SELF-INTERVENTIONS OF GIFTED UNDERACHIEVERS: STORIES OF SUCCESS

By

LORI J. FLINT

Under the direction of Bonnie L. Cramond

ABSTRACT

During the more than fifty years society has recognized the concept of superior ability, or giftedness, a related issue has come to light: the fact that many of our brightest students are not achieving to their potential. Researchers have not arrived at a single clear explanation for this behavior or met with success in consistently reversing underachievement. Given that some of the best minds in the social sciences have been steadily attacking this problem without reliable success, how is it that some students have managed to self-intervene and reverse former poor performance? And, what factor(s) do they perceive as being critical to both their underachievement and subsequent success? Was there some particular moment when they suddenly decided to change? How did individuals who had been consistently told as students they would never amount to anything become self-fulfilled, competent, and successful citizens?

The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of gifted students who once underachieved but who have since become achievers. The life-story qualitative research data were collected from four gifted adult participants via individual questionnaires and in-depth semi-structured personal interviews. Questions examined individual experiences of giftedness, related educational benefits and other issues, familial factors, social factors, and other pertinent information related to both giftedness and underachievement as well as perceptions related to both the moment and process of change. Data were then analyzed through inductive analytical processes.

Once analyzed, the data described students who possessed both high intelligence and intellectual self-esteem, but who would not play *The School Game*. Participants came from families where important survival tactics such as study skills, self-regulation techniques, metacognitive processes or others were not taught, and parental involvement in children's education was minimal. Lack of success in school led to years of personal difficulty, including substance abuse and suicidal tendencies, leading to hitting bottom. After hitting bottom, each made the conscious choice to change, which included a return to college to successfully complete formal education.

INDEX WORDS: GIFTED, UNDERACHIEVEMENT, SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, INTERVENTIONS, FAMILY, SUCCESS, HITTING BOTTOM, CASE STUDY, NARRATIVE, INDUCTIVE ANALYSIS

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Lori J. Flint

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LORI J. FLINT

Approved:

Major Professor: Bonnie L. Cramond

Committee: Linda Campbell
             Kathleen de Marrais
             Mary M. Frasier
             Thomas P. Hebert

Electronic Version Approved:

Gordhan L. Patel
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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DEDICATION
For the psychoneurotics of the world: you know who you are.

Be Greeted Psychoneurotics !
A poem by K. Dabrowski.

For you see sensitivity in the insensitivity of the world, uncertainty among the world's certainties.

For you often feel others as you feel yourselves.

For you feel the anxiety of the world, and its bottomless narrowness and self-assurance.

For your phobia of washing your hands from the dirt of the world,

For your fear of being locked in the world's limitations.

For your fear of the absurdity of existence.

For your subtlety in not telling others what you see in them.

For your awkwardness in dealing with practical things, and

For your practicalness in dealing with unknown things,

For your transcendental realism and lack of everyday realism.

For your exclusiveness and fear of losing close friends,

For your creativity and ecstasy,

For your maladjustment to that "which is" and adjustment to that which "ought to be",

For your great but unutilized abilities.

For the belated appreciation of the real value of your greatness,

Which never allows the appreciation of the greatness of those who will come after you.

For your being treated instead of treating others,

For your heavenly power being forever pushed down by brutal force;

For that which is prescient, unsaid, infinite in you.

For the loneliness and strangeness of your ways.

Be greeted!

From: Dabrowski, K. (1972) Psychoneurosis is not an illness, London: GRYF

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CHAPTER 1

Gifted Underachievers: Talent Unrealized

You know you're not the only one, Who has a lot to overcome
And when the time has come then you move on'….
Sometimes life is so unkind But change is never a waste of time
I know how you're feeling, I've been there before
The hurting is something much too strong to ignore
Don't be waiting for someone, Who can take all your fear away
When there's no one to listen, That is when you should not be afraid
But change is never a waste... it's never a waste of time

Lyrics: © Alanis Morrisette, (Change Is) Never A Waste Of Time
Now is The Time, 1992

For more than half a century, parents, educators, and psychologists have been acutely aware of a group of students whose academic performance does not correlate with their ability. Examine any discussion in the gifted literature regarding the need for additional research, and the subject of underachievement by high-ability students will be present. Though gifted underachievement may seem like an obvious construct, there is nothing obvious about it; researchers, educators and laypeople continue to disagree about the definitions of both giftedness and underachievement, as well as how they should be measured (Reis & McCoach, 2000).

Exceptional ability, or giftedness, is difficult to define and often controversial. Over the centuries, exceptionally bright people were simply known as geniuses; the term gifted arose later as an educational term. In our society, the word 'gifted' has traditionally been interchangeable with high IQ; if one scored above a certain point, approximately 130 on a validated intelligence test, he or she could be called gifted. The

last three decades have seen changes in that simplistic definition, however, with giftedness recognized in more areas than IQ alone: among them, high achievement, performance talents, leadership qualities, exceptional motivation, and creative production. A recent Internet search found that giftedness is used as a legal term in many states in our country, with those who fit a particular state's criteria considered gifted, and everyone else, not.

However one measures it, giftedness has a connection with high potential. That high potential may manifest itself through identification of high-ability as measured by standardized mental ability and/or achievement tests, or by individual psychological/educational examination, self-identification (based upon an awareness of differences in ability to understand people, ideas or content knowledge with greater ease than peers), or peer nomination. Or, it could be through exceptional creative products, performances, or leadership activities. It could also show in high grades, inclusion in special educational programming for gifted students, grade acceleration, early-admission into school, early college enrollment/dual enrollment in college and high school, and/or inclusion in accelerated classes. No matter how we specifically define giftedness, we often recognize it when we see it, just as we can often tell when an individual is not achieving to his or her ability.

Two major national reports: the National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform* (1983), and *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent (1993),* cited underachievement of highly able students as a major cause for concern. Renzulli, Reis & Gubbins (1992) published *Setting an agenda: Research priorities for the gifted and talented through the*

year 2000, a study that clearly identified underachievement as an area where a great deal of research is critically needed. Others (Rimm, 1987, 1988; Whitmore, 1980a, 1986; Supplee, 1989) have devoted virtually their entire careers to the examination of the causes for underachievement as well as interventions that extinguish it. Gowan, in 1955, called underachievement "one of the greatest social wastes of our culture " (p. 247). Twenty years later, he revisited the topic, stating that research into gifted children had, "turned up dry hole after dry hole," in investigating underachievement (Gowan, 1977). Since that time, progress has been made; the hole is no longer dry, but neither has it produced a deep and reliable well of information with which to make consistently sound educational decisions.

Researchers and theoreticians have allocated a great deal of time and energy to attempting to define underachievement, perhaps even to the detriment of the quest to alleviate it. Definitions range from doubt as to whether gifted underachievement ought to be recognized as an academic behavior at all (Anastasi, 1976), is simply test error, or whether it even exists (Behrens & Vernon, 1978). The single most commonly encountered definition of underachievement was that of Joanne Rand Whitmore, who referred to "Students who demonstrate exceptionally high capacity for academic achievement and are not performing satisfactorily for their levels on daily academic tasks and achievement tests" (1980). Olenchak (1999) offered a more inclusive definition, stating that, "underachievement among gifted students, like giftedness and underachievement separately, is not a clearly defined construct " (p. 294), and that our definitions of underachievement need to include more than students' academic work,

because, " regardless of its context, underachievement eventually produces the same [negative] outcomes for gifted young people who experience it" (p.293).

Underachievement, like giftedness itself, can be identified through personal anecdotes, school records, test scores, anecdotal records, work samples, and grades (Baum, Renzulli & Hébert, 1995; Peterson & Colangelo, 1996). Fehrenbach (1993) looked for, " established, self-defeating patterns of behavior," while Ford (1997) relied on psychometric definitions, qualitative, and/or subjective measures. No matter how you define or identify underachievement, one thing is clear: the failure of many of our most able students to reach their potential remains one of the most perplexing, challenging problems in education today, and how to teach and motivate high potential students to perform to their level of ability a major problem in today's educational community.

While most experts in the field seem to agree that somewhere between 15% and 30% of gifted students are not achieving to their ability on school tasks (Whitmore, 1980; Green, Fine & Tollefson, 1988) the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) claimed as many as 50% of all gifted students are not working to their potential. Suspected causes for this underachievement vary greatly and include such factors as family influences, social concerns, unchallenging curriculum, lack of racial identity, and/or undiagnosed learning disabilities. With so many potential paths to follow, finding answers to the problem remains an unmet challenge in most cases.

Early researchers tended to portray underachievement as a single problem, thus leading educators to seek common issues and solutions across all student populations. Now that researchers have generated numerous research studies and thousands of pages of theory, most no longer think that way. Instead, we now realize that underachievement

should not be considered *one* problem, but a *multitude* of sometimes co-existent problems that defy simple, linear correction.

As with most other complex behaviors, it is useful to study the underlying reasons for the behavior before attempting to change it. Researchers have deconstructed the group of students we call underachievers into its component parts, closely examining specific types of underachievers and how best they learn and we can work with them. Factors studied have included external factors such as family environments, teachers, and schools, as well as internal factors like motivational, neurological, psychological, racial, cultural, and gender issues, and their relationship to students' achievement (Rimm, 1988; Cramond & Martin, 1987; Purkey, 1978; Frasier, 1979; Kitano & DiJiosia, 2002; Kerr, 1985).

1.1 Rationale and Significance

Definitions of underachievement, characteristics of underachieving gifted students, factors affecting their achievement, and interventions employed as a means of reversing that underachievement are all relevant to contextually locating the phenomenon of students who were able to reverse their underachievement without benefit of formal interventions. Areas for further research are also relevant to this study because many remain extant despite the more than half century we have been investigating underachievement.

Though hundreds of experts have written thousands of pages on underachievement in all its aspects (Whitmore, 1980, 1986; Rimm, 1987, 1988; Frasier, et al., 1958; Gallagher, 1994; Fehrenbach, 1993; Dowdall, 1982; DeLisle & Berger,

1990; Hébert, 1991, 1999; Beasley, 1957; Bricklin & Bricklin, 1967), and underachievement of gifted students specifically, just one study (Peterson, 2001) to-date has sought information from adults who were themselves underachievers. There has never been a study investigating those individuals who have managed to reverse their underachievement without benefit of formal interventions then emerge as self-fulfilled adults. Studying these people, really listening to what they have to say via their personal narratives, inductively analyzed, offers us the opportunity to learn from their experiences and obtain the insider's views on underachievement. What factors do these individuals perceive as critical to their current success(es)? Can they identify a particular crystallizing moment, or a series of these moments that point to their changing? Have they any ideas regarding the basis of their problems?

At a time when educational systems and personnel are increasingly held accountable for students' achievement, gleaning inside information about underachievement and how to reverse it becomes even more critical. Teachers, policy makers, parents, and today's students could all benefit from hearing voices of experience. Those willing to listen might hear a note of hope: that contemporary families and teachers contending with underachieving behaviors today might not have to accept them forever. What a concept: that today's gifted underachiever could be tomorrow's CEO. What better way to learn about individual causes of underachievement and subsequent reversal than through stories told in the voices of those who have experienced it?

1.2 Research Questions

Though life-story research is by its very nature dynamic, with questions evolving throughout a study, I began this study with two main questions:

The first question examines how it was that some gifted individuals (who significantly underachieved while students) were able to eventually overcome their problems and become high achieving adult citizens? Related to that question are these: What factor (s) do they perceive as being critical to their success? Was there some particular moment when they suddenly decided to change? *Did* they change, or did factors outside themselves change? Do they attribute their current self-fulfilled state to their own hard work, or to others' interventions?

The second question is: to what do they attribute their former achievement problems? Other, related questions are: Were there particular environmental, intrapersonal or societal factors they felt "caused " the problem(s)? Why do they feel interventions aimed at reversing the underachievement failed? If they had the opportunity to go back and be students again, would they? If they were able to control all external and internal factors, would they do anything differently? Do these individuals wish they had become achievers at earlier age, or do they perceive benefits from their experiences, no matter how negative.

1.3 Chapter Summary

Though heavily studied, underachievement by highly intelligent individuals remains a major problem in our society. Underachievement is an amorphous concept with complex causes and effects that are difficult to either identify or alter. Early research considered underachievement as a single problem, while more contemporary researchers view it as a highly individualized problem with many components.

This study considered the issue of underachievement through examination of individual narratives of successful adults who were once underachieving gifted children. The preceding questions were answered through inductive analysis of these narratives.

CHAPTER 2

Integrative Review of Literature and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Factors Contributing to Underachievement

A review of the literature reveals several clusters of factors that contribute to underachievement by gifted students: individual, social, cultural, gender, educational and familial. A first, chronological, glance at the literature reveals that research has been conducted into underachievement by gifted students for at least 50 years.

Frasier, Passow and Goldberg (1958) were instrumental in identifying many of the factors contributing to underachievement in gifted youth, such as environment, curriculum and teachers. Durr (1964) classified many of the factors contributing to underachievement into four areas: family background and relationships (more authoritarian parents, more home conflict, lower parental expectations), school (school not meeting needs, less ability to manage time, poor study habits), social adjustment (social non-conformity, less popular, more rebellious attitude), and personal adjustment (low self concept, less competitive, more intrinsic motivation, less ability to problem solve). He believed that underachievement was a combination of several factors, rather than just one.

