adjusting. He did not feel popular in school: “No--I was different,” but did enjoy spending time with other kids his age in his city neighborhood and had a best friend when he was 10-12 years old.

Subject #14M was raised Roman Catholic by his Roman Catholic mother and Lutheran [nonpracticing] father. As an adult #14M wrote, “Religion is necessary to an orderly society. Collective rights as espoused by religious thought are important.” At no time did he mention any
religious or spiritual beliefs of his own.

#14M is categorized with a 3 Tone score because, even though he claimed to be satisfied with most aspects of his life, he admitted to being lonely.

I’m lonely. I love my wife and she is my best friend - she’s also my only friend. When I was young I remember other friends--I miss that.

#14M married his high school sweetheart and they have two children he loves very much. He has made no friendship connections at work saying, “It’s too difficult and it can be dangerous.” He is quite successful at his career but thinks he might have enjoyed being a doctor or a politician; he likes to problem solve and lead. He coaches his children’s sports teams, exercises regularly, but says he prefers solitude because he’s “introverted and shrink from such [friendship] relationships.” In answer to the question, “Do you feel that people like you and feel close to you?” he explains, “Not particularly. I think people admire me but I’m too powerful to get close to.”

#14M says that he may drink too much, and also mentions that his family almost broke up a number of years ago, “But my wife saved me.” Evidence that he is not a Searcher comes from the following responses: “I’m resigned to it,” is in reference to difficulty balancing work and child rearing; and “Accept the status quo,” is his response to what he would change if he could. He admits to getting migraines when he is stressed and says he has a lot of migraines.

He did well in one of the top engineering schools in the country, has risen to the top of his profession, and has a long term and stable marriage. This subject was primarily recognized and encouraged by his parents, especially his mother. He has never had a mentor. The migraines, the excessive drinking, and the recurrent depression indicate he is not happy. After agreeing to participate in this research study, #14M wrote things about himself and how he feels about his life that he has not, and feels he cannot, share with anyone else. He admits that he is holding it all together so that he can continue to succeed in his career position. But, he also admits to feeling stifled and trapped.

Just as Terman asked, “… one wonders how much farther he might have gone and how much greater might have been his contribution to knowledge had his talents been recognized early and adequate guidance and motivation provided” (p. 85, Terman & Oden, 1959).

#14M has never thought about suicide, but he would give a young person this advice:

Everyone has a purpose in life. Everyone has a gift that they can bestow. You may not see it now, but I assure you that your life will change someone for the better. Believe in yourself, lift someone else. Make a difference.

#15F, in a verbal career, reported a CTMM of 155 + and reports no abuse or need for therapy. She started the study at age 50 and received a Tone score of 1, for her very positive outlook and attitude, and a DIT score of 55.9, just slightly below the mean for the study group. Her Kohlberg level is Conventional, and her Dabrowski categorization is Level II. She also gave inventory answers that indicated she is a Nonsearcher.

#15F was, with her family, a poor refugee from Europe after World War II. Her mother had finished high school and her father was a physician. Her family was poorer, foreign, but better educated than her neighbors. She says there were no rules, no expectations at all in her
family, “an almost totally nonjudgmental environment of unconditional love.” She describes the level of affection as “Warm, caring, hugging, kissing. Told we were loved every day—that we were wonderful, intelligent, beautiful!” Her grandmother also lived with them and was a warm and positive influence in the household.

Examples of her positive interpretations of her childhood include the following:

When I was 4 years old I went to another city by myself (unbeknownst to my parents) to visit my father who was working for awhile at a UN hospital. They just thought what I did was charming! They valued my independence and emotional strength. They never tried to limit me.

Later in the inventory, when asked whether or not the subject was ever sexually abused during childhood, she wrote, “I was always protected, shielded and nurtured emotionally and physically.”

A second area where the subject says she is fine is the area of friendships. She says she was not particularly popular growing up and did not have a best friend until junior high. She attributes it to enjoying the company of her brothers and adults better than age-mates. “I was considered smart, independent, and most of my peers were intimidated. Those who got to know me really liked me...In high school - Great friends! Peers at last!” The down side to the ability grouped classes is also mentioned: In high school during the post-Sputnik era, she was placed in accelerated classes where she still was one of the top students. “I didn’t like it. Too much more work!”

#15F made one other slightly negative comment about school: “a math teacher was sexist and caused me to stop taking advanced math after trig.”

Although her adult inventory is unavailable to check her adult relationships, she seems happy with the status quo. She mentions her most important adult friendship in her childhood inventory: her husband. She married before she was twenty and has been very happy with her marriage and the love and support she has received from her husband.

She mentions no religious or spiritual issues, no angers, no concerns, and no changes she would make in anything. Her reaction to the issue of not “fitting in”: “It was good for me. I never felt I had to fit in. Still don’t!”

#16M, in a business career, qualified for the study with a score of 172 on an intelligence test, the California Test of Mental Maturity, that he was given when he was in elementary school. #16M was barely 40 when he completed his childhood inventory and Defining Issues Test. He earned a 74 on the DIT, very high for the group, which places him well into Kohlberg’s Postconventional Level. He gives considerable evidence that he is between Dabrowski’s Levels III and IV. He is a Searcher who recognized what was bad about his childhood but did not actually view it as abuse. He did seek therapy to deal with a number of issues, however. He has a Tone score of 3.

Subject #16M was raised in the upper midwest by his college graduate father and beauty school graduate mother. His father also worked in a business career and eventually had his own successful business in that field. They lived in a homogeneous community where they were among the most affluent and best educated. He said that both parents were probably gifted, as were numerous members of the extended family. The family name was one of prominence in
their community. The family reputation influenced the way the family dealt with any issues of being different. High giftedness is different.

He reported this unfortunate incident:

When I was tested at the age of 9 and found to have an IQ of approximately 172 the psychologist told my parents that for me to talk to them was as frustrating as it would be for them to talk to an idiot...I think my mother was always very intimidated by this.

#16M wrote that his high school friends and his oldest brother were those to whom he felt closest in childhood. “I felt that mom and dad just didn’t get it.” It is possible his parents did not “get it” because they were defensive, not because they were not smart enough. The psychologist presented them with the information that their son was exceptionally gifted and then made a statement that indicated that the psychologist assumed the parents were not “smart enough” to relate to their son. This could have shamed and intimidated the parents so that they became defensive rather than open to learning about high giftedness.

Although not outright abused, there were several areas of emotional concern in the subject’s background.

High expectations and shaming were the dominant means of discipline. The withholding of privileges was sometimes used. ‘Remember, you’re a [family name]’ seemed to carry tremendous significance to my father. My mother brought emotional ups and downs from her family of origin into ours. She would be loving and hugging and then she would vent her rage with ‘Damn you kids. Damn you!’ frequently in tears.

#16M felt unsupported by his father due to his father’s “double standard” about intelligence and resultant lack of sensitivity to his son. His reaction to his father’s viewpoint is best described in the following excerpt:

My father has two older siblings, both of whom were considered very gifted and who are now professors. I speculate that dad always felt a little left out. When he had three gifted children who required a great deal of energy again I speculate that he felt cheated by giftedness again. While he has a college degree and sent all his children to college, he really maintains a double standard. The school of hard knocks is really the only place to learn anything meaningful. He no longer reads; no one really understands things as well as he does. Some of his oft-repeated quotes serve as markers of this double standard.

• ‘If you’re so smart why aren’t you rich?’
• ‘What is it about smart people? They always seem to have their heads in the clouds.’
• ‘Giftedness is a problem, but a nice problem.’
• ‘People are really so dumb.’
#16M wrote that the children were treated with equal love and attention; there was no overt favoritism or sexism. He sees his parents as having a typical marriage, “which is to say it lacks intimacy and passion and depth.” If he could change anything about his family life it would be to increase intimacy and expression.

#16M, a Searcher, began what appears to be a serious positive disintegration in his mid-thirties:

When my daughter received a WISC-R score of 150 I began to explore this issue of giftedness. I had essentially discounted my own IQ as something in the past. As I studied I was confronted with my own life story, my own issues, my own giftedness. For a long time I was unable to discuss my own giftedness without crying.

An example of his approach to life is in the second question of the childhood inventory, “When someone asks you where you grew up, what is your answer?” He wrote,

My answer is that I am still growing. The idea that a human creature grows up between time A and time B and then stops growing is a fascinating concept. Who started speaking of life in that fashion? It only really makes sense if time A is birth and time B is death. I know that it seems painfully obvious when stated so bluntly but listen to how we speak, look at how we really behave. Now, stepping down from my soapbox, I was raised by my parents and lived in [small upper midwest town] until I went away to college.

Subject #16M made numerous observations about school.

Many of my friends were smart and there were other things to be involved in like sports and social activities. If anything, I think I was underchallenged and found an outlet in sports. This took the pressure off my parents and teachers so they didn’t push me intellectually. I don’t think many of them knew how or were too busy. I did fine (32nd out of a graduating class of 600) but nothing stunning.

In response to the question about any confusion over his giftedness, #16M wrote,

My wife has an IQ of approximately 130 [compared to his 172]. She was valedictorian of our high school class, she graduated from college with only one B, all the rest A’s. For a long time I could not distinguish between high academic achievement and giftedness. Why were my grades so much lower if I was really so much smarter? I realized that task commitment, or intrinsic motivation, or rebellion, or boredom, or defiance, or dutiful daughter syndrome can all play a part.

#16M enjoyed school most in high school when the coursework was finally challenging and he was successfully involved in sports. He always had a group of from 4 to 6 friends at each school level; and by late junior high school he enjoyed dating, as well. He feels he was generally
treated well in school despite the fact the school work was not challenging.

#16M is one of many subjects who talked about the relationships they had with teachers, not the class lectures. For example, #16M’s football coaches were mentors to him. “The teachers who really looked you in the eye and were interested in connecting to you were most influential.” When he graduated, his football coach wrote in his card, “[name], thanks for being someone who can be trusted.” #16M says, “That relationship has had a major impact.” Two basketball coaches were negative influences because they treated their players as “pieces of a puzzle. How you fit into winning games was all they cared about.”

His religious background was Lutheran, but he became disenchanted with organized religion early in life for two reasons. He describes his feelings as follows:

I found our church completely hollow. When I or anyone else asked good questions they either shamed us or gave absurd traditional, rote answers. I was placed in the Lutheran school at my church for 3rd and 4th grade and the teachers told my parents that they needed to teach the class at the rate of the slowest child or else it would not be fair. Somehow my parents seemed to be hoping that there was something to this religion business and that their children would benefit from a religious school. They were willing to sacrifice intellectual challenge to do the ‘morally right’ thing.

Although he did not complete an adult inventory, #16M mentioned working with a spiritual advisor in recent years to explore spiritual questions and their meaning for his own life. He has studied the world’s religions as background for his spiritual issues study.

After the experience of being hugely underchallenged at his Lutheran school, #16M was excited about “making it into the ‘high group’” at his public school.

The teacher had several of the brightest kids arrange their desks together and they got special assignments. The very day that I pulled my desk into the circle two boys were caught talking and apparently this had been a problem before. The entire group was disbanded for the rest of the year. I don’t remember being excited about what I was learning until 7th grade. A whole hour on a single topic with teachers who were specialists in that area; that appealed to me.

#16M was not given any more career guidance than any of the other subjects. His father guided him into pursuing the same career as he, and for the first twenty years of his adult life that satisfied him. He is actively exploring other career options now, however, and definitely expects to make less money in whatever career he follows.

My family message of ‘giftedness is a problem’ has been a major issue for me to work through. There was a time when I really bought into the idea that my net worth was more significant than my gifts (and my net worth was very small).

#16M married a woman who had been his favorite girlfriend during high school. They have been married more than 25 years and, although he declined to send in his adult level
inventory, he alludes to his wife with pride and reverence.

#17F, in verbal and technical careers, was 44 when she participated in the study. Her DIT is a high 74.5 and puts her easily into Kohlberg’s Postconventional Moral Development stages. She received a Tone score of 1 and gave ample evidence of being self-actualized at Dabrowski’s Level IV. She had no IQ scores to report but received an 83 (out of 100) on the Miller Analogies Test where 66 is a 99th percentile score. She felt strongly that she experienced no abuse during her childhood, but she received therapy as an adult for relationship issues.

#17F was raised in a small Midwestern community as an only child by her business college graduate mother and high school graduate father. As she described her childhood, she gave many examples of the good parenting she received. “When I was little my folks would shame my behavior when my behavior was hurtful to another - but they *never* shamed me. Even shaming my behavior was a rare occurrence. She further explained,

Both parents used what you would call “gentle guidance,” I guess. I rarely had any doubts about what the rules, limits, or expectations were. They must have been instilled in me at such an early age that I wasn’t always conscious of them. I never felt like my folks expected too much. As I grew older and we were confronted with new types of expectations and situations - we discussed the rules and limits.

No other subjects wrote as many specific, positive things about the way they were raised. #17F added,

As an adult, I realize how fortunate I am to have had the parents I have. Hugs and praises were a part of every day life - not just rewards for “good behavior”. My mother and I used to have “cuddling sessions” when I was little. My folks always made me feel that I was a much-loved, special person. Even as a young child they were respectful of me, my possessions, and what I had to say (even if they didn’t agree with it). They also asked for my opinions.

The mother of subject #17F completed the Parent Inventory. Her assessment of how she and her husband raised their daughter was in agreement with the subject’s opinion. In the section on discipline style, Mother noted about spanking, “Twice, but that only made her hostile.”

#17F has always had friends, neighbors, and relatives with whom to spend time, discuss interests and problems, and receive support and guidance. She grew up in a midsize, relatively rural community that had a large consolidated school district with a number of elementary schools feeding into two middle schools and one high school. She skipped first grade after the first two weeks. Her teachers tried to keep her busy with tutoring classmates, extra projects, and time to read. She was still the smartest child in her grade school classes.

#17F was in accelerated classes for middle school and began to enjoy her social life considerably more than grade school. She adds specific examples, all of which include the opportunity for discussion in the favorite classes. She explained,

For the most part, most of the people I socialized with in jr. and sr. high were also
in the accelerated classes. Since we had almost all our classes together for 3 years we got to know each other pretty well. These people were also smart so it wasn’t an issue among us ... I don’t remember an unhappy time in school. I guess if I had to choose the happiest, I’d say senior high. Why? Probably because of the courses I took and all my extracurricular activities.

Regarding guidance, #17F wrote of her parents that “They never even hinted that my being a female was a limiting factor regarding my career. As a result I would be able to do whatever I did choose, and most of the careers I considered tended to be male-dominated.” Although she writes that her parents did not guide her toward any particular career, she interprets that as good.

Friendships and learning opportunities have been an important part of the adult life of #17F. She finished college younger than most and married a professional athlete immediately. The marriage ended in divorce. She chose a much different man for a second marriage, a psychologist, but it, too, ended in divorce. In the case of the first, the husband really was not ready to “settle down” and found life on the road too tempting.

#17F believes now that the second husband actually had psychological problems, but her positive attitude made her believe, at the time, that she could “make things better.” He became emotionally and psychologically abusive, an experience that led her into psychological counseling and out of her second marriage. The difficulties may have been exacerbated by her inability to have children and his possible unwillingness to admit that it was a problem for him.

#17F has married for a third time and is celebrating her tenth anniversary. She is mellow and circumspect. After grieving the fact that she would never have children, she is now grieving the fact that she will never have grandchildren, either. She also feels bad for her parents’ lack of grandchildren. She is not famous or earning a high salary, but she says it is enough for her. She gardens, goes to flea markets and tournament bridge with her husband, and takes time for friends and family.

#17F once felt as though there was no point in living. “Only slightly seriously. I felt alone, purposeless, a sort of ‘out of body’ feeling. These feelings lasted about 4 hours.” She had a number of ways she would counsel a troubled young person:

I would ask them to tell me about themselves and why they feel the way they do. I would try and reinforce the positives that they mention. If they have no self-love, I cannot “fix” that, but I could help them pursue the resources that could help them develop it. I would also tell them that without any purpose (whether it be spiritual or materialistic) life probably won’t be of much value. The feelings of purpose and that life does matter must come from within to be sustained. No one but themselves can “make” their life worth something and they have to take some responsibility for their own happiness.

#18F, in a verbal career, was just approaching her forties at the time of the study and got a 67.8 on the DIT. She earned a 2 Tone score and indicates strong Searcher behavior. Like the previous two subjects, she experienced no childhood abuse but did seek therapy as an adult. She is in the early Postconventional Level for Kohlberg’s schema, and she appears to belong at
Dabrowski’s Level III: Personality Transformation. She qualified for the study as highly gifted with a Miller Analogies score of 88.

#18F was raised in the country’s midsection by her mother, in the same profession as her daughter, and her father, an optometrist with his own business. She and her younger brother were both very bright and had active, understanding parents who were always encouraging, accepting and supportive of their children. In fact, her mother answered the Parent Inventory and added this note:

I have no doubt been too detailed in my answers and have probably given you far more information than you want to know. I have spent about 16 1/2 hours on this project with about 2 or 3 hours spent reviewing my journals of our daughter’s childhood years. Those hours were particularly pleasant for me as the purpose of writing those journals was to record the ‘cute’ or clever things (in my estimation) that the children said or did. My mother encouraged me to do this, and I have not regretted it. I have encouraged other new mothers to do the same. I thank you for those enjoyable hours of reviewing.

#18F describes her childhood home’s level of affection: “My parents were both verbally and physically affectionate. We kissed goodnight and got hugs. Dad wrestled and roughhoused with us and gave us back rubs. My parents attended all our school plays, concerts, etc.” She had good friends while growing up and had confidence in her ability to make and keep friends. Also, “I fit in. There were other smart kids in my class.”

In response to the question, “Did people know you were smart?” #18F reported,

In 8th grade after taking the Differential Aptitude Test, the high school counselor told me I was bright but ‘not a genius.’ Other kids thought I was smart, but I thought I did better and learned more because I worked harder than they were, and they were just lazy. It wasn’t ‘til I took nationally normed tests - the PSAT, ACT, and SAT - in high school that I realized I might have a natural advantage over some of my peers. But, I had other smart kids in my classes, and we’d always competed and compared our test scores on classroom subject tests.

Despite no childhood abuse of any kind, and she said at one point, “To the best of my knowledge!” #18F experienced, by her own account, one existentialist crisis after another. During her college years she sought counseling to help her deal with it and find answers. She appears to have had all the elements necessary for good self-esteem and confidence: supportive parents, good friendships, community support and encouragement.

#18F has a conventional job for a woman; her inventories, however, have a strong current of unresolved rebelliousness. Here is a partial list of the sources of her identity crises and existentialist ruminations: She admits to having experienced some problems with eating disorders during her teens; she has long thought that marriages are mostly repressive to women and that women would probably make better life partners for women (although she is married and not inordinately unhappy about it); she thinks she and most others would be bisexual if not so shy about it; she thinks her work ethic, coupled with severe perfectionism, are somewhat
crippling for her; and she is still convinced that her decision not to be a parent is the right decision for her.

I had my first developmental crisis at age 10 when I felt that my life had no meaning. I considered committing suicide with the shotgun Dad kept in the basement but decided not to because I thought that would make my parents sad. I resolved the crisis by deciding I had two self-chosen purposes in my life:

1) To help others.
2) To have pleasure myself.

Shallow and simplistic as these goals now seem, when I’ve had mid-life crises since then, I’ve continued to come up with these same very basic life goals.

My other major turning points were around religion and career choice. As I mentioned earlier, I “gave my life to Christ” during a Lay Witness Mission at my church at age 15. For a year I believed fundamentally, read the Bible nightly, and warned my parents they’d go to hell because they had not had a second birth in Christ and been saved.

About the time I turned 16, I decided it was unlikely and incompetent and cruel of an omnipotent god to create a world where people not properly introduced to Christ would go to hell. Since it was likewise idiotic of Him not to make clear which of the world’s religions was most accurate, and Demond Morris (anthropologist) in The Naked Ape at the library said that primates evolved in such fashion that their minds made room for a god notion, I became an atheist.

For awhile it bugged me that I’d go to hell if I was wrong. On the other hand, the fundamentalists said that once I’d given my life to Christ I was always saved. So I guessed I had all bases covered.

I guess I should comment on how becoming an atheist was a turning point. Once I decided there was no god, I had no foundation for my values, which was largely Judeo-Christian-based. So I had to rethink all my moral decisions from a basis I decided myself. I’m still doing this, and it’s hard.

