Raising Gifted Girls into Gifted Women

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Let yourself be silently drawn by the strange pull of what you really love. It will not lead you astray.

~Rumi
Introduction

- In early childhood through the elementary school years, gifted boys and girls are equal in number.
- In adolescence, gifted boys outnumber gifted girls.
- In adulthood there are far more gifted men than gifted women.

Gifted Elementary Girls

- Superior physically, have more social knowledge,
- More like gifted boys in interests than they are like average girls.
- Have high career goals.
- More strongly influenced by their mothers than are gifted boys.
- Not as likely to seem well adjusted.
- Often loners without much need for recognition.
- Around age 10 express wishes and needs for self-esteem.
- Are confident in their opinions and willing to argue for their point of view.
The Adolescent Gifted Girl

- IQ scores drop in adolescence, perhaps as girls begin to perceive the giftedness in females is undesirable.
- Are likely to continue to have higher academic achievement as measured by grade point average.
- Take less rigorous courses than gifted boys in high school.
- Maintain a high involvement in extracurricular and social activities.
- Attend less prestigious colleges than highly gifted boys, a choice that leads to lower status careers.
- From twelve to fourteen years a strong shift if values related to strong needs for love and belonging.
- Adolescence may also bring a steep decline in self-esteem and confidence in opinions.

Gifted College Women

- Gifted girls fear having to choose between career and marriage.
- Gifted young women enter college with higher grades but less rigorous course preparation than gifted men.
- Gifted young women’s self-esteem is at a low point upon entrance to college.
- A powerful campus peer system supports a culture of romance, which rewards a woman’s romantic “achievements” while disregarding her intellectual ones.
**Gifted Women**

- Academic and vocational achievement, compared to that of gifted men, continues to decline.
- Gifted women engage in income-producing work are more satisfied with their lives than are those who are not.
- Early marriage and childbirth are closely related to low achievement of career goals.
- Marriage and childbirth affect the achievement of high potential women much more than they do that of high potential men.
- Gifted women who drop out of careers to marry and raise children may not catch up with their male peers for the rest of their working lives.
- Age 40 may mark another critical change in lifestyle values for gifted women, as a point in time when esteem needs become highly important and the urge for self-actualization may be great.

**What happens to those young gifted girls?**

- Many gifted girls don't capitalize on their giftedness. Their academic achievement and other talents falter, and their gifts may become obscured on the way to womanhood.
- Research suggests that several factors converge to produce barriers to the achievement of gifted girls, causing the declining numbers of identifiable gifted girls as they grow up.
Internal Barriers

- The Horner Effect
- The Cinderella Complex
- The Imposter Phenomenon
- The Self-Esteem Plunge

The Horner Effect

- Matina Horner (1972) observed that women characteristically underachieved when competing against men.
- Despite exceptional ability, women would perform decidedly below their skills, and curiously, would be unable to explain why.
- The Horner effect was renamed the Fear of Success Syndrome
The Cinderella Complex

- Colette Dowling (1981) observed herself and other women avoiding achievement.
- The Cinderella Complex is a network of largely repressed attitudes and fears that detain women in a kind of half-light, retreating from the full use of their minds and creativity.
- Like Cinderella, women today are still waiting for something external to transform their lives.

The Imposter Phenomenon

- Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes (1978) describe the phenomenon this way, “Women who experienced the imposter phenomenon maintained a strong belief that they were not intelligent; in fact, they were convinced that they had fooled everyone.”
**Four Common Behaviors**

- Diligence: She works hard at her job in order to keep others from discovering she is an imposter.
- Phony: Gave professors answers they wanted to hear rather than what she knew or believed.
- Charm and perceptiveness: Seeks out a mentor from supervisors and pursues an intense relationship.
- Lack of Self-Confidence: plays on the negative consequences of both the fear of success and the Cinderella Complex.

