

ADULT PERCEPTIONS OF THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING IDENTIFIED
“TALENTED AND GIFTED” AS CHILDREN: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Bradford Stanton Summers

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has been approved

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APPROVED, ACCEPTED, AND SIGNED ON HARD COPY:

DAVID JENKINS, Psy.D., Committee Chair

JOHN THOMAS, Ph.D., Ph.D., Committee Member

DONNA HANBY, Ph.D., Committee Member

ABSTRACT

ADULT PERCEPTIONS OF THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING IDENTIFIED “TALENTED AND GIFTED” AS CHILDREN: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Bradford Stanton Summers

Center for Counseling and Family Studies

Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia

Doctor of Philosophy in Counseling

This is a phenomenological study of adult perceptions of the experience of being identified “talented and gifted” as children. Data were gathered by transcribing the video recordings of adults who were students of the Talented and Gifted (TAG) education program in Fairfield, Ohio during 1978-1983. The phenomenological method was used to discover perceptions of a unique population of adults who shared life experiences during elementary and middle school. Analysis of the data resulted in the identification of four main themes: Growth, Interpersonal, Future, and Thankfulness. Three facilitating and three challenging subthemes were identified under each main theme. These were: Internal Validation of TAG Identity, Opportunity to Channel Talents and Gifts, Broadminded Thinking for Problem Solving, Overcoming Self-criticism, Setting Priorities Relative to the TAG Identity, Persuading Others, Positive Bonding Within TAG, Respect from Others, Social Confidence, Feelings of Isolation, Being

Misunderstood, Ongoing Intellectual Insecurity, TAG Career Preparation, Optimism, Awareness of Responsibility to Achieve Potential, Career Indecision, Boredom With the *Status Quo*, How to Achieve Potential, Creative Outlet, Positive Memories, Love for Enthusiastic Teachers, Need for Creative Outlet Post-TAG, Creating New Memories, and Disappointed with Other Education. Implications for future practice and research include an eclectic approach to counseling and education with the TAG identity in mind.

Cognitive Behavioral, Adlerian, and Existentialist theories and therapies are recommended as a resource for therapists and educators to help gifted people discover what they want out of life, and to help them focus on positive action in the present moment.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents, Frederick S. Summers, and Barbara G. Summers, who provided me with a blessed childhood. Dad taught the value of hard work and Mother taught the joy of learning by reading books to me from my earliest memory. Most important, both parents taught me the importance of having faith in God. This work is also dedicated to my children: Jordan, Bethany, Brooke, and Jonathan. I pray each of them will do what they believe God wants them to do, pursue and achieve their personal dreams, and never settle for less than a full and rewarding life and career.

Acknowledgments

I would like to gratefully acknowledge my elementary and junior high school teachers from the Fairfield, Ohio Schools Talented and Gifted (TAG) program: Ms. Sarah Stewart Dunbar, Dr. Donna Hanby, the late Mr. Richard Lapp, Ms. Carolyn Henderson Reinhart, Ms. Carol Sacre, and Ms. Chris Hartley Venable. These special people are appreciated for giving me an exceptional learning experience. Now that I am an adult, I am honored and grateful to still have Ms. Carolyn Henderson Reinhart as friend and confidant. She reminds me that a true teacher never stops encouraging or caring for her students. Dr. David Jenkins modeled patience and asked the right questions to help me focus this research. Thank you, Dr. Jenkins, for your professional and personal advice throughout this journey. Committee member Dr. John Thomas ministered to me at a crucial point in my life. Thank you, Dr. Thomas. Thank you to former TAG teacher and current reader, Dr. Donna Hanby, who had both the wisdom and the courage to bring the original TAG program to Fairfield, in spite of much opposition. There are many others who have come alongside and helped me, and the completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without their kindness. I regret there is not enough space to mention all who have encouraged me along the way.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

Currently no compelling phenomenological research exists investigating adult perceptions of the actual experience of giftedness for those identified talented and gifted (TAG) during childhood. While Zabloski (2010) qualitatively studied the phenomenon of gifted dropouts, his conclusions do not provide the kind of answers for which this study is intended. There are several books and peer reviewed journal articles about giftedness, but most are either not qualitative, or not scholarly (Rinn & Plucker, 2004; Streznewski, 1999). In spite of the bulk of extant quantitative data none describe the actual phenomenon or the actual experience of being gifted. Most importantly, those adults identified as talented and gifted have not been queried.

The Terman Studies of Genius (Burks, Jensen, & Terman, 1930; Cox & Terman, 1926; Terman, 1925; Terman & Oden, 1947, 1959) are the most comprehensive studies of giftedness. Vast demographical information and numerical data were obtained over a period of several decades but they do not provide either an in-depth understanding or a description of the actual experience of giftedness.

Scholars criticized Terman for meddling with his sample and unfortunately for this reason his quantitative analyses cannot be generalized. Specifically, Terman was accused of granting favors for his subjects, thus skewing his own data. The majority of

data were gathered from simple scales or multiple-choice answers, and answers to open-ended questions presented a challenge for the researchers to code (Holahan & Sears, 1995). Though Terman's work is useful, comprehensive, and impressive, its limitations lend credence to a qualitative methodology to better understand the phenomenon of giftedness.

Existing quantitative data relative to giftedness do not provide us with detailed descriptions of life experiences and is therefore inadequate for our purpose. Alternatively, this research seeks subjective descriptions from the people behind the numbers. Since qualitative methodology is intuitive and subjective (Merriam, 1998), it has been chosen for this research. The method of data collection will be video recorded interviews that elicit intuitive and subjective information. Since interviews often generate significant amounts of data, it is recommended that a study of a small group is best for this type of research (Becker, 1970; Creswell, 2007). From the 42 located and willing participants, 14 video recorded interviews, and 10 interview transcriptions, data saturation occurred after analysis of eight interviews.

In summary, there is a lack of extensive scholarly understanding concerning the experiential phenomenon of adult giftedness, beyond individual biographical and demographical studies. This is due to the fact that the individual experiences, insights, and intuitions of gifted adults have not been adequately researched. Much quantitative (mostly demographical data, test scores, career descriptions, etc.) exists, but how do the gifted perceive their experience? What is it like to be gifted? How have lives been

impacted by the awareness of being talented and gifted? This leads us to the next section, which describes the TAG designation.

The TAG Designation

Since their inception, gifted education programs have been variously called “Gifted and Talented Education” (GATE), “Gifted and Talented” (G/T), and “Talented and Gifted” (TAG) (Silverman, 2000; VanTassel-Baska, 2003), among other names. Since the original Fairfield, Ohio Schools program was named TAG, I will use this designation throughout the remainder of this study. The current Fairfield City Schools TAG program has been renamed “Visions” (Fairfield City Schools, n.d.). What are the criteria for identifying a talented and gifted person for inclusion into a TAG program?

Cognitive characteristics of gifted children include the ability to handle abstractions, the power of concentration, and the ability to make connections and establish relationships among disparate data. Gifted students have a rapid learning rate, an intellectual curiosity, a complex thought process, and a vivid imagination. Gifted children usually have early moral concern, perceptiveness, insightfulness, divergent thinking, creativity, capacity for reflection, and a keen sense of justice (Silverman, 2000; VanTassel-Baska, 2003). Affective characteristics of gifted children include idealism/perfectionism, intensity/introversion, sensitivity/empathy, excellent sense of humor, passion for learning, need to understand, need for mental stimulation, need for precision/logic, perseverance, acute self awareness/self criticism, nonconformity,

challenging rules/authority, and the realization of potential (Silverman, 2000; VanTassel-Baska, 2003). These identifiers are interesting, but they only reveal qualities. They neither tell us about real individuals, nor do they reveal their stories. This research sought the discovery of what it was like to experience these qualities over the course of a lifetime. What was like to be gifted for 30 years?

Locating the Researcher

From grades three through eight during 1978-1983, I was a student of the TAG program at Fairfield North Elementary School and Fairfield Middle School, in Fairfield, Ohio, a suburb of Cincinnati. I was tested, identified, recommended for the program, and separated from the rest of the student population for the majority of the school day. As a student, I remember being encouraged to think creatively, freely, and independently. Unlike the curriculum in a standardized public school, TAG class projects provided a unique opportunity to research topics in which I had an interest, and to showcase personal talents.

The TAG program provided me with a nonjudgmental, safe environment. This was good for a child who often felt ostracized, misunderstood for being different, or considered to be weird, “out there,” or socially inappropriate. I looked forward to participating in class and am grateful for the privilege to have been in the program. I have experienced life with the TAG identification and it has impacted my life both

positively and negatively. Given its impact on me, I wondered how it affected others prompting my decision to research TAG participants.

My personal motives for this project included the discovery of commonalities among my peers. I would also like to be involved in the improvement and advancement of gifted education. My interest in this topic derived from casual conversations with a few former classmates over approximately 30 years. At the fifth and fifteenth high school class reunions, I observed a few former classmates who seemed happy and content with how life turned out for them, but most of the others expressed frustrations in their career, boredom in their family life, and other disappointments that may or not have been relative to being gifted. I have since often wondered whether the experience of being talented and gifted is a blessing or a curse.

These casual conversations with peers, all post-program, included speaking with a graduate of a prestigious institution who, after graduating, was disenchanted by the thought of working in a laboratory, and who said he still could not determine what he wanted to do with his life. Another former classmate was using his high I.Q. at a local fast food restaurant. One old friend said she still felt ostracized by family members or friends who were intimidated by her intelligence. Another had experienced a brother or parent express, “You always think you are so smart,” and “For someone who was in TAG, you act pretty stupid.” There were also a few who had embraced their gifts by helping society in the fields of medicine, science, religion, and education, but how did

they feel about it? Did these casual observations indicate any common themes or were they just isolated trivia discussed at the occasional class reunion?

My own experience relative to the TAG identification was both positive and negative. Positively, I have enjoyed being in the company of individuals that the *status quo* would consider either eccentric or unconventional. Negatively, I have dealt with issues of pride, a sense of having not lived up to the expectations of myself or others, shame felt from being smarter than others, pressure to always perform at a high level, and existential issues related to significance and purpose. Was I alone in my thoughts and feelings? Would others reveal the same issues when interviewed? The existing literature did not provide the answers for which I was looking.

In summary, nearly 30 years have passed since TAG program participation. Casual reports of life experiences from former classmates prompted me to follow this course of research. What would a scholarly inquiry into the phenomenon of giftedness reveal? A review of talented and gifted literature revealed studies that were primarily quantitative, largely focused on the effectiveness of educational programs, and concerned almost exclusively with children and adolescents. This study was unique because it was designed to discover how talented and gifted adults have lived with the TAG designation, how they have interpreted it, and how they have described it.

History of the Fairfield, Ohio Schools TAG Program

Hanby and Badiali (1994) evaluated the Fairfield, Ohio Schools Talented and Gifted (TAG) program and provided a detailed history of its inception. In 1977, the school district submitted a state teacher's grant to serve the TAG student population. The pilot program that became known as TAG first focused on art and independent study, beginning January 1978. Exceptional opportunities were provided for the pilot group, including meeting astronaut Neil Armstrong and witnessing laser technology at the University of Cincinnati when the field was relatively new. Unique opportunities and creative enrichment projects were consistent characteristics of the program.

Lists of potential TAG participants were generated from a pool of the four Fairfield elementary schools. TAG students not only needed exceptional reading, math, composite, and ability test scores, but also high scores on other instruments such as the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT) (Torrance, 1974) and the Ross Test of Higher Cognitive Processes (RTHCP) (Ross & Ross, 1976), in addition to teacher recommendation. According to Hanby (personal communication, April 4, 2012) a matrix was created to analyze these criteria, and a committee of teachers and administrators was established to perform a blind review of the matrix. In order to fairly select participants, student names and related identification items were removed from the matrix, preventing the building of quotas and eliminating gender bias. While a prospective TAG candidate might have scored below the 95th percentile he or she may have scored higher on the

Torrance "Circle" Test of Creativity and/or teacher recommendation and still be selected for the program due to his or her higher scores on that part of the matrix rubric element.

From the four large suburban elementary schools in the city of Fairfield and Fairfield Township, 120 students were eventually selected. Several events paved the way for the maturity of the program. Ms. Sarah Stewart Dunbar focused one period each day for gifted elementary students while Ms. Cathy Milligan and Dr. Donna Hanby worked with elementary students in a full time program located in two buildings. Milligan and Hanby each taught 20-25 students from two elementary schools, one group comprised of students from Fairfield Central Elementary and Fairfield North Elementary and housed at Fairfield North Elementary, and a second group housed at Fairfield West Elementary for students from Fairfield West Elementary and Fairfield South Elementary. This program grew to provide a full time experience housed at one of the elementary buildings, led by a teaching team joined by Hanby and Milligan.

The full time elementary TAG program was synchronous with the establishment of a full time TAG program at Fairfield Middle School for students in grades 6-8, where Dr. Hanby taught a gifted Language Arts block. Those students attended a "level 1" type track for all other subjects. The TAG program was now enhanced with a focus on academic curriculum, whereas the original program for grades 3-6 had focused only on enrichment activities.

The TAG program now included full time participants in the four elementary schools as well as the Fairfield Middle School, with the established teaching team of Ms.

Chris Hartley Venable (Math), Ms. Carolyn Henderson Reinhart (Language Arts), Ms. Carol Sacre (Social Studies), and the late Mr. Richard Lapp (Science), each working together with all levels of students in a block schedule, enhanced by independent study, field trips, and creative projects. At this stage, teachers were being trained in gifted education, earning their validation, and following the paths of the original two elementary teachers. The original enrichment program had matured to a program focused on an interdisciplinary curriculum with twice the number of identified gifted students than were in the elementary program.

Hanby and Badiali's (1994) study is foundational to the present project and valuable for the analysis of the effectiveness of the Fairfield Ohio Schools gifted program and I hope my research will build upon those findings by providing a phenomenological glimpse into the real life experiences of some of those same students three decades post program and two decades post Hanby and Badiali (1994) evaluation.

More specifically, the Hanby and Badiali (1994) collaborative study of the TAG program's effectiveness from 1978-1994 included data gathered from 408 surveys, and interviews, observations, and artifacts. Surveys were sent to program staff, classroom teachers, students in 1994, former students, parents, administrators, and counselors. The survey consisted of 52 multiple-choice questions and seven open-ended questions. The collected quantitative data was useful for measuring the 1994 TAG program's effectiveness as well as performance outcomes. Conclusions indicated that 89% of TAG students liked creativity and uniqueness, 78% had multiple interests, 66% felt they were

able and willing to work with others as a result of the program, 89% liked to learn by doing experiments, 87% greatly enjoyed learning by using simulations, 75% liked to learn in cooperative groups, and 66% enjoyed working in a group of equally intelligent students. The Hanby and Badiali (1994) research assessed the attitudes of counselors, administrators, parents, and students toward the TAG program itself, but the current research project was designed to elicit phenomenological descriptions of the lived experiences of a small, yet significant sample of those same TAG students from their adult perspective. The present research is, therefore, not a TAG program evaluation, but a search to understand and describe gifted people and their experiences. This desire to understand a phenomenon by accumulating the data of personal descriptions of life experiences and the meanings attached to those experiences (Merriam, 1998; Creswell, 2007) is consistent with and true to the nature of phenomenological inquiry and qualitative methodology.