#18F has a view to similar to others in the study regarding friendships:

In my thirties, on the job, I looked for friends but did not find such close, beloved ones [as in her early 20s]. So I see the close, old friends infrequently and keep in touch with them with occasional letters. I don’t think I’m very desperate for human companionship anymore; my husband suffices, and I enjoy the companionship of authors through the books I read. Often I find their ideas more substantial than any I could glean from the typical conversation. I think my college friends had more depth than the people I’m around now, but I suspect that idea is a fallacy; maybe because we talked about our coursework and readings, we had riper material for deeper conversations. Maybe it’s my fault that I don’t get
into conversations of depth because I don’t start them myself. Often the topics I’m thinking about--like whether we could prevent war, how we could reduce world overpopulation, distribution of food and human rights across cultures, the cultural relativity of moral values--I just assume others aren’t thinking about those and will think I’m a fruitcake for doing so. Because the questions I ask no one knows the answers to, I don’t ask them aloud.

Her current career position is not her final goal; she continues to work toward a different position.

My career decision to become a [her job goal] occurred during my senior year of high school when my English teacher assigned us to write research papers on a career. I decided to become a [the job goal] in order to make unhappy people able to tolerate life. I rejected music as a career after all those lessons because music makes comfortable people happier yet, and I wanted to alleviate suffering. I still do.

#18F received another form of guidance from community members. She did a lot of baby-sitting during high school and was reading in the basement after putting her charges to bed, “as the parents had a party upstairs. As the women talked in the kitchen about PTA and their kids’ business, I thought how boring their conversation was, I vowed never to have kids.” She did not quite believe herself and prepared to be a counselor so she could counsel and raise a family, but by age 39 she still had not changed her mind. It seems she has always been introspective and an existentialist. She reports no conflicts with her parents over her episodes of soul-searching; it appears they were supportive.

#18F has trained in counseling and wants to be a guidance counselor. She has clearly thought about the meaning of life and how to share that meaning with others. Here is how she would address a troubled young person:

Your life is yours to take or keep, and ultimately I wouldn’t want you to live if you were in constant suffering. However, in my experience and from what I’ve read and heard from other depressed people, depression is only temporary and can be lived through--indeed, to moments of joy--on the other side. Sometimes to get through the depression, therapy and medications ease the pain and facilitate the transition. Lots of times depression is more chemical-derived--that is, a function of out-of-whack brain chemistry--than it is a result of our rational thinking. It’s natural for us to attribute our depressed feelings to our thoughts and, when we’re already depressed, to think thoughts that exacerbate our depressed feelings, but actually depression is far more chemical and eradicable than we realize when we’re in it.

What sustains me through periods of depression, and I hope what might sustain you, is the memory of the pleasure and the confidence that you want to experience that pleasure again--not necessarily big, major pleasures--but the pleasure of
feeling pool water envelop your body, of scratching a dog behind the ears as it wags its tail, of lying on the ground looking up at the stars, of smelling the evergreens in the mountains. During some periods of life, one may simply have to tolerate existence in order to get to living the pleasurable moments later. One can learn over the years to make more and more pleasure for oneself and to be more at peace with life’s miseries. One has a whole millennium to be dead and only fleeting seconds in the scheme of the universe to experience consciousness.

#19F, in volunteer and computer careers, was rated with a tone score of 1 and she is a Searcher. She was 42 when she started the study and earned the second highest DIT score, an 82. At Kohlberg’s Postconventional Level, she is categorized by her questionnaire responses as a Searcher in Dabrowski’s Levels IV and V. She acknowledges experiencing some childhood abuse, but she did not mention seeking therapy at any time. She submitted a CTMM score of 155.

#19F was raised by “a Sinclair Lewis heroine” and “in the rare moments my father was home, a man of few words.” Her father, who did not graduate from high school, eventually owned a chain of stockyards and was quite successful and well-respected. Her mother started college when the subject, the second oldest and only girl, was 11 years old, eventually earning a master’s in English.

As a child, #19F experienced little gentleness and much harshness in the disciplinary tactics of her mother: “old-fashioned spankings (with a paint paddle), dunking my head under water for temper tantrums, and sitting in the bedroom for long periods.” She says that spanking, shaming, and harshness occurred often. “I knew my parents loved me, but I wouldn’t let my mother hug me because it was a ‘sissy’ thing to do (I had 3 brothers).”

Subject #19F gives examples of how a sensitive, bright child can take a parent’s words to heart.

I always considered myself a bad person. My mother often said ‘bad boy’ or ‘bad girl’ when we were very young. My mother told me, as an adult that she didn’t praise me [as a child] because she thought that it was obvious that I was outstanding and she didn’t want me to get a swelled head.

She is aware that she and her brothers were missing some important parental care, but she is able to understand, without justifying, where it came from.

I would say we were somewhat abandoned—not physically, but emotionally—particularly after mother went back to school. Both of my parents were raised by their fathers. Their mothers abandoned them...As far as supplying the emotional support I lacked, I think that they were incapable.

#19F was seen by her mother as being very mature and capable; the daughter saw it as an unfair and unwanted burden. In answer to a questionnaire item, “Were you ever a bully?”, #19F writes, “No - except to my little brother.”

The mother’s inventory refers to “gentle guidance,” “spanking once in a while when they
were younger,” and “no shaming.” Her daughter mentioned that her mother cleaned their floors almost obsessively, and the mother says in her own inventory, “I must confess that I tried to be an excellent housekeeper while going to school and cooking from scratch. I had the ‘Superwoman Syndrome’.” She notes that her children all were very good at working independently, “gave them much freedom, [subject] especially. Later I found she regarded this freedom as ‘not caring.’ I felt I respected her judgment and maturity. I know now I was too wrapped up in getting an education for myself. I should have asked more questions and listened more.”

I asked parents how their own childhoods compared to that of their children. The mother of subject #19F wrote,

My childhood was fine until my mother left the summer I was to turn 10. A year later my father married. I liked my stepmother but she was only 3 years older than I (from Kentucky). My father was 31 when he married her. I had been his favorite, but that ended. [The subject’s mother lived with her father and stepmother; her own mother never came back]. Three years later my brother was born, then two others. Dad had marital problems - little time for me. Very lonely years!

#19F had close friends before her family moved, her mother went back to school full time, and she was burdened with the care of her infant brother. It took her several years to make new friends. “Eighth grade was my nadir, socially and academically.” She did not feel popular growing up. “No, I was very shy. I hired my younger brother to answer the phone when I was baby-sitting so I wouldn’t have to.”

As a girl with three brothers, #19F, whose IQ was the highest in the family, says she experienced differential treatment.

Absolutely. My older brother was to study science and math and become a doctor. My younger brother was to take over my father’s business. I was supposed to finish college before I married.

This was a particular double bind for her because, “My father seemed happy in his business. My mother seemed desperately unhappy as a housewife.” At home and at school she was “told I could be a nurse, a teacher, or a secretary.”

She would change school to have “higher expectations, far more emotional support, closer monitoring for problems...Because I was so shy, I had few relationships with adults.” She wishes that some teachers or community members had reached out to mentor or guide her. In her adult inventory she continues to express her recognition that she needed guidance: “I wasted a great deal of time because I was isolated, with no family or social connections to guide or steer me [in early adulthood, her 20s].”

#19F writes, “The heroes were the cheerleaders and football players.”

She dropped out of a master’s program. She explains, “I began a master’s thesis in mass communications, but quit when the mass media department, in 1980, refused my master’s thesis topic, ‘Computers as a Mass Medium.’” The department contended that computers were not
mass media. She showed considerable confidence and circumspection for someone so young to recognize that the authority figures at her school were wrong. She moved on without them.

#19F had “a very odd sequence of fortuitous circumstances” that led her into her career experiences. She is interested in art, writing, creative enterprises that turn her talents into needed products. Her former right-hand woman is her daughter’s godmother; they are still good friends. She experienced good commercial and financial success before having children; sold her business and focused on raising her children. She has experienced collaboration and friendship with many of the people with whom she has worked. In the historic, quaint community in which she now lives, “I have many affiliations now that I have settled here. I wish I had more as a child.”

“With the exception of my marriage, I’m growing more satisfied with relationships.” #19F married someone quite different from herself and has found the marriage difficult. They agree on the priority of raising their two children well, children they waited to have until their late 30s. One of the children is gifted and the other is intellectually handicapped, creating tremendous stress on the parents and the marriage. “I was lonely throughout my life until we settled here and I had children.” She is active in the community, particularly outdoors, with her children, and with female friends. She does not confide much, “but I could...Trusting people has been difficult, but it is one I am learning...I think that my children and a few close friends [like and feel close to her], and I am learning to allow and enjoy closeness.” Asked about her sense of being a worthwhile person, she writes, “I’m learning. (I’m giving myself another 40 years on that one!).”

#19F is a self-described Unitarian after being raised as a southern Baptist Christian. One of her issues with her husband has been their different views on religion. “I married a Roman Catholic perfectionist. Doesn’t match a Unitarian maniac artist.” In response to a specific survey question she writes, “promiscuity complicates life,” but also says that she thinks she would be bisexual if she were not so shy. “I think many people would.” Note that this is almost word for word what the previous subject, #18F, said.

#19F questioned whether or not she could go on “as an adolescent and when dealing with a handicapped infant...I usually ended up murdering the English language instead - writing a poem.” Her advice to a troubled gifted young person:

For matter to come together in such a complex form is so unlikely. Just don’t give a damn what anyone else thinks and enjoy this brief joy ride as a sentient being.

#20M, in verbal and creative arts careers, entered the study when he was 54 and submitted an IQ score of 167 on a test called the Henmon-Nelson. He experienced abuse as a child, but he did not seek therapy. With a DIT score of 58.3, he is well above the national adult average, but only slightly higher than the study average of 57.76. He is in Kohlberg’s Conventional stages and placed by questionnaire analysis as a Neutral in Dabrowski Level II. A rather low Tone score of 4 was assigned to him.

#20M was raised by parents who both graduated from high school. His mother was a homemaker, and his father was an assistant manager of a department store. In describing the level of affection in his home, #20M says there was no hugging and infrequent mention of being
loved. He would change his home by having “Less bitching, yelling, shaming.” He mentions some spanking, hitting, and beating by his parents, and a great deal of both gentleness and harshness. Nearly everyone from the generation in this study admits to at least occasional spanking; #20M’s report is stronger. As an adult he did not remain or feel close to either parent. #20M did not fully realize until he was an adult that he was favored over his sister. It became clear that his parents were sexist when they said his sister “didn’t need college” despite being academically as capable as he. “My sister was always assumed to be wrong when arguing with any male.” This bothered him. His sister never bothered to finish high school.

#20M always had a few close friends while growing up, but he never felt he fit in or was generally liked and accepted by other children, and “figured it was part of the package.” During parochial grade school he was often picked on or treated badly by his teachers. He had a “general feeling of being ‘different’ in several ways--interests, thoughts I thought only I was having.”

At his all boys high school he felt more comfortable and had a number of excellent teachers who acknowledged his high ability and were helpful and supportive of him. He has always been aware that he is more intelligent than most and believes others recognized this quality.

#20M enjoyed high school and college and has been fulfilled by his career. He has always had friends, enjoys his students more than he enjoys the other teachers (every subject who is a teacher said the same thing), and loved being a housemaster for a time at a boarding school.

He has never been married because he is gay. “Not ‘in the closet’ because there’s nothing to be ‘in the closet’ about. Celibate. Have no ‘second life.’ Am Ok with this.” He has no life partner but has numerous satisfying relationships with adults and students. He enjoys concerts, travel, “civilized conversation,” and has a strong and satisfying Catholic faith. At the time of his last correspondence to the study he wrote, “Have terminal cancer (liver) now. But, it’s OK. My religious convictions--of lifelong standing--make it possible to cope well enough.” His condition may account for his relatively flat tone.

#20M has never felt suicidal himself but would give this advice to a troubled young person,

The largest questions are the best, not the worst, indicators of the value of life. Religious values are the ultimate ones. There are reasons for things, however unimportant they are from time to time. Things become clearer after one believes, because then one understands.

#21F, in volunteer and verbal careers, was 50 at the start of the study and qualified with an 83 on her Miller Analogies Test and a number of 99th percentile standardized test scores from her school days. Her DIT score of 55 puts her in the mid-range for the entire study group and in Kohlberg’s Conventional moral reasoning stages. Although she describes an abusive background, she does not mention receiving therapy for herself. She received a Tone score of 3 and is categorized as a Neutral in Dabrowski Level II/III.

Subject #21F was raised in the northeastern United States. She is the only child of a short-lived marriage between her high school graduate, secretary mother and 11th grade drop-out janitor and factory mechanic father. She has a number of half siblings, none closer to her in age.
than six years. Her description of her childhood makes it clear that she was both emotionally and sexually abused. When she was four years old, her parents divorced.

Parents married 10 years - not a bad marriage - but my mother was very immature and both were very self-centered. She left looking for something better. [Her mother’s own father died when she was 8 years old]. He [my father] never got over her - Even today at 76. Father remarried on the rebound to someone less intelligent than self. She was jealous (rightfully so) of my mother, took it out on me. He’s still married to her after 42 years. Mother - married twice more - she’s never really cared that much about her husbands - unable to compromise, let herself be vulnerable, grow up. I have abandonment issues re: my mother leaving when I was 4, my father’s emotional abandonment, the wrenching from my grandmother - who I called mommy when I was little. My father’s home where I lived from 5 - 11 years I can only describe as an emotional desert for me. I went to live with mother and step-father at 11 - stepfather was mean, cruel. Mother nagged, yelled a great deal.

During the time #21F was four to seven years old, she was sexually abused by her step-grandfather, the husband of her beloved grandmother. She did not tell anyone or get counseling or other help. “Mother knew when I was 12 - she was outraged (helpful to me).”

Although she always felt like an outsider as a child, school was a place where she received support and encouragement. #21F liked school because it was so much better than home. Elementary school teachers allowed her to spend her extra time reading and writing.

I was brainy - I was a reader. I was socially unpopular in high school. My family was lower middle class. I loved classic music, art, literature--so my interests were often quite different from my peers. To some extent, I always felt like a social outcast. Felt I was just not liked by peers - something wrong with me.

#21F, as with many of the other subjects, had difficulty when she first went to college. She did not question her own intelligence, but she did have to do some adjusting.

As a freshman, I rebelled (having been a high school nerd) and wound up at the end of the year with a .5 average and a loss of my out-of-state tuition scholarship. I dropped out for 1-1/2 years. When I went back my grades were mostly A’s. As a grad student, I got more A’s than B’s.

#21F further noted, “I could do well with relatively less effort than I saw my classmates expending.”

Her stepmother “forbade me to read any more horse books.” Her primary interest during her youth was reading, especially about animals, and none of the other children seemed to share her interests. She found the best part about school was “- the religious ritual in Catholic School - the Shrines of Mary in the class, going to church and eating cold toast and cereal out of those little boxes in school after communion.”
#21F attended a northeastern high school which had an excellent reputation. She loved it.

In high school I got the lead in the junior play.” “Accelerated class for all my courses - they were excellent, challenging, stimulating - taught by fine teachers - all with master’s degrees (at that time!)...Had thought I wanted to be a school teacher because of that role model” [high school English/Latin teacher who was very helpful and encouraging].

#21F can look back on her childhood and see that the main reason she liked school is, “Got all my positives there!” There was an elementary school teacher who defended her against teasing. There was a high school English and Latin teacher who gave her an extensive “Great Books” reading list when she was in his accelerated 9th grade English class. “I took that list to the library religiously and read one author after another - Tolstoy, Austin, Hemingway, Maughm, etc. ... read every book I could get my hands on.”

#21F had numerous observations about the differing qualities of experience each of her schools provided. She attended a very competitive, regarding admissions standards, Midwestern university in the early to mid-60s.

It was a wonderful kind of Left Bank of Paris experience - reading Sartre and Camus, listening to classical, jazz, folk music, working at a beatnik coffee house - not at all concerned with jobs, with material things like the way college students are today...We were interested in things of the mind and the spirit rather than the things of the body. I feel my undergraduate education was great. I am a strong believer in the transforming power of the liberal arts and see the in-class experience together with the student life/ambiance as equally important. There were some wonderful classes and lots of dull, uninspiring ones. As for grad school - I found Ph.D. work and M.S.S.W. work totally unsparing. My counseling psych masters work was inspiring because of one of my professors/mentor. My two years at [Ivy League] Divinity School was something else again. Incredibly inspiring courses taught by internationally known scholars...and the atmosphere [there] - the commitment to quality, excellence, to the very best - in such sharp contrast to the kind of leveling egalitarianism of the Midwest which seems to value mediocrity more than anything - it is something that changes one forever.

#21F had her first real friendships during her college years. In retrospect she believes she behaved in college the way most people behave in high school. She has a number of people from her college days with whom she still keeps in contact. She has had two intense, significant relationships with two women with whom she has worked. Again, she believes that the intensity, and eventual ending, of these friendships, paralleled the experiences of most people in their childhoods and adolescences.

She has been married for nearly 30 years and feels she and her husband are intellectually compatible: he’s “absolutely brilliant...My husband and I are on very different wave lengths emotionally...we could hardly be more different. There has rarely been the intimacy and closeness I crave, but I’m not sure I could handle it if it were there.” They have one child, now
Subject #21F has extensive background in counseling psychology. She states that she wants to grow and find meaning in her life. Her educational background is filled with evidence of an intensive and extensive search for answers: she studied history in undergraduate school, earned masters degrees in counseling psychology, social work, and biblical studies, and completed all but her dissertation for a doctorate in counseling psychology.

She and her family have moved great distances a number of times, her husband is from Europe and they have lived there part of their marriage, and they have left friends behind more than once. She loves her alone time but sometimes wishes she had someone she could really tell her troubles to. She admits to being somewhat lonely.

I feel people like me - but I think I may in some sense be hard to get close to. I never thought about that before just this moment. I think I’m pretty guarded in respects - even while being superficially friendly and outgoing. I’m afraid, I think, of intimacy, while at the same time I very much want it. I often feel very alone in the world.

She belongs to a church and has a considerable spiritual life that is highly important to her. Her own spiritual journey is summed up as follows:

I see the need to be God-centered as opposed to centered on man as the single most important issue there is. And I’ve not said one thousandth of what I’d like to convey - because it is not something that can be explained in a few words or understood in a short time. It’s an understanding that requires years to even begin to acquire.

As with most of the subjects in this study, #21F says there are a number of other careers and educations she wishes she could have. She feels passionately about music and animals and would love careers dealing with either or both. She also has a strong desire to express herself and would love to do so as an actress or a writer.

Regarding jobs, #21F echoes numerous other highly gifted subjects,

My biggest problems with jobs is when there is rigidity, stupidity and control on the part of those in charge - and, unfortunately, these are the very type of people who tend to rise to the top in my field. I quit, I come dangerously close to quitting, or get fired ... because I speak up.

#21F writes that she has often felt depressed and has struggled most of her life with problems of low self-esteem. She also acknowledges that with her educational and career background she is well aware that sexual and emotional abuse can lead to these feelings, but that this information has not yet enabled her to free herself of the feelings. She has felt suicidal on occasion, “feeling totally worthless and unable to cope,” but never so strongly as to follow through. When asked to give her advice to a troubled young person, she answered as follows:
I think I’d have trouble with this one. I’m often so close to not feeling it’s worth it myself. When I focus on growing, self-perfection … then I don’t worry about whether it is worth it. I think we have to accept it, do the best we can and trust that there’s a greater meaning to our lives than we can understand.

#22M, in a verbal career, qualified for the study based on a CTMM of 142. His DIT score of 46.7 is in the low moderate range for the group. This subject took the DIT twice. The first time he tried to “fake good” and scored a 70, but the score was rated invalid by internal consistency checks. He explained what he had done, and he agreed to take the test again giving his most direct answers. He received a Tone score of 1 because he is humorous and upbeat throughout his inventories. He fits Kohlberg’s Conventional stages and is a Neutral at Dabrowski’s Level II.

#22M was raised the oldest of four boys by parents who each had some college training. His mother stayed home with the children and his father worked his way up to eventually head large construction projects. He describes his childhood home as “Germanic.” His mother was rather harsh and unemotional. “Affection was in the home but it was not overtly given. Mom didn’t know how to handle me, so I got little physical nurturing. At age four or so, she made me mad over something that I felt wasn’t my fault, so I vowed never to kiss her again…and I didn’t. Dad grew up in a caring, loving home but he seemed distant.

Reports have it that he favored me greatly when I was a baby, up to about age 4. Took me with him everywhere, let me ride on his shoulders, etc., etc. I don’t remember any of that, but it does sound delightful. As far as telling me they loved me, those words usually followed some traumatic event, discipline, whatever, but never ‘out of the blue,’ you know, just to let me know I was worthwhile.

In response to a question about any favoritism in the family, #22M said,

Perhaps [my brother] was favored, because he was an easy child to rear. I, the INTJ, [a personality profile] seemed to rub everybody the wrong way. I maintained inwardly that I was not going to become the ‘black sheep’ and fought for dignity and respect, although this approach backfired frequently. I think it was an attitude of feeling my brothers were ‘better than me’ (translation: easier to rear) that I remember most.