**The Self Esteem Plunge**

- Many researchers have documented a gradual loss of self-esteem in girls as they progress through school.
- Between grades 3 and 8 most gifted girls' self-concept declines significantly, and by adolescence many gifted girls suffer a marked lack of self-confidence.
- Eighth grade gifted girls report more negative self-regard and self-confidence in behavior, intellectual and school status, and popularity, than non-gifted girls in the same grade level (Kline, 1991). Some gifted girls come to believe that competition in academics should be avoided in order to preserve relationships even if it means underusing their talents.
Internal Barriers

The following themes emerged:

- Perfectionism
- Shyness
- Lack of confidence
- Procrastination
- Burnout

Perfectionism

- Many gifted women face perfectionism (Reis, 2002).
- Perfectionists do not feel satisfaction because they never seem to do things well enough (Hamachek, 1978).
- Healthy perfectionists are aware of their need for order. They understand that mistakes are a part of learning (Schuler, 1997).
- Dysfunctional perfectionists' concern over mistakes result in a high state of anxiety, self-doubts, procrastination, and worry (Schuler, 1997).
Shyness

- Shyness as an internal barrier, received mention by 10 out of 30 participants.
- They mentioned shyness as an internal barrier in their developing years.

Procrastination

- Procrastination was a barrier that persisted with these young women, perhaps as a result of a degree of perfectionism.
**External Barriers**

- Financial
- Others’ expectations
- Programming limitations

**Financial Barriers**

- Some young women experienced considerable financial difficulties.
- More than one young woman faced financial challenges in paying for college expenses.
**Other’s Expectations**

- Expectations of others can be a powerfully motivating force.
- However, when these expectations were perceived as stereotypes or gender roles, they became barriers.
- The stated or unstated message of stereotypical ethnic or gender expectations was powerful and potentially destructive.

**Programming Limitations**

- The gifted young women perceived educational curricular programming as an external barrier, citing some gifted programs and high school science programs as a deficit in their education.
Defining Gifts and Talents in Women

The following four factors defined the realization of gifted women’s talents:

- above average ability and/or special talents,
- personality traits,
- environmental issues, and
- the perceived social importance of the use or manifestation of the talent.
**Above Average Ability and Special Talents**

The women who realized their talents as adults were not always superlative students, but they certainly displayed creative and productive behaviors in their areas of talent and ability. In almost every case, their interests and motivations merged to enable them to develop their talents.

- Renzulli – creative productive giftedness
- Sternberg – contextual giftedness

**Personality Traits**

- The one trait clearly exhibited by every woman was determination.
- Creativity was evident in their talent areas as well as in the way they found time for family and relationships.
- These women also displayed a willingness to take risks and attempt tasks that others did not have the courage to pursue.
- All of the successful women emanated a different style of energy, interest and an enjoyment of life.
Environmental Issues

- Came from nurturing families.
- Had siblings.
- Most were married or in long term relationships
- Most married had children
- Many had divorced after finding that their partner was not very supportive of their talent development.

Perceived Social Importance of Their Work and a Sense of Purpose to Life

- The gifted women had a strong desire to use their talents in ways that were personally satisfying to them and would benefit society.

- They each had a sense of purpose about life. They enjoyed life, but were not content with raising their families and having good relationships.

- Their work was critical to them, and they believed they could make a difference in the world because of their work. For these women, there was no choice about this contribution. They were simply not satisfied with their lives unless they could actively develop their talents.
Mentoring Needs

- Classroom mentoring: Kindergarten through 5th grade
- Active Mentoring: Middle and High School Students
- Distance Mentoring: Middle and High School Students

Develop Voice

- Incorporating Personal Individual Experience
- Nurturing thoughts to maturity through consensus
- Collaborative Learning
- Midwife Model of Education
- A writers circle
Develop Resiliency

- The ability to persevere in the face of physical, emotional or social obstacles such as:
  - Failures of families and/or schools to recognize her giftedness
  - Failures of schools to accommodate and her needs
  - Societal attitudes towards academic giftedness in girls and acceleration
  - Lack of understanding of her high sensitivity and overexcitabilities
  - Unchallenging and often hostile learning environments
- “A trifold process of recognizing and resisting the intrinsic and extrinsic obstacles that inhibit the development of one's potential.”
  Kathleen Noble Ph.D.