Once Hanby and Badiali (1994) evaluated the TAG program's efficiency from an analysis of the data provided by those students, principals, teachers, counselors, and the program coordinator, they provided a solid record of the professionalism of the TAG program, the criteria for student selection, and the first longitudinal evaluation of the program's effectiveness. This information has been referenced in order that the reader might best understand the uniqueness of each participant's educational history.

In contrast, I wanted to know about the lived experiences of former students. I have not sought to discover information relative to TAG placement, administration, or

personnel, but my research is valuable for the development of recommendations for improvements in curriculum, classroom environment, and counseling, and is therefore a relevant addition to the literature. Thus, how might adults who participated in the TAG program describe the phenomenon of their experience of giftedness, and how did the TAG designation affect them?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand adult perceptions of the experience of being identified talented and gifted as children and how this affected their lives. A literature review indicated gifted children have different cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and educational needs, and therefore they must often solve life's problems differently than the rest of the population (Albaili, 2003; Ambrose, 2003; Brounstein, Holahan, & Dreyden, 1991). Would this prove true for former TAG students?

Silverman (2000) described the gifted experience as intense, absorbing, penetrating, and complex. This complexity is often experienced as an above normal sensitivity, which can either be an asset or a liability. It is common for gifted individuals to have problems with perfectionism, and since TAG individuals have also been described as intense and precocious, they often suffer from an intellectual idealism. When they do not live up to their expectations, for example, there can be internal conflict (Silverman, 2000). Will perfectionism and idealism be a common theme among the adult participants of this research? Did TAG students feel obligated to make a significant

contribution to the world? If so, do they believe this was realized? Will participants feel the TAG identity contributed to failures or successes, depression or joy, lack of fulfillment or satisfaction? How will they describe their experiences? What themes might emerge during the interviews?

Casual conversations with former classmates and a review of gifted literature prompted my decision to perform this research. It is hoped that the resulting phenomenological data will describe, in the words of the participants, the “essence of the phenomenon” (Rudenstam & Newton, 2001, Creswell, 2007) of giftedness.

Research Questions

There are five research questions for which I would like to know the answer:

1. How do TAG adults remember and describe their experience in the TAG program and how has this impacted their lives?
2. How do TAG adults describe the phenomenon of giftedness?
3. How do TAG adults describe their relationships with others?
4. What existential and/or spiritual meaning do TAG adults assign to their identity?
5. What, if any, common themes will emerge as TAG adults describe their life experience and its meaning?

Assumptions and Limitations

It is assumed that each participant of the present research is emotionally stable

and will provide accurate descriptions. It is important to reiterate an assumption about qualitative research: it primarily employs an inductive research strategy (Merriam, 1998). This research will build upon existing concepts and theories but it cannot begin with an existing theory. This new research project will be employed precisely because there is not yet a theory on which to base the research. The lack of structure and absence of a theory provides an intriguing backdrop to perform this qualitative research. Also consistent with this approach, I assume unforeseen events and realize this is uncharted territory (Merriam, 1998).

It is assumed that participants might provide data that is unrelated to the phenomenon of being talented and gifted. An invalid link might be created between a common life experience and the gifted identity. Those who refused to participate might have had negative experiences they don't wish to disclose whereas volunteers typically are those who have had positive experiences and are willing to share those experiences with others (Merriam, 1998).

It is always possible in any qualitative study that the limitations of the design, method, and/or the findings of the research may include respondent bias (Creswell, 2007; Rudenstam & Newton, 2001). To combat these limitations, I used a semi-structured interview, which means that participants were asked questions in a standardized manner. The interviews, along with a few follow-up calls and e-mails, which were necessary to clarify some of the answers, were the only sources of data. True to the standards of a semi-structured interview, interview appointments were made in advance. All but one

interview occurred at the participant's home. The interview questions were read verbatim and follow-up questions were asked as needed (Creswell, 2007).

Precautions were taken to prevent my own bias from impacting the answers to the questions. For example, when I heard something with which I either agreed or disagreed, I made every effort not to let it be known, unless it was in the form of a shared memory. Interview questions were designed to be neutral.

The number of participants also needed to be limited. Effective qualitative studies involve the analysis and descriptions of small groups or situations (Becker, 1970; Bradley, 1993; Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2002). Although 42 potential participants were located, it was deemed necessary to limit the research due to data repetition. The decision that enough participants were interviewed was not made on the basis of sample size, but because of data saturation. The final analysis of the data was limited to the responses of eight participants. When nothing new was emerging from the interviews it was assumed that saturation has occurred (Creswell, 2007). This began to be observed around the time of interviewing participant 10 (P10), but four additional interviews were completed as a precaution. Analysis of the first eight interviews confirmed that data saturation had indeed occurred.

Because this research describes a unique group and seeks their personal narratives, it is consistent with phenomenological research (Merriam, 2002; Creswell, 2007). Although there are assumptions and limitations to qualitative research, it is hoped

the accumulated data will provide the field with a deeper understanding of the experience of giftedness.

Definitions

- **Existentialism:** The philosophy that an individual is a free and responsible agent who determines his or her own development through acts of the will. It is assumed that some participants will possess faith in God and others will not. In the interview, the word “existential” is used in addition to the word “spiritual” in order to accommodate a variety of worldviews. Existentialism stresses the significance of human freedom and experience and is consistent with phenomenology (Hoffman, 2005).
- **Phenomenology:** The philosophy that is the ground of all qualitative research. This kind of research focuses upon depicting the essence of an experience, using a generous amount of textual data in the narrative. Discovering the essence of being in a particular program is one facet of phenomenological research (Merriam, 1998, Creswell, 2007).
- **Qualitative Research:** An effort to understand situations in their uniqueness. Understanding is the point of qualitative research. The researcher seeks to understand the phenomena of experience and the meanings people have constructed from their experience. Qualitative Research is subjective, intuitive, and descriptive of lived and felt perspectives (Merriam, 1998, Creswell, 2007).

- TAG: The acronym for “talented and gifted” and the name of the original talented and gifted program now known as “Visions” at Fairfield, Ohio Schools, located in a suburb of Cincinnati. “Talented and gifted” describes one who has been identified as having superior abilities in intellect, creativity, leadership, and the arts, among others (Konstantopoulos, Modi, & Hedges, 2001).

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because all people are significant. Since gifted people have unique abilities, they have a unique potential to improve our society and should therefore not be ignored as a potential resource. Although the needs of gifted children are often met by the existence of programs such as TAG, their unique needs do not stop at childhood (Delisle, 2003).

A better understanding of the phenomenon of giftedness can result in a better quality of life for gifted people, their families, and society. The identification of common themes among gifted adults can help professional counselors in the diagnosis, appraisal, and treatment of their gifted clientele. The identification of common themes can help educators improve talented and gifted education. The publication of these findings can bring awareness to a topic that lacks qualitative research data. The study will benefit those professionals who need a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of giftedness.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

There are philosophical concepts that form the basis of qualitative research and clarify the nature of this project. A phenomenological study should be inductive (analyzing data from the particular to the general), emerging (evolving), and shaped by the researcher's own experience in collecting the data (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenology derives from other philosophical ideas. Some of these are:

- **Ontology.** Ontology deals with the nature of being, and embraces the idea of multiple realities. Ontology assumes that reality is subjective, multiple, and seen through the eyes of the participants (Creswell, 2007). This research respects the individual viewpoint of each participant.
- **Axiology.** Axiology has to do with values, ethics, and aesthetics; those things that are right and good in individual and social conduct (Creswell 2007). It is assumed that participants will do their best to describe their experiences.
- **Rhetoric.** Phenomenological research uses rhetoric; results may be written in a literary, informal style, using the personal voice (Creswell, 2007).

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

The rest of this study consists of literature review (Chapter Two), which includes a discussion of the best-known study of gifted people, as well as a sampling of typical literature concerning the identification of gifted children and their common life challenges. The methods chapter (Chapter Three) provides a rationale for

phenomenology, a discussion of research design with sections on ethics, participant selection, instrumentation, interview questions, and follow-up questions. This is followed by a discussion of the procedures and a section on data processing and analysis. The data analysis and results chapter (Chapter Four) restates the purpose, delineates the research process, and provides the reader with selected answers to each interview question. The last chapter (Chapter Five) provides a summary of the study, the researcher's conclusions, and implications for counseling, social policy, and future research.

Summary

Chapter One discussed the background to the problem, which was a lack of compelling or scholarly qualitative research relative to the phenomenon of giftedness. The reasons for a qualitative study using the phenomenological method were discussed. All participants shared a common childhood experience in the TAG program. Video recorded interviews were chosen as the means to accumulate the data needed to observe the phenomenon of adult giftedness and to answer the research questions related to the essence of this phenomenon. The TAG designation was explained, followed by sections on locating the researcher, the history of the TAG program, the purpose of the study, the research questions, assumptions and limitations, definition of terms, significance of the study, the theoretical/conceptual framework, and the organization of the remaining chapters. A review of the literature follows in Chapter Two.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

In Chapter One, I discussed having casual conversations with former TAG classmates at the occasional class reunion. This is what prompted me to research gifted adults at this level. We have already established that gifted children have a unique way of looking at the world and a unique set of developmental issues. Plenty of literature supports this, but there is a lack of scholarly literature about the ongoing experience of adults who were identified gifted as children.

It has therefore been very difficult to find any scholarly articles written from a phenomenological perspective. Since most of the literature is concerned with the identification and challenges of giftedness in children and adolescents, this literature review shall provide a sampling of typical research. What is more, many researchers admit there has not been enough attention given to the matter of gifted adults (Becker, 1970; Konstantopoulos, Modi, & Hedges, 2001; Silverman, 2003).

Identifying the Talented and Gifted

Gifted children will have an unusually high ability in one or more domains (e.g., precocity, curiosity, abstract thinking, etc.), and their cognitive abilities will develop more rapidly than average children (Winner, 1999). Dr. Lewis M. Terman spearheaded

the most comprehensive study of the gifted. He identified 1,528 California children with an average IQ of 151 (Terman, 1925; 1926; 1930; 1947; 1959). The group was identified to be in the top 1% intellectually.

From this sample, he selected nearly 1,000 children with a median IQ of 147, and followed their progress throughout their lives. The focus of his research was devoted to 643 students, of which he was primarily interested in their psychological, behavioral, and physical characteristics. Intelligence was measured using The Stanford-Binet, National B, and The Stanford Achievement Test, in addition to other IQ tests. Students were selected according to teacher recommendation and other non-random methods (Holahan & Sears, 1995). Participants were surveyed three times during 1925-1956. After his death in 1956, Terman's followers continued his work through 1986.

At the beginning of the study, the age of subjects averaged 11 years, and ended when many of them reached 70. Terman questioned whether intellectual superiority would be matched by superiority in physical health, mental health, social adjustment, and breadth of interests. The research sought to reveal whether children who were intellectually superior fit the 1920's stereotype of physically weak and socially incompetent. The research proved that negative stereotypes of the gifted were not true. Gifted children were found to be socially superior, healthier, and conducted themselves better than children of average intelligence (Terman, 1925; 1926; 1930; 1947; 1959).

The children were initially asked about their intellectual interests, reading preferences, favorite classes, career dreams, and extracurricular interests (Terman, 1925).

Terman also wanted to know whether participants would continue to excel as they aged. None of the children made widely recognized intellectual contributions, however, even those with IQs over 180 (Feldman, 1984; Holahan & Sears, 1995).

Some researchers have noted problems with Terman's selection of subjects. Selection was neither systematic nor random, and it was impossible to compare the demographic data with other samples. Over time, many participants became disinterested in participation, and this created further problems with data collection (Ceci, 1990; Holahan & Sears, 1995). Questionnaires were mailed to parents, teachers, and health providers, and the quantitative data, however imperfect, were recorded.

Terman also sought an understanding of self-estimation, sociability, knowledge, and game preferences (Terman, 1925), but these data neither explored nor described details of lived experiences. Among many other categories, the quantitative data revealed a subject's gender, age, parent's national and racial origin, parent's education, parent's occupations, and family composition. These categories fail to provide qualitative descriptions of individuals or their stories.

Instead, the present study seeks to fill in gaps left by quantitative research, since even the largest and most famous longitudinal study of the gifted does not allow us to understand personal experiences of the phenomenon of giftedness itself. Much of the literature is concerned with gifted educational challenges, special populations of gifted students, giftedness and emotional health in children, and giftedness and academic achievement, but the data are usually program-specific, rather than person-specific.

Common Challenges of Gifted Children

Gifted children are described as individuals with advanced academic talent, high-achievers, and/or those who score extremely well on aptitude or achievement tests (Konstantopoulos et al., 2001). Gifted students have a qualitatively different experience of life identified by precocity, intensity, and complexity in the cognitive and affective domains (VanTassel-Baska, 2004). Most gifted children receive very little, if any, attention during their early years in school, however (Jaffe, 1997). This is why gifted programs exist.

Since these children are perceived to be smart it is often assumed they will figure out a way to do well in life, but all basic psychological theories agree in some form that a lack of attention creates the opportunity for negative personality issues to develop. Specifically, Jaffe (1997) found that some gifted students became lost, frustrated, bored, and limited in traditional settings. Some children developed to a fraction of their potential due to their environment, but there was no follow up study to determine how these factors affected adulthood.

Rysiew, Shore, and Leeb (1999), and Sajjadi, Rejskind, and Shore (2001) examined the effects of giftedness on career indecision. Results were inconclusive regarding any correlation between giftedness and career choice, and the findings do not explain the experiences of TAG adults. Since gifted people excel in various domains, it may have been difficult for them to choose a career, but qualitative evidence is lacking. Will TAG adults provide data related to career indecision?

Nelson and Smith (2001) identified external factors affecting the academic and career achievements of gifted girls. They found that gifted girls were underrepresented as adults in high-paying, high-status occupations. Peers, family, and school environment were found to be the factors affecting gifted girls' career choices. The research does not provide the data sought in this study, however, because it focuses on numerical data such as salary amount, but does not give detailed descriptions of life experiences.