#22M, as with several other subjects, experienced probable but not certain sexual abuse. He describes it as follows:

I must have been at least 6 years old. I was playing ball with a friend in the alley behind our homes. There was an older boy who might have been around 10 or 12 at the time. His garage door was open slightly, just enough for us to bend down and enter. He invited us into the garage. I don’t remember much of what happened from that point on, but I don’t think I was raped. I may have been
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Highly Gifted Adult Study

fondled or something of that sort. I never told anyone because it seemed to me such a weird thing to do to someone. Perhaps I bear a lasting scar, but I tend not to think so.

In adulthood, #22M reports that he has gotten numerous degrees and availed himself of every possible inventory to help him understand himself better. He refers, several times, to being an ISTJ or INTJ [personality types] and attributes his parents’ mishandling of him to the rarity of his personality type.

#22M started taking piano lessons when he was young. The teacher was supportive and encouraging, “a giant of a woman,” who held an extremely important place in his life.

Obviously, I felt closest to [piano teacher]. Mother was perfectionistic, harsh, demanding, probing, while Dad remained in the background showing more attention to his other sons who shared more of his interests and talents.

#22M attests that he generally had at least one good friend at a time while he was growing up. He played neighborhood games and had hobbies typical of other subjects. His undergraduate and first graduate degrees are both in music and music education. He stood out socially during his school years for his musical ability. He said that he felt that being talented in musical performance was more acceptable than just being smart.

When describing school, however, he most enjoyed the interaction with his teachers. He loved being helpful and being recognized for being helpful. “I tried not to be labeled ‘teacher’s pet’ because it always had a heavy price tag attached to it...People knew I had the smarts. I did not brag or flaunt my intelligence. I tended to hide it so that others would not be offended or made uncomfortable.” He is among one of the few subjects who does not complain about inappropriately slow pacing during his school years. His focus, admittedly, was on being recognized and appreciated by his teachers.

There were two questions regarding fitting in at school and comparisons to other students at different grade levels that he declined to answer. The fact that he is uncomfortable with this topic is clear, although he gives no explanations.

#22M’s level of giftedness is not so high that it is likely his intellectual functioning isolated him from others. Sexual abuse is known to distort relationship abilities, however, and this may be at the root of his refusal to review peer relationships from his childhood.

Religion has always had an important place in #22M’s life. After he received his Ph.D. in elementary education, he earned a degree in Christian Counseling. He was raised in a Protestant denomination, explored spirituality as a very young boy with his previously mentioned piano teacher (a strong Baptist), became a “born again” Christian in his late teens, but has “broadened” his view since, he writes,

the loss of a religious-related job opened the floodgates to explore full bore astrology, pendulum dowsing, the Tarot, etc., etc. I guess you might say the dam broke and I spilled all over the place. And that is where I am today: happy, spiritually-minded, not caring if I ever set foot in another church again.

Despite claims of happiness, #22M is leading a secretive double life.
Thought I would remain a bachelor all my life. (Who would want me, a homo?) Entertained the thought that if I married, my children would probably be defective in one way or another...curse of the third and fourth generation ...

In response to the question about his involvement, during college years, with sexual activity, he wrote, “Only with men.” In response to the question about how sex, dating, and feelings about marriage affected his educational preparation, he wrote, “I eventually ‘saw the light’ as regards married status and attaining a good job/position/reputation in the community. Also thought marriage would ‘cure’ dysfunctional homo perspectives.” A number of the subjects have mentioned being gay, but, unlike #22M, they give evidence of having integrated their homosexuality into their lives and personalities.

My fifteen year marriage is a marriage of ideas. Married at 30 (wife 28), I had gotten a chance to ‘see the world’... [It is] basically positive and supportive. Wife understands my peculiarities (with exception of homo tendencies which I have not divulged not intend to so).

#22M did not wish to remain anonymous during the study and made it clear that he revealed information that no one else knows. At the same time, he has been obviously evasive on a number of issues. As with his first attempt with the DIT, it appears he tries to convey a positive image. He is deliberately upbeat. On the other hand, he alludes to his “dark side,” being released from a parochial school principalship (fired) and having to change churches, school for his children, and living arrangements, and oblique references, in his adult level inventory, to “Who would like me, a homo?” after making no mention at all of this problem in his childhood inventory.

After losing his administrative position in the parochial school, #22M has worked only part time and teaches college level education courses. Here is his perspective on his present work:

[I am] mostly fulfilled. I relish the creativity and challenge of college teaching. I can search out new facts and continue to hone my teaching pedagogy. Classroom discipline is minimal and students are motivated to acquire what they want, when they want it. I am not lonely. Associations are rich and fulfilling. I purposely limit the number of associations because I am not a social creature and because I value quality friendships which take time to cultivate and perpetuate.

#22M continues,

Am generally pleased with my academic attainments. Am always learning more about myself, people in general, and the occult. Would like to be a psychologist one day [is currently in a counseling psychology master’s level program], but that may never materialize.

#22M responded to a number of inventory questions without elaboration. The answers
only hint at the complete picture. “People like me well enough. My nature is more introverted, so I project an aloofness that is generally interpreted as ‘cold.’ I think the proverb ‘The burnt child dreads the fire’ adequately sums my overall feelings about letting too many people into my intimate thought life.” At no point does he explain the serious situation to which he refers.

As far as relationships are concerned, he had a number of very close male companions during his late adolescence and twenties. He is not in touch with any of them now. At present, “My friends are what keep me going. Wife is great and really a neat person, but I long for male companionship. Male energy and thought life stimulates my thinking. I don’t like to play social games or have to decode them.”

In the final questionnaire section about suicidal feelings and views, #22M makes one more reference that he had not previously mentioned: “The first two years of junior high school were intolerable. Have had a few ‘dark’ moments of the soul when I questioned whether anyone really cared about me. Haven’t acted on any self-destructive thoughts.” His advice to a troubled young person is consistent with his overall tone, however,

Life is work. You must invest yourself. Don’t expect life to give up its riches just because you’re bright, rich, etc. Explore yourself and find out what makes you unique. Perhaps it is both marketable and enjoyable. Find a mission in life. Dedicate yourself to self improvement and to the uplifting of social consciousness.

#23M, in verbal and technical careers, entered the study at age 51 and submitted a CTMM with an IQ score of 147. He received a Tone score of 3, and his DIT score was in the average range for the study group at 56.7. He fits into Kohlberg’s Conventional stages and is a Neutral in Dabrowski’s Level II.

#23M was raised by parents who were college graduates. His mother, trained as a teacher, stayed home while her four children were growing up. His father worked as an engineer but was not always employed. There was not a lot of affection or guidance in his childhood household.

Except for meals, we all tried to avoid each other as much as possible (passing messages through Mom). This was true for others than me, as far as I could see. Mommy used food in place of love, and didn’t want any of it going to waste.

He describes the level and demonstration of affection as follows: “Low, none, what’s a hug?, and I wouldn’t have believed it anyway.” He would change his own parents by “get[ting] them different parents.”

#23M did not feel popular growing up, and he did not enjoy spending time with children his own age because “Children my age never/rarely had anything in common with me.” He had three different close friends at different times, all of whom contributed differently to his experiences. He was bullied badly once, told those in authority, and it never happened again. He said that the appropriate response from the adults was empowering to him.

#23M remembers his early school experiences:
I did OK in the first two grades, thought I had found a friend in a third grade teacher, who, for reasons known only to herself (probably involving her realization that being a nun was not the way to satisfy life’s needs) undertook to quite effectively mock me for trying to color-code a chart. Thereafter, I did what it took to get by, and get grades of about B-level, which wasn’t hard at all.

#23M expressed his frustration with his school years:

I took the usual number of aptitude-type tests, and, from the reactions of teachers and principals, did extremely well. But, nobody would tell me how well I did, or who else did well, so I could see if there was anyone I could compete with, to add some amusement to my life. The stated grounds were that I would immediately change into someone with an insufferable ego. When my mother did mention a number, it was so low as to be unbelievable to me. That just made me feel angry. I suspect, and suspected, that I was the most intelligent in the class, and releasing proof of that would make it clear that this wonderful parochial school was a total failure as teaching a moderately intelligent person of not-outstanding abilities.

#23M remembered and repeated twice in his questionnaires,

My mother does not recall telling 4-1/2 year old me that ‘you are very smart, but you mustn’t let anybody know.’ I didn’t realize what an effect those words had on me, but it lasted thirty years. But one can’t keep from looking alert and aware, so some others knew [that he was smart]. The feedback was mostly from educators wondering why I did so well on tests of ability and so poorly on tests of accomplishment.

#23M says he did not like his parochial private high school, but he did find his best friendships there. His experience there supports the interesting fact that valedictorians and people who get good grades in general, are not necessarily the most innately intelligent students in a class (Subotnik & Arnold, 1994). #23M writes,

The inconveniently distant private high school I was sent to, with my aunt paying for it, had a competitive entrance examination. 600 took it, and the top 120 were admitted. I was number 3. Numbers 1 and 2 were dramatically more intelligent than me, but numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 became school friends. Number 6 graduated as number 1, by dint of drudgery. I got a B average.

As with the majority of the male subjects, #23M was not challenged by his schoolwork and not cooperative enough with the teachers to get the best grades. He passed the time by reading, which also caused problems. “Being far ahead also meant that I was also far behind. I was chapters ahead in the book, but had no current memory of what the others were studying.” #23M sums up his dating experience in adolescence by writing, “The only date I remember was a picnic with a telephone friend (or so I thought) girl who then had little to say to me, and wasn’t particularly friendly. She took religious vows a week later.”
#23M claims that he received no guidance or mentoring at any level. In his case, the emotionally barren home was not the least bit ameliorated by educators or community members. When asked what he would do to change the schools, he answers, “Eliminate them.” He also explains his views on college attendance,

About an eighth to a quarter of them [people from his school who went on to college]. This was a time during the years when only the upper seven percent went to college, and before the years when a college degree was necessary to get a decent job. The people didn’t change, but the textbooks did.

In both his childhood and adulthood, #23M finds religion more of a problem than a comfort.

Due to a good religious education, I am an atheist by conviction, and the usual words to express strong anger are meaningless to an atheist. Nevertheless, I deeply resent being sent to schools operated by religious orders, and was not pleased that the law school which accepted me was owned by a religious order. My acquaintances of high intelligence either were pleased with the education they were getting in public schools, or at least had no reason to be displeased.

Now in his 50s, #23M lives alone and is “learning what it means to be over-qualified.” He practiced as a patent attorney for a Fortune 500 company “until the patent market collapsed.” He currently works as a test engineer in positions that are generally short-term, and has had several periods of unemployment. His extended family history is replete, by his own report, with well-educated people who had periods of undesired unemployment. He states several times that he still does not have a career and is not certain what he wants it to be. Most of what he has done, he writes, he does only because he needs to support himself.

#23M’s social life revolves primarily around Mensa events and a number of e-mail friendships. He was unsatisfactorily married for 15 years and has one grown child who was raised by her mother. He enjoyed parenting and resents how his ex-wife came between him and his daughter. He reads voraciously and states that he is generally satisfied with his life.

There have never been times when he questioned whether he could go on. As to considering suicide,

Yes, and not very seriously. I do have a problem with an outgo of 2.4 times what my income is, and not being able to file for bankruptcy, unless I wish to spend my retirement plan money, which I do not. But suicide does not solve any of those problems.

He has a slightly different response to the survey question about how to tell a troubled young person that life is worth it.

That is entirely the wrong question. I have some skills at provoking a person into telling me what is troubling them, and of closing off avenues of escape from that
realization. After that, it is a matter of time before they are not troubled anymore, and life is fun again. Explaining that I find life worth it is useless in this situation. The fact that everybody else ever born enjoys something does not make it enjoyable to that particular person.

#24M, in computer and business careers, was 46 when he entered the study and has a Tone score of 4 because he sounds both sad and angry. He submitted CTMM IQ results of 155. He scored quite high on the DIT at 70, as high as the Searcher subjects, but is categorized as Neutral due to analysis of his questionnaire responses. He writes about emotional abuse but does not mention ever receiving therapy. He is reasoning morally at Kohlberg’s Postconventional levels but is still categorized at Dabrowski’s Level III: Personality Transformation.

#24M did not complete an adult level inventory, so there is missing data. The lack of adult inventory responses makes it impossible for me to analyze what may have contributed to his high principled level thinking on the DIT when compared with the scores of other abused, non-counseled subjects who are not clear searchers. In fact, he is placed in the Neutral group due to lack of adequate information. Nonetheless, he is included in the case study analysis because much of the feedback he does give is pertinent for a study of the perceptions of the highly gifted.

#24M was raised on a Great Lakes area farm by his college graduate mother and high school graduate father as the second of four children. His father managed a hardware store and was a cemetery director while his mother taught home economics. The emotional abuse he experienced was almost entirely from shaming, particularly from his father. He reported that “...father always called me ‘stupid’ - taking Mensa test in 1975 ended confusion.”

#24M had a polio-like condition during most of his elementary school years that necessitated a brace and crutches. He had trouble fitting in during the time he had perthos, but was never really popular, and “Have never been able to make friends.” His interaction with teachers includes these observations: “Singled out by chemistry teacher as an enemy,” and “never allowed teachers to treat me as a pet.” He won science fairs, was a class officer two years in high school, suffered from acne in his teens, and felt closest to his mother and oldest sister because they were easy to talk to. “Life began after I left high school - and home.”

It appears that no one successfully reached out to him during his childhood or adolescence. He was unaware of how smart he actually was until he took the Mensa test. His father had always called him “stupid.” His parents paid for the first two years of college until he got married. He does mention that he excels in tournament chess and table tennis, and “Paintings accepted by galleries in Bern, Switzerland, L.A., Akron, and Bloomington.”

Although the questionnaire completed by #24M mentions that he is currently married, he writes nothing about the length or happiness of the marriage, whether or not there are children, and whether he has any significant adult level friendships. He mentioned no mentors or people who influenced or guided him.

#25M, in a technical career, was 43 when he joined the study, submitted a CTMM score of 147, and achieved a 46.7 on the DIT, which puts him in the low moderate level for the entire group. His overall attitude toward his life earned him a Tone rating of 3. He does not mention getting counseling or therapy, but he has a history of depression personally and in his extended family. He fits primarily at Kohlberg’s Stage 3 at the Conventional level, and analysis of his answers places him as a Neutral in Dabrowski’s Level II.
#25M was raised in the Midwest by his chemical engineer father and housewife/librarian mother. His mother filled out the parent questionnaire and added significantly to the information on him. The subject did not know he was at all gifted until he took the Mensa test as an adult. He had dropped out of college and drifted into a number of different jobs. He returned to college in his early 40s to major in computer science.

Family life for #25M as a child was difficult. His mother’s questionnaire says there was always a lot of affection; however, he writes, “Ours is not a very demonstrative family. At times I really craved--and didn’t get--some sign of love from my parents.” His three younger sisters were all about as intelligent as he, but they were more accepting of school routine, according to him, and earned good grades. He was constantly in trouble for his poor attitude. His mother wrote that she dreaded the calls from school where she felt accused of bad parenting.

Subject #25M responded to a question about “fitting in” by saying, “I never fit in. I thought I was stupid.” His mother, in answering the Mother Inventory, wrote that the schools told her year after year, “Your son is smart but lazy, and it’s your fault.” Feedback of this nature is still common in the 1990s (Ruf, 1990; Gross, 1994).

According to #25M, his father disdained uneducated people and anyone who had a career in anything but the hard sciences. The subject and his sisters all started their college educations in the sciences, but all eventually drifted into subjects they personally liked better. For #25M it meant dropping out of school and working minimum wage jobs for a number of years first. The father’s attitude made a deep impression on him in that he felt a lack of approval.

School played a more significant role for #25M than for most subjects in the area of emotional, even physical, abuse. He was overweight and near-sighted, and tended to have only one or two friends, admittedly never a close friend in school.

A group of kids decided, for no reason I can understand, that picking on me was fun. I couldn’t run fast enough to either catch one or get away, so I was essentially defenseless.

He went on to describe episodes of being hit, kicked, punched in the face, at different grade levels throughout his school career. No one, even when he told the teachers or his parents, ever did anything about it. He felt unattractive and had only one girlfriend, the “only blind girl in the school,” during his high school years.

Compounding his problems at home and in school was his attitude toward his school work. If it bored him, he ignored it and did poorly. If he found it interesting, he did very well. He personally was unaware of how bright he was. The adults in his life knew, and they accused him of having a bad attitude and were frequently humiliating him for his noncompliance. His mother wanted to remove him from his public school and send him to the private school she had attended. The father refused. In the mother’s questionnaire, she remarks in numerous places that she shed many tears over him. She wrote that his sisters were much easier to raise.

There were no mentors, no teachers or other adults who ever appeared to guide, nurture, or encourage him. He married in his late 20s to a woman who already had one child. His early experience as a step-parent was good, but he realizes now that he and his wife were too lenient with his step-daughter. He tried to parent differently from his own parents, and “caused many new problems.” His most severe adult depression was precipitated by problems with his step-
#25M has a couple friends, neither of whom he discovered in his work environment. His socializing is primarily at Mensa events and with his wife. He says he is happy with that and not lonely. He and his wife are intellectually compatible and share many interests.

His comment on his career success is quite similar to many of the subjects in the study: “I have generally been good at my jobs, but I have not been very successful because I am not particularly good at the ‘people’ part of any job.” In a section of the questionnaire on values, he gave his attitude toward a work ethic:

As one who has been continually self-supporting for 21 years, I don’t have a lot of use for people who seem to be able to get but unable to hold a job. I am also offended by those who hold jobs, but put more effort into avoiding doing anything productive than they do into their duties.

#25M has thought seriously about suicide through much of his life. In fact, at least two relatives from earlier generations committed suicide, and a number had problems with alcohol and depression. He takes Prozac and finds it helps. His response to the question about how he would convince a troubled young person that life is worth it is,

I’m probably the wrong one to ask, since I’d probably say that it doesn’t and it isn’t. I have pointed out to people that there is real satisfaction to be gained by helping people, even in mundane ways, and that one can take pride in making things a little bit better. My mother’s aunt frequently said ‘It isn’t perfect, but it’s better than it was,’ and I think that has merit. In particular it has merit for a highly or profoundly gifted young person who has more opportunity than most to make a difference. If the person in question were troubled because they were the target for abuse all day at school, then come home to more abuse, the only meaningful thing to do would be to help stop the abuse, because while the abuse goes on life really isn’t worth it. If a person with good physical health and no obvious major problems in their life thinks that life isn’t worth it, I suggest psychiatric evaluation for depression.

#26F, in volunteer and verbal careers, began the study at age 46, came from an abusive background, but never mentioned receiving therapy. She submitted a school group test score of 140+ IQ, and she was given a low Tone score of 5. She received the lowest DIT score in the entire study group, a 30. She is in Kohlberg’s Preconventional stages, a Nonsearcher at Dabrowski Level I.

#26F was raised in a university city by her high school graduate homemaker mother and her college graduate father who started and did well in one business until he could buy properties to rent and manage. She mentioned several times that she is quite proud of her father’s accomplishments. There is a history of secrets and deception in her family background. She was the third child, first girl, born to her parents. Her first brother died at birth, an especially traumatic event for her mother. The subject was never told about the loss, but learned about it from an aunt when she was herself 30 years old. The second son was pampered and spoiled, and
he deeply resented, and reacted to, the birth of his sister, the subject, when he was five.

#26F describes his treatment of her as “terrorizing.” He dumped her dresser drawers routinely from the time she was 4 and threatened to do worse if she told. He convinced her the closet contained ghosts and she dealt with that terror in secret, also. She also attributed some of her sense of “feeling different from other kids” to her secret that her brother hated her.

Nonetheless, #26F describes her early childhood treatment by her “very romantically in love” parents as fairly idyllic:

> Without knowing they had gifted kids, my parents ‘camped’ us all over the USA ... took us to tons of museums, U.S. battlegrounds, etc. (My Dad loved history). He’d ask the elementary school what part of history we’d study ‘next fall’ ... then he’d take us there that summer ... Williamsburg, Mesa Verde, Dead Horse Gulch, Anaheim, you name it! My Mom took us to the library weekly ... and the librarian told us we could check out as ‘many books as we could carry’ ... I spent lots of hours discovering new ways to carry more books at one time.

#26F wrote in great detail about the intelligence, talents, and woes of each of her parents. They had both died by the time the subject was in her 40s. She views them as unusually supportive of her and her interests. She describes her parents as encouraging and supporting her, taking the family on wonderful, 3 week camping trips through the time she was in 12th grade, paying for and taking her to ballet, art, and ice skating lessons throughout her childhood, and pampering her with professional quality home-made clothes and costumes.