Passow & Goldberg (1959), and Goldberg & Associates (1965) were visionaries with their studies of underachieving gifted students. Many of their findings continue to withstand the test of time, having been confirmed by contemporary researchers. Their long-term (three-year and nine -year) studies of 102 students with IQs of 120 or above

and grade averages below 80% found some commonalities among underachievers: high marks on standardized achievement tests, with low grades in school; early and frequent underachieving behaviors leading to cumulative problems in high school; poor study habits and self-regulation skills; peer relationship needs superceding achievement needs; more disruption of the traditional family structure. They also noted that a consistently caring and unconditionally accepting teacher could help reverse underachieving behaviors, and that providing students with tools to help them learn, e.g., self-regulation and study skills, could make a difference. Despite what we know as a result of studies like those of Frasier, Passow and Goldberg, schools continue to operate in essentially the same fashion now as then. Curricular approaches are still frequently one-size-fits-all, many teachers still fail to address affective needs of students, and survival skills such as self-regulation, study skills and metacognitive techniques are still not routinely taught in schools.

Other early studies (Gowan, 1955; Shaw & McKuen, 1960; Bricklin & Bricklin, 1967) made deliberate attempts to discover what social, personal and academic characteristics lay beneath underachieving behaviors, and how schools could intervene to extinguish the behaviors. All of these researchers noted that many more underachievers were male than female, by as much as a four to one ratio, though some researchers (Kerr, 1984; Reis, 1987) suggest that females may simply be more proficient at disguising underachievement just enough to *appear* to be achieving. Further research needs to be conducted inn this area.

Examination of Terman's studies of 857 boys and 671 girls, that families of gifted underachievers differed significantly from those of gifted achievers. The families

of the A's, or high achievers, set higher educational standards for their children, had more books available in the home and parents who were better educated than those of the C's or lower achievers (1954). Wolfle (1960) identified a need to study underachievement and achievement, and to find a way to nurture the talent she called our "nation's capital." Like Torrance (1961, 1979, 1980), Wolfle viewed schools as not valuing diversity, but squashing it. Society forcing students to fit its ideals, instead of schools attempting to fit the child, begs the question, " if mainstream education were more accepting of individual differences, would there be less underachievement?" Frasier (1979) saw a need for new methods designed to facilitate inclusion of children of color and those from disadvantaged backgrounds in gifted programs across the nation in order to meet their particular needs and increase the likelihood of academic success.

All of these researchers identified factors leading to underachievement, yet underachievement remains a problem of major proportions. With our current focus on high-stakes testing rather than on individual learning needs could underachievement become even more prevalent than it currently is? Might our persistent focus on *defining* (Reis & McCoach, 2000; Ford, 1997; Anastasi, 1976; Behrens & Vernon, 1978) the amorphous concepts of underachievement and giftedness have interfered with our true task of developing sound research-based interventions designed to eliminate underachievement?

The late 20th century saw masses of material written on the topic of underachievement, with the research beginning to appear in mainstream educational journals rather than just the gifted literature. Though researchers primarily directed their efforts into two areas: why underachievement was occurring, and interventions to reverse

it, little focus was directed at one of the prime contributors to underachievement, the schools themselves. We now know that school environment, inappropriate curriculum, and teachers not suited to teaching gifted students can have major impact on students' achievement motivation, so study these areas accordingly (DeLisle, 1995; Peterson & Colangelo, 1996; Kolb & Jussim, 1994; Supplee, 1989; MacKinnon, 1962).

Researchers began, also, to delve beneath the more exterior causes of underachievement and into students' inner characteristics: self-concept, locus of control, achievement attribution, and self-regulation. While this research afforded us greater understanding of underlying non-educational factors, it did not directly impact students. Few teacher education programs provide in-depth training in these areas (Flint, 2002). Greater focus was also placed on non-educational factors, such as family environment and parenting characteristics, areas over which schools exert little control (Rimm, 1995, Whitmore, 1980).

Individual

> *When I look back upon my life It's always with a sense of shame*
> *I've always been the one to blame For everything I long to do*
> *No matter when or where or whoHas one thing in common too…*
> *At school they taught me how to be so pure in thought and word and deed*
> *They didn't quite succeed For everything I long to do…*
> *So I look back upon my life forever with a sense of shame*
> *I've always been the one to blame…*
>
> *Lyrics: ©Tennant & Lane, It's A Sin*
> *Pet Shop Boys Actually, 1987*

Terman (1954) referred to the subjects in his longitudinal studies in terms of A's and C's, with A's being achievers and C's underachievers. All were exceptionally bright, but the C's failed to achieve as expected. Terman attributed this lack of success in school

and subsequent years as being due to " many things other than the sum total of intellectual abilities" (p.17), e.g., family configuration, and attitudes toward schoolwork.

Conklin (1931) and his experimental program to help bright underachievers and Beasley's review of literature (1957) also found that students' underachievement was not attributable to any one specific difference from high achieving gifted students, but that a combination of individual differences contributed to underachievement. Their work demonstrates that we have understood for many years that underachievement has never been just one problem, but a set of complex, individualized issues. In addition, they both noted that what seemed to drive success in one student might have exactly the opposite effect in another.

Soon after, certain intrapersonal characteristics began to be observed in gifted underachievers. Researchers noticed that, like underachievers in general, these students displayed more antisocial behaviors, more social immaturity, more emotional problems, lower self-concept, and higher levels of self-criticism and self-doubt (Dowdall & Colangelo, 1982; Durr, 1964; Raph, et al., 1966; Bricklin & Bricklin, 1967; Bachtold, 1969; Kanoy, Johnson & Kanoy, 1980; Whitmore, 1980; VanBoxtel & Monks, 1992; Butler-Por, 1987; Mehta, 1968). They observed that such feelings of inadequacy often lead to behaviors such as not trying due to fear of failure, self-recrimination, and insecurity about one's ability to succeed. In this respect, gifted underachievers are more like underachievers in general than they are gifted students (Laffoon, Jenkins-Friedman & Tollefson, 1989; Mehta, 1968), though they more closely resemble gifted rather than non-gifted students emotionally (Vlahovic-Stetic, Vidovic, & Arambasic, 1999). More research that critically compares gifted learners and their general education counterparts

is needed to help uncover whether the differences lie in the giftedness, or are simply part of individual differences in learners.

Gifted students, both achievers and underachievers, have been identified as much more intrinsically motivated than non-gifted students (Gottfried & Gottfried, 1996). This seems to be a paradox, as one would expect that underachievers would not be motivated in any way, yet they do display high levels of intrinsic motivation. The problem is that because they are not motivated by external factors such as grades or punishment, it becomes difficult to find something that will serve effectively as a reward. Motivating gifted underachievers often becomes a drawn-out process of trial and error with parents and teachers working to discover the student's interests in order to help them, a secret either closely held or unrecognized by even the child (Gottfried & Gottfried, 1996; Davis & Connell, 1985; Goldberg & Assoc, 1965; Passow & Goldberg, 1959). Studies that examine methods for increasing motivation, or at least uncover reasons for low achievement motivation are sorely needed.

Mandel & Marcus (1988) described the most commonly found trait in students who were academically underachieving as, " their seemingly endless series of rationalizations or excuses as to why they failed to achieve up to their potential" (p.256), according to the standards set by the school. This sentiment was echoed by Fine (1967). Would teaching students to accept responsibility as part of their school survival skills, along with metacognitive strategies and study skliis, help them become stronger academic achievers?

Many researchers found that gifted underachievers had significantly less developed metacognitive strategies than did their more successful counterparts. These

included poor self-regulation, study skills, persistence, and other academic skills (Terman, 1954; Baum, Renzulli & Hébert, 1995; Manning, Glasner & Smith, 1996; Redding, 1990; Krouse & Krouse, 1981; Seeley, 1993; Rimm & Lowe, 1988). Lack of completion of homework and other independent work, with excessive dependence on others to assure completion of work, was repeatedly mentioned in studies (Rimm & Lowe, 1988) as being significant in contributing to underachievement.

Gifted underachievers were often noted for their resistance to performing rote and repetitive tasks, or tasks they deemed otherwise irrelevant (Redding, 1990; Ohio, 1992). They frequently also displayed a low tolerance for frustration and an unwillingness or inability to deal with challenge (Warnemuende & Samson, 1991). These behaviors have been named a *resistance to playing the school game* (Fehrenbach, 1993; Heacox, 1991), frustrating many educators and parents who feel their child would succeed *if only* he or she would do what was necessary, and stop being so resistantly independent.

Hishinuma (1996) discussed intrapersonal characteristics of gifted underachievers that contributed to their underachievement while proposing an integrative behavioral approach to reversing underachievement. These characteristics included avoidance of rote and repetitive tasks, inconsistent completion of academic work, good oral performances rather than written products, variable test results, restricted or nontraditional interests, low self-esteem, low or too-high self-standards, self-centeredness, difficulty functioning in a group, unresponsiveness to typical social rewards such as praise and grades, and school attendance problems. His review of existing literature and experience in the field suggested that a proper approach would play on students' strengths while remediating their weaknesses.

Perfectionism carried to an exaggerated degree, what Piirto (1994) calls "disabling" perfectionism, often leads to underachievement when expectations are unrealistic and therefore unattainable (Adderholt-Elliot, 1987; Whitmore, 1980; Silverman, 1993; Rimm & Lowe, 1988). Students exhibit disabling perfectionism when they procrastinate about starting work, repeatedly begin, discard, then start over on assignments, are overly sensitive to even minor criticism, refuse to work with others, and have a total intolerance for making mistakes. Both fear of failure and fear of success (Whitmore, 1986) can lead to equally disabling consequences, including underachievement in both academic and non-academic areas.

Locus of control, or the belief that one has the ability to effect changes in one's life, environment or achievement status appears to be less well developed in underachievers than in achievers (Laffoon, et al., 1989; Van Boxtel & Monks, 1992; Dai, Moon & Feldhusen, 1998; Rimm, 1987). This lack of belief can sometimes lead to students' failure to even attempt to succeed. Most work in this area is recent and strictly theoretical. Further study could help uncover practical interventions for students with needs in these areas.

One substantial group of underachieving students is composed of those who have hidden (undiagnosed) learning disabilities, or unevenness in gifts that contribute to underachievement. Because academic self-concept is at stake, it is critical that we examine the possibility of hidden learning difficulties before we ever label a student an underachiever. According to the U.S. Department of Education (1994), and Reis and McCoach (2000), learning disabilities are just as prevalent in the population of gifted students as in the general population. Yet, according to Kyung-won (1990) gifted

underachievers are oftentimes gifted learning-disabled students whose learning disabilities are masked by high potential, so both exceptionalities may appear less than they are (Willard-Holt, 1999; Dole, 2000; Wolfle, 1991). Similar situations can arise in the case of gifted children who are ADHD: the ADHD masks the gifts, and the gifts help cover up the ADHD (Zentall, 1997). Whitmore (1980), Maker (1983), and Baum, Olenchak, & Owen (1998) found that even when learning disabilities are undiagnosed, gifted students generally have an intuitive sense of something being wrong, and are more self-critical and self-aware than average-ability students in the same situation. These students who may repeatedly try and fail, through no fault of their own, sometimes begin to exhibit learned-helplessness, which can lead to a particularly insidious form of underachievement (Kyung-won, 1990). Much more work needs to be done to examine the idea of learning differences in gifted children as well as to educate educators on how to best teach these students.

Students who are clinically depressed, are experiencing other emotional problems, or dealing with drug or alcohol abuse, may find their academics taking a sudden slide (Reis & McCoach, 2000; Whitmore, 1980; Webb, Meckstroth & Tolan, 1982), as opposed to others who gradually learn to underachieve over a longer period. The result is often the same, chronic underachievement.

Underachievement itself is often seen as a factor in underachievement: when a student fails to achieve, he or she is likely to suffer a loss of self esteem, further depletion of his or her sense of competence, and questioning of self-efficacy, all of which lead to the greater likelihood of more underachievement (Olenchak, 1999; Ciaccio, 1998). In the meantime, students who are not achieving to potential are seen as rejecting the authority

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of their parents, teachers and schools, so are punished by being given poor grades, removed from gifted programs or have other privileges revoked. If we studied these students would we find that they are sometimes retained, suspended, or removed from school altogether? What about suicide? Is there a higher rate of suicide among gifted students, particularly those who are underachieving, than among students who function in mainstream, general education classes? Longitudinal studies that examine affective and emotional characteristics could help pinpoint onset of problems and, perhaps, precipitating factors, which could, in turn, help us find ways to lessen their impact on students' academic performances.

Familial

….If you stay you won't be sorry cause we believe in you
Soon you'll grow to take a chance with a couple of kooks hung up on romancing…
We bought a lot of things to keep you warm and dry and a funny old crib on which the paint won't dry… a trumpet you can blow and a book of rules On what to say to people when they pick on you'Cause if you stay with us you're gonna be pretty kooky too…And if you ever have to go to school Remember how they messed up this old fool Don't pick fights with the bullies or the cads…
Cause I'm not much good at punching other people's dads.
And if the homework brings you down we'll throw it on the fire and take the car downtown…

Lyrics: © David Bowie, Kooks
Hunky Dory, Ryko, 1971, 1990

Not surprisingly, familial factors appear to play a significant role in underachievement. Studies (Zilli, 1971; Rimm & Lowe, 1988; Baker, Bridger & Evans, 1998; Emerick, 1992; Peterson, 2001) suggest that students' home environments may exert considerable impact on the type of achievement patterns they develop. Baker, Bridger and Evans examined the factors that appeared to result in underachieving behaviors in adolescents, the onset of underachieving behaviors, and challenges faced by school personnel and parents in dealing with underachievement. Their study of 56 gifted

students in grades four to eight found that incorporating interventions in three arenas: individual, home and school resulted in the best results for students achievement status. They provide specific suggestions for putting the research into action to assist students.