Grantham and Ford (2003) studied the effects of race, giftedness, and self-concept among gifted African American students. The research focused on the effects of labeling on self-image, feelings about being gifted, and whether they contended with more affective and psychological issues than others. They found that African Americans are underrepresented in gifted programs as moderated by their environment. Much of their research deals with race relations, only focuses on children, and is further evidence of the need for the present study.

Ambrose (2003) and VanTassel-Baska (2003) researched gifted students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those with learning disabilities. Their socioeconomic backgrounds were found to be barriers to achieving goals, intellectual development, and self-fulfillment. Barone and Schneider (2003) researched at-risk gifted students, but none of these educators have adult life descriptions on which to base their model. The purpose for including these examples is to further demonstrate that the concentration of existing research is focused on children, rather than adults.

Jaffe (2004) found that bored gifted students disengage from school over time. Magee (1998) found that gifted student scholastic achievements were better when special accommodations in learning were made for the gifted children. Chan (2003) discovered a relationship between giftedness, emotional intelligence, and social coping among students, while Peterson (2003) also explored gifted children and emotional health. Do gifted adults disengage due to boredom? Would special accommodations for gifted adults promote achievement? What about the mental health of gifted adults?

Albaili (2003) researched the affective needs of the gifted, especially the differences between intellectually gifted achievers and underachievers. Strategies for addressing the social and emotional concerns of gifted children were presented, but similar scholarly studies for gifted adults do not exist.

Udvari and Schneider (2000) explored competition among gifted children. They found gifted children should be encouraged to compete, without a view to winning or losing. The researcher is not aware of research describing the value of competition among gifted adults. Delisle (1992) and Kanevsky and Keighley (2003) studied underachieving gifted students. They found students did not attend classes or complete assignments because they considered them boring or irrelevant. How do TAG adults feel about boring or irrelevant responsibilities?

These examples are typical of existing research and are evidence of the need for scholarly research of talented and gifted adults. I found literally hundreds of other articles, but none that answer my proposed research questions.

Summary

Dr. Lewis Terman's study was quantitative and longitudinal, and measured how a California gifted group differed from the rest of the population. Gifted children were found to be precocious in many areas, mentally older than their actual age, and more mature in interests, knowledge, and behavior than the rest of the population. Terman's research is the best-known and longest longitudinal quantitative study of the gifted, but the data do not provide us with the depth of personal descriptions, which the present study seeks.

A typical sampling of gifted literature was reviewed, including how talented and gifted children are identified, talented and gifted challenges, special populations of talented and gifted students, talented and gifted education, talented and gifted emotional health, and talented and gifted achievement. Evidence shows a lack of qualitative data concerning gifted adults. Qualitative data is therefore needed in order to understand the complexity of the talented and gifted adult experience. TAG adults also have unique experiences, and these experiences cannot be described by quantitative data alone. No group is prevented from positive traits such as decisiveness, optimism, and life satisfaction, and no group is immune from negative traits such as indecision, depression, and life dissatisfaction, but the literature indicates these might be more intense for gifted individuals. This literature review demonstrates that literature concerning gifted adults needs to be expanded and enriched.

Gifted students have been identified as having better cognitive abilities than the population as a whole and these abilities have affective results (Eggen & Kauchak, 2004). Much research exists regarding the cognitive and affective needs of gifted children (Colangelo & Davis, 2003), but Delisle (2003) believes current gifted education is questioned, threatened, and underfunded. Could this be due to a lack of research about gifted adults?

White (2003) admits, “major figures in Western philosophy have not reflected on and analyzed...gifted children” (p. 19). If the literature review still suggests that too little philosophical and analytical data exists regarding gifted children, what of gifted adults? I hope to bring needed attention to the field. The literature review demonstrates that there are no phenomenological inquiries into the experience of adult giftedness, and since some scholars still admit there is not enough research concerning giftedness in general it is hoped this study will enhance the understanding of the phenomenon of giftedness by educators, counselors, and other researchers.

Finally, the literature review indicates that cognitive, affective, relational, and spiritual/existential themes should be described uniquely by my participants. The present research shall fill a knowledge gap by seeking personal descriptions of the experience of being talented and gifted from adults.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Rationale: Why Phenomenology?

This chapter acknowledges the existence of many options for doing qualitative research. Why have I chosen phenomenology? Creswell (2007) presents five options for doing qualitative research: Narrative Research, Phenomenology, Grounded Theory, Ethnography, and Case Study. It is not recommended to choose more than one approach. It is important, however, to choose the right approach to report how TAG adults view their life experiences, relative to the TAG identity.

Narrative research looks for stories, not necessarily for felt perceptions and meanings. I did not look for complete life histories from the participants; I sought to understand the meaning attached to the phenomenon of giftedness. A narrative typically reports the life of a single individual, whereas a phenomenology describes the meaning of experiences for several individuals. Grounded theory research seeks to generate or discover a theory, and I was not necessarily interested in new theories, but in rich descriptions of lived experience. Ethnographic research focuses on an entire social group and was therefore not appropriate for my study, since I dealt with a small sample. Case study research focuses on an issue explored through one or more cases in a bounded system (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998, 2002). These methods were all inappropriate for the present study.

Phenomenological research focuses on the subjective experience of the individual and seeks the answer to how people make sense of their unique experiences. I wanted to discover the meanings people attached to their personal journey. Since I sought to understand the essence of the experience of the TAG adult, wished to describe that experience, studied several individuals who shared that experience, and primarily used interviews to obtain my data, my qualitative research was consistent with the principles of phenomenology (Merriam, 1998, 2002).

Research Design

Choosing a study design requires understanding the underlying philosophy of the research (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998). Since this study looked for meaning in the context of TAG life experiences, qualitative research, and more specifically, phenomenology, provided the foundation for the research design. We are not concerned with testing theories but with understanding experiences. The subjective experiences of TAG adults cannot be obtained quantitatively because quantitative research design does not provide detailed descriptions of life experiences. Qualitative research gathers data from interviews, observation, and document studies (Bowen, 2005; Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998). I sought the meaning constructed by TAG individuals in interaction with their world, and I wished to richly describe those life experiences (Merriam, 2002). Contrary to numerical data, qualitative data provides depth and detail in order to understand lived experiences. In summary, I was not interested in numerical data, but in

the discovery of common existential, phenomenological, and descriptive themes. This section includes a discussion of ethics, participant selection, instrumentation, and interview questions.

Ethics

Ethics in qualitative research is important (Creswell, 2007). Risks to participants were minimized, and this project presented no risks to participants other than time involved for the interview, and the potential for brief discomfort in remembering difficult situations. All participants were provided with, and signed a legally effective informed consent document. The procedure of using a video recorded interview was consistent with sound qualitative data collection and was nonthreatening for participants.

Participants had the option of reviewing the video recording and remaining anonymous (Halai, 2006). Anyone who chose to review the video had the option of withdrawing participation. In addition to adhering to accepted standards of ethical research, additional Liberty University IRB Requirements were followed.

Participant Selection

Since generalization is not the goal of qualitative research, I employed non-probability sampling. Non-probability samples are created when people are chosen on some basis other than random selection (Merriam, 1998; Portney & Watkins, 2000).

Participants were those who participated in the Fairfield, Ohio Schools TAG program between 1978-1983 and were located on the Internet by searching Facebook, alumni websites, and/or by referral sampling. Referral sampling was accomplished by asking

participants to locate other participants (Merriam, 1998). Fairfield Schools, former teachers, and former students were contacted for referrals. Participants picked on the basis of specific criteria is called purposive sampling (Merriam, 1998; Portney & Watkins, 2000). This research focused on a specific sample from a specific program. Out of 42 willing participants found, 14 interviews from one to two hours each were recorded and 10 were transcribed. Data saturation was observed after eight interviews were analyzed.

Instrumentation

Interviewing is the most common form of qualitative data gathering (Merriam, 1998) and original interview questions were developed based upon the literature review and the casual conversations I had with participants over the years. I video recorded all of the interviews and stored them on an Apple MacBook Pro computer, and backed the data up on an external hard drive.

Merriam (1998) advises beginning an interview with non-leading questions and moving to directive questions based upon the content of the responses, supplementing data gathering by telephone follow-up calls or in-person interviews when necessary. Only a few follow-up telephone calls were necessary. Expanded answers, when needed, were obtained in a flexible and conversational style.

Since there was no theory of adult giftedness on which to base my questions, I relied on my own intuition, having also been a participant of the TAG program. This was in accord with Merriam's (1998) and Portney and Watkins' (2000) principles of basic

qualitative research. The following questions are therefore based upon the premise that the qualitative researcher can be compared to a detective (Merriam, 1998). The questions were designed to elicit cognitive, affective, relational, and spiritual/existential data. These were the categories in which I had interest, but in qualitative research, the data will present their own categories. The following open-ended questions were asked of each participant.

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your memories and experiences (both positive and/or negative) of being in the TAG program.
2. Looking back now over the course of your life, tell me what it has been like (both positively and/or negatively) to be identified as Talented and Gifted.
3. Other people have known you were Talented and Gifted. How has this identity impacted your relationships with others?
4. Considering your role in this world as a Talented and Gifted person, and considering the biggest existential and/or spiritual questions regarding the meaning of life, tell me what it means for you to be Talented and Gifted.

Follow-up Questions

When the open-ended interview questions did not result in enough data, I sometimes asked follow-up questions, which were also designed from a review of the research concerning gifted children. These questions were designed to move the

conversation along. They were asked in a conversational style and not read verbatim.

Most participants did not need to be asked any of the following questions.

1. Tell me about your lifetime educational and/or career pursuits. Tell me why you chose these pursuits and about the philosophies or individuals that have inspired you.
2. Gifted individuals have often been identified as having a rapid learning rate, a complex thought process, and a vivid imagination. Tell me how these qualities might be relevant for you and your experiences.
3. Gifted individuals are perceptive, insightful, and creative. Tell me how these qualities might be true for you and your experiences.
4. Gifted individuals can be idealists and/or perfectionists, have an acute sense of self-awareness, and are often self-critical. Tell me how these qualities might be true for you and your experiences.
5. The gifted experience is often absorbing, penetrating, and complex. This is often experienced as an above normal sensitivity, which can either be an asset or a liability. Tell me how this might be true for you and your experiences.
6. Sometimes when gifted individuals do not live up to the perceived expectations of themselves or others, there can be internal conflict. Tell me about experiences when this might have been true for you.

7. Gifted individuals are often nonconformists who challenge rules and authority. Tell me how this might be true for you and your experiences.
8. What role (if any) does spirituality play in your life and how has being TAG affected it? If you choose not to answer this spiritually, think in existential or purposive terms. Please describe the “big picture.” What is the meaning of life to you, a gifted adult?

Procedures

According to Merriam (1998), all forms of qualitative research include the concept that the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection. The steps I used to gather data are listed below.

- Locate potential participants using the Internet, alumni websites, referral sampling, and/or purposive sampling.
- Send the Recruitment Letter (Appendix A) by regular and/or electronic mail and ask for referrals.
- Send the Consent Form (Appendix B) by regular and/or electronic mail and set an appointment for the interview.
- Digitally record the interview and back up the data.
- Watch and transcribe the interview within 24-48 hours.
- Re-watch the videos and make corrections to the transcripts as needed.
- Locate key phrases and statements within the data, which directly relate to the

phenomenon being researched (Denzin, 2007).

- As an informed reader, interpret the meanings of these phrases (Denzin, 2007).
- Evaluate these meanings for what they show about the essential, recurring characteristics of the phenomenon (Denzin, 2007).
- Offer a provisional definition or statement of the phenomenon in terms of the essential recurring characteristics (Denzin, 2007).

Data Processing and Analysis

The qualitative analysis of interview transcriptions is based upon an inductive approach, which means that I must arrive at general concepts or themes from an analysis of the specific textual data. Qualitative data analysis typically, but not always, identifies patterns and themes by means of thematic codes (Bowen, 2005). These categories cannot be imposed on the data before it is gathered (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1980), therefore inductive analysis only occurs after the themes and categories emerge from the data. In other words, since these themes are inductively derived from the research data we cannot start with a theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A detailed analysis of the data appears in Chapter Four.

Summary

Chapter Three gave the reasons for a qualitative and phenomenological

methodology. This was shown to be the best way to obtain the subjective data needed for this research project. Phenomenological research seeks to understand an individual's personal perspective (Houser, 1998), the essence of an experience (Merriam, 1998), and in this case, the essence of being identified talented and gifted in elementary school and how that impacted the participants over the course of their lives. A phenomenological researcher seeks to understand a participant's personal perspective (Houser, 1998) and this philosophy was chosen as the foundation for this qualitative research project.

This research, true to qualitative standards, focused on the interpretation, the meaning (Merriam, 1998), and the understanding of a phenomenon from the perspective of the participant (Locke, Silverman, & Spirduso, 1998; Merriam 1998). The researcher was the primary collector of the data and allowed the data to reveal themes through an inductive analysis process.

Data analysis post collection was discussed, as was nonprobability, referral, and purposive sampling for the identification of participants. The instrumentation developed by the researcher was an original, semi-structured interview, with questions based upon the literature review and intuition based on personal experience. Since highly complex or elusive questions are raised by qualitative inquiry (Isaac & Michael, 1990), eight follow-up questions were developed to keep the conversation moving.

Qualitative methodology expects the researcher to be spontaneous and flexible (Rudenstam & Newton, 2001), therefore the qualitative approach was chosen for the research of TAG adults. Chapter Three addressed the rationale, research design, ethics,

participant selection, instrumentation, interview questions, follow-up questions, procedures, and data processing and analysis. Chapter Four will present a detailed analysis of what happened.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Restatement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study was to understand the adult perceptions of the experience of being identified talented and gifted as children. A review of the literature suggested that due to their unique emotional and educational needs, gifted children experience life differently from the rest of the population (Albaili, 2003; Ambrose, 2003; Brounstein, Holahan, & Dreyden, 1991). I was interested in what experiences might be common to the TAG adults. Since the existing literature focused primarily on the experiences of children or criticisms of gifted education issues, it was necessary to discover how gifted adults perceived their own experiences and what meanings they had attached to them. A detailed description of the research process follows.

The Research Process

The sampling of participants for this research was composed of 14 mentally stable adults, who were able to provide detailed descriptions of their lives relative to the TAG identity. Data was gathered from individual video recorded interviews. The interview questions were designed to elicit descriptive, phenomenological data. Forty-two potential participants were located, 36 of which expressed an interest in participation. Nearly half of those lived within two hours of my location in Cincinnati. After receiving their written or verbal communication indicating their willingness to participate, 14 interviews were

scheduled. Consent forms were mailed either physically or electronically and signed copies were scanned and returned either electronically, physically, or collected at the interview site. Every interview except one was recorded in the private residence of the participant. One interview was recorded in a private conference room at the participant's place of employment. Prior to destruction of the videos, the contents will be stored on digital media and locked in the researcher's office, in compliance with Liberty University IRB recommendations.