In later sections of #26F’s paper, however, she describes a different picture.

> My parents seemed to lose all interest in me when my brother got his girlfriend pregnant, and I was left alone pretty much from 7th grade on. I immersed myself in figure skating year around. Looking back I think I felt pretty abandoned.

Overt affection in her childhood home was not present. “I really don’t remember being hugged a lot or being told I was loved...I think they sort of assumed I knew...kind of like I was supposed to ‘know’ that I was expected to go to college.”

#26F did not feel popular growing up for a number of reasons. She was the only girl in her neighborhood and her brother actively interfered with her playing with the boys. Her interests, art, writing, and constant reading, were not shared by any of her classmates, either. She did, however, have a best friend when 9 to 12 years old, and another best friend from 12 to 14 years old. Each friendship ended when the other girl moved away. “I felt lonely most of my childhood - still do. It’s very difficult for gifted females.”

#26F wrote little about school but did give this example of unhelpful guidance: “An old male math teacher (8th gr.) patted me on the head and said, ‘Honey, you should be a cheerleader - not in advanced math.’ I quit math after that.”

#26F was raised and confirmed in a Protestant church but says she hates organized religion and makes no further mention of any religious or spiritual life.

She has been married and divorced twice to “men who were gifted but needed to be ‘fixed’” and were immature and emotionally unavailable. The first marriage lasted only a year;
her husband did not want children and routinely spent time with other women. Her second husband abused her emotionally and then physically before she left him.

She has moved frequently and has difficulty staying in contact with friends because she is “hiding” from her brother. He was granted executorship of their father’s estate and proceeded to bilk the subject’s and his own children out of their inheritances, and he kept his mother on a small allowance until her death six years later. #26F was to inherit about 1.5 million dollars, half the estate, when their mother died. It has been six years and she has received nothing.

In her early thirties #26F was in an automobile accident where a drunk driver hit her car. She has been partially physically disabled since that time and is still waiting for damages in that case. Her lawyers warned her to “disappear” while her suit against her brother is pending because there are many who claim he is a sociopath and will come after her and her daughter.

She has attended conferences on giftedness for the past ten years in an attempt to find answers about giftedness. “We use it as family therapy!” She has made a number of good friends over the years through these conferences and in each community where she has lived. She has home-schooled her younger daughter for the past four years, which takes a great deal of time, and her disabilities are the reason she gives for not pursuing her writing or her art as a career.

#26F has wondered during both bad marriages if life is worth it, but she has never felt truly suicidal. Her sense of worth and accomplishment are tied to her belief that she has been both a good mother and a good friend. She knows what she would do for a troubled young, gifted person:

I would take that person to a [Gifted] conference and show them that there ARE people like him/her, and that we aren’t alone, even tho’ we often feel that way. I’d especially encourage a young gifted WOMAN to ‘reach for the stars’ and try to find her role models of her gender. I would tell the gifted young person that they CAN make it in society, and that even tho’ we do feel ALONE, we aren’t, we count, and we are here. I’d tell him to surround himself with smart, gifted people.

#27M, in a technical career, was 54 when he began the study and submitted an MAT score of 87 as his proof of high giftedness. He got a 5 Tone score, a 38.3 on his DIT, described himself as abused, and says he has never gotten therapy. He’s a Nonsearcher who appears to hover between Kohlberg’s Preconventional and Conventional levels, and was categorized at an early Dabrowski Level II.

#27M was raised as an only child by two high school graduates who owned and ran a gasoline service station. In response to the question about the level of affection in the childhood home, he showed his awareness of the damage his home life caused him when he wrote,

As I remember, there was no affection, little indication of approval (but much disapproval), no hugging, and absolutely no indication anybody loved me. [If I could change anything] I would like to have had a mother who was not hostile to me, who would not tell me I was an oddball and a misfit who’d never amount to anything.

As an adult, #27M looked back on his childhood and explained,
When I started school, at 4, my mother decided that I existed to make her look good, so I lost a mother and gained a tyrant. My mother dominated my father. Although Psych 101 may teach this turns boys into homosexuals, it only made me afraid of women. I’ve never had a girlfriend. I like pubescent women, but they’re illegal. I respond to the usual curves, but they’re attached to vicious creatures with an agenda for my life. My mother died a year or two ago, and I still haven’t shed a tear.

This paragraph is quoted in its entirety because it is good background for the reactions others have had to #27M as well as his reactions to others.

As far as friendships, this subject was not popular in school. In his questionnaires, he variously attributes his unpopularity to being too smart, too short, or not rich enough, as well as the following examples:

The other kids avoided me because I was a ‘brain.’ They seemed stupid and not interested in what I was interested in...With people like that, I didn’t want to fit in. It seemed that I wasn’t interested in their activities, and I didn’t like being around the boys anyway because they were athletic. The few smart ones didn’t have time for me, I guess.

His relationship with teachers was apparently mixed.

I think I got no special attention, except that I sometimes got into trouble for making comments in class...I liked learning things, but I hated most of the teachers, because they were tyrants like my mother...One woman teacher told me she hated me, but I don’t know why.

#27M wrote many comments indicating he felt some confusion over his self-identity.

I thought I was intellectually peerless, from an average family and therefore shunned by the elite, untalented in art or athletics, interested in books and math that others didn’t care about, and lacking ambition. How can one have ambition to become rich, for example, without self-confidence? I don’t know that I exactly thought I was smart (since I’ve never been rich), but I’ve thought that I never met anybody of comparable intelligence until I joined Mensa, [a social organization for people who test at the 98th percentile on a nationally normed test, such as the SAT or an IQ test] and I’m not even sure about them. Maybe being intelligent has gotten to be a ‘security belief.’

It appears #27M was always a bit on the outside.

A school counselor told me I was smart enough to go into any field I wanted. I was supposed to talk with her boss, but he was never available...I selected my field because I had a major crush on a certain girl, and I was told that was her father’s field. Although her family was rich, I reasoned that I could support her if
he could...The only good time I can remember was a few days in 9th grade algebra when the girl mentioned above would save a seat for me, before she discovered I wasn’t rich and dumped me. I nearly had a girlfriend.

#27M said, “I feel that the university failed me. They did nothing to deal with the crippling lack of self-confidence that my mother gave me. They taught academic subjects well enough but gave me no preparation for dealing with the arrogant fools who become bosses.”

In his career field, #27M had “one boss who was capable, supportive, and a decent person worthy of my respect.” He had one associate who also became his friend until the associate divorced and moved away. In response to the questions about fulfillment and loneliness he responds, “I honestly don’t know what people mean by fulfillment...I’m not lonely because I don’t like people.”

This is a highly capable, intelligent man who is productive, in a fairly low position, in his field. His list of work-related inventions is impressive. He is not happy and his creativity has undoubtedly been limited by his emotional background. He has some e-mail friends and has had a number of female friends, but never any “significant others.”

Religion is not available as a source of comfort to him, either. “Between a mother who was a lapsed Roman Catholic and a father who came from a Methodist background, I was exposed to some Methodist influence but soon became an atheist...Religion may be defined as a set of beliefs based on faith rather than proof. I don’t care how people delude themselves as long as they don’t try to force their beliefs on me.”

#27M has been suicidal and has attempted suicide. If a troubled young person came to him asking whether or not life is worth it, he would say, “Find somebody else, since I don’t think life matters, and I don’t think it’s ‘worth it’.”

#28M, in a business career, entered the study when he was 57 years old with a CTMM above 140 (“I can’t remember the scores, but they were high”). His DIT score is a fairly low 40; and he is a Nonsearcher between Kohlberg’s stages 2 and 3, and in Dabrowski’s Level II. He has a 5 for Tone score. He described considerable emotional abuse but does not mention ever receiving therapy.

#28M was raised by his “very bright” college graduate father and high school graduate mother. His parents had each been married before and were in their 40s when they had him. He mentions that he considers himself to be smarter and brighter than his older brother. He says he was not allowed to go to parties or movies, felt closest to his mother, and thinks that his parents’ opinions regarding education, career, and even social matters were very important to him. If he could change his family background there would be “more love.” There was little affection in their home. “There was a certain benign neglect - but it was very happy.”

#28M always went to private school, and he went away to boarding school for a time and found it “very traumatic.” He was always tall and thin and felt awkward about his appearance. He did not feel popular growing up, was bullied “constantly,” and felt being smart was “mildly positive” and brought him some good attention from teachers which he “loved.” His parents were the most influential adults in his life. He says he had many friends in school, but his writing makes it sound as though he felt disconnected. He says he was generally unpopular and awkward.

He has recently converted to fundamentalist Christian and has decided that it is his
answer to everything. In his questionnaire writing he is highly conflicted in his answers; he is also highly agitated. He lists, and speculates about, one sadness after another and then dismisses it. He seems to be looking hard for cut and dried, easy answers. He had a painful divorce after a long marriage and it seems to be the precipitating factor in his apparently new search for answers.

Even as a successful business man nearly 60 years old, he alludes to but is unable to articulate the painful and confusing feelings he experienced in childhood. He did not explain whether the feelings related to other kids, the teachers, or the general atmosphere and activities at school.

Some subjects are especially difficult to quote because they offer considerably conflicting statements. #28M used recurrent phrases where he referred to his education as “the best, but I didn’t take advantage of it,” and he said repeatedly that his “childhood home was very happy,” but answered the question on his parents’ level of affection as being one of “benign neglect.” If he could change his parents they’d give him “more love”; and he would have the schools “be nicer”.

#28M feels that he was given access to the best possible education but that he wasted it. In separate sheets he writes, “Growing up I was completely influenced by what other people thought - mostly kids at school. I never could in any way cope with failure. I simply couldn’t handle it. I was lost. I had many failures and this bothered me.”

#28M mentions that he has suffered from depression most of his life and has abused alcohol since his teens. As to his career success, he says he is “lucky.” I ask in the adult questionnaire about any special circumstances or opportunities that had an impact on the family. He answered, “We had money.” In several places he mentions that he has never been a “snob.” Although he does not say anything about the level of wealth in his family, it seems to have been a somewhat isolating factor, his family being too different than most due to their wealth.

#28M spent some time doing things that gave him little satisfaction because “I thought I had to.” He says he was preoccupied with sex in college, athletes and tennis pros have been his role models, and when choosing between promiscuity and faithfulness chose promiscuity. Most of the subjects elaborated on the issue by explaining how trust is important in a relationship. #28M simply wrote down “promiscuity”.

He thinks he and his wife were intellectually compatible, but they had a horrible relationship. He does not elaborate. He loved parenting his two children, feels he is a better parent than his parents, and says, “You have to spend time with your kids--and tell them you love them.” #28M has good friends, confides in them, and thinks friendships are “pretty important.” He prefers time alone, though, to time with friends. Asked in the questionnaires if he had trouble finding really good friends, he wrote, “Yes--everyone does.”

#28M feels he is a worthwhile person, but writes that he is low in self-acceptance and a sense of personal value. In answer to the question about ever seriously questioning whether or not you could go on, he writes, “All the time.” Yes, he has considered suicide; he says depression makes him feel that way. The advice he would give a gifted, troubled young person is, “Become a Christian.”

#29F, in volunteer and computer careers, joined the study when she was 48. She submitted a Stanford-Binet IQ score of 142, and she described emotional abuse, but did not mention receiving therapy. Her DIT score is 46.7 which puts her primarily at Kohlberg’s stage 3,
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the first part of the Conventional Level, and in Dabrowski’s Level II: Stereotypical Roles. She received a 3 Tone score and gave evidence of being a Nonsearcher.

#29F grew up in an upper middle class community that greatly valued education. Both her parents were college graduates and her father completed law school and had his own law practice. She described the way her parents disciplined as both gentle and harsh, and “emotional support was implied, and seemed conditional. It’s taken me years to feel better about myself.” Her parents bickered frequently and this bothered the children greatly. She would change her parents:

Remake the perfectionist mold of expected behavior. However, I wonder if I would have fought so hard to demand their respect if they’d been different.

When she was 12 or 13 #29F was “subjected to voyeurism by uncle,” but did not tell her mother until she was an adult for fear she would not be believed. She did not give any details about the episode or how much it bothered her, but it appears she had no one to turn to discuss or deal with it.

She described a turning point in her childhood that is connected with her feelings toward her father.

I’d always thought my dad was the smartest person in the world, and that he’d hired everyone else to put on this play (life) for his family. I was quite disillusioned to find that was not the case. I do not remember the precipitating incident.

Subject #29F has been so pretty that she often felt her thoughts and viewpoints were ignored. Her attractiveness, she wrote, made it difficult for people to take her intellect seriously. She was always part of the “in” group in school, and she had good friends in school and church groups. One good friend was involved with her for years in music and dance classes. “And, we understood each other. Everyone should be so lucky to have such a friend.”

In response to the question about “fitting in” or not, she said, “Mother’s perfectionism was the greater problem.” It appears school was a better place than home for her. She had friends, and there were teachers she admired and who admired and encouraged her. She was in “tracked” classes, the college bound group, throughout her public schooling. She found it easy, even boring, in grade school, but it, and activities, improved over the years. She also wrote that her math teacher gave her difficulties when she was in high school. “He couldn’t understand why I was struggling. Now I’m [in a math-related field].”

In response to the question of whether or not she had experienced any uncertainty or confusion over her giftedness, she said,

Yes--never knew what was ‘normal.’ Felt that even more so when teachers asked me to compare my children’s behavior to normal children’s behavior. I don’t know what normal is.

Although #29F did not return an adult inventory, it is possible to deduce from the
Subject #30F, in volunteer and business careers, entered the study at age 47. She submitted a CTMM score of 184, profoundly gifted. Her DIT score is a very low 33.3 which puts her in Kohlberg’s Preconventional Level. Her questionnaire responses were supportive of that low level of moral and emotional reasoning and she fits the description of Dabrowski’s Level I. Her Tone score of 4 is reflective of her generally angry attitude. Although she describes abuse, she does not mention getting any help. She is a Nonsearcher.

#30F was raised by her mild-mannered mother and her harsh, unloving grandmother. Her parents, both high school graduates, met in high school, were apart during World War II, had two daughters, and divorced. She writes,

Mother was and is a gentle person...We lived with my grandmother and that was another story. She was brutal. Children were to be seen and not heard. She would brush my hair in the morning and if I flinched (She brushed hard) I would be hit. Some days, when she was struggling with her religion, she would throw me out of the house in the morning without breakfast, screaming that I should just go to school. I would return at lunch and sometimes she would still not let me in. It was terrible. I told my mother, but she did nothing. I don’t know to this day if she believed me or if she felt there was nothing she could do. I made my own way in the world. My mother was much too busy with other things to be part of what I did.

#30F says there was not a lot of affection in their home.

From time to time our mother tried to tell us that she loved us. She always made a big point of telling us that we were ‘planned’ and we were not mistakes. My grandmother never once said that she loved us or cared for us. I did not feel loved in my house. I did not feel that anyone cared and in time I didn’t care that they didn’t care...When I was younger I felt very badly that my mother would not attend school functions that I was involved in, she was just too busy. It didn’t make me feel bad about myself, it made me care less about her. I learned young that if I approved of what I was doing that was all that counted.

#30F’s father left the state when the subject was only 3 years old. She saw him only once after that, at age 12, when he came to retrieve the body of his father and take it back to their home state for burial. She wanted desperately “for him to stay, he would not. I wanted him to write, he did not. I have not seen him since.” Her father’s two subsequent wives apparently wanted him to stay in touch with his daughters but were unsuccessful in motivating him. The subject was seriously ill a few years ago and received a loving phone call from him.

I was very sick and almost died. When I was home from the hospital he called me. First time in 31 years. He said that he loved me and that we should talk more and become closer. I kept his phone number but have not and will not call him. It is too late.
Neither of #30F’s parents was highly educated, although her mother attended secretarial school and worked as a secretary, and her father was Trainmaster, a policeman and then a judge. Neither valued higher education for daughters. The subject did attend college, but her sister did not. She attended public schools except for a few middle school years where her aunt paid tuition for her. The same aunt paid tuition for college.

My aunt paid for college for me. I felt very badly and strange about this as it meant endless thank you letters that felt more like groveling than anything. My aunt got very angry if a week went by without a thank you letter from me. And if I had to buy books or something and needed money I had to send an even more groveling letter. It was the only way.

#30F grew up in an ethnically mixed, very diverse neighborhood. Although she never really fit in or enjoyed school, she seemed to thrive in her neighborhood where whole groups of mixed age, mixed gender, and racially diverse groups of kids played sports, pretend games, and roamed the under-the-street sewer system for care-free hours on end. She loved sports and played them adeptly, especially neighborhood ball games with mostly the boys. She took acting and skating lessons and made friends and received adult support and encouragement there, too.

#30F writes,

I always knew I was different. Yes, sometimes I felt bad about it, I wanted to fit in. Most of the time I just knew that I was different, sort of further ahead than the rest of the kids that I knew. I figured that it would always be like that and there was nothing I could do about it so why try.

She was more of a loner at school and never felt that she fit in. She felt many of her teachers picked on her.

I had a 5th grade teacher that I liked very much but she had her pets and I was not one of them. She almost destroyed me. She had a special library of books that she would let us check out. She would let us pick numbers to see who got the new ones. I figured out what her thinking was in picking the numbers so I could pick and get one. She didn’t like the fact that I got to read new books first and said so in front of the entire class. I gave the book back and refused to ever pick another number or read another book of hers. I felt like I was punished for being able to figure out the game when no one else could. I didn’t like her after that. That time haunted me for years to come.

She is one of the few subjects who reported becoming ill over school attendance.

Yes, I started to get sick when it was time to go to school. I think it started soon after the teacher did not want me to take home the library book. I got sick in the morning before going to school. Once at school and things got going I was fine, but it was rough getting there. This continued all through Junior and Senior High
School and disappeared the day I started college. I would be sick and throw up each and every morning for years and years.

Regarding her intelligence, #30F wrote,

Yes, people knew I was smart, “My family would not deal with it. The schools were shocked and I don’t think they knew how to deal with me.” [I was] fully reading by the time I started school so they didn’t pay much attention to me as the other kids needed their help and I could already read. They just sort of sent me to the library.

She says, “I remember no community support or interest. Academic accomplishment was nothing compared to being on the football team. The arts were paid little attention.” She had a creative writing teacher and drama teacher in high school who encouraged her and recognized her talents. Both told her she could indeed do all that she wanted to do. Their words are with her still.

Her accomplishments and contributions are notable. As a nine year old she started ice dancing and achieved the highest degree, Gold Dance. As an adult she organizes ice dancing competitions and is active as a volunteer at the highest levels of the United States Figure Skating Association. She has written numerous plays, books, articles, short stories, poems, and a musical. She is a private pilot and hot air balloon pilot. She has been active, at the highest levels, in politics. She earned her Screen Actors Guild card faster than anyone before her, according to her inventory. She has taught tennis, been a lifeguard, been an artist and sold her work, and uses her self-taught computer skills to teach others to compute and program.

Although #30F did not submit an adult level questionnaire, she gave considerable information about her adult life in her childhood questionnaire. She was married and had children, but did not say how many children or anything about how she raised them. Her husband decided he was gay, left her, and has since died of AIDS.

I went through all the anger you can imagine. For a time I wanted him to be dead and then he was dead. Now I don’t care. I just don’t want to be involved. I have a cousin that is gay. I didn’t want anything to do with him after my dead ex. Now it’s fine. I see him often.

#31F, in volunteer, verbal, and creative arts careers, qualified for the study based on a Stanford-Binet IQ of 162 and a Miller’s Analogies score of 93, putting her in the category of exceptionally gifted. She was 51 when she entered the study and was given a Tone score of 3. Her DIT score of 43.3 puts her at Kohlberg’s Conventional Level and in Dabrowski’s Level II. She is classified by the case study analysis as a Nonsearcher. She described emotional abuse in her background, but she does not mention receiving any therapy.

#31F was raised as the oldest of four children by her mother, who graduated from college with careers in volunteer and verbal areas, and her father, who held a master’s degree in a technical career area.

Interestingly, #31F’s father consented to participate in the study, and her mother filled out the parent questionnaire about her daughter, the study subject. The final study group does not
include the father’s age range, but the information is helpful to a fuller analysis of #31F. He scored an 83, a very high score, on the Miller’s, and his wife wrote to explain why he may not have done better (eyesight, aging, etc.). His Stanford-Binet is 158 and he is clearly on a par with his daughter intellectually. He achieved a score of 48 on the DIT, an insignificantly higher score than #31F.