One of the earliest studies to identify the underachiever was that of Louis Terman, as part of his *Genetic Studies of Genius* (1947). In this research, Terman noted an apparent link between family disruptions, such as divorce or parental death, and children's underachievement. Kahl (1953) also observed links between family behaviors and children's achievement status, noting that family attitudes toward jobs and school were influential. Terman (1954) found that underachievers were more likely to come from homes where fathers were less educated and fewer enriching opportunities were available. Families in which children felt unable to openly express themselves also tended to produce underachievers. Raph, et al., (1966) referred to this as a passive-aggressive type of underachievement; an unconscious way of dealing with a situation otherwise out of the individual's control. Future research could focus on the effects of cognitive therapies designed to bring issues to students' conscious awareness on student achievement.

Other studies (Rimm, 1987; Goldberg & Associates, 1965), purport that parents of underachieving students tend to be better educated and high achieving themselves, but have many conflicts, especially conflicts between parents regarding parenting styles. Parents of any socioeconomic status who did not demand a high level of academic achievement (McClelland, Atkinson, Clarke, & Lowell, 1953), had inconsistency in expectations of the child within the family, lacked goal setting, displayed frequent opposition between parents regarding discipline (Rimm & Lowe, 1988), and who

emphasized ability over effort (Laffoon, et al., 1989) also appeared to be potential contributors to the development of underachievement. Much more research needs to be conducted with families of gifted students, both high achievers and otherwise, in order to pinpoint factors that specifically affect academic and other achievement.

Conflict generated by students' underachieving behaviors created a great deal of stress in the home and in familial relationships (Whitmore, 1980b). Though children who are underachieving intensely dislike the conflicts generated, they do not or cannot generally simply change their behaviors to eliminate it. In addition, families with underachieving children tended toward less positive affect, and more internal conflict (Mandel & Marcus, 1988), leading one to wonder which preceded the other: underachievement creating the stress, or *vice versa*. Parents of underachievers also lean more toward punishment than discipline (Clark, 1983), and have either a more authoritarian parenting style, or a more lenient one (Pendarvis, Howley & Howley, 1990; Weiner, 1992), rather than the *authoritative* style that promotes high achievement. These families frequently do not behave in a manner that encourages the appropriate taking of risks, or the development of high self-concept (Gurman, 1970). Little, if anything, has been either studied or written about parents who display a *Laissez-faire*, or somewhat neglectful, parenting style. Research is needed to examine the similarities and differences in families of all types that display this parenting style. Does a family that where both parents are busy working to ensure the survival of the family create the same set of circumstances and achievement status as a family where parents are both busy working for status reasons, or to provide children with extensive material possessions?

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Regardless of parenting approach, a key factor affecting achievement appears to be consistency in parenting, with expectations made clear on a regular basis. Studies of gifted achievers (Bloom, 1985; MacKinnon, 1965; Walberg, Weinstein,Gabriel, Rasher & Rosecrans, 1981) all indicated that these homes were organized, parents had clear and predictable expectations, and behaviors and expectations were consistent.

Rimm and Lowe (1988), and Fine & Pitts, (1980) found that too early empowerment of children, not uncommon with precocious children in adult environments, frequently leads to discord within the family. Once the parents attempt to reclaim authority in the household, underachievement may ensue as a form of rebellion. Children reared in homes where lack of respect for educational institutions or teachers was openly voiced also tended toward underachievement (Jeon & Feldhusen, 1993). Parents who praised for ability rather than effort, giving children the message that hard work is unimportant, were also more likely to produce underachievers (Rimm & Lowe, 1988; Rimm, 1999; Kaufman, Harrel, Milam, Woolverton & Miller, 1986).

Educational

We don't need no education...we don't need no thought control.
No dark sarcasm in the classroom...Teachers leave those kids alone.
Hey, teachers, leave us kids alone.
All in all it's just another brick in the wall....

Lyrics: "Another brick in the Wall, Part II"
Pink Floyd, Roger Waters, 1979

In 1922, Leta Hollingsworth, a pioneer in the gifted child movement, exhorted researchers to study gifted youth in order to better differentiate their curriculum. In 1931, she likened compulsory heterogeneous education for gifted children to the equivalent of teachers and school administrators being forced to consort on a regular basis with "thugs

and gangsters" (Klein, 2000, p.102). By 1940, she looked forward to a time when the "school will be fitted to the child. Suicide of pupils, in despair at failure, will be unknown. Truancy will be outdated…the gifted will be selected for the extraordinary opportunity, which suits them by nature…." (Hollingsworth, 1940, p.48).

Hollingsworth may have made her remarks decades ago, but according to current federal laws in the United States, *all* students have a right to a free *appropriate* public education, as well as opportunities that assist them in reaching their potential. Gifted students are no exception. Inappropriate education not only does not promote academic achievement, but, for some, can lead to severe underachievement in school. Given the statistics on high ability students, it would seem logical that motivating underachievers should be a major concern of our schools. A serious examination of students' school, classroom, and curricular options is something that would benefit many underachievers (Emerick, 1992).

Emerick studied ten gifted students ages 14-20 who had been underachievers but became high academic achievers later in school. Through the study, these students and the researcher were able to identify six factors that had a positive effect on performance: parents, setting of academic goals, appropriate and desirable academic instruction and curriculum, a teacher who genuinely liked and excouraged them, self-growth and responsibility and out-of-school interests that resulted in personal success. Expanding this study to include college and adult aged learners as well as increasing the sample size would most likely result in additional useful information.

Other researchers have critically examined educational policies, school environment, teachers, and the possibility that students could be underachieving out of

boredom (Rimm & Lowe, 1988; Supplee, 1989; Whitmore, 1980; Heller, 1999), or a mismatch between curriculum and needs, or learning styles (Gowan, 1977; Newman, 1973; Zilli, 1971; Torrance, 1979; Whitmore, 1980; Richert, 1991; Baum, Renzulli & Hébert, 1995). Too easy curriculum is inappropriate, leaving students, especially those already at-risk for other reasons, under-challenged and underachieving (Clifford, 1990; National Excellence, 1993; Silverman, 1989: Redding, 1990; Keating, 1991). Inflexible educational policies, failing to allow individual students to pursue the optimal plan for them when it diverges from what is best for most students, and insistence on a lock-step approach to education have all been cited as areas for concern (Maker, 1983; Supplee, 1989; Clinkenbeard, 1996). Some studies have found that acceleration, a viable option for particular underachieving gifted students, is rarely permitted by school administrators (Fehrenbach, 1993). Other students who have little motivation to excel in school, underachieve primarily due to a mismatch between the child's wishes regarding learning and the opportunities given that child within the school setting (Whitmore, 1986).

Purkey (1978), understanding the relationship between achievement and atmosphere, coined a name for environments and teachers that promoted achievement, calling them "inviting." Inviting schools address students and their needs holistically, not just academically, but socially, psychologically, educationally, and culturally as well (McCombs, 2000). Classrooms that are inviting to gifted students are those where psychological safety is a reality: where no one is ever called "egghead", "nerd", or "brain", and intelligence is a valued commodity (Kennedy, 1995). According to McCombs (2000) a school or classroom that promotes psychological safety exemplifies a culture of care, and "represents a core set of beliefs about how we should be with other

people" (p. 32). Unfortunately, " teachers and administrators sometimes use fear to coerce students into compliance with their desires. The system has a devastating impact on some students struggling with the learning process" (p.11), stifling creativity, and forcing students to hide their intelligence. Torrance (1980) noted, based on data from his 22- year longitudinal study of creativity, that schools often value conformity over creativity. In doing so, they effectively extinguish children's creativity and promote underachievement when children refuse to play "the game" that way, or will not play the game at all. Future studies that examine what both high and low achieving students perceive the game to be and how they believe they can beat it or win it could be useful in providing researchers and educators clues as to how to reach these students.

Motivational and social factors are also important elements of appropriate programming for gifted students (Clark, 1983; Kennedy, 1995; DeLisle, 1990). Studies have found that inadequate educational opportunities can lead to underachievement. A classroom environment that is rigid and unstimulating (Clinkenbeard, 1996), where repetition is rife (Redding, 1990), and tedium is the word for every day can obliterate the joy of learning from school for many highly able learners. Udvari (2000), Rimm (1995), and Ballard (1993), found that gifted children are frequently afforded opportunities for competition, and that competition is sometimes employed as an intervention for underachievement, but others, such as Natale (1996), and Borland (1989), have claimed that excessive competition exacerbates underachieving behaviors in those who are non-competitive by nature.

For many gifted children, the quality of their school life hinges on the teacher(s) with whom they spend their days. In a survey, classroom teachers across the United

States reported that although most gifted and talented students spend the majority of their time in regular, heterogeneously grouped classrooms, teachers make only minor modifications in order to accommodate the needs of talented and gifted learners (Archambault, Westberg, Brown, Hallmark, & Emmons, 1993). When four or more gifted children are "clustered" in heterogeneous classrooms, however, the teacher is much more likely to make appropriate educational accommodations for those children (Alan, 1991; Rogers, 1991; Feldhusen, 1989).   Another survey (Renzulli, 1981) of experts in the field of gifted education identified teacher selection and training as the single-highest priority in the field at that time.

Though all children function best in classrooms where teachers genuinely like and respect them, this type of teacher is important for the academic survival of many gifted children. Some teachers do not value qualities such as extreme intellectual precocity, and may respond by treating children like the adults they may resemble, not taking into account that extreme intellectual precocity does not necessarily equate to exceptional psychological or social maturity (Rimm, 1988; Baum, Olenchak and Owen, 1998). Other teachers dislike the constant challenges directed at their intelligence or competence, and actually feel intimidated by the students (Kennedy, 1995). Some teachers freely admit they do not like working with gifted children, and many more feel the same way, but do not openly discuss it. Others simply do not value academic brilliance (Cramond & Martin, 1987), and view "gifted as a privilege" to be revoked at the first sign of "misbehavior," (Whitmore, 1980). These teachers sometimes deliberately, and other times subconsciously, punish gifted students for being what and who they are. This punishment is accomplished in many ways. Sometimes it is by setting teacher

expectations either too low or too high, causing problems for gifted students (Pendarvis, et al.,1990; Robinson, 1990). Teachers who expect students to be perfect because they are gifted, or who perceive their students as irresponsible and give lower grades as a result, set children up for failure and underachievement (Kolb & Jussin, 1994; Wentzel, 1993; Whitmore, 1980; Weiner, 1994). Gifted children who violate teacher expectations tend to receive less praise and lower grades than those who do not. Bricklin & Bricklin's (1967) study corroborated these findings, and also found that teachers and counselors with negative attitudes toward gifted underachievers could significantly worsen students' achievement problems, rather than alleviate them.

Teachers who expect that children will continue to underachieve rarely raise performance. Instead, a cycle of underachievement ensues: students' behaviors lead to teachers lowering expectations about student performance, and the student lowers his or her performance even further (Jussim, 1986). In the same vein, well-meaning teachers who consider lowering expectations due to perceived inequities, e.g., cultural or socioeconomic, do their students no favors when they do lower the bar, failing to realize that students still need an appropriate education despite those issues (Hébert, 1997). That very education may eventually help them change their circumstances.

Educators who are not familiar with the psychological overintensities (Dabrowski, 1979; Piechowski, 1979) displayed by many gifted individuals are sometimes unsure of how to deal with the emotional outbursts, mild neuroses, excessive activity levels, unwavering intellectual persistence, vivid imaginations and constant conversation found in the gifted classroom. Uninformed teachers may punish students for this perceived misbehavior, or attempt to have certain children labeled as ADHD (Flint, 2001).

Conversely, teachers who have had training in what to expect from gifted children, as well as how to meet their social, psychological and curricular needs understand the differences between genuine misbehavior and overexcitabilities, and that bright children who are actively engaged in their learning rarely misbehave; they are too busy.

Of the 50 states in this country, only 24 currently require specific training for teachers of the gifted (Karnes & Wharton, 1996; Flint, 2002). Often this training consists of only three to four courses, but it is enough, at least, to acquaint them with the characteristics and needs of talented youth, and with the idea that effective teachers of the gifted are those who are willing to advocate for their students (Kennedy, 1995; Jenkins-Friedman, 1984).

In the 32 states currently claiming partial or fully funded mandates for gifted education (Flint, 2002), there is an effort being made within school districts to develop a base of teachers who are trained and certified to teach gifted students. Research needs to be conducted on whether these teachers are screened for appropriateness to teach gifted students, or whether we are simply striving to train as many teachers of the gifted as possible as quickly as possible in order to claim a greater share of available dollars. In other words, are we truly benefiting gifted students when we approach their education in this way?