All interviews lasted from one to two hours and each video was watched a minimum of three times. Interview transcriptions were accomplished by playing eight to ten seconds of video, pausing the movie, typing the words, and repeating this process until the transcription was complete. Common themes began to be observed when transferring textual data to a separate spreadsheet. By reviewing the video and transcription data a minimum of three times and relying on my own intuition, I was following the phenomenological approach, which was a search to understand the essence of what the participant was communicating.

The interview transcriptions of six females and four males were included in this analysis. During the period before the interviews, there were casual conversations, coffees, introductions to family, and other common social graces. Although there were occasions during half of the interviews when participants became pensive, and sometimes tearful, every interview was casual, cordial, and seemed to be enjoyed by both parties. Each interview was a comfortable and relaxed event. Post recording, each interview

video was typically watched for the first time within 24-48 hours. Four participants were contacted by telephone post interview to clarify a few responses to the interview questions. These follow-up calls lasted no more than 15 minutes.

Participant identification information was entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and to protect their identities, participants were renamed P1...P10. Two documents were created to keep track of the data: a Microsoft Word document named "Dissertation Transcriptions" and a Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet named "Dissertation Transcriptions Spreadsheet."

The Dissertation Transcriptions file was approaching 26,000 words when I was convinced data saturation had occurred. Transcribing stopped after the completion of the tenth interview and four interviews were not transcribed. After 10 transcriptions were completed and corrected for errors in spelling, most verbal pauses and unrelated data were deleted. This resulted in 64 pages of double-spaced text consisting of 21,385 words. I kept track of this data in the Dissertation Transcription document by identifying the participant and the answers to the interview questions with paragraph headings such as "P1: Question One" through "P10: Question Four."

After researching the option of using qualitative research software to help me analyze the data, I concluded it was not worth the investment. A computer program would not help me for several reasons:

- There were no other phenomenological interview studies of adult giftedness on which to base my model of data analysis.

- I personally experienced the TAG program and understood obscure participant references and asides, something a computer could not have done.
- Phenomenology implies the necessity of the researcher's human experience and intuition as essential during the entire research project.
- Qualitative research programs do not discover, describe, or analyze the essence of a phenomenon; they basically sort and group textual data.

Upon the next reading of the transcripts, I used the highlighter feature in Microsoft Word to identify any possible themes that might be common to participants. Still at a preliminary phase of data analysis, I often highlighted words, phrases, sentences, or entire paragraphs. I highlighted what I thought would be common themes in yellow.

At the next reading of the transcripts, I expanded and developed the Dissertation Transcription spreadsheet by naming 10 columns: Theme, Q1 Text, Theme, Q2 Text, Theme, Q3 Text, Theme, Q4 Text, Theme, and F Text, where "Theme" denoted a possible theme name, Q1 denoted Question One, and F denoted answers to follow-up questions. The spreadsheet cells contained the specific text, which had been copied and pasted from the Dissertation Transcriptions document. Personal notes and observations were recorded by hand in a notebook and discarded after the discovery of the most common themes. I was able to keep track of the data and look at it from three different perspectives: video recording, word processing document, and spreadsheet. This method

of data organization was the best way for me to allow the data to speak for itself. This approach was also consistent with the flexibility of phenomenology.

When I copied the relevant text from the Dissertation Transcriptions document and pasted it into the Dissertation Transcriptions spreadsheet, I also copied the accompanying video clip and pasted that into a separate compilation video. Over one hour of video highlights from 10 participants was assembled and edited. The video contains the interview questions followed by assorted movie clips of the participants.

I listed the potential themes in a notebook, and on the dissertation transcriptions spreadsheet. Each time I watched a video or read a transcript, I either combined similar themes or deleted those that did not often repeat in the data. These had preliminary theme titles and codes such as (A) Awareness of Giftedness, (B) Broadmindedness, (C) Complex Thinker, (F1) Family Relationships, (F2) Faith, (G) Gratitude, (I1) Insecurity, (I2) Isolation, (L1) Legacy, (L2) Loneliness, (S1) Security, (S2) Self-consciousness, (S3) Self-criticism, (S4) Spousal Relationship, and (V) Validation of Giftedness. Similar themes like (I2) Isolation and (L2) Loneliness were combined. These themes represented my initial impressions of the data. These themes were chosen both for the number of times they surfaced and for the number of participants who mentioned them.

The next step in data analysis involved reading through the textual data again and “un-packing” the main themes by identifying their particular subthemes. Themes were marked with 12 different colors by using the highlighter feature in Microsoft Word. The analysis of the data resulted in the identification and the renaming of the four main

themes. Fifteen subthemes were expanded to 24 and also renamed. The main themes were annotated by the acronym, GIFT: Growth, Interpersonal, Future, and Thankfulness. When these themes showed up in data analysis, large chunks of text were then highlighted violet (G), bright green (I), turquoise (F), and dark yellow (T).

The Growth theme was designated as such because the essence of the phenomenon of adult giftedness expressed itself in thoughtful reflections by all of the participants. These reflections centered upon external and internal confirmations of their giftedness. Many struggled with self-criticism and finding opportunities to express their giftedness. The Interpersonal theme was designated as such because most of the answers dealt with or highlighted relationships with spouses, families of origin, and coworkers. The Future theme was designated as such because with one exception, all struggled with what to do next in their lives. The Thankfulness theme was designated as such because there was unanimous gratitude for the TAG experience including the opportunity to have a genuine creative outlet and to make lasting and often lifelong friends. There was an overwhelming genuine affection for the TAG teachers, and deep gratitude to them for making school fun, exciting, and interesting. The designation of the acronym GIFT was an unexpected bonus, which accurately expresses the analysis of the data.

During the next phase of the data analysis, the particular subtheme text was highlighted according to its Facilitating (F) or Challenging (C) subtheme. In the following list of subthemes, GF1 indicates Growth-Facilitating-Subtheme 1, and so forth. Eight additional highlight colors were used to mark the transcription text.

Subthemes GF1, GF2, and GF3 were marked in red. They are: Internal Validation of TAG Identity, Opportunity to Channel Talents and Gifts, and Broadminded Thinking for Problem Solving. Subthemes GC1, GC2, and GC3 were marked in pink. They are: Overcoming Self-criticism, Setting Priorities Relative to the TAG Identity, and Persuading Others.

Subthemes IF1, IF2, and IF3 were marked in dark green. They are: Positive Bonding Within TAG, Respect from Others, and Social Confidence. Subthemes IC1, IC2, and IC3 were marked in teal. They are: Feelings of Isolation, Being Misunderstood, and Ongoing Intellectual Insecurity.

Subthemes FF1, FF2, and FF3 were marked in blue. They are: TAG Career Preparation, Optimism, and Awareness of Responsibility to Achieve Potential. Subthemes FC1, FC2, and FC3 were marked in yellow. They are: Career Indecision, Boredom With the *Status Quo*, and How to Achieve Potential.

Subthemes TF1, TF2, and TF3 were marked in light gray. They are: Creative Outlet, Positive Memories, and Love for Enthusiastic Teachers. Subthemes TC1, TC2, and TC3 were marked in dark gray. They are: Need for Creative Outlet Post-TAG, Creating New Memories, and Disappointed by Other Education. The following table shows the main themes and subthemes without their color-coding.

Table 1

Gifted Adult Themes Table

Main Themes							
G Growth		I Interpersonal		F Future		T Thankfulness	
Subthemes		Subthemes		Subthemes		Subthemes	
Facilitating	Challenging	Facilitating	Challenging	Facilitating	Challenging	Facilitating	Challenging
GF1: Internal validation of TAG identity	GC1: Overcoming self-criticism	IF1: Positive bonding within TAG	IC1: Feelings of isolation	FF1: TAG career preparation	FC1: Career indecision	TF1: Creative outlet	TC1: Need for creative outlet post-TAG
GF2: Opportunity to channel talents and gifts	GC2: Setting priorities relative to the TAG identity	IF2: Respect from others	IC2: Being misunderstood	FF2: Optimism	FC2: Boredom with the status quo	TF2: Positive memories	TC2: Creating new memories
GF3: Broadminded thinking for problem solving	GC3: Persuading others	IF3: Social confidence	IC3: Ongoing intellectual insecurity among TAG	FF3: Awareness of responsibility to achieve potential	FC3: How to achieve potential	TF3: Love for enthusiastic teachers	TC3: Disappointed with other education

Selected and Coded Answers to the Interview Questions

Participant 1: Female, age 41

Most of my memories are extremely positive and I tell this to my kids: high school is rough. I didn't like high school and I wouldn't do it again. (IC1, TF2)

I think of the good old "TAG Fag" that we were always called, and you know, everyone wants to fit in, and I think we became a closer-knit group because the surrounding people around us would say that to us. We would eat lunch together and we had our core classes together but when we would go to other classes like French, Gym, or Band, we would stick together because people would make fun of us for being in those classes. It wasn't cool to be smart. I wouldn't go back to high school but I would go back to sixth, seventh, and eighth grade TAG in a heartbeat – loved those years. (IF1, IC1, IC2, TF2)

Teachers were way ahead of the times...so far ahead of the time. They made us feel special and not different. (GF1, GF2, IF2, IF3, FF3, TF1, TF2, TF3)

Some of those people are my closest friends. I love to talk to them and put them on Facebook (IF1, TC2)

I have such good memories. Ms. Sacre had us do the ship race across the ocean and to get points you had to do different things – different projects – and one of them was an advertising project – so we did, like, toothpaste. And it was so funny! You had to come up with a whole advertising script, and we did the Twilight Zone Movie – the part where they saw the gremlin or goblin on the airplane and I can remember acting all that stuff out with everybody. (GF2, IF1, IF3, TF1, TF3)

We had a TAG magazine. I remember Mr. Lapp had that tarantula – the "Hairy Harry" we called it – and Harry Hairy turned up dead so we investigated who killed Hairy Harry. So they were such good, solid memories. (GF2, IF1, TF1)

And really and truly we all got along. There wasn't "clique-y" – a little bit – but it wasn't nastiness. (IF1, IF2)

When it was over, I didn't like how Fairfield dumped you off in ninth grade. I felt very lonely. (IC1, IC2, FC2, TC1, TC3)

You needed that group; you needed that closeness. After TAG, the teachers were not the same. I felt like we were the four TAG teachers' children. Afterward I didn't get that feeling. We were just another student. And it was really hard to adjust to that. I can remember my Mom saying she almost wished she hadn't put me in TAG because of the way they dropped you off in high school and you were so unprepared for it, and that was rough. They catered to us and then it was like why were you even in it? What was the point? The sludge test was my favorite part though. I liked to have fun rather than study so got smart - I partnered up with the really, really smart people because it was rough. (IF1, IC1, IC2, IC3, FC2 TF1)

BSS: The "really, really smart" people? You didn't think you were that smart? You had to be to get in [the program].

My I.Q. was 159, and a lot of people are like "wow" but no, not compared...I felt like I was one of the dumber people in TAG. Yeah. And maybe I didn't apply myself. (GC1, IC3, FC3)

I get things quickly and I manipulate them in my mind a different way – you know – and I always thought I could never be a teacher because I just "get it." I mean, how do you teach four times five? You just get it. But there were so many smart people in that class and sometimes I did feel on the downside, for sure...and they were incredible "go-getters." The ideas that they came up with! I just felt lucky to tag along with them so to speak. (GF1, GF3, IC2, IC3)

During it I felt like I wasn't one of the smarter kids... (IC3)

I figure my importance in the world is not dependent on my giftedness. It just helps me.

BSS: How does it help you, specifically?

I think because I see the bigger picture. I think that's the one thing intelligence can give us. I don't feel pigeon holed sometimes. Not everyone, but some of those with lesser intelligence if they don't get the big "pic" - and it's not about memorizing the facts or knowing countries

and the continents - to me it's about the broader perspective of the world...the way things work, what people need. (GF1, GF2, GF3, IF3, FF2, FF3)

You know, sometimes they just need a hug. Sometimes they just need a smile. Telling someone to have a great day makes the difference...and I believe in paying it forward. I'm the one at McDonald's that might be paying for the person behind me because they might be having a bad day. You never know...and I believe in fate, a ton, I believe things are meant to be the way they are meant to be. If we're late, I never stress about it because maybe there was an accident I'm not in. So to me that intelligence is the wisdom to understand the big picture and to trust that we don't know everything and it's OK that we don't. And I feel a little bit broader in my perspective because of that. (GF1, GF2, GF3, IF3, FF2)

I get more respect because of it - a lot more. (IF2, IF3)

She comes to me to edit her work and she really respects me and asks my advice and gives me a lot more leniency to make decisions and stuff. And trusts my judgment...[other people] respect where you're coming from. So if anything, I'd say the relationship has to do with respect. (IF2, IF3)

You just don't want people to think you're arrogant, either, you know? We're our own little group you know. We get each other - we've been there. (IF1, IC1, IC2)

[Regarding their gifted child] He knew what I'd been through and he let me make that decision. And I said, "Will, do you think that, God gave you this gift and do you think it's OK to dishonor Him by not using it?" I said, "I'm sure someone else would love to be considered gifted." (GF1, GF2, IF2, FF2, FF3)

School was easy for us. I didn't have to study. You know, I was 23rd out of 670 kids and I was only 23rd because I didn't study. You know, the kids above me were the ones who really cared and wanted a "100," and I was like, "Hey! 95!" (Laughs) You know, without studying or cracking a book. (GF1, GC2, IF3, FC2)

So, I got to college and was overwhelmed, because they don't care. That's the biggest thing I've struggled with. I don't want that for my kids. I insist that they are pushed. (GC2, IC2, FC2, FC3, TC1, TC3)

[To her gifted child] I want your brain to learn how to think through hard things and work through hard things and figure it out. And I felt like they did that in TAG and back to the high school where they just dumped us off and didn't care. And we were just back to being a number to get through. (FF3, TC1, TC3)

I'm very much a Christian. Maybe it's the kid I touched at school because his mom hit him last night...and you don't know where you touch lives and the differences you make. But I go back to my talented and giftedness – my intelligence – as being a true gift from God. He could have given it to anyone and he chose me. So I might not use it in economics and inventing stuff, and in making money. I feel like I use it spiritually, and nurturing people, and my glass is half full – I say that all the time. Life sometimes is rough, but it's easy to look around you and see how great we have it. Our homeless are better off than some third world countries. (GF1, GF2, FF2, IF3, FF2, FF3)

So it's lots of – I try to use it to overcome bad situations – perspective – but to me it's very much intertwined with my spirituality...so for me, it's having the wisdom to be appreciative and to be happy. (GF1, GF2, GF3, IF3, FF2, FF3)