#31F’s father has a completely positive and self-satisfied tone and no questions or regrets about his life. He is not a Searcher; he has strong, consistent opinions and viewpoints. His view of the home he and his wife established for their children is quite different from the report his daughter, subject #31F, gives.

In her childhood home there was…

…I very little affection. There was always a tacit approval from father but mother took my accomplishments for granted, e.g., in high school, one semester I came home with all As but an A- in PE. Her comment was ‘Any dunce should be able to get an A in PE!’ My mother actually told me several times she didn’t want me.

Throughout her questionnaires #31F gives considerable evidence that she is very proud of her father. He held several positions of great responsibility and high visibility in their state. In his own questionnaire the father claims to be very proud of all his children; he also notes that although he has a strong interest in history, he did not choose it as a career because he “never had a deep respect for the academic environment.” The comment is significant because his daughter who is part of this study is involved in such a career.

#31F was given adult responsibilities early in her life. “As eldest, from 13, I was in complete charge of housecleaning, laundry, cooking and dishes, plus picking up youngest sister from daycare.” It is interesting to note that she mentions in her questionnaire that her youngest sister may have been favored by her mother. In his own questionnaire, the father mentions that all four children are college graduates with advanced degrees. Subject #31F says she is the only one with an advanced degree, and the youngest sister attended college only one year.

Discipline in her household included considerable corporal punishment as well as yelling and shaming. She would change the way she was raised:

I would have thrived in a gentle, trusting, rational environment. I was not an ‘evil’ child who needed to be punished.

She did have someone to whom she was special during childhood,

My grandfather. He would listen to me, thought I was very bright, and constantly discussed his most recent readings with me. I felt close to Dad ‘at a distance’ because he was always off to himself and his own reading.

The grandfather’s attention did much to encourage and sustain the #31F. In her adult level questionnaire, she gives a sad post-script:

My father’s father died and was buried without my being told. He was someone I
truly loved and admired and I am still sad about that.

#31F had a rather traumatic experience in her early teens.

At age 13, I ‘escaped’ from initial stages of sexual abuse by neighbor, father for whom I was baby-sitting. I just never went near him again. Told my mother, but she brushed it off as my imagination.

#31F says she was not popular or unpopular, and she always had one to two close friends. She is still friends with a woman from high school. She liked school very much because the teachers were kind, encouraging, and supportive. When she was in high school she had a teacher in whom she could confide about her homelife, and “even cry.” There was tracking, grouping, and acceleration for the brightest students, and the gifted education professor enjoyed most of her classes and many of her classmates. Good grades and awards were important to her.

By young adulthood, #31F showed resilience when “refusing my mother’s demand that I go to jr. college so I could continue to take care of the house--went off to [major university in big city] on my own.”

Her parents never dated anyone but each other, and #31F dated and married one man, too. She makes many references to her disappointment in her marital relationship, “would like to have a healthy marriage of ‘equals’ but don’t.” She takes a positive attitude toward her problems as follows:

I think I have continued to grow in adulthood, and a great deal of my growth may be in reaction to a husband who sees the downside of everything I accomplish...Quality wins out, so I know I will come out with his admitted respect in the long run, but at times it is hard to take comments like ‘you’d never make it in the business world,’ ‘education is an easy field,’ ‘do you realize you were working for 20 cents an hour,’ etc. I don’t think I would be as strong as I am today if I hadn’t had the lack of positive family support I have had. I’ve enjoyed the hurdles, if only for their character-building. BUT, I would never do what was done to me to others!

In adulthood she has one woman in whom she occasionally confides, but generally she prefers time alone and reads, plays piano, and listens to music for hours at a time.

I realize I should have [friends] in my life, but I just don’t make very much time to do it...I believe most people like me, but don’t necessarily feel close to me. I think I am ‘too much’ for most people. They’re afraid I’ll judge them, although I’m not very judgmental.

#31F continues to describe her relationships with the important people in her life:

I believe my father, though very taciturn, is proud of me. My mother respects what I have accomplished, but does continue to try to diminish it.
In several places she mentions that she has great pride in her children and that they are all doing very well. Her son has the highest IQ but she ranks him lowest, in response to my questionnaire item to rank family members by intelligence, because “my youngest child, a rebel and underachiever, is probably the hardest for me to accept. The other two try and do achieve at high levels.” Her highly gifted son attended schools that had no acceleration or tracking, a factor that seems, as mentioned previously, to harm males more than females during their school careers. The highly gifted daughters, as with many of the highly gifted female subjects, appear to have adapted and done well despite the schools.

Aside from the loving and encouraging grandfather and the numerous teachers who guided #31F, there have been many people in her career field who have strongly encouraged her. She has won numerous community, state, and even national awards for her work.

She says she probably reached her low point in her early 30s when, with three small children and a husband who was totally uninvolved in their care,

I questioned what I was really doing and accomplishing. I can’t say that I’ve ever seriously contemplated suicide. I feel I do have control over my life and what happens to me and I have enough smarts to overcome any hurdles put up by others.

Her advice to a troubled young person is:

Things can change for you so quickly. Being smart has advantages because you will have many chances to change things yourself and some of those changes will bring profound satisfaction to you personally.

#32F, in volunteer, verbal, and creative arts careers, qualified for the study with a Wechsler Adult Intelligence Test IQ score in excess of 150. She has a Tone score of 1 and is categorized as a Searcher. Her DIT score is 70 which puts her into Kohlberg’s Postconventional Moral Development stages. She describes emotional abuse in her background and has sought and received therapy. She appears to be between Levels III and IV in Dabrowski’s Emotional Development.

#32F was raised by her high school graduate mother and high school drop out father. The household “had a totally patriarchal family life. [My father] ran everyone and everything, including my mother, while she did all the work-- until we kids got old enough to do a lot of it.” Her mother was primarily a housewife but was active in school and community volunteer work where she often had positions of leadership and great responsibility. The father, although not technically highly educated, became quite successful as a manufacturing executive in an era where ability played a more significant role than college degrees (Bell Curve, 1994). She frequently referred to her father as “left-brained, rational and disciplined.” It was she, however, who wrote that his childhood dream was of being an artist. It is possible he chose to rein in or suppress his creative side to concentrate on a “responsible” career in order to support his family.

#32F vented her anger over the confusing feedback she got as a child, feedback that left her depressed and shamed. She received little verbal or physical affection in childhood.

Shaming used steadily, physical punishment occasionally, high expectations to
the point of paralyzing the playful self--achievement was the order of the day! Sometimes they said they were proud. I do not ever remember being told that I was loved.

I wish I’d had more hugs and more play and fewer rules for good character. Good character meant being orderly, neat, respectful, quiet and unfailingly rational. I was messy, disorganized, challenging to authority, loud and emotional. I was also imaginative, funny, bright and loving, and if those traits had been recognized as much as the others were criticized, I would have had a very different view of myself.

If she could change anything about the way her parents treated her,

I’d have them express love and support rather than criticism and demands for achievement. I was motivated internally to do well and didn’t need the constant demands for perfection. An A- was a problem, a B a disaster. If I wasn’t first at something there was hardly any point in doing it. I wish I’d had more hugs and more play and fewer rules for good character.

Feedback she perceived as negative came from both home and school.

Much of who I was, I always felt, was bad, needed to be curbed and kept down. Brains were okay if they didn’t lead to disrespect for authority or challenging systems. Products were okay, but the somewhat chaotic self that was responsible for the making of the products was not.

#32F did not return an adult level inventory but gave information about a number of adult issues in her first inventory. Her responses give insight into the impact of psychological therapy on her ability to redefine episodes and situations from her past. It is in light of her changed viewpoint that she frames many of her answers.

#32F wrote that she suffered from lack of approval from her parents.

Therapy made it clear that my mother’s low self-esteem (she felt ‘dumb’ compared to her oldest sister) [there was only enough money to send the oldest of the seven children to college] was visited on me and that there was nothing I did that was ever ‘good enough.’

#32F mentioned several sexist situations from her past. First, her patriarchal father completely dominated his wife, the subject’s mother. The mother tried to advise her daughter:

Mother, feeling inferior, seldom stood up to him about anything, and advised us to avoid confrontations. Because he often said “No!” when we’d gotten as far in a question as, “Dad, may I...?” and because he never went back on a “No!” (even if he’d said it before he heard a perfectly reasonable request), she told us to ask her instead and to keep things from him. I ended up usually going head to head with
him, though. And when she suggested that I’d get much farther with him by batting my eyelashes and being his “sweet little daughter,” I wanted to throw up! It seemed dishonest and devious; I’ve never learned how to flirt for that reason, I think.

#32F had two best friends during her youngest years, neither of whom she met in school. Both girls were the daughters of her mother’s friends. She had a full and imaginative play life that entertained her with or without friends. Her success or failure at making friends in school was related to the types of school she attended. When she was in classes where there were few or no other bright children, she had no successful school friendships, although she only felt truly unpopular in junior high school. She attended a private girls’ high school where many of the girls were highly intelligent and motivated. She had many friendships in high school.

It was clearly dangerous to be so bright, so I was “good” instead of bright. That meant I did all the work the way I was supposed to do it, and got good grades. Since the work was so stupid most of the time, it didn’t make me feel I had to be bright to do it. I don’t know why I thought other kids didn’t always have good grades. It literally didn’t occur to me to think they couldn’t do that easy work. Maybe I didn’t think that much about it. My best friends were very bright kids, so I didn’t feel beyond them. I often felt brighter than my teachers, and that was hard to deal with, leaving me just angry with them, I think, for not being what they were supposed to be. The deep knowing about my intelligence got locked up and chained down, surfacing only years later when the dam of repression broke.

#32F, like so many highly gifted adults, did not automatically figure out what had been askew in her childhood. When she had children of her own, highly gifted as well, she wanted and needed to learn as much as she could about high giftedness so that she would not repeat the mistakes her own teachers and parents had made during her childhood.

#32F had two teachers in elementary school and several during high school who gave her positive feedback, guidance and encouragement. Her private, all-girls high school had…

…high expectations, brilliant teachers (some not so, but they were few) and genuine peers. Not to say it was all sweetness and light--it was adolescence, after all, and complicated by the many levels of processing done by all of us—we were ALL bright!—but educationally, it was terrific. And we learned women could be highly intelligent and run things!

As a young child in elementary school, #32F had two teachers who clearly resented their bright, rambunctious student. The behavior of the teachers makes it fairly evident that they assumed more maturity and intention on the girl’s part than could have been possible for a young child. High intelligence in a young child is often confused with adult circumspection. It is difficult for uninformed adults to deal effectively with highly gifted children. The subject’s own narrative best describes how asynchrony of emotional and intellectual development (Silverman, 1993) causes problems:
I was often taken to the cloak room and shaken by my second grade teacher, who left fingernail marks in my arms every time; she lost no opportunity to catch me in a mistake and ridicule me in front of the class—“and you think you’re so smart!” That was the year, too, when I was not allowed to take eighth grade books out of the library till my mother had me read one out loud to the librarian and she relented. Finally, my sixth grade teacher framed me, accused me of stealing records from the nurse’s office when she’d sent me there to run spelling words with a slow student, and got an announcement made over the PA system that I was a thief and a liar and no one should play with me on the playground. What had I done to her? I think I had refused to respect her, though I wasn’t a kid who talked back. I did raise my hand and correct her when she said something that wasn’t true, which was often. And as my mother said, when she refused to take my part and go to the school to defend me “you let your eyes show how you feel about her and what she does—so what do you expect?”

#32F feels that she knew early in life that she wanted to be a [career] but that her parents really did not care what she did beyond marrying and being a wife and mother. She had teachers in high school, college and graduate school who expressed admiration for her ability and work, and such encouragement meant a great deal to her. Her fifth grade teacher, a man, was one of her best teachers; he was supportive, encouraging, and accepting of the way she was. When she was accused by her sixth grade teacher of being a liar and a thief, he was the only adult in the school to help her.

He came to me in the hall to tell me he knew I hadn’t done what they said because he knew me, and that I shouldn’t let them “get to me.” My fourth grade teacher, on the other hand, met me in the hall to say she was not surprised that I was a thief and a liar.

#32F wrote about the one instance where she was allowed to work on her own. “Ironically, my sixth grade teacher sent me to the back of the room when she didn’t know what else to do with me because I’d finished the work, and had me do the very work that became my life long career--she thought it punishment, so I played Bre’r Rabbit and complained bitterly, and loved every minute.”

#32F, attended an all-girl high school of considerable challenge and excellence. She loved it there, did well academically and socially. Her experiences there led her to have some difficulties later, as follows:

In college, where I was with males in class for the first time since 7th grade, and especially in graduate school, I was called a ‘castrating bitch’ for arguing with male students and professors. This was not, it was made very clear, acceptable behavior for a female. On the other hand, some professors made it equally clear they liked that interaction, and sometimes I was told I’d given them ideas they’d never heard before.
Her career has made most of her adult life more solitary than social, yet friendship connections remain significant. She met her husband in college, married him soon thereafter, and has been quite happy in her long term marriage. Some of her avocational interests have brought her to acquaintances and friendships with others and #32F seems to have always found satisfying connections throughout her life.

She has a background in a Protestant religion, but religion has not been a focal point of her life. She did not write much about her spiritual journey because most of the questions are on the adult inventory. She admits to having felt depressed and suicidal through most of her life, until therapy, and said it is due primarily to the lack of “fit” between the way she is and the way she perceived her parents and teachers to want her to be.

#33F, in volunteer and verbal careers, submitted a Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS) in the upper 130s that the test administrator told her was a minimal score for her. She is a Searcher who scored 80 on the DIT, the second highest in the study group, and well into Kohlberg’s Postconventional moral development thinking. She was 45 years old when she entered the study. Someone had submitted her name as a possible subject; she was flattered and amazed to be asked to participate. She described extensive abuse in her background and did seek and receive extensive counseling as an adult. She has a Tone score of 2 and appears through questionnaire responses to be a Dabrowski Level IV/V.

#33F was raised as “an army brat” by her college graduate father, a lower-ranking officer, and her mother until she was 11 years old. Her mother died, her father remarried, and life changed drastically for her. She has two older and one younger brother who are close to her age. A much younger half-sister and half-brother round out the early family picture. The family moved almost once a year and spent many years in Europe, and Army schools, due to her father’s military career.

#33F was another of the women who was given extensive household and childcare responsibilities early in her life. When her mother died, she was sent to live with her grandmother for the first year, and then came back to the family where her father had married a German national. The “older children,” that is, the children from the “dead wife,” did the majority of the housekeeping and cooking, and the stepmother was extremely critical and negative about their efforts.

#33F said that, as the only girl in the family, she was treated more protectively than her brothers. She was not allowed to go anywhere, not even stay after school for activities. She was also needed, and used, at home. In retrospect, she is still very angry that she was forced to stay home where she would be safe, and yet that is where the sexual abuse took place. Her oldest brother was a troubled young man who tyrannized the family. Apparently Army children who misbehaved could get their parents disciplined; this son used this information as a weapon against his parents.

#33F was the victim of sexual abuse. Her older brother abused her. It began when she was 4 or 5, then stopped for about 6 years. It began again as full sexual intercourse and intimidation when the subject was in her teens. The family was so dysfunctional that she knew it was useless to tell anyone about her brother. She did not fully realize herself that it was sexual abuse until she was in her thirties and in counseling. The brother is only about 2-1/2 years older than she and she felt guilty and responsible, although completely at his mercy.
Shortly before the abuse continued to its fullest extent, subject #33F was taken for surgery to remove scar tissue. She had not minded the scar, from an early childhood burn, but feels her family did not want her to be less than perfect. She was terrified of the hospital stay and surgery and felt violated and powerless. In her study surveys she keys her weight gain, she has been “fat,” by her own description, since her early teens, to the surgery that was against her will. She believes that she became compulsive about eating in order to assert control over her own body. There is considerable evidence that victims of sexual abuse assert this type of control, too, and the incest resumed shortly after the surgery. She also experienced inappropriate kissing and fondling from her stepmother’s father, “which terrified me.” She kept putting on weight. She hated her body and used to draw pictures of herself with only a head.

Her survey answers are long and detailed. The following quote is one of many similar descriptions:

I felt like I was not worth anything for a long period of time, both as a teen and as an adult. My parents’ perceptions were a direct influence. I felt that I was unlovable as a person, especially since I was fat. I felt that I was only good for sex as every female was, but again my being fat decreased my value there. I was stupid on top of it from the expressed opinions. I could never do anything right, no matter what, and was raised with the idea that I had better be grateful for any crumbs that came my way.

She continued to explain the effect her parents had on her. “They believed they were making sure I did not think I was better than anyone else, while in fact, they killed my spirit and talents, intentionally, routinely, methodically. They made sure that I felt worthless enough not to challenge anything they did to me.”

In answer to the question about what she would change about the way her parents raised her, she wrote,

You mean besides a total overhaul and infused humanity? I do not think there is any one thing to fix. The errors were so hurtful, especially being premeditated. If I could change something, it would be not having my mother die, and growing up with someone who loved me to guide and help me.

She wrote many more suggestions, as well, all that would make a child feel loved, encouraged, and supported.

#33F, as is typical of emotionally abused subjects, said that she simply tried to do the opposite of everything her parents did. As she explained,

There were no other role models in ‘real life’ but I had plenty in the books I read. I do not remember specific characters I wanted to be like, except Alex Ramsey in the Black Stallion books. Most of the attraction there was having a beautiful black horse as a friend, and part may have been being rescued. I looked to any person, fiction or not, who had a bond with a horse, and who made decisions in spite of adversity to do as they believed.
Military schools were quite different from civilian schools. For #33F the most important difference was that the schools were challenging. The Army tested children before school entrance and the ones who scored especially high started school early. She was always at least a year younger than classmates and she feels that caused her some problems. Despite being older than her classmates, she was still more advanced than most of the children, and the teachers gave her more work and let her read a great deal on her own. She loved reading. Almost every study subject in the study mentioned a great love of reading; and they mentioned that being “allowed to read” was their favorite way of passing the time at school.

#33F made a number of observations about school and her relative intelligence.

I heard others think I was smart at school, but heard at home that I wasn’t that good, and not to get a fat head about it. The teachers, especially in English, encouraged me, but being raised in my family just taught me that I wasn’t anything special. I knew I was faster to pick things up, but again, I thought it was just luck. My parents made it very clear to me that I was not special in any way, and I rarely had any teachers who thought otherwise and expressed it to me. I was brainy by reputation, but I thought that was mostly because I cared about school work more than most. School was the one place where I was allowed out of the nightmare [of sexual and emotional abuse at home], and homework took me out of the way of a lot at home. My seriousness was unusual, and I was aware of that. I did not see it as being smarter than the other students, just more focused.

According to #33F, in the schools for military children there was always homework and the expectations and competition were high. The down side was that there was power and prestige based on the rank of the parent. She loved school anyway. It was safety and respite from a horrible home life. “It was an island of sanity for me.” She did not receive a great deal of encouragement or notice at school, especially since she deliberately tried to go unnoticed due to feeling different [from the abuse], but she did not receive much negative treatment, either, for which she was grateful.

I thought that I was the only one in the world that abuse was happening to, and kept others away from me so they would not ‘figure it out’ and blame me...I did not do much to take care of myself, including washing my hair, using deodorant, etc. for the first year of the abuse, and that didn’t help.

Because military children move often, the subject never had any long-term friendships. She always had at least one friend, however, “usually another social outcast like myself...As a teenager, I usually had better connections with my teachers than with other kids.” She had an art teacher during her junior year in Germany who “encouraged me, helped me to see my talents, told me I should pursue art school if that’s what I wanted. That teacher was the first person who I felt ever saw my soul.”

Subject #33F had a number of self-identity issues that stemmed from the sexual and emotional abuse at home. She tried to “read” the reactions of people outside her family so that
she might discover some positive attributes of her own.

Some saw me as a person with rare insight, others thought I was crazy. It was very hard to see it clearly. I was often confused by the variety of responses. Even reading about giftedness and having my own children identified was confusing. I did not see them as any smarter than I was, so could not see how they would be gifted. Seeing a list of characteristics made it very clear that I was probably in the gifted range, yet it was hard to accept. It feels like I am boasting, or somehow trying to claim something I have not earned. There is something bad about claiming to be smart, it is arrogant and boastful. I have less confusion now, but there are still beliefs that make it hard to say I am anything but average. There is nothing wrong with being average, but somehow there is an idea that there is something wrong to see yourself as anything more than average.

After she left home, #33F went to college. She did not have the skills for making friends except “for favors.” She was afraid of men “because of the sexual abuse.” She wanted friends, though, and found them through becoming politically active on her college campus. She went through a great many changes during the years of college and discovered that the changes she was making seemed to drive away old friends. She married in her mid-twenties while still thinking it was her job to “take care of a man.” The marriage did not last long, although it did produce two children.