Effective teachers of the gifted are those who model for children their personal struggles and imperfections, teaching children the value of persistence and that no one is perfect, or expected to be perfect (Nugent, 2000). Others, who relinquish their need to keep their power to themselves, share it with students in order to empower them (Archambault et al., 1993). These teachers, who tend to have a more flexible approach to

instruction, are more accepting of individual differences in students, and are willing to get to know their students as people are considered more effective, and to be promoting a supportive learning environment (Heller, 1999; Baldwin, 1993; Gallagher,1985; McCombs, 2000; DeLisle, 2000). Teachers who express a personal passion for learning, a certain *joie de vivre* about teaching and learning, also encourage the development of achievement motivation in their students (Emerick, 1992; Heller, 1999).

Passow & Goldberg (1959) and Goldberg (1965) noted that a consistently caring and unconditionally accepting teacher could help reverse underachieving behaviors. Emerick's study (1992) of high school student underachievers who reversed the trend found that just *one* teacher who genuinely liked the student, was willing to communicate as a person, was enthusiastic about his or her subject matter, and employed creative teaching methods could make all the difference in the world for that student. Conversely, teachers who do not have these qualities can quickly and effectively extinguish even the brightest spark for learning. Some teachers evince no passion for learning or their jobs (Natale, 1996). Underachievers can always recall the name and characteristics of the teacher(s) whom they considered their greatest tormentors, but those who reverse their underachievement also remember those "teachers who will live on in the hearts and minds of their appreciative students; they have performed the noble achievement of turning desperate victims into joyful successes" (Ciaccio, p.16).

Social

> *How come you only want tomorrow…with its promise of something hard to do*
> *A real life adventure worth more than pieces of gold…Pretending it's a whiz-kid world…I feel like a group of one… they can't do this to me I'm not some piece of teenage wildlife*
>
> *Lyrics: "Teenage Wildlife", Super Creeps, David Bowie 1980*

Though parents and teachers may send the message that anything less than stellar academic achievement in their students is unacceptable, society sends an altogether different message: "The message society often sends to students is to aim for academic adequacy, not academic excellence " (National Excellence, 1993, p.3). Gallagher & Gallagher (1994) called America's relationship with gifted people one of love versus hate, because although society claims to love what they can do and considers them national resources, in actuality many people feel intimidated by their abilities. The message many gifted children regularly hear is: "why aren't you working to your potential," when they aren't, followed by "who made *you* so smart?" when they are.

Gifted students sometimes put undue pressure on themselves when they have their egos invested in always being the first, the best, most creative, and most popular (Whitmore, 1986; Nugent, 2000; Adderholt-Elliott, 1987; Rimm, 1987). This need can lead students to avoid challenge in order to avoid possibly failing (Rimm, 1987). Adolescents' developing awareness of the importance of social standards and the desire to conform to them may result in students attempting to hide their intelligence to effect better peer relations and preserve their preferred social status (Brown & Steinberg, 1990; Tannenbaum, 1962; Gallagher & Crowder, 1957; Coleman, 1961). Brown & Steinberg (1990), and Clasen & Clasen (1995), studied underachieving students who reported that the influence of their friends and peers interfered with their achievement more than any other factor. Berndt, Hawkins & Jiao (1999) followed students for an entire academic year, and found that students' academic behaviors were very much like those of their friends by the end of the school year, even when they started out differently.

Social immaturity, rebellion, antisocial behavior, negative personal adjustment, social ineptitude, poor group interaction and general apartness have also repeatedly been cited as culprits in students' underachievement (Bricklin & Bricklin, 1967; Hecht, 1975; Terman, 1954). More research needs to be conducted about why these students do not function effectively in social or group situations, and whether the social problems preceded and contributed to the underachievement, or the underachieving behaviors occurred subsequent to the social problems.

Students who are experiencing social anxiety often appear unmotivated and underachieving, even to their peers, when what they may actually be experiencing is an inability to deal with challenges due to constantly being in an overly aroused psychological state (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). When underachieving students with adjustment and social issues have been placed into homogeneously grouped gifted classrooms with appropriate teaching and curriculum, their performance on academic tasks improved significantly, but their social skills and acceptance by intellectual peers did not (Karnes, 1962).

Cultural

… long time ago lived a lonesome caveman…Frustration and torment tore him inside Then he fell to the ground and he cried and he cried…But then education saved the day.
He learned to speak and communicate…Everybody needs an education.Black skin, red skin, yellow or white, Everybody needs to read and write… Then the day when that primitive man learned   To talk with his brothers and Live off the land…He learned to think and To work with his brain…
He thanked God for the friends he'd made…Thanks to all the mathematicians and…the professors in their colleges… Trying to feed me knowledge that I know I'll never use.
Education drives me insane… The day that it came was a sacred day…
But you can't tell me what I am living for cos' that's still a mystery. Can't tell me why I am.

Lyrics: © Ray Davies, Education
The Kinks, Schoolboys in Disgrace, 1975

Many minority populations, including African-American students, Native Americans, and Latinos, are underrepresented in gifted programs across this and other countries (Ford, 1996; Tomlinson, Callahan & Lelli, 1997; Jenkins, 1936; McCombs, 2000; Troyna, 1991). When these students are identified and placed into gifted programs, the statistics on underachievement are startling; as many as 50% of students have been reported as underachieving (Ford, 1992, 1997). Are minority students really underachieving at the high rates reported? Reis & McCoach (2000) stated that we must first recognize talent in order to assess underachievement, something we are not consistently accomplishing across all cultural groups. In addition, we need to embrace all of the different concepts of achievement, which vary considerably from culture to culture; recognizing that what is accepted and valued in one culture may not be in another (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997).

Standardized, mainstream-education measures of intellectual potential or academic achievement are not always considered reliable or valid measures for people who are not of the majority culture. These tests may not be reliable or valid indicators of students' true abilities for a variety of reasons, so using them as the sole criterion for entrance to gifted programming could be construed as bias, intentional or unintentional (Ford, 1996; Frasier & Passow, 1994; Baldwin, 1987; Kitano & Kirby, 1986). In the same way, they cannot be considered reliable measures of *underachievement*. An achievement ideal based solely on tests might overlook many African-American students who exhibit behavioral causes for underachievement (Ford, 1996) because poor behaviors often prevent students from ever being nominated for testing.

Crocker (1987) suggested that prejudice, discrimination, poverty, and comparable social factors remain significant contributing forces to underachieving behaviors in some minority groups of students. Interventions that address these issues are allegedly more effective when instituted at the earliest levels of school, before underachieving behaviors are firmly established (Greenberg, Coleman & Rankin, 1993; Gallagher, 1974; Whitmore, 1980). Ogbu (1974, 1985) suggested that we can find clues to who will underachieve by examining how a particular group came to this country: did they arrive willingly, as in the case of immigrants who came here to find a better life, or were they castelike minorities, forcibly conscripted to work here, as in the case of African slaves? Ogbu theorized that voluntary immigrants generally use the educational system to advance themselves, while castelike minorities do not trust the system to help their children advance, thus stand a greater likelihood of becoming underachievers.

When underachievement is studied, it is generally studied in students from potentially high achieving families of middle to upper middle class status, primarily in the majority culture (Reis, Hébert, Diaz, Maxfield, & Ratley, 1995). The tradition in the American educational system has been to automatically attribute students' underachievement to such factors as socio-economic status, family configuration, geographic location, and race. Researchers have begun addressing these issues during the past decade. One longitudinal study (Reis, et al., 1995) of a diverse group of gifted high school students who appeared to be underachieving found no correlation between family size, parental marital status, socioeconomic level and achievement. Ford & Wright (1998) noted that research has failed to keep up with the effects of changes in family structures, leading to a need to critically examine how those factors impact achievement. Much more

research is needed in the area of culture and family and academic achievement as current research barely touches on these issues.

African American students may be predisposed toward what Ford (1993) and Mickelson (1990) called an attitude-achievement paradox: though the students value education and high achievement, they actually display poor academic achievement. In any case, underachievement in African-American students is most often attributed to psychological factors (Ford, 1992), or concerns about being accused of "acting white," by being high achievers and using standard American English (Ford, 1993), thereby acceding to the values of the dominant culture (National Excellence, 1993). Fordham & Ogbu (1986) and Fordham (1988) found that high achieving African American students in an urban high school were more willing to accept the values and beliefs of the prevailing culture than were students who were similar, but underachieving, students. A study of Hispanic underachievers revealed comparable results: that one of the ways people of color succeed is to define success, not in terms of their own culture, but in terms of the prevailing culture (Cordeiro & Carspecken, 1993). Hébert's (1999) three-year study of culturally diverse high school students revealed that a strong individual self-concept, adult mentors, a closely-knit network of high achieving peers, extracurricular activities, challenging curricula, and family support all worked interdependently to enable students to succeed.

Hispanic students grapple with their own set of issues, not the least of which is a lack of understanding of the value system of their culture by majority culture educators (Reis, et al., 1995). Language-related issues and cultural issues are often implicated in underachievement of Hispanic students. Rumberger and Larson (1998) found that even

with proficiency in English, Hispanic students' test scores, grades and other measures of achievement were not particularly high, meaning that we should not rely solely on academic measures to either include or exclude students from programming. This leaves educators in a quandary regarding underachievement: if we use strictly objective measures to identify underachievers from an Hispanic background we will most likely miss many, but where are the instruments for finding these bright students? Logic says they must exist, yet our current identification measures are not effective at consistently and effectively identifying these students from a rapidly expanding culture .

Finally, attribution for success and failure in school varies considerably from culture to culture. American students tend to blame failure on external factors like school, curriculum, and teachers, while other groups, such as Asian students, look within for attribution and blame only themselves, or their own lack of effort for lack of success (Tuss & Zimmer, 1995). More study is needed in order to further build culture-specific theories of attribution; the more we know about how different people think, the better we should become at designing research instruments.

Gender

Another way in which underachieving gifted students are grouped for study is by gender. Underachievers tend to be white, middle-class males of high ability; students it might be "difficult to work up concern for" (Colangelo, Kerr, Christensen & Maxey, 1993, p.160; Gallagher, 1985) when they do not work to their potential. Although giftedness occurs at approximately equal rates in both males and females, nearly every study performed found approximately a three or four to one ratio of underachieving

males to females (Wolfle, 1991). Underachievement in males tends to start early, often by first or second grade, and persist for many years, though most interventions are not instigated until students are failing in middle or high school. By the time these boys get to high school, they are typically suffering from problems greater than academic underachievement: they are typically socially maladroit as well (Wolfle, 1991).

Many of these young men display overexcitabilities (Dabrowski, 1979) or overintensities (Piechowski, 1979) in the emotional, intellectual, and/or imaginational realms, which does not endear them to their peers. Our society usually only accepts young males with sensitivities in the psychomotor and sensual areas: playing sports and chasing girls are socially acceptable, but studying and writing poetry are not. If they are creative, sensitive, and enjoy intellectual pursuits, then do not engage in 'typical' male activities, such as team sports, real problems can ensue relative to a social life. Tannenbaum (1962) collected ratings from 615 high school students and found that the most admired male student was the bright, athletic, non-studious boy. The least admired? The studious, intelligent, non-athletic boy. Similar results have been reported in other studies. Not fitting in with a peer group can lead to feelings of isolation, worsening the student's inability to socially interact (Torrance, 1961). Having to choose between having friends and working hard in school can be no choice at all, and underachievement is a natural consequence of such a situation. When these boys are academically advanced, their social deficiencies may become even more noticeable (DeLisle, 1982).

Males tend to have greater difficulties coping with multiple changes that occur simultaneously (Wolfle, 1991), making adolescence, with all its changes, a particularly volatile time for students who are already underachieving or at the borderline of

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underachievement. Expecting students to develop social and other survival skills with which to handle life's stresses without implicitly teaching them puts at-risk students in further jeopardy. Boys in trouble often walk around feeling bad inside without being able to define exactly what is bothering them, or to talk about their feelings. Hébert (1991) has suggested using a program of bibliotherapy to assist these young men in dealing with their issues and feelings. Future research could address specific interventions delivered to all adolescent boys through school classes or counseling in order to ascertain what and if interventions might make a positive difference in the lives of these young men.

Gallagher (1985) found that many boys achieve just enough to get by, and appear to be achieving, but are in reality, silently underachieving. These boys often begin as the good little boys who sit in class and are never disruptive, but also rarely engage in social interaction with others (Wolfle, 1991). They learn to be "creatively inattentive" (Webb, Meckstroth & Tolan, 1986), and how to just get by in school in the early years, traits that serve them well in their later underachievement. New research could help develop positive interventions designed to develop social skills and school survival skills, e.g., how and when to ask for help, how to get teachers' attention, and how to self-advocate in situations where the loud, active busy boys are garnering all the attention.

Gifted females bring their own particular set of issues to the underachievement arena. Unlike males, who typically begin to underachieve early in life, underachieving females frequently begin as overachievers, then spiral downward at approximately the onset of puberty, when they begin to value conformity over achievement (McCormick & Wolf, 1993; Redding, 1990; Wolfle, 1991; Borland, 1989). Gifted girls also begin to show dramatic decreases in self-esteem as they approach adolescence when they fail to

appropriately develop their intellectual potential (Brown & Gilligan, 1990; Kerr, 1985; Reis & Dobyns, 1991).