Participant 2: Female, age 42

I liked the out-of-the-box type of projects we did back then...where we were allowed to be really creative. I remember making a garbage bag hut or something that I hooked a fan up to and it blew around. I just remember a lot of our projects were neat, and hands on...and it seems like a lot of today's gifted programs are all about the grades. It's not about the creative side of things anymore... (TF1, TF2, TF3, TC3)

I just really liked how things were more creative-based instead of just “read this paper, write this paper, read this book.” (TF1, TF2)

But some of the negatives – being with the same group of people all the time – when you came out of it – going into the ninth grade – there was a lot of social issues, “Oh, you were in TAG, so you're *smart*, dah dah dah...” It kind of, it was a label that was stamped on you. (IC1, IC2, FC2, TC1, TC3)

I did feel like I missed out on a lot of friend making, because you are stuck with the same group and then everybody else has all these really close ties and if you are being dumped back in – and you were in there from elementary on – you missed out on those three or four years of those connections. (IC1, IC2, TC3)

You got left out a lot. (IC1, IC2)

I just always felt like I was on the outside socially, and then I'm with - those same three years - the same people and so I struggled socially... (IC1, IC2)

...there was no one else for me to connect with and I know when they did group projects nobody ever wanted to do it with me and so it was a social struggle big time. (IC1, IC2)

...that's just how my personality is, that people like to tease and make fun of me, yes, as this social humor kind of thing. (IC1, IC2)

I wasn't making the great grades everybody else was because I was more the creative thinker and not the academic thinker and I was a massive procrastinator... (GC1, IC1, IC2)

...so even in college I remember – because I got a teaching degree – and they would put you in groups to do these things, and you would have like a month or two to put them together, and everybody's getting together and they'll see me like the night before and “where's your part?” And I'm like, “I haven't done it.” The project is due and they're like, “Oh, you're just checking it fast.” I'm like, “No, I'm just getting started.” And they'd get so mad because I'd get an “A” just like them...because I work better under tighter...if I have a lot of time I just won't put the effort in. It won't be as good. So nobody wanted to work with me then in college, because I always put everything off till the last minute. (GF1, GC2, GF2, GC2, GF3, GC3, IC1, IC2, FC2, TC1, TC3)

When I was young we did more things, like, creative, and thinking outside the box, and now it just seems it's about the academic, which is just the AP stuff, so why bother doing gifted? (TF1, TF2, TC3)

I know when I was in it [TAG], I enjoyed it, even though I struggled. I'm glad I did it because it felt like it was something special that I got picked for. (GF1, GF2, IF3, TF1, TF2)

And then in high school, "oh you were in TAG", that kind of stuff...I think being in it you were still five steps behind because everybody else had already had more connections because you were out of the loop for three years, four years. (IC1, IC2)

I thought I was a creative person and that's just part of what I am. (GF1, GF3, TF1)

The TAG core people, they're more quick to, like on Facebook, they're like "Oh yeah, I'll be your friend – I was in TAG with you!" You know – I know I knew you and I think that was really the only thing that tied us together. (IF1, IF2, TC1)

I wouldn't have sought [name omitted] out except I was in TAG with him, so that small body of people, were people that I went to first. (IF1, IC1, TC2)

[After TAG] ...you never had a core group of people that everybody knew and liked kind of a thing. Outside that group I don't think anybody cared at all. (IC1, IC2, FC2, TC1, TC3)

Every now and then my parents might make some comment or something...just comparing with my kids or something...about them being creative like when you were in TAG. (TF1)

I guess in the grand scheme, it opens me up to see things outside the box and to approach things differently, which - egotistical kind of thing - I might impact people differently than if I hadn't gone through that experience... helping with my own kids go through their own social and emotional struggles, or whatever. I could, first of all, put myself into it, and help them think outside the box, and maybe approach things more creatively. (GF1, GF2, GF3, TC2)

I hate using that term, "Think outside the box." (Rolls eyes). It just helped me have another dimension of choice. (GF3, TF1)

Every job I've ever applied for I got. (GF1, IF2, IF3)

[I] Get things quick, but have to wait for everybody else. It was easy to cram for massive tests...I could take a picture in my head...near photographic memory. (GF1, GF3, IF3)

“Outside the norm” kind of stuff is fascinating to me...creativity allowed me to enjoy that. I’ve experienced a lot, kept it all with me, and take away from everything I’ve done. I see the big picture and bring everything forward with me, instead of shutting the book. (GF1, GF3)

Socially, I won’t change just because you tell me to...I’ll fight to the end...I don’t want to have to change just because you are telling me to. (IF3, IC2)

Participant 3: Female, age 43

Well, most of them were positive, I have to say. (TF2)

I started in 6th grade with a teacher I loved dearly. Her name is Ms. Hanby. I also had Ms. Hartley. (TF3)

I remember going to middle school, where all of the classes were on the same floor. I liked that we all got to be in the same group, and we were so close. They actually got those classrooms connected, which was nice. I think we were more like family; brothers and sisters, and I felt safe. (GF1, GF2, IF1, IF2, IF3, TF1, TF2)

I remember being outside the classroom or on the bus, or...electives, or other classes...the kids were different...they were just not as nice. (IC1, IC2)

I like the way the teachers gave us more independence. We could go at our own speed, and we had lots of creative writing projects. I had to write two books: one in sixth grade and one in eighth. Friday was like the free day – you know, pick something new and learn about it. Mr. Lapp even set up a darkroom because a couple of people (like me) wanted to learn how to do that. He said, “I’ll get the equipment” and he did it. I mean, you wouldn’t get that if you weren’t in TAG. Looking back, I really appreciate it now. (TF1, TF2, TF3)

You know, it’s really weird, because I always wondered why I was in it, why I was chosen? I always felt like the one who was the stupid one in

the group. I mean like these people are really smart, I don't know how I got in here. I always questioned it, and wondered...maybe they made a mistake? (IC3)

And then when you got out, especially in ninth grade, it was hard. (IC1, IC2, TC1, TC3)

I think after the fact when we had to go back into the mainstream you had to deal with kids you didn't know that treated you differently. Whether they treated you as, "Oh, you were one of those weird TAG kids." You know, "You were one of those kids that were in that *group*, you're weird, different, you think you're so smart." Or something like that. I didn't feel like I was part of the group. (IC1, IC2)

I think at the time I thought I probably should have done better. I probably should have finished college or something. (FC1, FC3)

It doesn't mean I'm not as smart as somebody else just because I didn't go to college and get this degree and do something spectacular or something. I did really great up to geometry, so I don't know what happened. (FC1, FC2, FC3, TC3)

He would say, "You're smarter than that!" (IC2)

I signed up for creative writing and some other stuff and I got my schedule for senior year and I took the creative writing class, but I didn't get in and all my friends who were in my creative writing class before were in it! (TF1, IC1, TC3)

That was the only time that creative writing class - and that was what I liked in TAG - was offered! (TF1, TC3)

So I went to my counselor and I said I want whatever class I can get out of to be in that class. He said, "No, I'm not doing that. I decided you need physics. You need physics and if you want to get into a good college, you need that and you don't need creative writing..." (IC2, TF1, TC1, TC3).

He was pushing me into stuff, expecting me to do more based on what I had done before. (IC2, FC2, TC1, TC3)

I probably put more expectations on myself when I didn't do as well, not doing your best, and I can remember not doing my best, and knowing I

should be doing better. I can remember not being happy with my performance. (GC1, GC2, FC3, TC3)

I always said I wondered why I was in the class...I guess because I...I don't know...I guess I never felt that I was any different than anybody else. I mean I never really thought of myself as this talented and gifted...whatever they thought I was. (IC2, IC3)

I think for a time I was a pretty good student but I don't think that was based on being talented and gifted. (GC1, IC3)

...Some of the kids that came into the classroom...I don't know if I even realized they were better students and that they performed better than others. (IC3)

I took all those circles and I made different planet things and alien stuff and most of my stuff was based on the story of the aliens that she told us. And I did all my drawings based on cosmic stuff, and I thought if it was based on this test, how did I get in this program? (IC3, TF1)

So I don't even know what any of my gifts – except maybe the creative side of it – I'm more creative than some people... (IC3, TC1)

It's hard to explain stuff to others sometimes...because it's in my head. (GC3, IC2)

Things come easy to me...I picture the calendar in my head – I don't see a list of things I have to do. I see the days ahead of me...like instead of a sheet, I see a three dimensional model extending into the future and all the things I have to do are written on each day...stretched out. (GF1, GF3, IC2)

I don't think I'm that special. I think I'm just an average person doing the best I can. (IC3)

Participant 4: Male, age 42

Hmm. I would say, mostly positive, from the standpoint of being in a smaller subset of students, and as a side note, I'd say getting to know everybody better instead of being in a big classroom, and whenever we were asking questions in class and the teacher started laughing, I used to

love that...(silly laughter) kind of like you're laughing right now. (IF1, IF2, IF3, TF1, TF2, TF3)

I think it was good because we knew the same people – probably 70% of the group we knew from third grade on, so you really got to know a small group of people pretty well. We also got away with murder...teachers were all...as long as we kind of “got it” and accomplished what they expected us to do in class...we didn't have to work that hard. We were kind of treated sort of “above the law” “when it came to goofin' around and having fun. (GF1, GF2, IF1, IF2, IF3, TF1, TF2, TF3)

And, um, on the down side, I don't know how much of a work ethic was instilled on the one hand that would have helped us in high school and college or elsewhere because I think we took a lot of things for granted, cause it came easy to us and I think the teachers loved the whole thing of fostering creativity, and maybe didn't crack the whip as hard as they should have sometimes. (GC2, FC3, TC1)

But when we entered high school, a lot of times we were the odd man out in terms of knowing everybody. (IC1)

So the high school experience was...maybe a little bit of a social hurdle at first. (IC1, IC2)

I wouldn't say I had a lot of close friends. You know, the few people I could have a heart to heart with would be the few people I knew from the early days of TAG like yourself...there weren't that many people I got that close to. I probably have 2 friends outside of TAG that I still keep in touch with, outside of just knowing people and saying “hi” in a restaurant. So if everybody says that, it's probably a random occurrence (Laughs). (IC1, TC1)

When you got to high school, it felt like a total drop in the creative experience. I didn't feel like there was a real support mechanism to say what you expected, and where you feel rewarded, and what you got the most joy out of in school. (IC1, IC2, FC2, TC1, TC3)

I do remember a case where there was a teacher, [Name omitted]. It was a ninth grade algebra class and I get the feeling in hindsight that he was not respectful of the TAG approach, so I came into this classroom and he gave me a test that I remember going, “I have no clue.” I took this test and got

some sort of failing grade and it was to assess where I was, in “prep” for his class, and he basically implied that I had no place in honors math based on the outcome of that test...I think he wanted to rub it in the face of Ms. Hartley and the folks from the TAG program because I never had an issue with math at all. (GC3, IC1, IC2, TC3)

[Regarding another test] I came in third place out of all the juniors, and we were sophomores, so math was never a problem, but I remember feeling really out of place and odd and insecure for that moment. (IC1, IC2, TC3)

But very inappropriate things stand out in my mind...hilarious. Some of my greatest memories in TAG...knowing that any creative thought that was outside the box...would be accepted. [That] kind of allowed us to just really go nuts in our imagination and just have fun. So many times in class – many instances I remember – kind of getting into a laughing fit where you couldn’t stop laughing because you were either imagining somebody had a cow’s head, or whatever that situation was, and maybe you and I or whoever it was, would say to each other, “Look at so and so and imagine something ridiculous.” And then we just couldn’t get it out of our mind because the imagination was so powerful. (GF1, GF2, IF1, IF2, IF3, FF2, TF1, TF2)

We were able to enjoy the social, and the imagination, and the creative side of things, and it wasn’t like we were failing out of class. We could do that and really have fun with it...feeling free in whatever you wanted to do and being rewarded and accepted for what you brought to the table...for what you offered...from that creative standpoint, or that intelligence standpoint, or whatever they were looking at. (TF1, TF2, TF3)

I don’t remember anyone ever cracking the whip or being upset that we weren’t putting in enough effort, because we could always fall back on some “creative way” that could make the project good...for me it was always at the last minute drawing up some picture...and boom! There! That’s wonderful! (GF1, GF2, IF2, FC3, TF1)

BSS: “So you could shoot from the hip?”

Yeah, I don’t remember ever studying, I don’t remember taking work home, that much at all, and that made school...it was creative, it was social, it was relaxed, it was fun from my perspective, it was a really good experience. (TF1, TF2)

In my case that was not kicking my own ass...I wasn't trying to make sure I got an "A" every time...because we had honors classes where you could get a 4.0 for a "B." (FF3, FC3)

So, for whatever reason, I didn't develop as much of a driving, over the top, work ethic, where I felt like I had to bust my ass or was ever stressed out about having to accomplish things. I knew I could do whatever needed to be done without putting forth a ton of effort. (GF1, FF3, FC3)

I would say, probably, the biggest thing has been...comes back to the amount of effort I had to put into things. So, I never developed that kind of self-imposed stress or pressure to do things at the highest-level possible and feeling if I didn't do that there was going to be a major repercussion. (FF3, FC3)

So I think the same thing applied in...you name it...I always felt like, well, this is going fine, or I can do this, or I'm good at that, or I've put enough effort in to make things go well. In hindsight I probably could have climbed the ladder better, or been a better parent or more involved husband, all of those things. (FF3, FC3)

Things have always kind of worked out and...probably haven't pushed myself anywhere near enough in terms of my aptitudes or what I could have achieved. So, I've just kind of enjoyed life similarly to how I enjoyed high school, and middle school, and everything else...just kind of took the easier road instead of pushing myself. (FF3, FC3)

It's kind of funny to look at the clock and how old you are...I didn't go out and start my own business at a young age and I didn't become some real estate mogul, you know? (GC1, GC2, FC1, FC3)

Everything came so easy at a younger age, I think time got the best of me, and I look back now and wonder at what point did you fail to live out those self-created dreams or expectations that never happened, and I wonder, hmm, is it now too late? (GC1, GC2, FC1, FC3, TC1)

I would say that relatives or friends, or people that I get to know socially, in the neighborhood or whatever, coworkers even, when they hear where I went to college...I know they have to be thinking, "You're in sales? What are you doing? You should be running the company!" (GC1, IC2, FC1, FC3)

Well, I think if I didn't say this I would be lying to myself after every other question I've answered...I've kind of walked myself into that corner, but I definitely would say it means I've wasted an opportunity, you know? When you think about what you could do in life, what you could have done, um, if somebody considered you that, and you've just kind of gotten by and enjoyed life and you could've done more. (GC1, GC2, IC2, FC1, FC3)