#33F was raped after her marriage ended and she became pregnant. She already had two children and was struggling to go to school, raise her children, and work full time. She had an abortion, one of the hardest decisions she ever made. How she has progressed since her troubled youth becomes evident in writing such as the following:

I am not lonely. I used to be, before I was a whole person. Then I thought I had to have someone with me constantly, and could not tolerate being alone. Now I enjoy solitude as much as I do having company. I think the people I have known and still know have been good, solid connections, intimate friendships. I am an open and available person, or at least I try to be, and I have enough people to call when I need to talk. I share outlooks in common with people from work who I become friends with, and we can and do often express our support, empathy, affection, connections and concerns.

She adds that the career or job she has as not as important for her fulfillment because “I look to be fulfilled by the person I am, and that has happened.”

#33F stayed home for a couple years with her children and was on welfare. Her eldest child had severe emotional and learning problems that were diagnosed as being related to ADHD (an attention deficit disorder). She spent a great part of this time getting her own therapy, as well. It is merely speculative to interpret the apparent progress that subject #33F has made. A key to her resiliency seems to be that she understood early that she needed to change the way she viewed the world, not just try harder with the same remedies she had learned in her abusive past. She continues to have a network of supportive, diverse friends, and is currently seeing a man.
about whom she is quite serious.

She does not practice a religion but has explored different religions and philosophies throughout her adult life.

Religion is fine for people who want it. I would like to see our society more supportive of any spiritual expressions, not just those of recognized, organized faiths. I think there are some religions that are dangerous exactly because they stop the faithful from examining the changing world around them. Often too they relegate men and women to rigid roles, which I have as hard a time with as I do racism. I see fanatical religions able to turn people’s wills against the community’s and their best interest. That scares me.

In the final “round-up” where subjects were asked for additional information, #33F was requested to take the Miller Analogies Test. She decided she did not want to, but wrote asking about her DIT score. She was curious about whether or not high scores on the DIT could explain her social movement farther and farther away from others.

What I am finding is that the closer I get to being the person I want to be, the further I go in a direction that is so clearly ‘right’ to me, the further I get from being acceptable, understood and even in a place others find comprehensible. I have concerns that while my physical world gets larger as I grow to be me, my social world is getting rapidly smaller. I have fewer values and connections in common with people, see their choices as uninformed, often wrong for the world or our ecosystem and find people apparently unable to see limits, consequences and directions that are so clear to me.

There were times when #33F wondered whether or not she could survive, especially when she was divorced and had two babies. “I was on welfare, had no financial resources, had been pulled into court by my newly divorced ex-husband over the visitation schedule that the child psychologist was recommending, had my ex-husband try to raise my sexual abuse issue in court, had my parents disown me when I said I felt unloved when they couldn’t cancel a dental appointment to make a promised visit, started having health problems that the doctor could not diagnose that turned out to be a stress related syndrome, was raped, got pregnant and had an abortion which I did not really want but felt was needed, got involved with a man only to find out he was a drug user and ended the relationship. I had several room-mate changes in the house I shared, my Great Aunt, my favorite relative, died, and I went back to work full time, then got laid off, called back and laid off again. I also started having counseling at this time for the incest issues and having a totally crazy life. There was no end to it, it seemed.” She never seriously considered suicide, however.

Her advice to a troubled young person would hinge on her own study of Dialectical Materialism.

I would try to start with how changes are so subtle that even while they are happening, it is hard to see them, but more and more happen, and when there are
enough, there is a change that appears to be sudden and major. While life is often painful, especially for those who see more and don’t shut it out, all those pains add to the depth of our understanding and enrich our lives when the little changes build up to the big leap...I would add that every person fills a hole in history, that everyone affects the life of every person around him or her.

#34F/M, in computer and creative arts careers, was 42 years old when she entered the study and is a member of numerous high IQ societies having consistently scored in the 150s on intelligence tests. She has a Tone score of 1, and she received the highest score in the group on the DIT, an 83.3. She is a Searcher who operates at Kohlberg’s Postconventional stages, and has been categorized for this study at Dabrowski’s Levels IV and V. She experienced considerable childhood abuse and has had extensive therapy as an adult.

#34F/M was raised as a boy by her attorney mother and college graduate electronics sales manager father. She began life as a boy, but writes that he knew by the time that he was 10 that his true self was female. He had surgical sexual reassignment when he was in his thirties. So, just as different subject’s viewpoints must be considered within the context of their backgrounds, subject #34F/M must be considered with his transsexual nature in mind. In addition, the first 35 years of his life he attempted to live successfully as a male. For the remainder of the case study I shall refer to #34F/M by the masculine or feminine according to the time in the subject’s own life.

#34F/M was the older of two boys. His mother stayed at home to raise the children until they were both well into elementary school. He describes the discipline as mostly harsh with screaming, hitting, and shaming. “...positive often taken for granted, negative behaviors punished.” He felt that his parents’ pride in his cleverness was used more as a tool for them to show off, “Second-hand self-esteem for my parents.”

His parents’ views on education were supportive but, as he wrote,

…protective and a bit overbearing...pressured me to enroll at [nearby university] and commute from home. Not the best environment for me, I feel. It would have been better to develop independence ‘away.’

#34F/M experienced sexual abuse. He explains:

I was technically raped by a middle-eastern man at about age 15, my first remembered sexual contact. There may possibly have been some childhood abuse, but I have no direct evidence. Always felt myself to be ultra-prudish and Victorian in my younger years, much less prone to sexual exploration than my peers of either sex. I’m far more open now.

#34F/M’s mother had two brothers who lived with the subject’s family. The subject’s elder uncle was severely retarded; the younger one was very bright and a diagnosed schizophrenic. The subject feels he was probably closest to the younger uncle than to any other adults during his childhood.

According to #34F/M, his mother seems to have been a confused woman, confused by
the era in which she lived.

Mother always spouted Pauline biblical exhortations about ‘the woman’s place’ yet contradicted these in her daily life (she was a police officer in the early 1950s) and much the caretaker for her brothers. I was rather sheltered and dependent; maybe a bit passive/aggressive in terms of inner rebelliousness in adolescence.

Eventually the mother earned her JD and worked for first the state and then the federal government as an attorney.

“Marriage seemed chilly or distant. Not much display of affection before the children. We did see them quarrel a lot.” He would change the way his parents raised him. “They should have encouraged much more independence, provided choices, and offered guidance about the ‘real’ world. They seemed to have believed that one is a child until age 21...no gray area. No process of maturing!” The subject never directly refers to his father’s influence. The subject’s younger brother is presently a struggling realtor and lives with their widowed mother.

School was generally not a good place for #34F/M but he mentions a few good things about school in the “turning points” item.

I could read even before kindergarten. I remember that adults were really astonished at my reading level versus age. School in fact held me back by forcing me to plod through material which was too easy. I liked elementary school very much, particularly those years when the teacher provided special encouragement and reinforcement...Had very positive teachers in 5th and 6th grades who totally encouraged my curiosity and learning. 7th grade, even as part of an Accelerate Program, was comparatively a wasteland...cold and impersonal...Advanced reading (e.g. college physics) encouraged in 5th and 6th grades. Those teachers gave me math books and special problems. All else much of a waste.

He added one final observation on his school experiences related to curriculum:

As said elsewhere, 5th and 6th grades were the peak. Afterwards, my high expectations of the future were surely disappointed and enthusiasm waned over subsequent years...I feel they delivered a ‘standardized product’ without much regard for needs and abilities of the individual. I believe effective education is personal, one-on-one only, as in ancient Greece.

#34F/M is one subject who has truly belabored the point that he did not receive enough guidance during all of the years he was required to go to school. He wrote:

Would wish that I had spent more time with guidance counselors or other professionals in trying to find out what I really wanted to do with my life...I needed more positive encouragement and didn’t receive enough; too often left to my own devices ... [Needed] more individualization and encouragement at earliest years...I just came to feel increasingly lost and abandoned within a system that cares only for its own perpetuation and process.
As with a number of other subjects, #34F/M wrote that he feels that he is largely self-educated and, except for a few stand-out teachers, schools mostly got in the way. There were a few stand-out, positive opportunities:

In primary school I did feel that I fit in. It possibly was a special ‘fast track’ sort of class anyway, that rather much held together during those primary years. They were also rather kind and gentle in that group.

The social side of school was as abusive as his “chilly” home life. “Very much bullied and beaten by classmates during middle school years, especially ages 12-14. This was horrible; nightmarish. Could not defend myself...Had few childhood friends, even in primary school. Found adult companionship more stimulating.”

#34F/M felt very lonely throughout his childhood. He was not interested or good at athletics and his main interests were solitary, like reading. His feminine mannerisms caused him severe problems by adolescence. He wishes the school had provided “intervention to prevent persecution and bullying.”

He was quite depressed and “lost” during his college years. He believes that he badly needed guidance or counseling, but did not actively seek it because he was afraid his gender identity issue would be too much of a problem. He acknowledges that his abusive childhood led him on a dedicated spiritual quest during his young adulthood; he explored many religions. The philosophical and spiritual journey that #34F/M has taken in adulthood holds particular interest for this study because he had so many things cause difficulty for him. He was always good at math and sciences and stumbled into computer programming by chance. Although he was good at it, recognized for being a “troubleshooter,” and paid quite well, he found the work cold and unsatisfying.

He married a woman “pen friend” from another country whom he had met through Mensa when he was 22. The marriage lasted less than a year. He married another woman at “age 29--for about 9 years...started happily but ended in coldness (divorced by partner).” The subject did not become a parent either as a man or a woman, but has related very well to children of all ages and wishes she could have raised a daughter.

#34F/M did not write as much on her adult level inventory as she had on her childhood questionnaire. Now in her mid-40s, she has discarded her career as a computer programmer, left two marriages behind that she was legally in as a man, and entered into a “loving triad” relationship with two other lesbian women, at least one of whom is also trans-gendered.

Some illustrative quotes indicating where subject #34F/M is now emotionally and philosophically come from the section on “Beliefs and Values.” Work ethic: “Replace with a happiness ethic.” Mixed marriages: “Wonderful. We’re only one people across this globe, anyway. Best hope for humanity.” Religion: “As a matter of taste, I prefer polytheist goddess religions or none at all. Ethics more important than form. Dogma is garbage.”

Promiscuity/faithfulness: “It is a matter of honor and honesty in love; I see it as an ethical good.”

American educational system: “Paraphrase Gore Vidal: ‘In Russia there’s no food...in America no culture.’ Educational system is out of step with the times owing to bureaucratic institutions.”

#34/M writes that friendships and relationships have improved for her “in proportion to
my own willingness to be open and ‘take risks.’” She now confides in friends and follows her heart in most matters. There is only one reference to her new career as a beautician/cosmetologist, and several more references that imply she is the primary cook in her triad and does not presently work outside the home. Attempts to get a follow-up response from her after a three year lapse were unsuccessful. She had admitted that her present happiness is highly related to “being in love,” so a follow-up would be helpful. She did not respond to the request for an update.

#34F/M did experience thoughts of suicide “when agonizing over gender-related problems and ‘holding it all inside,’ but too passive to follow through. Hoping life would ‘get better’ in time. And, it did!!” Her advice to a troubled young person is this:

You must give destiny and meaning sufficient time to materialize potentialities.
You can’t know of either without living it through, at least to satisfy curiosity.

#35F, in volunteer, verbal, and computer careers, was 47 when she joined the study. She mailed sections of the inventories to the study over a period of four years. She wrote literally volumes about her life and her thoughts. She had no qualifying test scores to submit until she took the Miller Analogies Test and got a 79. She received a 2 Tone score and a 71.7 on her DIT. She is a Searcher who fits Kohlberg’s Postconventional levels and her questionnaire responses indicate Dabrowski Level IV emotional development. She experienced considerable childhood abuse and sought therapy as an adult.

#35F, now in her early 50s, appears to have undergone a series of positive disintegrations during the past four years. She freely admits that being invited to participate in the study contributed tremendously to her new and better feelings about herself and her abilities. In the first year of the study, #35F was given a Tone score of 3 because she has a great deal to be angry and sad about from her past. Her tone actually improved during the four years and would now warrant a 1. She took the DIT early in the process and earned a 71.7, quite high for the study group. It seems likely she would score even higher now. Follow-up research could possibly substantiate that opinion.

#35F was raised by two parents who fought with each other and treated their children oddly from the beginning. In fact, the parents finally divorced when the subject was 16 years old. Both parents finished high school and the father took two years of engineering in college. The father had numerous affairs, was an active and sometimes violent alcoholic, and the mother was a housewife who lived by her own very strict set of “rules.” Only the eldest child received any definite favorable attention from either parent. The parents were both children of immigrants; the mother did not really understand the American educational system, and the father was “old world” sexist and believed, and frequently stated, women were for “sex and chores.”

#35F was the second child of four and apparently not as attractive, in the eyes of her parents, at least, as her first-born sister. The most illustrative anecdote from her surveys is regarding the celebration of birthdays in her family:

My parents did not like us children. They both vied competitively for the attention of my older sister. It was as if the other three didn’t exist. Only her birthday was remembered. Only her first sacraments were worth celebrating. My younger sister
was lucky enough to be born on my grandfather’s birthday. While she never had her ‘own’ day, she also never had the pain of seeing it forgotten as my brother and I did.

#35F and her siblings were raised strict Catholic through attending Catholic schools and church, although neither parent attended church.

My confirmation: Thrown together afternoon affair. My parents did not attend. A new prayer book was thrown at me--not wrapped. No ceremony. Picked up a ride from my neighbor--their whole family and grandparents were attending--as everyone had done at my older sister’s. Another example of who’s not important.

#35F experienced sexual interference as a young child, as well as some odd sexual overtones exhibited by her father. The background leading up to the episode is as follows: Every time she made friendships, it seemed, the girls moved away and left her searching for new friends. When in 3rd grade, one girl, the child of a divorcee, “my Dad talked about her in nasty and mean ways,” became her “illicit” friend for the next 3 years and “we explored sexual pleasures together.” Toward the end of this friendship, before the girl moved away,

I was walking home from church on Sunday morning. Our home was 1 mile from church. My sisters had walked ahead after fighting with me. A car approached me and the driver asked if I knew where the high school was. I told him where I thought it was. He asked if I’d show him. I said I didn’t really know where it was. He looked down at his pants where he was fondling himself. He asked me if I knew what that was. I lied. I said ‘no.’ It was after my brother’s birth so I did know what it was. I was so ashamed that this happened to me. I knew it was because I was not liked by God, because I was evil. It would never happen to my sister--she was chosen by God. I felt totally at fault and to blame. He wouldn’t have stopped me if it weren’t for my little illicit thoughts and pleasures, etc., etc. I never told my mother because I knew she would find fault with me.

Although it is unlikely anyone reading all this would question whether or not subject #35F was emotionally abused, there is one more important story that stands out from the many she listed. When she was four her next youngest sister was born. The family went on a picnic and the subject remembers distinctly that she thought her mother tried to drown her. She wrote in a later section of the inventory, “I was afraid of water--especially when anyone was around.” It seems she may have tried to kill herself a few years later:

When I was 7, I almost drowned in our neighbor’s swimming pool. I was playing on the stairs and jumped or something because I felt myself walking to the bottom of the deep section. The neighbor’s daughter swooped her hand into the pool and pulled me out. I remember thinking how easy it is to die. You just walk down into it. I wasn’t scared. I was curiously calm. Stoic.
#35F not only was never identified as gifted, she experienced what seemed like a deliberate “put-down” of her abilities throughout school. She was removed during 8th grade from the high track classes in order to remove her from a teacher who was feuding with the subject’s mother.

In the 8th grade my teacher despised my mother and used me as her punching bag. She made me the object of humiliation in front of the class. Background: her son was sweet on my older sister and she wanted my mother to discourage the relationship. My mother refused. It was a harmless attraction between 2 high school freshmen. The tension between my teacher and my mother ended in a shouting match outside of the classroom while we were in session. The principal pulled me from that class and put me ‘where there was room.’ Our school ‘tracked’ students. I was in the top ‘A’ track class. The put me into a low B track class. I was not allowed to take a language nor algebra that year. Although I maintained good grades, I was not challenged at all. When I entered high school, I had hopes of getting into some interesting work. But I had already been branded. I was put into remedial math and average English classes [the only classes available for the track].”

The subject was never returned to the honors track classes, yet she pursued literature, art, and creative writing on her own. The following quote from her was written early in the study when she still believed there had been a mistake inviting her to participate.

Once I shared a poem with a [high school] teacher who was in charge of publishing the school newspaper. He also taught the advanced track literature seniors who were all ‘gifted.’ He did not think well of me and found it a pain to have me in his newspaper class...His only comment to my poem was to circle the word ‘torrential’ and put big question marks around it. He smirked at my emotional outburst in the poem. Not another word as to subject, rhythm or anything. I laugh at this experience today because I realize that this teacher who had a list of ‘right things to do’ which guided his life had no concept of what to do with a student like me: I obviously was not important or the district would have put me in his ‘gifted’ class. He smirked at me because he realized I knew nothing about the structure and form of poetry and yet I thought I could write it! I wonder today how many students have been battered by the schools and teachers who sit in judgment over ‘gifted’ minds?

#35F concluded her comments in this section by writing, “I resent having been robbed of education in my early years because some arrogant teachers only wanted to teach the select few students that they found appealing.” Life at home was not any better in helping her build a coherent self-identity.

My older sister was perfection plus. I was nothing but a DISAPPOINTMENT. I was a girl--I was supposed to be a boy. I was inquisitive which both parents
interpreted as rude and challenging their authority. I was smart so they confused my ability to learn with a capability for understanding my actions in a greater context. Therefore, they attached adult motivations to even the simplest questions of a 4-year old. By the time I was 7 or 8 my life had become a painful existence. I knew God had made me wrong and I could never be right.

#35F is an example of a highly gifted woman whose home life and school life came together in such a way that she found it nearly impossible to concentrate and learn despite her high ability. Her SAT scores were just under 1000, unusually low for someone as bright as she. Despite the fact that she is now quite successful and productive in her very technical career, it took her years to overcome the family and school obstacles she endured.

#35F had numerous girlfriends her own age through Brownie troops, but each one moved away before a long term friendship could be established. No educators ever seemed to take any special interest in her. Her father’s father treated her with love and respect and she credits that relationship with salvaging a sense of self-worth in her. There was also a neighbor woman who was her mother’s age who befriended her. This woman was totally loving and accepting of her and their friendship continues still. Again, this kind of opportunity in the life of an abused child appears to be critical to eventual resiliency.

Guidance for #35F was minimal. She was told she could be “a nurse or a teacher. I didn’t want to be a nurse.” Her father believed, and said, “No girl goes to school after 18 - go to work!” She put herself through school.

Dad didn’t want to pay for anything. I won a small scholarship, but Dad refused to let me have additional funds. Financial aid was not available to me because Dad made plenty of money.

She provides an excellent description of how lack of accurate information about her abilities still leave her wondering where she fits in:

In my current work I am faced with this on a daily basis. I worked in a department of Ph.D.s in science, computer science and mathematics. We work on issues relating to the future use of computing technology. I do not hold even a master’s degree. I have my BA in English and a minor in music. Often the advanced Ph.D.s will talk about concepts completely foreign to me and I am totally lost. But, if I get the opportunity to question one-on-one, I will discover that the concept has occurred to me often, but I have not explored the concept in mathematical or computer science vernacular. There have been situations in which I have actually forwarded new issues or alternative solutions to the Ph.D.s (who have not previously thought of this aspect) because I understand the concept so well and I have a ‘common sense’ approach to dealing with it.

#35F married in her early twenties, had one child, and worked and went to school throughout her first marriage. She became aware that “something was not right” with her and sought help from a psychiatrist. She learned that she was intellectually gifted and needed to
increase her training and career aspirations. She learned that she had inappropriately turned her child into her best friend, thus leaving her husband out of the family circle. She then left both her husband and child.

#35F left her child in the loving and very capable hands of her ex-husband, sent double the child support required, and learned everything she could about herself, life, spiritual issues, and the nuts and bolts of her career. After several years she married “the kindest man in the world” and after another year, her daughter moved back in with her. She has a wonderful relationship with her ex-husband, her daughter, and her second husband of 15 years.

During the period between marriages, #35F says she gave herself time to explore her own goals and needs. There was one man, a co-worker, who relentlessly “bullied” her into finding out for herself who she was. She saw a therapist, read widely, and decided she was the one person who could make her life the way she wanted it to be.