In bright girls, pressure to please teachers and parents often leads to perfectionism, leading, in turn, to hypersensitivity to criticism and to a failure to even try to achieve (Rimm, 1987). Girls who do not honestly invest their efforts in attempts to do well can never fail, because they never actually tried. Even when they do work hard, gifted adolescent girls typically receive little recognition for academic accomplishments. The pressure to maintain high involvement in social and extracurricular activities in high school can lead to reduced study time and underachievement, so girls frequently take less rigorous coursework (Kerr, 1994), leading to a reduction of post-secondary options.

Females tend to value social acceptance more than high academic achievement (Whitmore, 1986; Eccles, 1985; Reis, 1987; Fox & Tobin, 1988). Gifted women also do not generally achieve as high career status as gifted men. Researchers have called for increased early intervention directed toward gifted girls, in order to keep self-esteem at appropriate levels, teach that career options are unlimited, and that women can do math and science as well as men. Bell (1989) has recommended these intervention programs begin as early as elementary school in order to achieve maximum effectiveness.

And what of curriculum? When the role models, the stories, the authors chosen for study in schools are all males (Reis & Dobyns, 1991; Kolloff, 1996), is the curriculum appropriate for females? Might some gifted girls be underachieving because of a lack of interest or feeling of connectedness to the curriculum? Kerr (1994) posited that some underachievement in females might actually be a misnomer, because the achievement is measured according to standards created by men, for males. A girl's or woman's idea of

achievement may not be based solely upon grades or career, but, instead by criteria such as social achievements, and other such personal, self-designated goals. Parents must, however, take care they are not teaching their daughters that success is measured solely by the acquisition of a husband and family, either (Webb, Meckstroth & Tolan, 1982). Desiring to have a family may be a goal, but girls who consider marriage their ultimate goal for success are at risk for underachievement when their involvement in academics begins to be viewed as irrelevant. Instead, girls, like boys, need to be informed that they have options; that today's women are no longer required to choose between family and career, but that both can be successfully integrated (Rodenstein & Glickhauf-Hughes, 1979).

McCormick & Wolf (1993) and Reis & Dobyns (1991) suggest we work to rapidly increase our body of knowledge on gifted girls' affective, social, and intellectual needs. To date, few major studies have been conducted specifically about bright girls and women: Kerr's *Smart Girls, Gifted Women* (1985) was one of the first, and remains the most well known.

2.2 Interventions Designed to Reverse Underachievement

Since underachievement is generally global in nature (Petersen & Colangelo, 1996), it seems logical to provide multi-faceted instruction and intervention in order to address the many factors of underachievement (Baum, et al., 1995). Hishinuma called successful interventions integrative in approach (1996).

Passow & Goldberg (1959) found that when students had teachers with whom they could identify, who were consistently interested and supportive, who individualized

instruction, were willing to give the special help needed, and who maintained consistently high expectations (Butler-Por, 1987; Emerick, 1992) their achievement improved more often than those who had teachers without these characteristics. Fehrenbach (1993) and Hishinuma (1996) found that a team approach that incorporated the gifted program teacher, classroom teacher, parents, administrators and students was useful in helping students become achievers. Ford (1993) found that mentors and role models were beneficial for working with African-American underachievers, as were counseling programs and teacher education aimed directly at teachers of gifted African American students. McCormick & Wolf (1993) found that interventions for gifted underachieving girls should begin in elementary school and focus on bolstering academic self-esteem, training educators of girls, and teaching gifted girls to keep their options open.

Hishinuma's study (1996) found that teachers need to be innovative, understand how to plan appropriate curriculum, and be well acquainted with the needs of gifted children. He also felt that effective interventions taught coping skills, study skills and provided for a predictable academic environment. This meshed with the Manning, Glasner & Smith (1996) study on the effectiveness of self-regulated learning. Laffoon, et al. (1989) found that in order to address attributional issues, only effort should be praised and rewarded, not ability, and that mastery teaching and learning were effective interventions in many cases. Redding (1990) called for explicit modeling of process and problem-solving strategies by teachers and parents. Rimm (1987) exhorted parents and teachers to engage students in consistency of goal-setting, for parents to model respect for schools and teachers, model effort, emphasize the positive, and encourage independence without undue empowerment. Wolfle (1991) suggested parents and teachers link outside

interests to academics in order to give the students reason for academic success, in much the way that Baum, Renzulli, and Hébert (1995) call for Renzulli type III processes linked with student interests. Wolfle (1991) recommended finding ways to enhance learning within groups in addition to increasing social skills. Clinkenbeard (1996), Emerick (1992), Hébert, (1997), and Whitmore (1980a) stated that teachers must adapt instruction to the needs and interests of the students in order to increase motivation and task commitment.

Since the 1960's, psychological counseling has been employed as an intervention for underachievement and found to be costly, time consuming and to produce inconsistent results (Baymur & Patterson, 1960; Finney, 1965; Ohlsen & Gazda, 1965; Raph, Goldberg & Passow, 1966; Broedel, E., Ohlson, M., Proff, F. & Southard, C., 1960). Researchers believed these shortcomings occurred because counseling generally implied to the students that there was something wrong with them that needed to be fixed, and thus deprived them of their already short supply of self-esteem (DeLisle, 2000; Polaine, 1994). In the 1970's, counseling was revisited as a possible intervention, but was still noted to be inconsistent to ineffective in its results (Zilli, 1971; Perkins, 1971).

Mentoring and bibliotherapy are considered to be two effective techniques for working with gifted children. Mentoring, according to the literature, can be one of the single most effective interventions we do with underachieving gifted youth (Goertzel, Goertzel, & Goertzel, 1978; Bloom, 1985; Gallagher, 1985; Hébert, 2000; Olenchak, 1999) provided the mentors are non-judgmental, provide consistent social and emotional support, and ongoing advocacy. Bibliotherapy (Silverman, 1993; DeLisle, 1990; Adderholt-Elliot, 1987) can be used to help alleviate the symptoms of disabling

perfectionism, problematic gender-related issues, and a host of other issues related to giftedness (Frasier & McCannon, 1981; Hébert, 1991; Olenchak, 1999).

No single intervention can be one hundred percent effective in reversing chronic underachievement. No matter which interventions are selected, focus should remain on students' strengths (Hébert, 1997; Willings, 1998) and what they *can* do, rather than what they *can't*.

2.3 Closely Related Research

Underachievement has been primarily studied by researchers' examination of underachievers, rather than by underachievers' examination of their own situations. Two studies closely related to mine have specifically examined underachievement in this way. The first, by Emerick (1992), examined ten students' perceptions of factors that reversed the pattern of underachievement. She studied ten gifted adolescents and young adults and found six factors influential in reversing underachievement: positive opportunities for success outside of school, involved parents with a positive attitude, classes that provided "fun" challenging opportunities for learning, a teacher who genuinely liked the student, student buy-in to the importance of academic success, and the setting of academic and life goals.

A retrospective second study (Peterson, 2001), examined 31 adults and their experiences of reversing underachievement. Peterson, who works from a counseling perspective, located her findings within a family systems theory framework, examining parenting behaviors and messages, parent-adolescent relationships and family communication. She concluded that while school, teachers, curriculum and other

environmental influences contribute heavily to underachievement, parenting, student behaviors and the interactions between the two also have a major impact on student achievement. Parental underinvolvement and teacher indifference appeared to be two of the factors that, when combined with student characteristics, contributed most significantly to student underachievement.

Emerick's study utilized open-ended questionnaires and in-depth interviewing, while Peterson employed a non-standardized questionnaire that was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

2.4 Chapter Summary

Most research into the troublesome problem of underachievement has focused on one or a few issues that together comprise an encyclopedic body of research. However, since underachievement remains a concern in schools and society and is now recognized as a *multifaceted problem* it seemed logical to investigate it as such, first as a whole, then deconstructed into its component parts, and concluding with a synthesis of the data into a new understanding of the problem.

Despite decades of research regarding gifted underachievement and its causes, consequences and interventions, we have yet to eliminate the syndrome. Most studies have examined underachievement from outside the student, but two studies have retrospectively examined underachievement from the formerly underachieving and now successful student's point of view (Emerick, 1992; Peterson, 2001). These studies have corroborated findings of other researchers regarding timing and factors associated with

change (Baum, Renzulli & Hébert, 1995; Baker, Bridger & Evans, 1998) as well as contributed new information regarding the significance of interactions between factors.

CHAPTER 3

Methods

3.1 Narrative Traditions

I read your book and I find it strange that I know that girl And I know her world a little too well. And I didn't know that by giving my hand that I would be written down, sliced around, passed down among strangers' hands…You carry a pen and a paper and no time and no words you waste. You're a voyeur…a kind of thief And what do I get…while you lay it all out…I laid my heart out, I laid my soul down I'll always remember…

Lyrics: "The Book", Sheryl Crow, 1996
Sheryl Crow & Jeff Trott

This chapter introduces methodologies within qualitative research that use narratives as their primary source of data, then discusses how they were used for this particular study. History and disciplinary bases for the methods are also briefly addressed. Research methods are presented, including participant selection, data collection methods, and data analysis methods. Researcher bias, reflexivity and rigor are also touched-upon.

Narrative Inquiry

Several methodologies located within qualitative research rely on narratives as their primary source of data. Though these narratives take different forms and rely on slightly different methods and analyses, they are all known as *narrative inquiry*. In order to understand the particular methodology I have employed, life story research, it is necessary to understand the theory behind narrative inquiry.

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Storytelling is an age old activity; one that has been universally used by human beings to make sense of their universe, their culture, their gods, and their selves. Storytelling is the act of providing narrative explanations for occurrences, experiences, or other facets of the human condition. Narrative explanations serve many purposes. According to Witherell & Noddings, (1991, p.50), "Narrative processes function as a connected medium for knowing -- an embodiment of an intimate relation between the knower and the known. " Weiss, (1994, p.ix) stated that "Some issues can be investigated in no other way…qualitative interviewing is a fundamental method for learning about the experiences of others." The qualitative interviewing to which he refers is the primary means of collecting narratives for research purposes.

Polkinghorne (1988, p.15) considered that when human beings tell their stories-their narratives- they become reflective beings seeking to bring meaning to their lives. He called this the "realm of meaning" and considered it not a place where truth dwells, but an activity where one's subjective truth is built through the process of the narrative. Further, Polkinghorne asserted that we each only have access only to our own particular realm of meaning, approachable by others only through the deliberate recounting of our stories. Thus, when we listen to another's retrospective, we are better able to comprehend why events occurred as they did and how they changed over time; both important when one is attempting to understand such phenomena as underachievement and achievement. Atkinson (1995, p.xv) says we each author our own story by choosing how to tell our story, and what we say; that our own lives are where we find our own truths.

Barthes (1974) posited that narratives serve two important roles: a) enabling individuals to understand who they are, where they've been and where they are headed,

and b) transmitting shared beliefs values at a cultural level. Cognitive psychologist Bruner (1986) also considered narrative of great importance for understanding human experience, because it offers us a framework within which we make our lives comprehensible to both others and ourselves.

Language is the vehicle by which narrative is delivered, and language is itself subject to interpretation. This is not a detriment, however, as Polkinghorne (1988, p. 27) said, " Language may be the device that allows reality to show forth in experience. Rather than standing in the way of experience of the real, language may be the lens whose flexibility makes reality appear in sharp focus before experience."

Ricoeur (1983) has studied narrative extensively and considers it a discipline that functions to help gather human experiences into a unified whole. Further, he asserted that narrative *must* be employed by researchers in the human disciplines when they wish to study humans.

Life Story Research and Personal Constructions of Reality

Within narrative inquiry lie several research approaches, such as life story, life history, and oral history. Similar in many ways, each has different specifics, primarily in the fashion data is analyzed. Anthropologists use life history and individual case study to study cultural similarities and variations. Historians use oral history to accomplish the same ends. Atkinson (1995) contended there was little difference between life history, life story, and oral history, and that the first two were interchangeable, while the third usually focused on a specific aspects of an individual life. He also considered there to be a difference in scope, with oral history covering one aspect of a life, and the life story or

life history encompassing the entire lifetime. Atkinson (1998) saw life story as a kind of mini-autobiography, evolved from life history and oral history, both ethnographic field approaches. Bennett & Detzner (Josselson and Lieblich, 1997) also considered life history interchangeable with life story. To Witherell & Noddings (1991), the terms life story and life history are interchangeable, except for the act of telling not being completed until the teller has read the story and affirmed or negated its veracity. Marshall and Rossman (1995) saw life history as stories told within a cultural milieu, for example, stories of underachievement told within a critique of twentieth century American educational systems.

Though many sources I consulted employed the terms life story and life history interchangeably, I consider there to be one major difference between the two terms. Life histories have traditionally been collected from individuals, then heavily edited by the researcher, with the researcher maintaining power over the data. In life story research, the data is collected, and then interpreted by the participants of the study, keeping the data in the words and hands of the informants. The meaning making in life stories arises from the actual words and actions of the informants. Weiss (1994) considered life histories as a way for a person's story to be heard, through the conduit of the researcher/research process.

The epistemological base for this type of work is interpretivistic in that the knowledge gleaned from the life stories of participants is constructed by both them and the researcher, and is the product of the interaction of both minds and environments. There are no right or wrong answers to discover in this type of research, only personal *constructions* of reality. Indeed, there is no 'truth' to be found, because when dealing

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with humans there can be no one truth, merely a seeking of understanding, or *Verstehen*, of their lives and the events that shaped them. This understanding is my goal in using the life story method for my research.