That's probably my biggest regret...knowing what I'm able to do, when someone puts me to a task, and then looking at, well, what have I really done in life at this point? I think I've been a "pretty good" dad...husband...employee, but "pretty good" is kind of that, backhanded compliment you know? (GC1, GC2, IC2, FC1, FC3)

The biggest issue really is probably the fear of, if this much time has blown by and I'm laying on my death bed someday, am I going to think, "geez," I never did do, you know, I never did do...I should have made a list and accomplished more of the things that mattered. You know, getting around and actually doing something more meaningful would be a nice thing to do one of these days, maybe when we're done filming here (Laughs). (GC1, GC2, IC2, FC1, FC3)

Feeling you've got a little more intellect than the guy down the street, and that's probably the biggest difference in the meaning of life, knowing that it could be very, very different than what we'd like to believe it is. (GF1)

I think being spiritual and being maybe a little smarter than the average guy can be a nice challenge to pull off. So how do you define spirituality? How does religion fit into your life vs. understanding the science of this big giant thing we're a part of...pretty hard to make those two mesh. (GF1, GF3)

Participant 5: Female, age 40

I predominantly have positive memories. I feel it was the best time for me educationally. I am still in touch with Carol Reinhart. I definitely think the work I did as a student in TAG tapped more into my creativity. I remember voraciously writing, and I still love to write, and I find myself longing for the time when I wrote that way. After I left the TAG program, it was just a lot of stifled creativity. Honestly, with the work I produced whether it was visual art or writing. (TF1, TF2, TF3)

In fact, I remember one of my teachers in high school...we were given an assignment to talk about Dante's inferno and we had to place ourselves in our "hell" and describe what that could be and you could just do a five paragraph essay or whatever, but I could write a poem and I could rhyme with what ever would come easiest, and it was a pretty clever piece I wrote about lying, and the comment at the bottom of the paper was, um, "I'm sorry to hear you have this problem." And I was like, wow, I'm really not a liar! (IC1, IC2, FC2, TC1, TC3)

The high school teachers didn't get that awesome pretend creativity that was just normal in the TAG setting...it wasn't even conceivable out there in "high school world." That's kind of how I felt. I felt very squashed my freshman year. I turned in all this writing I had to do, pages and pages of this creative journaling, story ideas...and my teacher wrote back that clearly I had stolen this work because work of this caliber was not possible and I just learned to play the game after that point I think, as opposed to reaching my potential. (GF1, IC1, IC2, FC2, FC3, TC1, TC3)

I want more than anything to write, and I feel like its still a barrier for me. (FC3, TC1)

Um, so a lot of positive memories for me...I mean gosh, I remember, like, the projects we did, I remember for like a year I dropped acid every Friday...

BSS: What? Oh! I thought you meant you dropped *acid*...because that could make you really creative. (Laughs)

No! No...dropped acid on a rock...to look at the deterioration...as part of one of Mr. Lapp's science projects. Um, you know, I can still see the classrooms together in one big huge open space, and I can still sing the jingle that we wrote. (TF1, TF2, TF3)

I think some of the students saw me on the outside...like they didn't think I was as smart as I was, if that makes any sense. (IC1, IC2)
I never felt like anybody thought I was smart...you know what I mean? (IC1, IC2)

I always felt like they thought I didn't put in the effort, that I was maybe inferior to them... (IC1, IC2)

Nobody wanted to be my sludge test partner because I think that they thought that I couldn't compete. (IC1, IC2)

It was the one time I felt like I could say to the other people, "See, I got like the highest score...don't like, underestimate me." (GC1, GC2, GC3, IF2, IF3)

Um, you know, I think it's been lonely. (IC1, IC2)

Like, in the TAG setting, you could be yourself. I mean...I was fully me. (GF1, GF2, IF1, IF2, IF3, FF2, TF1, TF2)

I think into high school, I could be...I don't think I tapped into...I mean...I was bored academically in college and college was all about lets hurry up and get done because this is a waste of my time, um, instead of enjoying the process. (FC2, TC1, TC3)

My vision of education is not the reality that is out there and I thought everybody kind of thought how I think, and would do the kinds of things I do, and I didn't understand that I was creative...I mean I knew that I was gifted...I though that meant smart, but I didn't know that meant creative, I didn't know that meant ridiculously intuitive, I didn't know it would mean the eternal quest for that surge of...YEAH...do you know what I mean? (GC3, IC1, IC2, FC2, FC3, TC1, TC3)

All the other teachers around here just think I have ADD! (Laughs) They do! I mean, they think she's just high energy...she has ADD, poor thing. She can't focus on just one thing. And I'm like, "No, that's not it." I master it and I move on...life is never enough for me, and it borders on insanity. I mean it's this constant pursuit for the rush of the best learning, trying to be the best. I mean it's like this huge void constantly. I never feel like I'm good enough, I never feel like I'm really great at anything because I'm kind of good at everything. (GF1, GF3, GC1, GC2, GC3, IC1, IC2, FC2, FC3, TC1, TC3)

I've been doing stuff [in her job] that people are just now starting to do...when everyone thought I was weird. Like, I have felt more like a weirdo in my adult life than at any other time in my life. And so many people seem intimidated by me and I'm like the least judgmental and least intimidating person that I personally know, and so I never quite

understand – and it's from the passion, and it's from that excitement.
(GF1, GC3, IC1, IC2, FC2, TC1, TC3)

What's my job? I'm ready to do it! Well, everybody else is complaining about the coffee that we had that morning. (FC2)

Once I learn it, I'm ready for the next thing, you know? I mean...if I didn't have a family and children, I'd probably live all over the world. It's hard for me to feel locked down, and it's got to deal with being gifted. It's so lonely because friends don't get it; you sound like you're bragging if you talk to anybody about it, and it's just so lonely...it's just so lonely a lot of the time. (GF1, GC3, IC1, IC2, FC2, FC3, TC1)

I had a conversation with a guy today. I told him I was going to do this interview. He's one of the few people I feel like I can kind of be myself around, because they think I'm a goofball. I mean it's still kind of the same feelings I think I had when I was in the program. (GC1, GC3, IC1, IC2, FC2)

I think it [being TAG] definitely means to have a responsibility. And I think I'm keenly aware of that, and I think that's where this insatiable...I need to do more, there's more that I have to do, I have a responsibility, I get it and other people don't. I mean it's a heavy freaking burden to carry. It's hard to be me...I mean I carry that weight. (GF1, GF2, GC2, IC1, IC2, FC2, FC3, TC1)

I have to be real careful not to go there too fast with them, because I am real intuitive with that and that can be kind of scary. (GC3, IC2)

Everybody has their gifts, and because I'm aware of it I have an obligation, and what's troubling to me is I don't think I've found the right job yet. (GF1, FF3, IC2, FC1, FC2, FC3, TC1)

I haven't felt like, "Oh, this is it. This is what I'm supposed to do." So, I feel like I am praying, I am seeking, and I'm always looking for a new job...I'm still looking for the right place to get plugged in, because I haven't found it. (FC1, FC2, FC3, TC1)

I wish mine [gift] wasn't so...multiple gifts...I wish it was one. You know, because sometimes I feel like an Olympic or professional athlete that maybe had to retire because of an injury, you know, but they still want

to be that athlete. Like, intellectually, I mean I'm not challenged ever intellectually, but I also wouldn't want to spend the day being challenged intellectually so I'm like this hypocritical dichotomy. (GC2, IC1, IC2, FC1, FC2, FC3, TC1)

BSS: Would you say you feel stuck in your life right now? Because that's the feeling I'm getting.

Abso-stinkin'-lutely! OK, like in my classroom we make these like, we call them culture dolls, it's a way to get to know each other, and you decorate this doll - all of who you are - and the thing that my doll carries in her hand is a cage, and a bird in a cage, and that's me - I'm a caged bird, man. Like...and I'm happy in my circumstance, but I'm not flying. I'm beating my wings...I'm putting on the show...you know what I mean? (GF1, GC1, GC2, IC1, IC2, FC1, FC2, FC3, TC1)

Somebody's got to have an answer to my situation, 'cause I sure don't have it. (GC3, IC1, IC2, FC1, FC3, TC1)

I would love to be just awesome at something where I felt like man, I went "all out." I always feel like there's a little left in me, no one's ever pulled it out. (GC1, GC2, IC1, IC2, FC1, FC2, FC3, TC1)

BSS: What would you be doing if you woke up tomorrow and everything was exactly the way you desired?

I would write. I just don't follow through with it because I think what I want to do is to just have that and focus only on that and that's just not a possibility. (GC1, GC2, FC1, FC3, TC1)

I fight against, I think, fight against my natural instinct to go sit in a room and write. (GC1, GC2, FC1, FC3, TC1)

Participant 6: Male, age 39

The earliest memories I have were actually pretty good. The thing that stood out from elementary school TAG was this thing called "Societies" where...we had to create these societies...and we had to figure out the rules of the other society without anyone teaching us. (TF1, TF2, TF3)

BSS: I remember calling that, “Utopias.”

The activity days in Mr. Lapp’s Science class...I loved that. I also got injured in one of those...(laughs)...they had to put some restrictions on it after my class because we started making gunpowder and I actually got a huge burn on my hand because we were making little bombs and little explosive things with gunpowder and grinding the mortar and pestle and it flashed in my face and burned my hand and melted my hair and it was pretty...traumatic.

BSS: Wow...did you have to get medical attention?

Yeah...the Cincinnati Shriners Burn Center at one point...and they had to restrict access to the chemical closet after that!

BSS: Never again in Fairfield has any kid had any fun...thanks to you.

My earliest memories of being good in school were during the second grade flashcard games...where you would yell “flashcard!” I remember I would go around the room and win...I loved that...like I won the flashcard thing in second grade. So, athletically and sports, that was not my thing. The idea of being with other smart kids and being challenged...I seemed to enjoy that. (GF1, GF2, IF3, FF1, FF2, TF1, TF2, TF3)

BSS: So Math and Science was your thing?

Yeah, I mean, Ms. Sacre [Social Studies] tried to make you think, but Ms. Hartley was the math teacher and she was great and challenged us in those things. So math and science gave me more opportunities than anything else and I have a career in Science now. The TAG program assisted my love for those things. I did biomedical [engineering] in college. (GF1, GF2, GF3, IF3, FF1, FF2, FF3)

I think I thought I was still pretty hot-stuff in college, thinking OK, I am this elite...whatever...and did very well in college and was in top of my graduating class...got to medical school and suddenly everybody was talented and gifted! I suddenly had this realization that, oh, here I’m just average...I think that was humbling...and at some point we got around to talking about TAG, and everybody had a different name for it, but everybody had been put in those groups. (GF1, GF2, IC3, FF1, FF2, FF3)

So I think I realized that my abilities...I had to be careful...that everybody didn't get things as quickly as I did, and I don't think I struggled with looking down on people, but definitely some people I could tell...you know...*that* person's just arrogant and thinks that they know more than everybody else. (IC2)

I remember in high school when there was no TAG program anymore, struggling how to interact with other kids, just because of some of our experiences, some of our abilities. (IC1, IC2, TC3)

I think I struggled with how to talk to folks...with how to socially interact for sure. (IC1, IC2)

Like I say, I wasn't as socially aware as some of the kids in my class were. (IC1, IC2)

I think I knew that I was going to succeed in whatever I did. I was confident in my abilities, I was confident in what I wanted to do, and I would get there, and whether people liked me or not...didn't matter. (GF1, GF2, IF3, FF1, FF2, FF3)

By the time I got to med school, everybody takes the same classes and there were some really brilliant people...photographic memories...guys that never came to class, and yet, could ace every test, and it's like...OK, I don't think I could...I'm smart, on the scales I'm probably really smart...but there's some ridiculously smart people here and it's probably frightening how smart they are...and it knocks you down a peg...like these guys' IQ's are...I don't know how high...but it's really high, and mine's pretty high, but these guys can't talk to a box? But they can ace every test, and look at a page and remember it forever. (GF1, IF2, IF3, IC3)

I don't like superficial thinking. Sometimes my colleagues...or other folks...I can get frustrated by their lack of depth on some things. When I ask people questions or they give me an answer that I can tell is not very well thought out, or they're just parroting somebody else's talking point, I like to argue and expose the fallacies of some of those things...helping them think through a problem and trying to convince them why their talking point is...that's what it is...it's not a reason to argument. (GF1, GF2, IF3, IC2, FC2, TC1)

The medical field is perfect for me because it involves lots of complex thinking and...you have a lot of stuff it could be, and you have a wide differential, and people are telling you symptoms, and they don't come walking in with a sign that says, "Here's what I have!" And if they do, I'm always questioning...well is it that what they have? (GF1, GF2 GF3, FF1, FF3)

To whom much is given much is expected, so I'm going to have to answer to God someday based on what He has...I didn't choose to be given the brain that I have or the parents I have...or any of those things. So, if all I ever did was make money and run over people and all the rest along the way and used my gifts to further me and nobody else, then I think that would be a problem...or at least in the big picture that would be a problem. So for me I think choosing medicine as a career and then following the "breadcrumbs" and seeing how God boils ministry in there too...it's helped drive career choices and how I see what I do. So the talents and gifts God's given me, I have to use them to help other people, whether that's in ministry, counseling, discipleship, or the idea of helping others who are younger coming up. So, the next generation: giving back, seeing them mature spiritually, emotionally, and all the rest. So our abilities...using them to not just focus on ourselves, but based upon the idea of mission and calling, and how that works. (GF1, GF2, GF3, IF3, FF1, FF2, FF3)

Health and poverty and all those things are all linked in a much greater way overseas and other places. And so we started to realize, OK, these countries have a lot of natural resources...they have plenty of stuff in the ground that you can dig out, but they have a leadership deficit. The countries have no leaders. It's cronyism, it's tribal, it's corruption, it's endemic...terrible...and they need leaders. We started realizing we can do clinic stuff, but if we aren't training leaders as we go, if we aren't investing, if we are not raising business leaders and bringing over business guys to train them, then we're not actually helping them. All we're doing is making them dependent on us again and it's colonialism continued, rather than raising them to be self-sustaining. (GF1, GF2, GF3, IF3, FF1, FF2, FF3)

BSS: I wonder how you've integrated your giftedness and faith with all the science and math problems that aren't necessarily logical, like the concept of infinity, negative infinity, or string theory?