The tone of her adult level inventories is filled with observations of what can and cannot be in life. The following is especially illustrative:

I have learned that I never really need to be lonely if I call upon my connections to participate. Most are glad to support me. My mistake early on was to believe that there were these special friends who were ‘kindred spirits,’ and I used to ‘throw people away’ when I discovered that they did not complete me in that fashion. I have learned that no one - no matter how close (even my dearest daughter and husband) can ever be the person who is you. So you invite people to participate at the level that they can. And if you feel continually depleted by an individual, you ask that person less often than someone who fulfills you.

Another area where she shares a viewpoint common in higher DIT scorers is in the area of personal accomplishment. It is an intrinsic motivation independent of credit or recognition. She writes,

What is most important to me is to grow, change, and be part of something beyond my own little life. To contribute to the world, even if in some small unseeable way. It does not bother me, for instance, to have people not recognize me or know I was the founder of this association or on the founding board of that program. I am happy to see the thing take a shape of its own, independent of its beginnings.

In response to a question about what she wants for her own children, #35F wrote,

I have raised her to understand that she is responsible for herself, and for the things that happen to her. I was 36 years old before I learned this and it was a shock to see that I could have prevented my own unhappiness and degradations by simply accepting responsibility for the things that happened to me.

Raised Catholic, #35F believes strongly in God, but she has read widely on all the world’s religions and integrated the common threads into one spiritual picture for her own life. Her spiritual life is very important to her. She has many interests and hobbies, strong and well-
developed opinions, and continually growing and changing goals for herself. She reports that she is very satisfied with her life, but adds that does not mean she is done growing and changing.

#35F has had a number of times in her life when she seriously considered suicide. There was an episode during her late thirties that involved heavy drinking and behavior that she thought she could never forgive. A sister and a couple friends helped her see that she could forgive herself and change herself. This was the most profound positive disintegration she experienced, and she almost did not make it through it. She had to be willing to face what she did not like and take an active role in changing herself.

What she wrote about what to tell a troubled young person is a similar written summary of what the highest DIT scorers all said.

Learn to trust yourself—no matter who disagrees with you. What looks to your parents like craziness might be creativity, what looks like nonconformance might be individuality, what looks like anti-social isolation might be a need to reflect and contemplate. Always rely and depend on yourself, never on things outside yourself—like food, drugs, alcohol, movies, or friends. Friends are there to share a journey, share joy or sorrow, but they are not there to lead or follow. And always know that the answer to your problems, the answer to your questions is inside yourself, because as you develop knowledge to ask the question, so you are developing the power to answer it. You can do anything you want to do, and an academic grade no more reflects your interest or ability to succeed in a subject than your age reflects your maturity. A subject you understand poorly today may catch your imagination and prove your genius tomorrow. Never, never, never let anyone tell you who you are or what you can be, no matter what the evidence is to you. You can change yourself to be anything you focus on. What you think you are is what you are. What you dream about is what you become. Never turn your thoughts or dreams over to anyone else. And finally, forgive yourself, love yourself. Hatred and resentment will tear away at your creativity and imagination until nothing is left. Forgive others for what they do to you. Remember that everyone is doing the best job that they can with what they have to work with. Expect a miracle every day, and the world will unfold miraculously before you.

#36M, in verbal, technical, and business careers, qualified for the study with a CTMM of 185, one of the highest IQs in this study group. Like the previous subject, #35F, this subject experienced great changes from the time he started the study at age 47 to when he completed it four years later. He initially completed only the childhood level inventory and then refused to participate further. The DIT score and initial childhood information come from his first participation in the study. He did not appear to become a Searcher until after he completed his first survey and DIT, therefore, he is placed in the Neutral group for the main analysis. His clear change from probable Nonsearcher to Searcher gives some indication that there are self-actualizers who did not begin life as natural Searchers. Theoretically, if they did not begin life, or even their adulthoods, as Searchers, that means a person can become a Searcher and increase the likelihood of self-actualization.

#36M earned a Tone score of 3, and his DIT score is a low moderate 48.3. For the
aforementioned reasons, he is categorized as a Neutral and appears to have moved from the early Conventional to late Conventional stages of Kohlberg’s Moral Development and to be actively in Dabrowski’s Level III.

#36M was raised by his mother, who finished high school and secretarial school, and his 8th grade graduate father. His mother worked primarily as a homemaker until he went to college. The father worked in a manufacturing plant as a machine operator, a foreman, and a plant foreman. The mother was very supportive of each of the four children and expected her brightest child to attend engineering school. The father was hostile toward college-educated people, and the father was generally cold and undemonstrative with his wife and children.

#36M grew up in a community that was largely of white, northern European ancestry. Most people his age were second generation Americans, and only a few of his parents’ generation had received college educations.

In the community where I grew up, the application of ‘discipline’ was not limited to parents. In this community, most adults who observed a child misbehaving, even a total stranger, would take it upon themselves to speak to the child and find out the child’s name, family, and where your father worked, and then word would eventually get back via the grapevine to my parents.

His mother was overwhelmed by his older sister who was mentally handicapped with an undiagnosed condition that kept her from learning to read, write, or attend school. He wrote in his inventory:

I remember my life when I was in kindergarten and first grade as if I was in a cloud or a bubble which had a tiny hole through which I looked. I felt like I was getting tiny little jumbled up pieces of what was going on in the world around me. [This subject may have been sexually molested by a neighbor when he was a preschooler. These feelings could be connected with that or with his being profoundly gifted and misplaced in the primary classroom, or both]. The teacher would shake me and I would wake up and the rest of the class had been sent to another part of the room without my noticing them leave. In retrospect, I suspect that this is because 99% of my time was spent daydreaming with my senses shut off. I still spend most of my time daydreaming. I remember the school nurse coming to the house when I was in kindergarten to talk about my problems. I can remember that my mother was frightened that I would be taken out of school like my sister.

His mother delivered lectures on why not to do something; his father sometimes spanked the children. “This really did not have any relation to the severity of the infraction; it had a lot to do with whether he had a bad day at work, or if the checking account had been overdrawn.” His answer to what he would change about his parents is, “I wish that my father had talked more. Especially about his feelings.”

Affection in the household of #36M was limited to interactions between his mother and mentally handicapped sister. “When we were young, in grade school, my father would let us sit
on his lap while he watched television. I never saw my father kiss or hug anybody. I can’t remember my mother hugging me—perhaps she did when I was small.” In response to the question concerning emotional support and guidance, he responds,

It is painful to think about this. The environment in my home was one in which one did not talk about feelings, except anger. This has carried over into my adult life; I confide in no one. I have no friendships outside my family, except one friend with whom I correspond who lives a ‘safe’ distance away from me. I have never discussed most of the topics in this survey with anyone.

#36M may have experienced sexual abuse as a boy.

I am not sure. When I was a preschooler, there was a family which lived next door comprising a father, his male friend, and two older sons. I am not sure how old they were. There was a problem with these boys coaxing younger boys into the wooded area behind the row of houses where we lived on the edge of town. They offered candy or something to get younger children to go with them. One afternoon there was a very frightening argument between my parents and the father next door about this. It must have had something to do with me or one of my brothers. Then, my parents sold the house and we moved to another house about 7 blocks away.

As a school boy, #36M did not feel popular growing up. “I maintained a relatively low level of interaction with others while growing up.” He did not enjoy other children his age, and he had his first real friend when he was about 15 or 16 years old. “He died about a year after we became friends.” He makes no further comments on the death of his friend.

#36M was not athletic while growing up. He had trouble with his breathing when he exercised.

I suspect that this had something to do with my father’s chain smoking and all the cigarette smoke I was exposed to. I also had a collection of heavy metals, both lead and mercury, that I kept in my bedroom and that probably didn’t help matters, either.

#36M did not like being in school. He would rather have stayed home or at the library. He never stood out for his grades. He received no encouragement at home to make good grades, although some teachers noticed his grade-making underachievement and expressed concern. There were several high school teachers who periodically called his mother to tell her “that I was capable of doing a lot more than I was doing. I remember that one of my teachers mentioned my IQ score.”

People knew that I had answers to lots of factual questions. I rarely said anything in classes, but did frequently correct science teachers when they said something that was wrong or incomplete. My eighth grade science teacher sat down a couple of times and had me finish his lectures on electricity because I would not stop
correcting him. People brought me malfunctioning radios and TV’s to fix.

#36M says, “I had interests that did not seem to match up with anyone else’s interests, I did not fit in, and I sometimes felt lonely.”

His notes, “I think the schools I attended were excellent schools in comparison to other schools in the USA. [However] there was a lot of prestige and publicity associated with athletics, especially football, but very little associated with academics.”

#36M followed in the footsteps of his name-sake uncle. His mother dreamed of having a son who was an engineer. Profoundly gifted and painfully shy, he thinks his early love for and facility with languages should have been recognized and encouraged. He writes,

I feel that my career dissatisfaction has a start or a cause in growing up in an environment where I had no mentor to encourage me to make decisions and be accountable for them. Parents and schools seem to encourage dependency and letting others decide for you, encourage an authoritarian world view.

#36M received no mentoring, no guidance, no acceleration or recognition of his need for challenging pacing and material. He was quiet and feels as though he went basically unnoticed throughout his school years. He loved French class and thought the French teachers were excellent. He uses foreign languages as an adult in his international [career] work.

If he could change the way the schools treated him, “I would rather have had the schools spend more time working on social and individual development and less time on academic subjects.” His extensive reading and excellent language classes gave him the bulk of his academic knowledge. No one helped him, or his parents, with the social and emotional issues and needs that he had.

After #36M dropped out of the study for more than two years, he experienced a number of changed attitudes:

I would like to share with you some things that have happened since I dropped out of your study some years ago. I spent a year or so crying almost every day, then met with a psychologist for another year, but got frustrated with the psychologist because I felt he wasn’t doing anything, just listening. I started reading psychology books. I have now read about 30 books on psychology, ethics, and relationships. I do not feel depressed now. I am slowly changing my beliefs about personal responsibility, authenticity and tolerance, and integrating those changes into my life. I feel that forms of authoritarianism and intolerance have been a major problem for me. I would like to accelerate this change process, but I resist and take time to integrate one change before I take another step.

The adult level inventory for #36M was written recently, more than two years after his childhood inventory. His adulthood started out with the study of electrical engineering because it was his mother’s dream, and college kept him out of Viet Nam. “My heart was not in it. During my 3rd year, I really fell apart and was not going to class, not studying and flunking classes left and right. After 5 years, I finally graduated near the bottom of my class.”
Love, intimacy and friendship are still a problem for him. Until quite recently, he kept himself socially isolated. His values have changed to the extent that he realizes relationships provide the principal joys and meaning in life.

I am lonely. I learned from my home situation and from the community where I grew up that intimacy was bad. Especially for men. If I can change myself, I can make friendships. I am the only one responsible for fixing the problem...I married my spouse when I was 20 years old, and we have been married for 29 years. This has been a very good thing for me. My spouse is my best friend. I have not been a very communicative, open disclosing partner and I am trying to improve that. For most of our years together, I have had a very authoritarian viewpoint of our relationship, and I have changed that recently.

#36M continues to explain his early confusions:

I think that my irrational feelings, prejudices and sexual stereotypes distorted my view of the world. The taboo about discussing sex and my aversion to people meant that there were very few avenues open to changing my viewpoints and beliefs...I feel that there has always been a great variety of choices available to me, but that I have rarely had the courage to make the choices. I have let events or other people decide for me. I chose not to choose. I am changing that now and I am going to keep changing it.

Although #36M attends a church regularly, he is integrating religious beliefs and his faith into a picture of spirituality that is compatible with his changing views, particularly his views on authoritarianism and personal responsibility. Religion is part of his overall changing world view. He writes that “I feel very worthwhile as a person,” but he says of his career successes, “I don’t think I have had any.” On paper, it looks as though he has had considerable success, however.

He gives an amusing assessment of how he differs intellectually from his wife: “I tend to think in heroic terms--I will think about several ethical aspects of my activity while taking out the garbage. She sees things in more practical terms.” He can see this difference with humor now, but as a child it made him feel odd.

#36M says that he has never considered suicide. This is what he writes about helping a troubled young person:

I would listen, I would ask them to talk, I would be present and be silent if that felt right. When it was appropriate, I would share parts of my own story of coming to understand personal responsibility and realizing that life is about caring for others. That each of us is a spiritual part of the universe. That the difficulties that we are experiencing are a gift which will develop up. That it is important to have courage. I would ask them to read a book on counselling (sic) and try to understand their problem from a counsellor’s (sic) perspective.

#37M, in a verbal career, entered the study when he was barely 40 years old. He submitted a CTMM of 150+ and received a Tone score of 4. His DIT score of 59.6 indicates that
he is in Kohlberg’s Conventional Moral Development levels. An analysis of his case study data places him between Dabrowski’s Levels II and III. He is categorized as Neutral. He wrote about abuse in his background and has sought and received therapy.

#37M was raised by a mother who earned a master’s degree in special education and a father who had some training after high school. His mother founded and ran a special school for retarded children; his father was a member of the highway patrol and eventually ran his own small business. Although he was the oldest of the four children born to his parents, the subject’s mother had an older daughter who was “born out of wedlock.” The family lived in a very small community with fewer than 2,000 members. They were devout practicing Catholics who sent their children to Catholic schools. #37M wrote sparsely in his inventories. He said that although his father was affectionate, he drank too much and eventually turned into an alcoholic. His mother was harsh, cold, and tender only to her infants, and developed an addiction to prescription drugs. The subject implies that the household was generally uncomfortable and unwelcoming. The family approach to discipline and child-rearing was consistent and predictable. The parents held high expectations for both their sons and their daughters and expected them to do well in school, learn chores for both inside and outside the house. Shaming was the principle form of behavior control. He indicated that the marriage was bad and that there were a number of separations. Both parents, in retrospect, exhibited a great deal of depression.

There were a number of significant turning points in the childhood of #37M. He listed them without elaboration: “Move at 13 years old; grandfather’s abuse 5 years old; moving from public to private school; tornado.” He later mentioned that he received no help at the time of the sexual abuse by his grandfather, but has received help since as an adult.

The subject believes he is the most intelligent in the family but that he received no recognition for his intelligence. He was also unusually tall and athletic while growing up as well as unusually intelligent. Although he has gone on to receive the most education, a number of his younger siblings have become quite successful financially and this seems to bother him somewhat. There seems to have been an underlying current of resentment aimed at him by his mother in particular.

#37M noted that “Oldest sister was accelerated several grades. My mother was opposed to it for me.” He wrote a number of things that indicated school was a better place than home. He had many friendships, was successful in all sorts of sports and other activities, and received a great deal of positive feedback from teachers, friends, and relatives outside his nuclear family. He alludes to “some traumatic episodes with the nuns” but generally felt the teachers were good and that he was encouraged in his favorite activities. He believes that the schools could have pushed and encouraged him more academically, but since the community had very few people continue for college training, college preparatory coursework was unavailable.

In his adult survey #37M mentions being more spiritual than religious. Before entering his profession, he spent 3-1/2 years studying at a Catholic seminary, a similar life course to a number of emotionally abused subjects (#21F, #22M, and #23M). His viewpoints and Tone are very much like theirs, but he is the only one who has gotten counseling for himself. All four of them are rated Neutral because it appears at this point that their search for answers has been more at the survival rather than self-actualization stage. For all of them, the abusive backgrounds included that they felt unloved by at least one parent.

#37M married during his mid-twenties and has three children. He loves parenting but
finds it very challenging, especially the adolescent stage. His wife has had numerous health problems, apparently related to emotional or psychological health in particular, and he writes that she is not as bright as he and this has caused some incompatibility. His best childhood friend died when the subject was 30 years old. He writes that he has found it difficult to cultivate and maintain deep friendships since then.

It appears that subject #37M enjoys a number of solitary activities that include fishing, hunting, reading, and a few team sports. He has a strong conviction about volunteering to help others and turns this into a family activity. He wrote that he has never felt suicidal and would not try to talk a troubled young person “out of” suicide but would instead discuss the problems the person is having. “I would talk about the choices and potential cost.”

#38F, in a verbal career, submitted a Miller Analogies Test score of 87 as proof of high giftedness. She began the study when she was 49 and received a Tone score of 4 and a DIT score of 64.4. She appears to be between Dabrowski’s Levels II and III, and her DIT results indicate she is entering Postconventional reasoning morally, as well. She wrote one tell-tale sentence: “I’m trying to learn to be happy with what people will give and not to want or need more.” Such a viewpoint indicates that she feels she can control her wants, needs, and feelings more so than the people categorized as Searchers. She is therefore categorized as a Neutral. There is reported abuse in her background, and she has received therapy.

#38F was raised by a mother and father who both had some college after skipping some grades in school. The mother was primarily a homemaker but did some occasional part-time work. The father was in business for himself, some product packaging, marketing and design, but did not gain any significant financial success while the subject lived at home. In fact, her family was among the poorest in the neighborhood.

#38F is the oldest of four girls and is another of the subjects who was given a great amount of adult responsibility early in her life. “Their expectations were strange,” she wrote about her parents. “They didn’t expect us to get married and have our own families but rather to stay there and take care of them. There are no grandchildren and only one married.” She wrote that she wished her parents had divorced, and the one positive time in her childhood was when “father [went] into business for himself and mother work[ed]--age 4-7-- we were at baby-sitters.”

In response to a question about whether or not they were adopted, she wrote, “No, but I thought I might be because I never seemed like the rest of the family.”

#38F was emotionally abused throughout her childhood. The subject was in her late forties when she wrote the following painful descriptions:

My father mostly yelled, criticized harshly and disapproved. My mother was quite harsh with me and used physical punishment and disparagement, too. Both were somewhat inconsistent and moody and both had high expectations for perfect obedience and no expression of anger or protest from me.

I never felt loved or approved of. I often felt that if I’d only been a bit more perfect or good, then they’d love me, but they never did. There was some affection for my two youngest sisters from my parents and from my next oldest sister and me. I took care of the two youngest [8 and 11 years younger than she] most days and was somewhat affectionate to them but was also quite jealous of
them and on occasion, abusive towards them.

[My parents] were extremely dependent on one another and on the kids. They never let go of the children—2 of my sisters still live at home. They fought a lot and there were long periods of cold, hostile silence especially at holidays. There was little affection or warmth. My mother was quite distant from me, was abusive towards me and in general made me the surrogate parent in the family. Even as adults there are high expectations of togetherness, lack of boundaries, and expectations that the parents’ needs come first.

#38F experienced sexual abuse and described it in much the same way as many of the other sexual abuse victims, as though not sure.

I probably was—I’m still not sure but there are reasons to think a neighbor molested me around age 7, more than once. I don’t know if my parents knew or not. I suspect my mother did but I’m not sure. Certainly cover-up was the only available option. It was after this age, though, that a lot of suicidal feelings surfaced but no one seemed to notice them, either.

She mentioned, almost in passing, that she was physically and sexually assaulted in her adulthood, but she gave no details of the circumstances.

In response to the question about confusion regarding intelligence, #38F said,

Yes and no. I’ve had a lot of doubts but it’s been more of an inner split - I knew I was smart but reluctant at times to know it. In grad school one fellow student was the smartest person to graduate from a particular university - and I know I was smarter than he; yet at other times I’ve doubted that I do have as much intelligence as many others. Now I see myself as highly gifted. [In elementary school there were always two other children of comparable high ability with her].

Subject #38F experienced tremendous parental pressure to achieve.

Despite the pressure to achieve high grades and be 1st in class, I also had the idea that my parents considered me smart enough to accomplish this. There were also comparisons to cousins and peers by my parents in which they saw me as better. I constantly compared myself to the peer with the highest grades and tried to beat her on the report card. I rarely did, but I still thought I was smart.

To further explain the pressure she felt, she continued,

Mother [wanted] college for me. Father- medical school. Mother often focused on needs of the family now, and expense. I felt I could not do more than she’d allow but also pressured by father to achieve—he’d often say education before anything including getting married or having a family.
It seems her parents, and she, confused perfect grades with achievement.

In adult years, I asked [my parents] why they had set ever higher standards (I felt like I never measured up); they felt they should be providing incentive - I would have preferred more appreciation for completed accomplishments.

She added that “There were lots of hugs. Lots of ‘you’re a good girl.’ Few ‘you did a good job.’ Would hear their pride in my accomplishments when they reported/bragged to grandparents, etc.” She said that her parents’ emotional support seemed conditional.

I never felt loved or approved of. I often felt that if I’d only been a bit more perfect or good, then they[‘d] love me, but they never did. [The lack of parental support has been] very important - it’s caused years of depression and pain.

Apparently #38F was outgoing and socially involved during many points in her childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. She had one or two close friendships at each stage of her life that usually ended with someone moving or a graduation that split people apart. As an adult she feels she has become introverted and isolated, and she feels lonely. She wrote about these feelings when answering the question about whether people feel close to her.