Background of the Method and Its Limitations

Life histories have been collected for centuries, evolving from oral history and other ethnographic approaches to data collection. The use of life stories, "for serious academic study is considered to have begun in psychology with Freud's 1910 psychoanalytic interpretation of individual case studies" (Atkinson, 1998, p.3). Before that time it was primarily a tool of anthropologists and sociologists known as a life history.

After Freud, life stories were sometimes used throughout the 1930's, 40's and 50's by psychologists and researchers such as Erikson, though not frequently until about the 1980's. Since that time, the contemporary use of life story research as a type of narrative inquiry has increased, mainly in the disciplines of sociology, education, and health care, and has become a growing element in the narrative study of lives (Josselson & Lieblich, 1993; Cohler, 1988; Gergen & Gergen, 1993).

Atkinson (1998) called the subjective narrative of the life story the quintessential way to help the researcher comprehend the phenomenon under study from the insider's point of view. Bertraux (1981) saw the life story narrative as providing not only that point of view, but also a constructed view of the social reality existing outside the story, as explained by the narrative.

Collecting, examining, then comparing life stories gathered from participants with shared experience (cross-case analysis) also provides the researcher insight into how particular social factors, events, and political forces may have contributed to their experiences as related to particular phenomena (Stewart, 1994). This allows the words of people who lived the underachievement experience to inform us about how we can better help certain gifted students become achievers.

3.2 Cross-Disciplinary Nature of the Tradition

The Value of Narrative

Life stories are currently collected in several domains of human experience, as well in various academic disciplines. They are used to interpret or explain mythical or religious phenomena, and in anthropology and folklore, to catch the thread of shared cultural meanings, obtain the insider's view of a culture, and to explore the dynamics of cultural change (Geertz, 1973; Langness & Frank, 1981). Since the early 1960's (Butler, 1963), life stories have frequently been used in a way known as the "life review" in gerontological studies. There has been a renewed interest in life story in counseling psychology, too, where the telling of the life story with integrity can have a variety of therapeutic uses.

Although I will not venture into the therapeutic domain of narrative, transforming and therapeutic are words commonly applied when narrative is mentioned. Most people have experienced a time when the simple unburdening of a story became a cathartic event. Others have experienced the crystallizing moment during the telling of a story

when suddenly all becomes clear. Conversely, many of us have experienced the heavy weight of a story left untold; secrets left unshared. Duhl stated,

> Stories are like jazz. They have different meanings to different people. They allow for interaction, for surprise, and for finding new and alternative ways to cope. At different times, when repeated, they have new meanings. Stories permit each of us to learn at our own pace (1999, p.542).

A 1999 pilot study, virtually identical to this one, examined life stories of two individuals, one white male and one African-American female. Data collected were very similar to those collected for this project, though the data analysis was not quite as in-depth as for this study. Based upon the pilot study data, I expected that people would want to share stories of success because they were proud of what those stories told. While the lives behind the stories may have been difficult to survive, their outcomes were positively focused. As I engaged in interviewing with my four participants, I found them eager to share their narratives, thrilled to have the opportunity to present their own world-views, and all but one cooperative in responding to post-interview inquiries.

Narrative inquiry makes it possible for a person to *tell his or her story in the manner in which he or she wishes to tell it* to a non-judgmental listener. This is important because sometimes people's stories are either not allowed voice at all, or are not of their own creations, or both, but are instead foisted on them by someone more powerful than they. This is known as "silencing" (Lister, 1982) and is often at the center of problems, including achievement problems, plaguing people. Whether the silencing is actual physical violence, a family environment steeped in secretiveness, social isolation related to the way we live in modern societies, or attached to issues of authority such as those found in schools (Lister, 1982; McLeod, 1996), the effect is the same: people are

prevented from telling their stories and from gaining the associated therapeutic effects of narrative.

Privileging Lived Experience

In narrative inquiry, the researcher follows the thread that leads to people's authentic stories; the stories people create for themselves about themselves. Narrative inquiry, particularly life story, can be an attractive means to *"privilege a person's lived experience"* (White & Epston, 1990, p.83). I chose this particular type of research because I enjoy talking with people and hearing their detailed, more intimate stories, rather than those they weave for casual, fleeting consumption. I have learned that if you express a sincere interest in people they will talk to you, often sharing parts of themselves they have never before shared. In our increasingly fragmented and isolated society, it is an honor to receive the gift of precious stories, especially when they are painful to relate. Stories of underachievement often have emotional baggage attached to them regardless of the number of years that have passed; years of underachievement and its subsequent effects leave their marks.

3.3 Researcher Bias

I would tell you about the things they put me through
The pain I've been subjected to But the Lord himself would blush...
Now I'm not looking for absolution Forgiveness for the things I do
But before you come to any conclusions Try walking in my shoes...
You'll stumble in my footsteps Keep the same appointments I kept...
But I promise now my judge and jurors My intentions couldn't have been purer
My case is easy to see I'm not looking for a clearer conscience
Peace of mind after what I've been through And before we talk of any repentance
Try walking in my shoes...

Lyrics: © DePeche Mode, Walking in My Shoes, Songs of Faith & Devotion, SRE, 1993

Reflexivity, Rigor, & Trustworthiness

More than reliability, validity and triangulation, all concepts originally designed to judge quantitative research, there exists another means for judging the merits of our data: what Lincoln and Guba (1985) call trustworthiness in qualitative research. Trustworthiness is determined through the application of these questions to a study: Are the data truthful? By what criteria can they be judged? Can the findings be considered applicable to other groups or individuals? Would the same or similar findings result if the same participants were studied in the same context by another researcher? And, finally, how can we be reasonably certain that the findings are representative of the study and the participants rather than researcher bias?

Reflexivity maintains rigor in qualitative research when researchers examine and admit bias, and generally position themselves in their studies. Sword (1999) cautions researchers to position themselves in their studies, because, sometimes:

> Qualitative investigators *do not* acknowledge how, among other things, their own background, gender, social class, ethnicity, values, and beliefs affect the emergent construction of reality. Reflection on the influence of self not only creates personal awareness of how the research is shaped by one's own biography, but also provides a context within which audiences can more fully understand the researcher's interpretation of text data (p.277).

Reflexivity is a critical thinking process where researchers examine how their personal feelings and emotions might influence a study in process, then incorporate that understanding into the study (Lamb & Huttlinger, 1989, p. 2; Ceglowski, 2000). Further, reflexivity affects every step of the research process, is dynamic and constantly changing, and, "reflexivity occurs repeatedly during all phases of a research study and adds rigor to qualitative data analysis" (Eaves & Kahn, 2000, p.2).

Rigor in qualitative research is a topic that is beginning to appear in more and more of the literature, though, "The issue of quality criteria in constructivism is…not well resolved, and further critique is needed"(Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.114). How can I be sure my research is valid and reliable when there is no experiment, no one truth? Qualitative research from the antirealist position rejects the idea that there is one unequivocal social reality or truth that can be distinctly separated from the researcher or the process of research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Instead, and especially in life story research, there are many truths created, each with its own validity. Some writers even go so far as to say qualitative research is not subject to the same rules by which we judge quantitative, realist research: reliability, validity and generalizability (Morse, 1999). How can we strive for replicability when people do not lead replicable lives (Putney, Green, Dixon & Kelly, 1999)? A good point, but rigor can still be maintained. There are several ways in which I have assured my work is quality research.

Pope, Ziebland, and Mays, in a paper entitled *Assessing Quality in Qualitative Research* (2000), suggested several ways to improve validity. The first one is triangulation. Though triangulation is an originally quantitative tool adapted to qualitative methods (Seale, 1999), it is appropriate nonetheless, and simply involves comparing data collected from several different sources, or in different ways, then looking, " for patterns of convergence to develop or corroborate an overall interpretation" (p.51). Triangulation is considered by many to be a worthwhile process for helping ensure reliability and validity in a qualitative study (Peck & Secker, 1999; Atkinson, 1998; Reissman, 1993; Marshall & Rossman, 1999), especially one where there is no " whole truth and nothing but the truth." All we can hope for in a study of this sort is that respondents are consistent

within their own stories. In this particular study, I looked for, and found, consistency between the questionnaires and the interviews. Flick (1998) says that, "Triangulation is less a strategy for validating results and procedures than an alternative to validation…which increases scope, depth and consistency"(p.230).

Another method of assuring quality is by using member checks, or validation by respondents of their words. Member checks are essential in life story research for two reasons: for keeping the research in the words of the participants, and for reducing errors in the final analysis (Mays & Pope, 2000; Merriam, 1988; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Member checks were conducted with each respondent subsequent to the formal interview, in the midst of analysis, transcription, and writing. Cordial dialogue continues with the participants at this time.

Other steps were taken to increase trustworthiness of this study: inclusion of an entire constructed narrative for each participant, the basis for the findings; inclusion of codes in the Appendix; the aforementioned triangulation, member checks and search for internal consistency among the data; acceptance of participant revisions; and discussion of not only findings, but the process of synthesis that led to those findings. Finally, the insider's stance and researcher bias were considered.

The Insider's Stance and Researcher Bias

Researchers make many decisions during the course of a study. Merriam (1988) referred to the researcher as *the* primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Yet, being human, the researcher is fallible and subjective, no matter how rigorously he or she attempts to maintain a neutral stance. Peshkin (1988) commented that subjectivity is

inevitable in any study, whether qualitative or quantitative and that researchers should consciously seek it out during their entire study. Ideally, researchers should inform readers of their own biases while they seek to control them. Instead of attempting to downplay prior knowledge and experiences, current expectations are that we openly state our biases, do everything we can to maintain accuracy and objectivity in our research methods and increase plausibility of our findings. By being forthcoming about our stance, we allow the data to speak for themselves. This helps keep our work from becoming unintentionally "autobiographical." Though there are some legitimate autobiographical research methods such as auto-ethnography, they belong in their own studies.

Participants speak for themselves whenever possible in this study. My interpretations, however, are grounded in the framework I have assembled regarding education, giftedness, and underachievement, as well as colored by my knowledge of psychology. This description, derived from qualitative research, and then combined with established frameworks derived from the literature helps prevent us from reaching conclusions that could be seen as "trivial," by some. Borman, LeCompte, and Goetz (1986) suggest that the recursive nature of qualitative research allows us to build new theory, which can then be integrated into existing research literature in order to generate explanations for what has been found (p. 49).

Though this may seem paradoxical in light of earlier statements regarding tolerance for ambiguity and openness to the data, the synthesis of new theory cannot occur within a vacuum. There must be a familiarity with prior research before recognition of novel findings can occur. This awareness translates into the internal realm of the researcher as well. Because there can be no perfect objectivity in any human researcher,

Peck & Secker (1999) suggest researchers calculatedly and deliberately adopt the insider's stance in order to streamline the research process and allow for better understanding of respondents' points of view. By conducting research in my community, with people who share my social class, values, and other attributes, and as someone with an achievement history similar to theirs I deliberately adopted an insider's stance rather than a marginal position. Entering into research relationships as an insider allowed me to streamline the process of getting to know the participants, thus building rapport more rapidly. By acknowledging these commonalities, I think about them, and raise my own awareness of their existence and vigilance regarding the maintenance of objective empathy and take care to not overidentify with the participants.

Duhl (1999) said, "…It is not giving out secrets of one's private life but sharing common experiences that permits identification with the other. These come through telling stories"(p.542). Because I share some experiences of former underachievement as well as other aspects of my existence, such as returning to school at a later age, having a child who struggles with gifted/underachievement issues, and working in the automotive business for many years, with those of my study participants, I assumed a reflexive posture even as I encouraged them to do so. In narrative inquiry, the researcher is a part of the process much more than she or he is an objective bystander.

Though there were clear advantages to adopting an insider stance, there could also have been drawbacks. When you work in your own community, there is a danger that people may associate some negative aspects of their stories with you. If something goes awry in the course of the study, hard feelings between researcher and participant may result. Finally, there is the very real danger of researcher over-identification with the

research participants, or getting too close to the participants and their stories. Because of my history and insider stance, I was extra-vigilant about objectivity, but also employed my experiences and prior knowledge in listening for the ring of truth when participants described their experiences of underachievement and subsequent achievement.

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3.4 Participants

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Recruitment

Through various community involvements, I have established a wide-ranging network of friends and acquaintances with which I share regular correspondence. It is this network I employed, using a variation of what LeComte and Preissle (1993) call "networking sampling," and Patton (2002, p.194) refers to as "snowball sampling," to recruit participants.

With studies dating back as far as the 1930's, these methods were originally designed to locate and study individuals in concealed populations, and who shared common behaviors or characteristics, especially those considered to be socially stigmatizing. For example, people who were drug abusers, homeless, or sexually promiscuous might be difficult to locate in the numbers required for studies, or unlikely to voluntarily come forward. Because there is an element of trust inherent in this method, i.e., you are always working with someone who knows someone who knows you; it can help researchers access participants who might otherwise be unavailable. The purest form of network sampling, or snowball sampling, involves identifying one person who fits the requirements of the study, then having them identify someone else who possesses the desired characteristics, repeatedly until the desired sample size is attained. Simple and

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elegant, the researcher contacts her network, which then spreads the news through their contacts, resulting in an ever-increasing collection of potential participants from which to choose.

With such an extensive pool of successful people around me, it seemed logical that some of them had underachieved for part of their lives. Indeed, as I have discussed my research interests throughout the community, several have exclaimed with a self-effacing chuckle, " Oh, yeah, I'd be a good one for your study."