It used to bother me. I get Newtonian world, I get constants and the rest...but relativity messed me up. But back to the mission work: We saw lines of patients and you had like two minutes with each patient. It's quick and it's not at all like in America where you have to have 100%, 99% certainty. One guy came in and he had obviously a traumatic injury to his eye. He can't see anything...totally opaque...white cornea...you can tell no light is getting in...he can't see because of that injury. And I looked at him and I'm like, "I got no fix for that. I can give you medicine, some ibuprofen for your arthritis, I can give you some vitamins, I can deworm you if you've got some worms." And, I'll pray and move on. And so, here's my prescription, and [hurriedly] "Lord, help this man. Heal him, in Jesus name, amen." So the first time I walk outside [much later], there is the person with the giant cataract that hadn't even gotten his medicines yet. And people were just waiting in the line, kind of praying for him, and he could see now, and his eye no longer has the cataract. That was one of my most humbling experiences of, OK, it wasn't my medicine; it wasn't me, the "highly educated doctor" that had the answer. (GF2, GF3, FF1, FF2, FF3)

Participant 7: Female, age 40

I loved it. We were all day in the classroom with the other [TAG] students and we had our good friends. The whole experience was very positive. I remember learning Japanese, and I think I still remember a little song that we learned back then. (GF1, GF2, IF1, IF3, FF2, TF1, TF2)

We had a regular homeroom teacher who did not like us going to a separate class. I overheard her saying, "Oh, TAG is a thorn in my side." (IC1, IC2)

I felt very isolated in our little bubble of kids. (IC1, IC2)

So, yeah, I felt too isolated and I think the whole name-calling thing, "TAG fag," I think I was more sensitive to that. (IC1, IC2)

I remember wanting to get straight A's in TAG and always comparing myself to the other kids. And maybe if I wasn't getting it as fast as they did, I was like, oh, maybe I started to feel a little insecure like maybe I shouldn't be here. (IC1, IC3)

When you're with the smartest kids you're still comparing yourself. And so I remember feeling some insecurity with like, math...that was always my thing...to be insecure about. (IC1, IC3)

When I got out of TAG, I remember sitting and having the teacher read a chapter book to us, thinking, "Whoa, really? This is what you do?" And I remember the teacher giving a spelling test and I think she used the word as a plural, just added an "s" and it didn't change the spelling of the word. And on my test, I put the "s" on the word and she counted it wrong, and that just really morally offended me. And I remember going and asking my teacher and I don't think my teacher appreciated me caring so much. She's like, "You missed one, and why are you even asking about this?" But to me I was like, "But I know how to spell this word. You and I know both know how to spell this word." And it was like this moral high ground. And I think that teacher was saying, "This is not how it works here [outside of TAG]. It's not whether you know it or not. It's like, we let it go, we move on. I don't know...little things like that were just kind of wake up calls. I don't know. (GF1, IC1, IC2, FC2, TC1, TC3)

Well I think being good in school, developed part of my identity. Being a "brain." (GF1, GF2, IF3)

Um, I was very confused about what to do in college, because if you're a kid who does well at everything, it's hard to know...well, people say, "What do you like?" Well, I don't know what I like! I had no idea what to do. I had no clue which direction to go. (GC1, IC1, IC2, FC1, FC2, FC3, TC3)

I think knowing I was in TAG, I'm glad to know, you want to be a smart person, and so maybe it was some validation...when I think something or come to some conclusion, I can say wait a minute...I could be right! You know? I have a good enough mind that my conclusion could be right. So I think that validation is good. (GC1, GC1, TF2)

On the other hand, I think that there is some pressure to do something, to become something, you know, um, solve some medical mystery or do something amazing. (FC1, FC3)

I've really had to grapple with what is success...for *me*. I enjoy picking things up easily but then I can make it more difficult by overanalyzing everything, so I can keep my gears turning because I'm always looking at different sides of the story. (GC2, FC1, FC3)

BSS: Tell me about something you've overanalyzed.

I have found later in life that I enjoy other creative outlets, and I've latched on to dance, and I've found opportunities like modern dance where it's just purely creative. (TC1)

Modern dance...can be more expressive and purely creative, so I think it's just a different way to use your mind. And with art and music, I played piano – well I played mostly in high school – but I've always enjoyed that because that uses a different part of your brain as well. (GF1, GF2, GF3, IF3, TC1)

In terms of career, it's still hard to figure out what I want to do when I grow up, and if it's not the perfect ideal thing, then I may not pursue it, so I limit myself in that way. (FC1, FC2, FC3)

Maybe my brain is just slipping. I think I'm my biggest critic and I think feeling that insecurity of...if I'm not getting this better than anybody else then maybe I shouldn't be doing it. (GC1, GC2, IC1, IC2, FC1, FC3, TC1)

So being gifted for me is an endless curiosity, always thinking, always questioning, and not being able to understand yourself. (GF1, GF3, FC2, TC1)

It was challenging because when I graduated I didn't like my job...I was kind of on that path and it's hard to change the path. (FC1, FC3)

So I'll probably end up going back to school if I can, but something more science-related instead of engineering. I don't know what but I know I'm more interested in biology and health than chemistry and manufacturing. (FC1, FC3)

That is like my whole overriding experience of my life. I just feel...disappointed...yeah it makes me sad. (Chokes up) I feel really disappointed because when I think in my own mind, I feel like I had a failed career. (GC1, GC2, FC1, FC3)

So yeah, I feel like that was a failure...that's one of my biggest problems...not being able to decide what I want to do when I grow up. (GC1, GC2, FC1, FC3)

I don't want to be like you! I don't want to do it your way. If you four people are doing it this way, then I'm over here...I'm doing it this...I'm not joining you. And so I think some of it can become negative. So trying to learn and just fit in and go with the flow is hard. (GC3, IC1, IC2, FC2)

BSS: Do you feel like you *need* to fit in and go with the flow?

I know that I will never be like everyone else. As soon as I got out in the world...it became very hard because I was even more isolated. (GF1, IC1, IC2, FC2, TC1)

Participant 8: Female, age 41

I remember feeling a little bit isolated and also a little bit special. (GF1, IC1)

I realized that wow...we're doing things in this classroom so completely different from what the other kids are doing in their classroom...and feeling really privileged and really and very excited about that. (TF1, TF2)

We really truly felt like we were on an island academically and all of the rest of the kids just couldn't relate to us...didn't understand what we were doing...why we were there. And that was where I think there started to be some of that social resentment from one group of kids to another. (IC1, IC2)

I always felt very excited, very privileged, and never questioned that that special class was where I belonged academically. (TF1, TF2)

There were just times where I was like, really? We have to do this again? I'm bored. I want to do more interesting things. (TC1, TC3)
The feeling of being academically privileged and excited about what I was doing, but also the ostracizing from some of the other kids. Outside of the TAG group there was very little interaction with the other kids...there was such strong division. (GF1, GF2, IC1, IC2, TF1, TF2)

I could just not imagine how a child outside of TAG couldn't see how wonderful it was. Everyday there was something interesting and exciting going on, and we just sopped it up. And hearing about what other students

were doing in the so-called normal classes just seemed like hell to me. And I could not imagine doing that. (TF1, TF2, TF3)

Answers to the Research Questions

Chapter One introduced five research questions for which this study was intended.

Answer to Research Question One

How did TAG adults remember and describe their experience in the TAG program and how has this impacted their lives? All participants unanimously expressed their gratitude and appreciation for the TAG program. With one exception, which was unrelated to the gifted identity, all participants said that this was a very positive experience in their lives and something they immensely enjoyed. A few credited the TAG program for inspiring them to follow certain career paths in science, music, and education. Participants expressed love and gratitude for one or all of the TAG teachers.

Without exception, every participant had vivid memories of TAG and it was evident they enjoyed telling their stories. Nonverbal communication included brightened eyes, lots of laughter, smiles, and sometimes tears.

Answer to Research Question Two

How did TAG adults describe the phenomenon of giftedness? Most of the participants were aware of their giftedness from having been in the TAG program, but none knew the criteria for being selected. It was common to be asked why they had been selected. Most remembered taking what they called “The Circle Test,” which was part of Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (Torrance, 1974), a creative test given to potential

TAG students. Six out of ten participants mentioned taking this test but having no idea why. TAG adults variously described their lives as being characterized by curiosity and boredom with the *status quo*. Many felt it was difficult to communicate some of their creative ideas to family and friends, and still felt ostracized at times for being the “weird one” or the “goofball” in the room, even at age 40. Broadmindedness was also a characteristic of adult giftedness. Politics or social issues sometimes surfaced during the interviews and while extreme views were sometimes verbalized, most participants used caveats such as, “on the other hand,” or phrases such as, “but I have looked at all sides.”

Participants described abilities of photographic memory, vivid visualization, ability to intuitively “know” things without studying for them, and other characteristics consistent with descriptions of gifted children. It appeared to me that gifted abilities did not deteriorate over time, although four of the ten participants expressed doubt that they really were gifted. They called themselves “average” or were skeptical of their inclusion in the gifted program.

Answer to Research Question Three

How did TAG adults describe their relationships with others? The data varied depending on the experience in the participant’s family of origin, but all participants expressed feelings of isolation and ostracism, albeit to varying degrees, in the past and the present, which was directly related to the TAG identity.

A feeling of “not quite being understood” was a common experience. There were comments about not wanting to appear arrogant as well as feelings of irritation and

impatience when other people did not grasp concepts quickly enough. Eight participants expressed dissatisfaction with boring jobs or tasks, past and present. Three participants expressed that it was difficult being the “creative one” in their family of origin.

Answer to Research Question Four

What existential and/or spiritual meaning did the TAG adults assign to their identity?

This question was the most difficult one for participants to answer. Most were aware of a sense of responsibility to contribute to society. Others were grateful to God for their intelligence. Others were still searching for the answer.

Answer to Research Question Five

What, if any, common themes emerged as TAG adults described their life experience and its meaning? When analyzing this kind of data, it was important for me to remember that phenomenological analysis is employed to discover the essence of a phenomenon. I knew that I had discovered that essence when four common themes had repeatedly surfaced. These themes surfaced not only in the textual data, but were also sensed during the interviews and the reviewing of the videos. These themes were discussed earlier, and appear in the table on page 44.

Summary

At the beginning of Chapter Four, the purpose of this research was restated, which was to understand adult perceptions of the experience of being identified “talented and gifted,” or TAG, as children, and how this affected their lives. The research process,

including the decision to forego the purchase of qualitative research software, was discussed. This was followed by a selection of coded participant answers to interview questions, providing the reader with a generous sample of coded transcript data, and a sense of the participant personalities. Answers to the five research questions concluded the chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

This study began by explaining that talented and gifted individuals have the potential to improve society. They may have been identified as having high intelligence and multiple abilities, but they still have unique cognitive, emotional, and relational needs, which should continue to be addressed throughout adulthood. This research sought to understand the experiences of TAG adults.

The researcher sought the identification of common themes, both positive and negative, hoping that this discovery could potentially help educators and counselors to better address the issues faced by talented and gifted adults, since the topic of adult giftedness has not been adequately addressed at the doctoral level. It is hoped this research will add to that limited knowledge base and that this study will benefit those who develop future TAG programs by providing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of giftedness.

Did TAG students feel obligated to make a significant contribution to the world? Most of them felt like they had not yet lived up to their potential. While participants did not necessarily say that the TAG classification contributed to their failures or successes, depression or joy, or lack of fulfillment or satisfaction, the data revealed four common main themes and 24 common subthemes, indicative of the experience of being talented and gifted.

Conclusions

The awareness of the four most common themes suggests to me that counselors and educators would better help gifted people by continuing to improve gifted education with the addition of psychological coursework, which addresses feelings of insecurity and isolation, and which helps people in their existential search for authenticity and meaning.

The participants in this study felt their school experience was fun and sometimes easy, but they often felt socially isolated outside of TAG. They appreciated how the TAG program provided a safe place with peers who were similar yet different and how they were taught to accept those differences through special opportunities for creative and critical problem solving. The absence of a challenging curriculum post TAG, accompanied by being different, resulted in feelings of resentment, with some adults wondering whether they had ever been good enough or smart enough. What can be done to improve those feelings of never being good enough? When someone is very good at multiple things and gets bored easily after mastering a new skill, how can he or she find something challenging enough to warrant a long-term commitment? How should one deal with the fear of making the wrong life choices? Can anything satisfy the insecurity resulting from decades of failing to live up to unrealistic expectations? How can gifted people discover what makes them happy and fulfilled regardless of what others think?

Implications for Counseling

Unfortunately, many professionals have not been aware of the unique social and

emotional characteristics of gifted people. Highly intellectual and creative people have distinct personality traits, which often mimic the symptoms of personality disorder.

Misdiagnosis

Psychologists, psychiatrists, pediatricians, and other health care professionals have traditionally misdiagnosed gifted individuals. Recent studies (Moon, 2007; Webb, Amend, Webb, Goerss, Beljan, & Olenchak, 2005) indicate gifted people have been incorrectly diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), and Bipolar Disorder (BPD), among others. Because of these misunderstandings, gifted adults have often been criticized for decades for their gifted characteristics. They may have been told they are too sensitive, ask too many questions, or that they are seeking attention by being different. This results in frustration for those whose giftedness already exhibits intensity of emotions. This has resulted in a history of sibling rivalries, power struggles with authority, and restlessness (Moon, 2007; Silverman, 1993; Webb et al., 2005).

Underachievement

Misdiagnosis is one problem, but another is how to deal with general psychological issues, which often have a different genesis in the psyche of a gifted individual. For example, participants in this research sometimes exhibited feelings of underachievement. Since the feeling of underachievement impacts one's social and emotional wellbeing, motivation, and career, awareness of these issues relative to being talented and gifted might help the gifted client overcome those feelings of being

unlovable, and/or unintelligent, which were clearly evidenced in this research as I observed the body language of participants as they told me they felt like they had not lived up to their potential. When one is convinced of a personal inability to succeed, it can result in an existential depression, which is further accompanied by feelings of alienation and meaninglessness. Counseling interventions should therefore be focused on issues of purpose and meaning (Bricklin & Bricklin, 1967; Bruns, 1992; Weiner, 1992; Yalom 1995; 1999).

Perfectionism

In addition to underachievement, another issue faced by gifted people is perfectionism. Perfectionists feel like their accomplishments are never good enough. Gifted individuals sometimes feel if they cannot be the best, then they must be a failure. The feeling of underachievement that they experience can sometimes lead to perfectionism. This perfectionism, which is characterized by self-defeating thoughts and behaviors, either comes from one's own excessively high and unrealistic goals, or those that have been placed upon them by others (Roedell, 1984; Webb et al., 2005). Perfectionism results from the perception that other people value you because of how much you accomplish or achieve. Can you imagine the pressure a gifted person suffers when told they have the ability to succeed while simultaneously feeling they must be perfect at the same time feeling they have underachieved? As the data showed, self-esteem issues for my participants were often based on external standards, which made some of them sensitive to the opinions and criticisms of others.

Since perfectionism reduces productivity, which leads to more self-criticism, lower self-esteem, feelings of anxiety, and feelings of depression, professionals should be prepared to educate their clients about these psychological issues as they relate to the TAG identity. If gifted people are not properly made aware of this identity trait, they might feel like giving up on their original goals and erroneously believe they need to try harder with a different unrealistic goal, repeating the cycle of self-criticism, lower self-esteem, anxiety, and depression (Clark, 1997; Silverman, 1999; 2000; Webb et al., 2005).