I’m not sure. I feel people like what I do for them--I’m a good listener and I empathize well but I wonder if they knew the real me, all my problems and burdens, if they [the other people] wouldn’t disappear. A lot of people have, quite unexpectedly, after I’ve revealed certain parts of myself. I’m trying to learn to be happy with what people will give and not to want or need more.

When asked if her parents paid for college, #38F said,

No. In fact I paid part of my next younger sister’s tuition one year. They did not have the money but also did not encourage me to try for big name schools. They wanted achievement but also having me at home to help out. I was angry about that.

She also said, “I chose a career path despite the nuns who would never have approved. They told girls we could be nuns, mothers, teachers, or nurses.”

#38F attended [parochial] schools until college. She agrees with numerous other subjects on both the quality of the instruction and the treatment by the teachers. “Boring and repetitious; very competitive over grades - nuns fostered being #1 by 1/10th of a point of grade average. Nuns also were strict and abusive to all of us, including both physical and emotional abuse.”

Although she began reading around the time she started kindergarten, she was hindered by sticking with ‘readers’ and forced recitation of curriculum. I used to read reader easily 1st night of school, also all the other texts. It would not have
been so bad if when we finished work we could do something else, even read, but we had to sit with our hands folded. Nothing else allowed. Kids who disrupted were beaten.

She believes that there were at least two or three other highly gifted girls in her grade level and that their companionship helped her survive. Participating in girl scouts was also helpful to her. Nonetheless, “Underneath I felt I was different and bad.” Interestingly, #38F may have hidden some of her differences, whether they were positive or negative, because “I was always one of the herd. We had so many kids per class only discipline problems got singled out for beatings.” She tried hard to “please my unpleasable parents” with good grades, but by high school was only in the top quarter of her class. Her high achievement, particularly on standardized tests, earned her a full scholarship to a private girls’ high school, also Catholic, where she felt additionally different because she was from the poorest family in the school. The academics in the school continued to be unchallenging for her despite some honors classes. In response to the question about liking school, she wrote, “No - there was nothing there for me.”

In response to the question concerning the influence of educators, #38F wrote “Negative...all teachers who made school as unpleasant as possible.”

Graduate school was the happiest time of her life. She met many people with whom she became friends and is still in touch with some of them. Some professors and their wives were among her friends. During undergraduate school, however, her parents made her stay at home to take care of her younger sisters and “save money.” Asked if those years were happy, she wrote, “No, I was miserable and wanted to die.”

Her views on both her career and the state of education in our country is summed up in this observation:

I hate all the wasted time and stupid things people demand that use them and me up. It’s hard when I can foresee how disastrous some new reform is going to be and knowing I can do nothing about it. I think we like to jump on bandwagons of bright ideas for reform that no one looks at the long term or actually sees why a program works for one group. There’s too much going with the latest fad and no real thought. I’m in despair that it can change.

#38F has never married. She dated during high school and college, and “mostly I found it anxiety provoking but I was relieved someone liked me.” Her father made it clear that his daughters should put education ahead of marriage and this subject kept pushing thoughts of marriage and family further and further into her future. She wrote that she is a closeted lesbian and…

…it’s hard to find other women who are as intelligent and care about the things I do. I’m much more of a free thinker and less apt to join in with group norms than most lesbians I’ve met and I don’t fit into the local community at all, especially educationally.

There is no main personal friendship in her life. She communicates with colleagues both
locally and around the nation but generally feels lonely. As with many of the subjects, she understands her need for personal friendships but finds she would often prefer to read or be alone with her thoughts even when opportunities to socialize present themselves. Many, many subjects expressed that they must work at finding and keeping friends.

I feel I am very different from most other people and much more able to see the underlying truth of things. My perceptiveness and logic makes me keenly aware of nuances of how others perceive things. I am very empathic but I feel the lack of a real connection.

As previously mentioned, #38F has felt suicidal throughout her life. She associates the beginning of those feelings with the onset of the sexual abuse when she was seven years old. Her feelings of “disconnection and desolation, a weight and a heaviness in my body, a sense of despair things can ever be different” have not taken away her desire to help and encourage others. The advice and encouragement she would give to a troubled young person are as follows:

I’d probably tell him or her that I’ve had similar feelings when I was their age and that a lot of very gifted feel like this because they see so much more than most other people and have trouble with standing the fact that others who can’t see are in charge of the world. I’d say that things do change slowly and they can work to make them change and that even small changes are worthwhile for the people involved. Eventually they can become bigger changes. I’d give some examples of civil rights and world hunger changes. I’d also say these things continue to be problems truthfully and aren’t probably going to be 100% solved but trying is worth it because we don’t even know what will happen if we work on one change. I’d mention chaos theory and how it works in favor of things changing both for bad and good. I’d also discuss the problem of relationships because a troubled young person also feels disconnected from people and needs to find some ways to feel a part of something.

#39F, in volunteer and technical careers, was 45 when she began the study and submitted a CTMM of 141. She received a 56.7 on the DIT, about average for the entire group, and that places her in Kohlberg’s Conventional moral reasoning stages. She is categorized with a 2 Tone score, and is a Neutral in Dabrowski’s Level II. Her background is full of abusive issues and she sought therapy in adulthood.

#39F was raised by her high school graduate, auto mechanic father under circumstances that were probably the most obviously abusive of any in this study. Her mother committed suicide at age 26 when the subject was 3 years old. The children were sent to live in an orphanage and with various relatives for the next 6 years until the father remarried. The marriage was the third for each partner; they each had children from previous marriages and had more together. The father was formerly a mean, abusive drunk but was “dry” by the time he reclaimed his children; therefore, #39F has no memory of her father as a drunk. The stepmother, however, was an active alcoholic and treated the stepchildren badly.

She has experienced many, many serious difficulties in life and is still actively dealing
with their aftermath. She did not begin to question her past until her late thirties “when my then-husband began training as a family social worker. I have to say...that it came as a shock to me as an adult to read about child abuse and neglect and see my siblings and myself in the stories I read.” #39F wrote several descriptions in her questionnaires that reveal some of the difficulties she and her siblings experienced.

Physical punishment, shaming, yelling, inconsistence were the norm, the only methods. I thought everyone had “butterflies” in the stomach all the time, until after I was married.

No, I was not hugged a lot. My father often told me he loved me. Any affection displayed came from me to them, by a kiss goodnight or good-bye.

My father’s verbal support and praise made me feel good. But coupled with his lack of protection of me physically and emotionally, it gave me an unhealthy understanding and expectation of love, and I never truly believed I was all that smart or good at singing. [Singing is a strong talent that she mentions numerous times].

There were loud arguments, punching and foul language by my stepmother, (he never hit her or called her filthy names, although I’m told it happened with my own mother. I do not remember any of that). We kids often called the police to intervene. She had several other men at different times, once when I was with her. She would break things, throw things, scream at us kids to get the hell out of her house (usually at 2 a.m. after drinking).

When #39F was in 11th grade her stepmother beat her so badly that the subject was sent away to live with her father’s relatives where she would be safe. The father did not leave his wife; he sent his daughter away. In describing her own sister and two brothers, she wrote,

My older sister was not in the top classes [at school] like my brothers and I were. Maybe because she chose a business program rather than college prep. Her grades had slipped [this is the child who at age 6 discovered her mother hanging dead in the basement] and stayed average or below around 5th or 6th grade. My brothers were unable to shut out home life and do well in school the way I did, although it was always clear they were very bright.

#39F and her siblings were physically neglected. She and at least one of her brothers were regularly shamed throughout childhood for bed-wetting, as well.

There was extreme medical neglect of all the kids. My braces remained on without any dental check-ups or orthodontic adjustments for three years. My father had arranged for those without consulting my stepmother, and the treatments stopped about 7 months after they started, until a girlfriend’s mother
had her dentist take them off and clean my teeth for me. My brother’s mumps went with no treatment, no warm blankets, no clean sheets (he wet, too), and of course, no TLC.

She had difficulty figuring out whether or not she was really very bright.

I received lots of mixed messages, even from my extended family. As soon as my father would ‘brag’ about me in some way, grandmother or aunts would be quick to point out something one of the distant cousins had done. It was their attempt to keep me from getting a big head, I think.

She gave her own explanation of her apparent resilience in response to the question about important turning points:

Once, after overhearing still another adult conversation about how bad things were for us at home, I remember resolving not to let any of it interfere with how my school life went. I was almost 10 at that time. Another was my becoming involved with a strict, close-knit church when I was a teenager. The church and its rules provided me with the stability lacking at home. I felt loved, admired and accepted there.

#39F also had numerous good connections with other people.

My paternal grandmother. She would spend hours talking to me about family life in her youth, about how awful it was that my dad let ‘her’ treat us so badly, or just about life in general. She taught me to sew, hem, and use a sewing machine.

She also found tremendous support and encouragement in the schools she attended. Among teachers, several stand out:

All my teachers seemed to assume I was going to college. (My place in the extended family is out of 16 grandchildren that my father’s mother had, I am the only college graduate. In fact, the only one who ever attended with any intent toward a degree. My brother, age 50, is now working on his. Intellectually, I’m pretty sure several of my cousins are at least on the same level). One guidance counselor made many phone calls to admissions officers on my behalf...My English teacher in 11th grade used to call me a pet name, which I loved, and she wrote it in my yearbook; music teachers encouraged me to make a career in singing if I wanted to; 2 math teachers were caring and concerned. One of the math teachers gave me a scholarship application which broadened the areas in which I was looking for colleges.

#39F found friends who were on an intellectual par with her by the time she moved to her final school system halfway through 5th grade.
In upper elementary and secondary school, there were a large number of high ability kids in my class such that there were 3 honors English and 1 or 2 AP in 11th grade, out of a class of about 520. So I felt like I fit in. We were tracked by ability from 7th grade on, but they tried carefully to hide that from kids.

#39F also wrote about school,

It was all good for me. In 6th grade, I helped other kids, graded papers, read to the class at rest time. My friends and I were even permitted to put together some plays, unsupervised. High school was probably the very best, because I knew it would end soon and so enjoyed the time. That was the time I really began to catch on that my friends and I were smart. Also, home was so awful that school was wonderful.

She had little to complain about as regards school:

When I expressed interest in the subject of biochemistry to my high school guidance counselor, she was condescending and patronizing, so I figured that maybe I was not as smart as I had thought. Why else would she not tell me to pursue the interest?

#39F attended a small, private, liberal arts college. She had scholarships, worked, and received some money from home, but “nearly starved, I was so poor.” She met her future husband, who was studying for the ministry, through a Pentecostal Christian church. They were married for about 10 years and had three children before he revealed that he was gay and asked to end the marriage. This event was probably the major turning point in her life in that it began her questioning everything about life. She began long term therapy, as well. She started counseling at first primarily because she felt she had no good parenting role models, and needed to learn how to parent her own children.

#39F has earned a master’s degree in her career field, and after 17 years of being single, is about to remarry. She has many friends in her workplace, through her very active singing avocation, and from friendships that have lasted through many years. She is happy, feels adjusted, and excited about the rest of her life. Her spiritual life keeps her connected with the God she has always known, but it “less denominational now.” She did not finish the final survey sections; therefore, there is no information on her views of how to counsel a troubled young person.

#40F, in verbal and creative arts careers, entered the study when she was 46 years old and submitted Stanford-Binet results of 158 IQ. She has a Tone score of 3 and is categorized as a Neutral. Her DIT score of 61.7 indicates moral reasoning development at Kohlberg’s high Conventional level. She comes from an abusive background and has received therapy. Her questionnaire responses indicate that she is currently at Dabrowski’s Level II.

#40 was raised by her father, who has an economics Ph.D., and also trained as a CPA and ran his own accounting business, and by her mother who has some college education, worked some as a seamstress, but mostly stayed home to raise two children. She experienced some sexual interference, occasional fondling on public transportation and “Men on the street would
say obnoxious things. But never shared this with parents.”

#40F is aware of parental shaming, particularly by her father, to the “point of verbal abuse,” but generally felt supported and encouraged by both parents. The father was verbally abusive to his wife and son, as well, and the subject believes it depressed her mother’s expression of, and confidence in, her own intelligence.

The family lived in a neighborhood that was ethnically similar to themselves. #40F was one of the few subjects to attend full-time gifted programs that were available in her public school system. It was in the school for the gifted that she felt her family was “poor” and this caused her some discomfort. Jewish, she learned about the “philosophy, history, and practice, but loose about following religious practice.”

Although #40F returned both surveys and her mother completed the majority of the Parent Inventory, the responses are short and seem somewhat perfunctory, although the subject stated that she cares deeply about the topic of high giftedness. Her survey answers do not reveal any sense of probing and searching; in fact, she writes several times that she has no regrets about anything. She does mention adolescence as an especially difficult time for her, and she mentions having a number of unsatisfactory love relationships, but she gives no details. There is no indication of any mid-life crisis or positive disintegration, although she may simply have left that out.

In early elementary and in junior high the programs in her school were not fast-paced and intense and she felt “like a star.” When she was in the gifted schools for her main elementary grades and high school, she felt “average, but I knew that was relative.” She reports that there were no particular mentors or people who gave her guidance, but she received “general encouragement from everyone.” If she could change anything about the schools she “would have liked more attempt in gifted programs to draw out what I was really good at.” She writes that the gifted grouping deprived her of the opportunity to be “the best” at anything, a feeling she had liked before she entered the gifted school. Because she actually fit with the other students and the schoolwork, she never learned to underachieve; however, being especially impressive was not possible, either.

Friendships were an important part of #40F’s childhood. Because she was already grouped with other gifted children, finding others of like mind was relatively easy and natural, and she always had at least one or two best friends. As an adult she finds it difficult to trust her coworkers enough to be close; but she does have a number of friends in her field who live in different parts of the country. She also has some close friends in the city where she lives who are very important to her.

#40F has never been married and has no children. She reported a significant, and satisfying, relationship during the time she was completing the questionnaires. She keeps active with lots of walking, friendships, her work, and hopes to contribute more to her field. She finds her field frustrating due to all the “PC,” politically correct, issues. If she could leave her present position, she would, but does not know where else to go where it would be any better.

In her early adulthood she felt suicidal, “but very romantically,” and had no thoughts of acting on it. “I’ve been very low - but have always found my way out, especially with friends, family, and therapy.” She would tell a troubled young person roughly the same thing a number of other subjects would:
We’re put on this earth for a reason, and it’s our job to find that place (usually manifested as a talent) and develop over a lifetime our individual gifts.

#41F, who has never worked outside the home, could not be scored on the DIT due to inconsistent answers. Although she has been in therapy all her adult life, she is placed in the Nonsearcher category. Her therapy is for emotional survival. She qualified for the study with a 155 WAIS and membership in numerous high IQ societies. She is categorized with a tone score of 4 because she seems quite miserable but not hostile or angry (which would have earned a 5 tone score). Everything about the analysis of her questionnaire responses indicates that she is operating at Kohlberg’s Preconventional Moral Developmental levels and she is in Dabrowski’s Level I, as well.

#41F was raised as the oldest of three children by her mother and father. Her mother graduated from a private high school and attended college for a year before marrying and becoming a reluctant homemaker; and her father went to public schools and attended college for awhile before going into business and eventually owning a number of factories that supported his family quite well.

The subject and her mother completed the childhood level inventories, but #41F sent no adult level information. Her comments and observations are consistent with people who score low on the DIT, however. The mother scored a 21.8, the lowest of anyone to whom the test was administered for this study.

In the case of #41F, lack of adult level information means there is no information at all about her career or work status, marriage, motherhood, friendships, spirituality, or advice to others who are troubled. Her childhood home was clearly a troubled one. Her younger of two brothers finished high school but has struggled his entire life with schizophrenia. The father was particularly sexist and domineering. He wanted his daughter to study the arts and not pursue employment. He guided his sons toward careers in professional sports or business. The older son was a professional baseball player for a number of years.

Sexual abuse is described in response to a question on “any important turning points during your childhood?”

When I was ten and my father decided to invite me into his bedroom for a mutual masturbation session—Ostensibly to answer my questions about where babies come from. He then told me not to tell my mother. This warped me for life.

The perspective on nearly all issues appears “warped” for #41F, and the remainder of her case study is devoted to her perceptions. It is common to hear, “If she’s so smart...?” or “Why didn’t she...?” questions about victims of abuse, and #41F’s story is illustrative of how even a highly intelligent person from an upper middle class, two parent home can struggle with many of life’s most basic issues.

She came from an overtly sexist home where her highly intelligent mother had been forbidden by the grandfather to get a college education. Her parents were in sharp disagreement as to how to raise their children.

I did not know I was smart because no one praised me. My mother was frightened
by my love of reading and drawing and tried to discourage me. She wanted me to socialize. [The inventory her 86 year old mother filled out noted that she was concerned that her daughter was lonely and unpopular]. My father appreciated my love of classical music and art. But did not think intelligence was important for a girl.

The discipline in the family was inconsistent.

My father spoiled me. My mother was very strict and would have tantrums, shout and throw things at me if I didn’t take a nap every afternoon. My mother was cold and distant although she liked to talk to me about her youth. My father was very affectionate. He molested me when I was a child. When I was a teenager he embraced me and told me he loved me. He also made sexual advances towards me and was jealous of any young man that I liked. My mother’s coldness and disapproval of me made me feel bad about myself. My father’s sexual desire for me made me feel very guilty about my sexuality. My father encouraged me to study music, art, and writing. My mother did not expect me to work. My mother wanted me to go to college. I did what they both wanted.

#41F’s parents stayed together until she, the oldest of three, was 21 years old. The mother married one more time; the father twice more.

Their marriage was unhappy. My mother did not like sex. My father drank too much and was unfaithful. He also made sexual advances towards me behind my mother’s back. He used to strike my mother.

If she could change anything about the way she was raised it is this: “I wish my mother had loved me and I wish that my father had not made sexual advances towards me.” To whom was she closest during childhood? “My father. In his own warped way he was the only parent who gave me any real affection or acceptance.” This subject was nearly 60 years old when she wrote these words.

The “cold” mother and “affectionate” father appear to have affected #41F’s relationships throughout her life. “I was always unpopular and considered strange by my peers. I felt different from my peers. They bored me and even as a child I preferred the company of men!” In answer to the question about enjoying being with other children her age, #41F wrote, “No! I tolerated them only if they insisted on playing with me. I preferred to read or draw or be with men.” In describing some of her favorite childhood pastimes, she wrote, “I loved to read and draw stories. I also studied the piano and loved classical music. I preferred to be alone or with men.”

#41F mentioned repeatedly that she was not told by anyone that she was gifted. This made it difficult for her to interpret the input she received from others.

When I was a preschooler I was always drawing stories and did not care to socialize with other children. My mother was told that I was a genius—she cried and said she just wanted a normal child—A friend of mine in the third grade thought I was weird because I skipped all over my books and read ahead in my
assignments. In high school I was considered weird because I only listened to classical music and read extra books that were not required.”

#41F found school to be an uncomfortable place for her. “I felt there was something wrong with me. I was not good looking enough, I was too tall, I was awkward, I was shy, I had a lousy personality, I was weird, I wore glasses.” In response to the question about bullying, she wrote, “Yes, my classmates bullied me. They spat at me and insulted me verbally. Once I was locked in a closet and forced to take off my pants.”

“I wish I had been encouraged and praised and put into gifted programs. I never knew I was gifted,” wrote #41F. She had herself tested for numerous high IQ societies after she reached adulthood.

She described guidance that did not seem helpful to her:

I wanted to get an MA in psychology but was told by educators that I was the artistic type and not suited for research. My high school advisor thought I should become a model. Another teacher wanted me to act. The older women that I met socially were primarily homemakers and mothers.

In describing her extended family #41F explained, “Among my cousins I was considered to be the younger beauty and intellectual. I was considered to be gifted intellectually and artistically. My older male cousins and I flirted a lot. My cousins’ wives loathed me. They still do. I had crushes on my older male cousins.” In various places in her inventory she mentions her cousins and teachers and professors all making passes at her.

Despite the fact that she wrote no one told her she was gifted, #41F skipped second grade because she was so advanced in reading. Her poetry and art were published in school and local papers. She says she hated school until she went away to University. Even though there were gifted programs in her schools, she was never tested for or put into them.

#41F was raised with no particular religious affiliation although her family has a Protestant background. She claims no spiritual life, either, and seems not to have had any sorts of group affiliations when she was growing up.

As an adult, #41F continued to experience abuse.

I have already commented on my father’s sexual abuse. I was raped by my psychologist when I was 22. I had no counseling about my father until I saw the psychologist who then raped me. Since then I have been in therapy with different psychologists and psychiatrists all of my life until the present.

#41F followed her father’s wishes and never developed an active career. Her interests in art and literature were not developed for either career or volunteer work, either. She did not send in an adult questionnaire, so her views on what to tell a troubled young person are unavailable.