I did not randomly choose people I encountered in daily life as participants, but instead chose to engage in purposeful sampling by networking for study participants (Patton, 2002). I also decided not to interview people I already knew, feeling that prior relationships might inhibit participants' speaking freely, or otherwise create awkwardness. In reality, I have found that relationships have been built during these studies; two individuals from the pilot study have been friends since that time three years ago, and three of this study's participants have evinced interest in maintaining communications.

My first step in participation recruitment was to create email notices with the subject line, "exciting opportunity to participate in educational research." There were two of them, each a little different from the other. While one was very straightforward, the second was a little whimsical, taking a slightly humorous slant on the former underachievement, and mentioning the kinds of comments underachievers might have seen on their report cards (Appendix A). I sent this email to everyone in my address book who lived in the immediate metropolitan area, describing the participants I sought, and asking that those who fit the profile and wished to participate contact me. I also added a

line requesting that if they did not fit the profile, they forward my email on to others in their network of friends and colleagues. I sent the initial notice the week before Christmas. I received just three responses immediately, a fact I attributed to notices being lost in the chaos of the holiday season. I was disappointed in this low response rate, as a similar notice used for finding potential participants for my pilot project, sent to about 25 people, netted me about twelve responses from potential participants within twelve hours.

I sent a second round of notices the week after the conclusion of the holiday season, this time to employees of two organizations to which I belong: the community college system and the local school district faculty and staff. This directly located another four possible participants immediately, and then a few more via the roundabout network route where someone who knew someone who fit the profiled had them contact me.

Some respondents self-nominated, while others were contacted by a family member or friend, who asked them to contact me. Sometimes I received notice of these one-time underachievers from a parent or spouse, who would then call them and tell them about the study, saying, "Honey, you should talk to this person." Interestingly, though the research shows that males underachieve relative to females at a rate of three or four to one, I received more responses directly from women. When I pondered the possible reasons for this, I thought of two: that men were either less willing or interested in disclosing this type of information, or they were more likely to simply delete the email when they saw the subject line. When I asked two male participants, both of whom were nominated by their wives, about this, they stated they would most likely have deleted the email without even opening it.

Gender notwithstanding, results were the same in all of these cases: the original email branched out into my network, snowballing as it gathered momentum into the community until I found my participants. Though this technique was relatively easy to use, I found it required me to keep sending emails until I found enough potential participants, and to immediately impose order on all the electronic correspondence I was sending and receiving.

Sample Selection and Size

It was impossible to determine in advance how many potential participants I might garner through networking for participants. For the purpose of this study, I sought depth over breadth so elected to recruit four participants who clearly met my parameters for participation. Each participant's story has become an individual case study, as well as a part of the cross-case analysis, lending greater reliability and, perhaps, generalizability to the findings (Merriam, 1988), because patterns that emerge through the study of individual life stories or case studies can help strengthen the internal validity of research.

Purposive sampling was used to choose four prospective participants, representative of intensity samples (Patton, 2002) of chronic underachievers (those who underachieved over a multi-year period), since they were my primary area of interest (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Intensity samples are those that are neither extreme cases of the phenomenon being studied, nor marginal ones, but are, instead, intense exemplars from which we can learn. Because the literature has shown differences in the experiences of underachievement between males and females, both sexes were equally represented.

I emailed approximately 1,000 people and received about 25 responses. Of those 25, several responded initially, but then did not follow up on the next round of email. Once I received email responses to my queries, we corresponded, also via email, negotiating arrangements for a telephone call during which we could briefly discuss the study. If the individual was interested in participating, I made the follow up phone call, explaining that I was conducting a study of individuals who had been underachievers earlier in life, but who were now successful adults. I explained that participation would entail a few emails and telephone calls, the completion of a life-story questionnaire, a lengthy recorded interview (approximately 2-3 hours), and a follow-up examination of the transcribed data.

As individuals responded, I chose the first four who met the criteria of being gifted, were formerly underachieving, and who now felt successful. These occurred in the order of male, female, female and male.   At the point of identifying these four individuals, I stopped going through the qualifying scripts for potential participants.

For the four participants, I asked several screening questions (Appendix B), thus establishing whether there was a good fit between potential participant and the study. The questions in this script specifically addressed several criteria, including whether the individual had ever been considered gifted, and how, as well as whether they considered themselves successful adults, and why.

Only adults past traditional college age were included as potential candidates. Because of the nature of this study, it seemed logical that if people were underachievers as children or youth they required some time to reverse their underachievement, as well as time to develop expertise in their area of success. Since it generally requires at least

ten years to become expert in a field, this meant that my study participants had to be at least approximately 30 years old. Since educational programming designed specifically for gifted students is a relatively recent phenomenon, I chose a ceiling age of 60 years. Historical indicators of giftedness mentioned earlier: grade acceleration, early admission, dual enrollment in college, and special classes, were included as well.

Since giftedness is a difficult to define and often controversial topic, for the purpose of this study a participant was considered gifted if at least three of the following criteria were met: formal identification of high-ability as measured by standardized mental ability and/or achievement tests, individual psychological/educational examination, self-identification (based upon an awareness of differences in ability to understand people, ideas or content knowledge with greater ease than peers), high grades, inclusion in special educational programming for gifted students, grade acceleration, early-admission into school, early college enrollment/dual enrollment in college and high school, demonstrated creative ability, awards for exceptional creativity or academic performance, and/or inclusion in accelerated classes.

In addition to identifying the potential participant as gifted, I also had to ascertain whether he or she considered himself or herself to be a successful adult. Success is a personally defined construct. For the purpose of this study, I examined the criterion of success by asking potential participants three questions: are you personally capable and fulfilled? Have you attained competence in your chosen discipline? Do you feel self-fulfilled? Yes, answers to these questions, combined with appropriate responses to the previous questions allowed us to proceed to the next level.

At that point, candidates were invited to participate in the study, with the explanation that participation was purely voluntary and no compensation would be no provided. Further, I explained that I was looking for two male and two female respondents who clearly fit my criteria. This was determined by my reading their questionnaires prior to interviewing them. None of the dozen or so individuals who returned questionnaires was disqualified from the study; each had appropriately self-identified.

An agreement to participate led me to gather additional contact information, then send the life story questionnaire and consent form to them via email. This was either typed into and sent back to me, or mailed as a hard copy on which they could write answers, and then mail back to me. I offered assurances that all responses would remain confidential, then asked each potential participant to be honest and thorough in his or her answers. Participants were also asked to identify a pseudonym by which to be known in the study data. In the past I have found that offering study participants the opportunity to choose their own name early in the research process seems to warm them up more quickly; they think it is fun. One highly introspective participant, when asked to choose a pseudonym for this study could not simply pick one, but had to ponder the possibilities then choose one with symbolic meaning. It took a couple of months, but he eventually decided, "For a name Casey Ryan. Casey struck out at bat but the town still loved him. Ryan achieved greatness through hard work. The combination of the two seems the most fitting."

After I received four appropriate completed life-story questionnaires, I emailed the other respondents and thanked them, explaining that I had selected my participant

pool for this study. Because this is research I am interested in pursuing beyond this study, I asked the other eight or ten people for permission to retain their contact information for possible future use. Each person gave permission and will be contacted at a future date for an interview.

3.5 Data Collection

I read the questionnaires as I received them, telephoning each participant to negotiate arrangements for a face-to-face in-depth interview. I conducted the interviews during a two-week period, in neutral locations, public places that were relatively quiet and private. Merrifield, Kingman, Hemphill, & deMarrais suggest this telling best occurs in the participant's natural environment, with as little disruption as possible (1997, p.12), so we met in local restaurants in which the individuals felt comfortable. We deliberately did not meet in anyone's home, as I did not wish there to be any discomfort related to either going to a stranger's home (mine), or having a stranger come into theirs. Finally, since I knew from my pilot project that these individuals had most likely not shared their unabridged stories with anyone, including their significant others, I did not wish to put participants in a position where what they said could be overheard by someone they knew.

Armed with a tape-recorder and a completed questionnaire, I came to each semi-structured interview prepared with the same list of *potential* questions (Appendix D) rather than a set script. Ideas regarding the flow of each interview sprang from the particular story each participant revealed in the life-story questionnaire. The initial interview questions emanated from the information provided on the questionnaire by

each participant. During the course of the interview, the answers to the original questions guided the direction I took with new questions, and so forth, until I reached some understanding of the phenomenon the participant was describing, in this case, underachievement. I took notes as the flow of the interview allowed.

Childhood underachievement was documented when my participants recounted their life-stories, with the questionnaires providing additional, and somewhat different documentation. Though I requested archival data such as report cards, school records, personal journals, and etc., they have not been included due to unavailability. Only one of the participants is from this area, and his records have been lost, according to the local Independent School District's central office. Another is from a district in north Texas, and has no idea where to find any records, has none of his own, and his parents are both deceased. A third moved frequently and has not been able to gather any substantial records, and her parents are deceased, as well. The fourth is from a small school district in the Midwest, and was told the records have been destroyed.

3.6 Data Analysis

After collecting the first of the four tape-recorded, in-depth, life-story interviews, analysis of the data began. Pope, Ziebland & Mays, (2000) consider beginning data analysis immediately good practice, as it informs subsequent interviews and helps further refine questions. Innate researcher-curiosity also compelled me to examine the data frequently in order to visualize the emerging shape of that data. According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992), data analysis in qualitative research is a matter of organizing everything the researcher has heard, seen, and read, so she or he can begin to make some sense of

what was learned. Wolcott (1994, p.12) said, "analysis addresses the identification of essential features and the systematic description of interrelationships (of the observations made by the researcher and/or reported to the researcher by others) among them; in short, how things work." Marshall and Rossman (1995) defined the process of data analysis as the bringing of order, meaning, and structure to all of the collected data. Their contention was that qualitative data analysis "is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data" (p.111).

Data analysis began with the development of a database in a text-processing program, *EZ-Text[1]*, for each study participant. Verbatim transcription of the taped interviews, as they were conducted, was performed in preparation for further analysis. This assisted in developing rapid familiarity with the information. Transcribing within 24 hours of each interview made it easier to remember most details, though there were times when information was heard on the tapes but had not been noticed during the course of the interview. All transcriptions, field notes and questionnaire data were not only entered into the programs, but also additionally organized as hard copies into a large research notebook divided into individual cases. A handwritten research journal was kept for jotting down ideas about process, new directions, and questions.

Data were also entered into the *ANSWR[2]* qualitative data analysis program for later use. Although data were entered into these programs, initial coding of all data was performed by paper and pencil methods, and then set aside for approximately one month. After a month, data were again coded from scratch, this time with the software, using

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[1]Freeware for managing questionnaire and test data, available from the Centers for Disease Control, `www.cdc.gov`.

[2] Created to manage the massive AIDS/HIV databases generated by Centers for Disease Control, ANSWR is free, designed for web accessibility, simultaneous use by multiple coders, and to manipulate data in numerous ways. Not particularly intuitive, ANSWR was worth the effort to learn because of the reports and graphics it generated from coded text.

both the original codes and adding new ones as needed. Individual and cross case reports were generated by ANSWR (see samples in Appendices E, G, and J).

Though some might think this dual analysis redundant, it seemed a necessary step in the data analysis due to the absence of a second set of eyes to reason-check my findings. Isolated from my academic community, and having concerns about coding reliability, examining the data on two separate occasions allowed me a fresh perspective on the data. Thus, in this way, I acted as my own inter-coder, and was as careful and honest as possible with the data analysis.

I elected to adopt an inductive approach to data analysis, rather than a deductive one (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this method, which includes a fairly structured set of rules for data analysis, theory develops from the data during a process of creative synthesis, rather than being fitted to any pre-existing conceptual framework. Three types of coding were applied in this study: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) allowing responses to be compared across cases and produce identical computer reports.

Themes, categories, hypotheses and concepts were flexibly developed through theoretical sampling by the constant comparative method (Strauss, 1987). In the constant comparative method, analysis was performed in four stages including, "(1) comparing incidents applicable to each category, (2) integrating categories and their properties, (3) delimiting the theory, and (4) writing the theory" (Glaser & Strauss, p. 105). This was particularly useful in the analysis of case study data, where the cases were analyzed both individually and separately, and both differences and similarities had to be examined. Developing data through the process of open coding required me to keep an

open mind about what the findings communicated. Coding was performed with the goal of attaining *emic* understanding, or understanding based upon participants' own views and reflections. This conceptualizing occurred on multiple levels. Simple concrete codes were sometimes derived from participants' word selection. *In vivo codes,* or the exact phrases participants employed to describe a particular phenomenon e.g., underachievement as "not playing the game " were also used. Contextual codes, or how what was being said fit with the surrounding words and ideas were the third type. The last type, abstract codes, was based upon the concept being described, e.g., "acceptance."

This conceptualizing was done in a microanalytic fashion, considering not only each word, phrase, sentence, etc., but also the semantic possibilities of the words the participants chose to use as well as the manner in which the topics they chose to discuss fit together. For example, consider the concept of *SELF CONFIDENCE.* Though there were some explicit mentions of self-confidence, this concept arose from phrases like, " I don't have to prove to you how much I know," and the contemptuous, "the homework system is designed for the people who need the cheap easy grades," "my thinking led to choices and determinations," or, " I don't have to do what you tell me to because I already know all that, and I don't respect you anyway."