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) can be used to challenge the gifted person's self-defeating thoughts and behaviors that feed perfectionism. A counselor might help a gifted client to set realistic goals based upon their own wants instead of what they feel others want. They can be encouraged to enjoy the process of an activity rather than the end result. They can be taught how they use their advanced abilities to imagine ambitious goals and then use their advanced critical thinking skills in a negative way to put down their own inability to achieve those same goals. This sabotages one's ability to reach his or her true potential and sets oneself up for failure (Roedell, 1984; Webb et al., 2005). Once aware of this self-defeating thinking pattern, they can then be taught to reframe it.

Adlerian Therapy

The data showed that gifted adults often feel misunderstood. An educator, mental health counselor, or other professional would benefit by studying Adlerian therapy.

Adler (1927) developed the theory of the inferiority complex. His suggestions include directing people toward maturity, common sense, and social usefulness. Adler used a technique called “Active Wondering,” which is a good way to tap into the creativity of gifted adults. If I were counseling a gifted adult, I might ask, “Knowing that you are gifted, I wonder what it would be like for you to overcome this intellectual insecurity? What might be different about your life if that were accomplished?” With this technique, a professional can help to drive out the faulty belief system of a client who believes he or she is inferior.

Adler’s (1927) theories of “goal striving” for the purpose of overcoming obstacles and becoming a person of significance can address the issues of perfection, success, and significance. When presented with feelings of regret, a professional in practice might reframe a client’s perspective by posing questions in action terms. A direct question, which focuses the gifted adult upon his or her responsibility to change might be, “Since you feel you have wasted your potential, what are you doing right now to change this?” Adler focused upon the present instead of the past or the future. A gifted adult, struggling with regret, would be helped by learning how to do this.

Existential Therapy

Practitioners should also become familiar with the theories and techniques of the existential therapists, including May (1979) and Yalom (1995, 1999), among others. Existential therapy can help individuals face problems of loneliness and isolation, which often lead to, or result from, a sense of meaninglessness. A gifted adult should learn to

shift the focus on the past to the free choice of the present moment, prompting action (May, 1979; Yalom, 1995, 1999). Gifted adults would benefit by recognizing that they have a responsibility to forget the past and need to take action now for their own lives. Goal setting or motivational workshops, tailored to the TAG population would help gifted people to better discover and achieve identity-appropriate lifetime pursuits. This focus will help them deal with their existential issues of loneliness, isolation, and meaninglessness.

Community

Gifted adults need other gifted adults. Establishing relationships with other likeminded people can result in increased self-acceptance (Adler, 1927). Gifted adults should be encouraged to join or create gifted adult social and/or support groups to combat feelings of loneliness and isolation. These needs can be addressed in both the secular and religious spheres. Support groups, therapy groups, or online communities should be a helpful support system for the gifted adult. Pastoral counselors, armed with an understanding of the psychological and emotional traits of gifted people, can also create support communities within their congregations, fulfilling the mandate to minister to every person within the church.

Summary

It is my recommendation that these theories and techniques be implemented in all gifted educational programs, modified for age appropriateness. People who work with gifted people should be able to help them discover what they want and help them focus

on the present moment. This is the way to emphasize the positive potential of each gifted adult and address the themes presented by the data. Cognitive Behavioral, Adlerian (1927) and Existentialist (Glasser, 1998; May, 1979; Yalom, 1995, 1999) therapies have been mentioned as sources to deal with the “agnostic” feeling I sensed among most participants. This was not a religious agnosticism, but what I would call “general life agnosticism.” The majority of participants expressed the frustration of not having the answer, questioning their giftedness, or not knowing what to do with their lives. May (1979) addressed the polarities and paradoxes of life, which often result in a stalemate or blockage of some type. With the exception of a few, I sensed a blockage in the majority of the participants, a feeling of not quite being who they had envisioned themselves to be at this age (39-43). A working knowledge of the aforementioned issues and theories will aid the professional who works with gifted people.

Implications for Social Policy

Policymakers would do well to improve and develop programs, which tap into the potential of talented and gifted people. Presently, the national trend is to cut funding for gifted programs (Robinson & Moon, 2003). This is a terrible misfortune since gifted people have a great potential to improve our society in a wide variety of ways. The trend of cutting funding should be reversed, more teachers should be trained to teach gifted children, the public should be taught that gifted children have special needs, and the

needs of the talented and gifted community should be a priority rather than an afterthought.

Implications for Research

The findings of this research warrant the need for additional study. The data did not present the variety of themes, both positive and negative, that I expected. Data from a larger sample size might better represent this population. While it is certain that most human beings feel gratitude for the happy times in their lives, feel insecure, lonely, or isolated in certain situations, and have regrets about certain aspects of their lives, this does not mean those issues share a similar origin or pattern in gifted adults. I would like to see the results of studying more than one school system, but the qualitative method used would need to be changed.

Since all participants expressed genuine gratitude for the TAG program, this is evidence that gifted education programs are important and vital for meeting the academic and social needs of students who might otherwise be continually teased, bored, or unchallenged in childhood. Constant improvement and refinement of these programs is a must. I recommend more research into goal setting for gifted students. Gifted education provides positive reinforcement, but there is a need for specialized guidance counseling.

More empathic research such as this will result in a better understanding of the problems faced by gifted adults. Research into taking personal responsibility for one's success is even more crucial. Future research should focus on helping gifted adults to

find workable solutions for the many issues that have the potential to block the achievement of their full potential.

Summary

Chapter One discussed the background of the problem, which was a lack of compelling or scholarly qualitative research relative to the phenomenon of adult giftedness. The TAG designation was defined, the identity of the researcher was explained, and a detailed history of the Fairfield, Ohio Schools TAG program was given. The purpose of the study was outlined, and five research questions were listed. This was followed by a discussion of the assumptions and limitations of qualitative research. Assumption and limitations were discussed, definitions were given to aid the reader, and the significance of the study was offered. Theories and concepts concerning qualitative research and phenomenological inquiry were discussed, followed by a brief paragraph on the organization of the remaining chapters.

Chapter Two was a literature review, which illustrated common types of gifted research and made the case for the present study. The chapter highlighted the most famous longitudinal study of the gifted by Dr. Lewis Terman, an impressive feat in research, but consisting almost exclusively of quantitative data. Reasons were given why qualitative data were needed to understand the complexity of the gifted experience. In addition to Terman, several sources were cited to illustrate common types of existing

research, which usually focuses on identifying talented and gifted children and the common challenges they face.

Chapter Three presented the rationale for a qualitative research methodology and the philosophy of phenomenology as the foundation and the best way to obtain the subjective data for this research project. It was the best choice precisely because the goal was to understand the personal perspectives of the gifted adult. The researcher was established as the primary collector of data. Research design was discussed next, with sections on ethics, participant selection, instrumentation, and interview questions. The research procedures were discussed and followed by a section about data processing and analysis.

Chapter Four discussed data analysis and results, beginning with a restatement of the purpose of the study, which was to understand adult perceptions of the experience of being identified “talented and gifted,” or TAG, as children, and how this affected their lives. The research process was discussed and followed by samples of participants’ answers to the interview questions, which evidenced four main themes and 24 subthemes. This was followed by answers to the five original research questions.

Chapter Five presented a summary of the entire study, and its conclusions provided practical implications for counseling practice (misdiagnosis, underachievement, perfectionism, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Adlerian Therapy, Existential Therapy, and Community), social policy, and future research. This research has followed the basic principles of phenomenological research in order to identify and describe common adult

perceptions of the experience of being identified talented and gifted as children. I did my best to describe the essence of the common experience of the participants (Creswell, 2007; van Manen, 1990). I hope these findings will benefit talented and gifted people by educating those who work with them.

To the many gifted people who feel misunderstood, insecure, lonely, isolated, regretful, or frustrated in their lives: May you find the counsel you need to overcome your challenges. To those who counsel or teach talented and gifted people: May you have a greater awareness of and sensitivity to the academic, intellectual, and emotional needs of gifted people, in order that you might best help them discover the life path, which is best for them, and thereby make a real difference.

Our awareness that talented and gifted people experience intellectual insecurity despite the knowledge of their own giftedness, or that many are plagued with life regrets should cause us to adjust curriculums and treatment plans in order to best serve this population. Finally, thank you to all who work with talented and gifted children of all ages. Your work is significant, potentially life changing, and greatly appreciated.

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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT LETTER

ADULT PERCEPTIONS OF THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING IDENTIFIED
“TALENTED AND GIFTED” AS CHILDREN: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Bradford Stanton Summers

Liberty University

Dear former Fairfield Schools Talented and Gifted (TAG) Student:

I am Brad Summers, your former classmate in the TAG program during the years 1978-1983. I am (e-mailing, writing, and/or calling) you to request your participation in my doctoral research, entitled:

ADULT PERCEPTIONS OF THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING IDENTIFIED
“TALENTED AND GIFTED” AS CHILDREN: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

You have been located either through the Internet, the Fairfield alumni association, and/or referrals from former teachers and/or classmates. I am handpicking participants for this study based upon your participation in the TAG program and your willingness to

participate. The research I am attempting focuses on a specific sample of persons from a specific program, and I would appreciate your help in referring others who were in the TAG program anytime during the years 1978-1983.

For a full description of what will be required, please read the attached CONSENT FORM. Should you agree to participate, please scan your signed Consent Form and e-mail it to me at bssummers@liberty.edu or send your signed hard copy to Bradford S. Summers, 2548 Middletown-Eaton Rd., Middletown, OH 45042.

Finally, I would appreciate your help in locating additional participants for this study. If you know of others who fit the criteria for participation in this research, please feel free to forward to them a copy of the text of this letter (or e-mail), the accompanying Consent Form, and my contact information. Alternatively, please send me their information and I will contact them directly.

Thank you for considering to be a part of this study. I look forward to your reply!

Very best regards,

Bradford S. Summers

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

ADULT PERCEPTIONS OF THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING IDENTIFIED

“TALENTED AND GIFTED” AS CHILDREN: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Video Recorded Interview

Bradford Stanton Summers, Ph.D. Candidate
Liberty University
Center for Counseling and Family Studies

You are invited to be in a research study of Adult Perceptions of the Experience of Being Identified “Talented and Gifted” as Children. You were selected as a possible participant because you were a student in the Fairfield Schools TAG or VISIONS program sometime during the years 1978-1989. You have been selected because you share common experiences with the other participants. You participated in the Fairfield, OH Schools TAG program and you have lived with the knowledge you were talented and gifted. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Bradford Stanton Summers, a Ph.D. Candidate in the Pastoral Care and Counseling program for the Center for Counseling and Family Studies.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to understand how Talented and Gifted (TAG) adults remember and describe their experiences in the TAG program and how the gifted identity has impacted their lives. The researcher wants to know how TAG adults describe the phenomenon of giftedness. The researcher will be looking for common themes, if any, as TAG adults describe their life experiences and the meanings attached to those experiences.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things: Agree to an in-person video recorded interview. Open-ended questions will be asked relative to how

your TAG identity has impacted your life. Participants will have the option of reviewing the video recording and withdrawing their participation. Participants may also choose to remain anonymous. A one-hour interview is requested.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

You might experience some mild discomfort should you choose to recall negative experiences, however there is no more risk than you would encounter in everyday life. Although this research is being performed for a doctoral degree in Counseling, you will not be psychoanalyzed. The researcher is primarily interested in your personal perceptions, intuitions, and descriptions of your life experiences. There are no tangible benefits for participation in this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any publication (e.g., dissertation, journal article, etc.) or presentation (e.g., conference presentation), I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only I will have access to the records.

Your privacy will be protected and you may remain anonymous if you wish. You may be referred to as “Participant 1” instead of your real name, or another alias will be designated.

I will record the video onto an Apple MacBook Pro. The footage will be stored on an external hard drive in a locked file cabinet in a locked office. The audio will be transcribed and input into a software program designed for qualitative research analysis. The software will look for common themes presented by interviewees. The original footage will be deleted if you desire. You may review the video and you have the right to withdraw participation at any time.

Video will not be used in the Dissertation Defense unless permission is granted. Bradford Stanton Summers will be the only one who will have access to the video.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your relationship with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is: Bradford Stanton Summers. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at 2548 Middletown-Eaton Rd., Middletown, OH 45245, (513) 785-8553, and bssummers@liberty.edu. Bradford's dissertation chair and advisor is Dr. David E. Jenkins, Psy.D., and may be reached at (434) 592-4045, and djenkins@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Please check one of the following boxes:

I consent to be recorded during the interview.

I do not want the interview to be recorded; I wish to remain anonymous.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

IRB Expiration Date: 11/16/12

IRB Code Number: 1201.111611

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

ADULT PERCEPTIONS OF THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING IDENTIFIED

“TALENTED AND GIFTED” AS CHILDREN: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Bradford Stanton Summers

Liberty University

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your memories and experiences (both positive and/or negative) of being in the TAG program.
2. Looking back now over the course of your life, tell me what it has been like (both positively and/or negatively) to be identified as Talented and Gifted.
3. Other people have known you were Talented and Gifted. How has this identity impacted your relationships with others?
4. Considering your role in this world as a Talented and Gifted person, and considering the biggest existential and/or spiritual questions regarding the meaning of life, tell me what it means for you to be Talented and Gifted.

Follow-up Questions

Should the open-ended questions not result in enough data, I may ask the following follow-up questions, which come from a review of the literature.

1. Tell me about your lifetime educational and/or career pursuits. Tell me why you chose these pursuits and about the philosophies or individuals that have inspired you.
2. Gifted individuals have often been identified as having a rapid learning rate, a complex thought process, and a vivid imagination. Tell me how these qualities might be relevant for you and your experiences.
3. Gifted individuals are perceptive, insightful, and creative. Tell me how these qualities might be true for you and your experiences.
4. Gifted individuals can be idealists and/or perfectionists, have an acute sense of self-awareness, and are often self-critical. Tell me how these qualities might be true for you and your experiences.
5. The gifted experience is often absorbing, penetrating, and complex. This is often experienced as an above normal sensitivity, which can either be an asset or a liability. Tell me how this might be true for you and your experiences.
6. Sometimes when gifted individuals do not live up to the perceived expectations of themselves or others, there can be internal conflict. Tell me about experiences when this might have been true for you.

7. Gifted individuals are often nonconformists who challenge rules and authority. Tell me how this might be true for you and your experiences.
8. What role (if any) does spirituality play in your life and how has being TAG affected it? If you choose not to answer this spiritually, think in existential or purposive terms. Please describe the “big picture.” What is the meaning of life to you, a gifted adult?