Autonomy and Affiliation

- Autonomy
- Autonomous Learner
  - Self awareness of self as a learner
  - Self-directed learner
  - Manages resources
  - Understands effort-success relationship
  - Prefers independent problem solving
**Autonomy and Affiliation**

* Self-Regulated Learning Skills
  - Sets learning goals
  - Organizes learning tasks
  - Manages Time conscientiously
  - Collects and records information competently
  - Practices critical reading skills
  - Efficiently prepares for exams
  - Effectively plans, drafts and revises papers
  - Evaluates work accurately
  - Reflects on and improves skills above

* Affiliation through supportive learning environments
  - Provide a open and welcoming setting
  - Encourage students to collaborate and connect with others
  - Have faculty and staff understand the unique needs of the gifted and respond appropriately
  - Affirm a clear learning ethic
  - Define a level of challenge within a framework of support
  - Emphasize personal growth
Self-Efficacy

* Educational practices that support the development of self-efficacy:
  - The appropriate identification of gifted students.
  - A thorough understanding of the whole child
  - A willingness to respond to overexcitabilities
  - The promotion of self-regulated learning in the classroom
  - Use of connected teaching, collaborative learning and cluster grouping
  - Reflective reading about gifted girls, adolescents and women
  - Nurturing Autonomy

Self-Efficacy

* Benefits of Individual Efficacy
  - Intellectual Efficacy: The individual perceives herself as a learner who can master and apply information effectively.
  - Emotional Efficacy: The individual believes herself capable of understanding and moderating her emotional responses to ensure her well-being.
  - Behavioral Efficacy: The individual feels capable of acting in a manner consistent with who she is and her unique needs in a variety of contexts.
Entelechy

Entelechy is considered to be an inherent regulating and directing force in the development and functioning of an organism, the actualization of form-giving cause as contrasted with potential existence.

"Derived from the Greek word for having a goal, entelechy is a particular type of motivation, need for self-determination, and an inner strength and vital force directing life and growth to become all one is capable of being.

Gifted people with entelechy are often attractive to others who feel drawn to their openness and to their dreams and visions. Being near someone with this trait gives others hope and determination to achieve their own self-actualization." - Lovecki

Agency: The Destination

Aspects of Agency in Females
- **Instrumentality**: The individual possesses specific personal skills that can be applied to individual and collective problem solving.
- **Interpersonal Ease**: The individual realizes her potential to impact her world.
- **Self-efficacious**: The individual has developed the positive attributes of efficacy.
- **Self-assertive**: With increased reflective and analytical skills gained from efficacy development, the individual has the strength to defend her ideas and actions.
- **Self-protective**: In order to be an effective agent in society, the individual is aware of and respects personal needs and limits.
Where do we go from here…

Resources

⭐ American Association for the Gifted (AAG)
  – www.aagc.org
⭐ National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC)
  – www.nagc.org
⭐ Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG)
  – www.sengifted.org
⭐ The Association for the Gifted (TAG)
  – www.ectag.org
⭐ The World Council of the Gifted
  – www.world-gifted.org
⭐ New Mexico Association for the Gifted
  – www.nmgifted.org
Acknowledgements

- Smart Girls (Revised Edition), A New Psychology of Girls, Women, and Giftedness by Barbara A. Kerr, PHD
- Smart Girls Two, A New Psychology of Girls, Women, and Giftedness by Barbara A. Kerr, PHD
- Nurturing the Gifted Female, A Guide for Educators and Parents by Joy L. Navan
- Work Left Undone: Choices and Compromises of Talented Women by Sally M. Reis