Naming the Data

The next step in my data analysis involved grouping codes together and examining their interrelationships, in much the same way I examine pieces of a jigsaw puzzle to see how the edges might fit together. Some categories, like that of integrity, came together fairly easily. Integrity was a combination of *SELF-CONFIDENCE,*

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refusing to work for people "I don't respect," *(RESPECT-)* a refusal to, "grovel for attention," or "stooping" to ask for help, and a dislike for people who would not accept personal responsibility. Integrity was also meant not accepting *MEDIOCRITY* from either oneself or others, including teachers *(TEACHERS-)* or parents *(MOM-, DAD-).* This stage of data analysis was first approached by making webs of participants' words and phrases, and then followed by creating then manipulating colored index cards in multiple ways until patterns emerged. I found this to be a process both logical and intuitive, logical in that it involved simple categorization of data, but intuitive in that I had to be deeply engaged in the data in order to allow the synthesis of the less obvious relationships between the data to occur.

This was the point in the data analysis where I first squelched thoughts of how what I was finding fit with what I already knew of underachievement and its causes. Being aware that forming conclusions at this early stage could possibly lead to premature closure of the analysis, and/or shallow analysis of the data, I chose to put those ideas out of my head and proceed as though I had no knowledge of literature on the topic.

Axial coding, or the process of relating categories to one another within a "conditional structure" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 127) was the next stage of data analysis. Through close scrutiny of, and immersion in the data it was possible to discover connections or relationships between the various codes assigned in open coding, and relate them to conditions, a process requiring both inductive and deductive thinking. Axial coding was where the whys and hows of the study became apparent, moving the data beyond the more concrete who, what, and where. For this process, I created a matrix (see Appendix I) into which I placed similar data. I looked at not only the concepts and

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phenomena, but at across the cases, as well, for conditions that could be acting on those concepts and phenomena.

Examine, for example, the idea of underachievement. Underachievement, was, of course, found in all four individuals' narratives, but the degree of severity had to be discerned. Next came an examination of underachievement within the context of the educational establishment, as well as the home/family situation and what was occurring there. Only then could I see relationships between the home environmental factors and the phenomenon under study.

It was at this point that the data required extensive manipulation. Though I had read all the narratives, transcribed the tapes, and coded everything, the data had not yet given up their deepest secrets. It took days of rearranging notecards, jotting notes and making giant webs on chart paper before I recognized novel relationships between the data. Once the relationships were noted, however, there came moments of recognition, the sudden intuitive leaps when all suddenly became clear, seeming so obvious I wondered why I had not previously seen the connections.

One example of these relationships between data and conditions involved the code *INTEGRITY*. I had already established that these very bright children displayed intellectual self-confidence. In school they were often asked to perform tasks they considered to be beneath them, or were asked to work for teachers they found undeserving of respect. But, their stories told of families of bright people who valued intelligence and rewarded smart thinking with affection and attention. Thus, while performing low-level, unrewarding, rote/repetitive work might have been a violation of their internal standards of INTEGRITY, it also got them good grades and positive

attention. Not doing the work earned only approbation. In many cases, students knew they were going to invoke severe consequences for violating parent and teacher expectations, yet doing the work violated their personal integrity. What a choice: let others down or let yourself down. Neither aggressive nor insouciant about underachievement, students appear to have simply continued with the behaviors, and resigned themselves to the resultant negative consequences.

Data were examined to the point of saturation, or, "The point in category development at which no new properties, dimensions, or relationships emerge during analysis," (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 143). In this study, the saturation point was reached the second time I worked through the data, on the computer. Selective coding, the third type previously mentioned, led to the careful examination of all data, including categories, themes, and relationships between them.

This was the highly abstract place where an integration of the major categories occurred and theory was built, leading to an understanding of this phenomenon being studied and the people affected by it. The selection of my central category was a synthesis of all that preceded it with my interpretation of that data. There was a most intuitive element to it, sparked by immersion in the data and fueled by years of studying the phenomena of underachievement and giftedness. Because I had effectively kept an open mind regarding the data, I was stunned at the identity of the central category as it had neither been previously recognized nor expected in this study. Yet, it had a rightness that allowed me to walk away from the study with conclusions that seemed both logical and fitting, and the desire to further pursue certain elements of the study.

To clarify, I will return to the example of integrity, and an unwillingness to play

the school game, rejection of substandard performance on anyone's part and adherence to personal high standards. As I worked the data I realized that those were all characteristic of intellectual overexcitabilities in gifted individuals. After recognizing that, I began to see other overexcitabilities in the data. Soon, suicidal tendencies were revealed and substance abuse emerged in all four stories. The code HITBOTTOM was present in each narrative as well. But it was not until after all data were coded, and had been extensively rearranged, and after reaching the realization that each participant described the conscious decision to change sometime after hitting bottom that the central category emerged.

In geology, muck is the useless material removed in the process of getting at the desired minerals; in data mining, we muck about in the data in order to extract the gems from mounds of useless material. But only after we have thoroughly examined all data from every conceivable angle and in every possible combination can we discern the differences between the two. Such was the case in this study. Only after repeatedly sifting and grouping the data did I suspect what I had: that gifted individuals who underachieved in school but later became successful in life had gotten that way only after they had hit bottom and subsequently *chosen* to change their behaviors and minds to become successful.

Gifted individuals who lived in families where school skills such as self-regulation and study skills were not taught or reinforced rejected mainstream educational values, and underachieved. Years of underachievement, painful social experiences, and others' lowered expectations created an extended period of personal disintegration, known to contribute to substance abuse and suicide attempts. After suffering years of

painful episodes, each participant finally took the one path that led to his or her eventual salvation: making a choice to do whatever it took to change.

Were these gems lying on the surface of the data waiting to be gathered and joined with the other valuables? No, they were buried deeply in hundreds of pages of data, and obfuscated beneath more obvious explanations.

Cross-Case Analysis

Four study participants, four different stories collected, four separate analyses performed. Each case was treated as a single case, and then studied as part of a group. Similarities and differences were examined, and emergent themes moved from the particulars of the individual to the generalities of the group and back again (Kiesinger, 1998). According to Merriam, by studying several cases there is an increase in, "the potential to generalize beyond the particular case (1988, p.154)." Similarly, Miles and Huberman (1984, p.151) believe researchers can establish a, "wider range of generality," of the findings, and make a stronger case for the circumstances under which those findings might occur. Even with those claims, however, care had to be taken not to assume that these four individuals were representative of the entire population of gifted individuals who underachieve. "The true value of these qualitative profiles is as case studies" (Merrifield, Bingham, Hemphill & deMarrais, 1997, p.15), with theory arising from the experiences and perceptions of the individuals, and then carefully collected, analyzed and compared with each other. Patterns that emerge during the study of individual life stories or case studies only increase the internal validity of our research. And, though the bounds of this study include only the four stated cases, material collected

in a pilot study two years ago and in questionnaires not yet formally analyzed support the findings of this study.

Confirming the Data Using the OEQ II

Because this type of research demands flexibility in design, with findings driving process, another element was added to the study after data analysis began, for the purpose of verifying findings. The Overexcitability Questionnaire-Two (OEQII, Falk, Lind, Miller, Piechowski & Silverman, 1999) was administered to the participants. The OEQII is a 50 question, objective form with items derived from responses on the original open-ended OEQs (sample in Appendix F). It was created to provide researchers with an easily administered and scored instrument and eliminate the need for elaborate scoring systems and highly trained coders. The original 124 question OEQII was tested with approximately 1,000 subjects aged 10-76, about 225 of whom were in some type of gifted or accelerated educational program. Principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted using the SPSS program, yielding a final stable factor structure of five factors with ten items each. Cronbach's alpha was used to investigate internal reliability, or consistency among the ten items in each of the five areas. All alpha coefficients were found to be highly reliable (alphas above .80 with 1.0 indicating perfect internal consistency). Quartile scores, means and standard deviations were computed, and are provided in the manual.

Although this OEQII has high reliability and content validity, it has not yet been administered or interpreted enough to provide firm conclusions about which scores indicate overexcitability and which do not. Neither do we know the percentage of

overexcitability in any given population, so cannot reasonably say that a 50th percentile score indicates overexcitability and a 25th does not. Further research, and one of my purposes for using this instrument, demands OEQII scores be compared with other measures of OE, such as qualitative data. This dual methodology will begin to establish relationships between characteristics of overexcitable individuals and scores on the OEQII.

Constructed Narratives

Each recorded interview took from 1 to 3 hours to complete. Following the interviews, verbatim transcriptions were performed. The next step involved the transformation of transcripts into narratives, stories by which each individual located themselves, their giftedness, underachievement and subsequent successes in their worlds. Researcher choices were not made regarding what to preserve and what to discard; everything was retained. Choices were only made about the *organization* of the narratives; in what order should the raw interview material that initially had a stream-of-consciousness quality be finally presented?

There are many types and levels of meaning in narratives. The words a person chooses to speak have meanings, the place where we begin and end our stories has meanings, pauses and small vocalizations have meanings. The things we choose *not* to say have meanings. The challenge, then, was to find a way to maintain the integrity of each person's story, while creating a narrative flow. This task was accomplished by using each participant's words, *exactly as spoken*, but moving *chunks* of the transcriptions around so as to create a story that read well. Because meaning resides in both words and

experiences, some chunks were grouped together by words, others by meaning. The flow of the narratives is loosely chronological, from earliest remembrances to the present.

When people answer open-ended questions, they do not usually do so in a linear fashion, though the degree of directness varies from person to person. Instead, we tell small stories to illustrate points in the greater narrative; we digress, circling the issue, repeating various points throughout the entirety of a conversation or interview. Sometimes we just stop, and then resume, without ever having answered the question. Left as raw transcripts these narratives are difficult to follow, the structure of the narrative often interfering with our ability to discern meaning. By constructing these narratives into stories, each has a beginning, middle and end. Each contains a problem or problems, some explicitly stated, some only implicitly. Each narrative has its own cast of characters, concurrent plots and a happy ending of sorts.

The construction of each narrative took at least as long as the initial interview had, though some took much longer. This construction was carefully performed so as to respectfully preserve the intent of each speaker. Creating story flow without the insertion of transition sentences was challenging. The choice was also made to eliminate fillers such as *um, ah, you know* and *like* except where needed for emphasis. Long pauses, laughs, or any other notable instances were bracketed within the text. Words or phrases emphasized by the individual were placed in bold print. A series of dots…was used to indicate small conversational pauses, breaks, in the conversation. Interviewer questions were not included in the text. (see Appendix D for questions asked of each individual).

Keeping Narratives in Their Owners' Hands

Because this is life story research, there was another step in my research process: presenting the collected data to study participants and having them check for accuracy (Nye, 1997; Hones, 1998), otherwise known as member checking. Participants own these, their stories, thus have the right to edit their own words and be sure I have them correct. Member checking was originally to have taken place in a follow-up interview, but for both participant and researcher convenience, was instead done by email. Once I had transcribed the taped interviews and written a biographical piece derived from the initial telephone calls and life-story questionnaire, I emailed this document to each participant, asking him or her to check for veracity and accuracy, and inviting them to change what they felt needed to change. Two participants chose not to edit, one mentioned her perceptions regarding how she "sounded" in the narrative, while the fourth had several changes, stating that some data must have been wrong, and asking that personal identifiers for family members be changed. Though this was a potentially risky undertaking, one where participants could choose to heavily edit work already carefully done, it was a step crucial to the process of narrative analysis. Why?

Data collected and subsequent writings were not only *based upon* the participants' stories, they *were* the participants' stories. When interviews were transcribed, they were transcribed verbatim, with the exception of researcher questions, when possible, and the usual *ums*, *ahs*, and *you knows* deleted to improve narrative flow. Participants completed their questionnaires, told their stories, made their own interpretations of what was occurring, and why, then had the opportunity to examine their interview transcriptions and what I wrote by means of member checks. Member checks were completed during

the finalization of my construction of the narratives, and the last changes were received after I had finished all the narrative construction. Though momentarily exasperated, I did the right thing, and never even opened the email before assuring the participant that I would honor any changes she wished to make. The story was her story. Though I was the one asking questions and searching for narrative spaces in the stories, I was merely the sounding board, the conduit through which their stories and their interpretations of those stories traveled, sometimes for the first time. Knowing "What to leave in and what to leave out: choosing to be sensitive to individuals who allowed me to enter into their stories and lives" (deMarrais, 1998, p.151) was one of my greatest challenges in the writing up of this study, so I handled it by returning the power to edit to the rightful owners.

3.7 Importance and Implications of the Study

A thorough review of the literature has revealed that just one study to date, published this year, has sought personal stories from successful adults who were formerly underachievers (Peterson, 2001). Given students' increasing propensity toward underachievement in this country and others, it behooves us to address the problem in new ways, rather than continuing to study underachievement as it has been studied for over fifty years. We have a firm grasp on all the *reasons* for underachieving behaviors; we have reached the saturation point as regards *rationale* for underachievement, yet we have neither eliminated it nor made even reasonable progress toward that end.

As a parent, educator, and problem solver who has practiced her craft in the educational community with students from preschool through college age, I can

knowledgably state that despite repeated efforts, few of us have found keys that consistently unlock achievement motivation in students. Will our increased focus on competition, and concomitant high performance on state and federally mandated tests encourage students to perform to their measured, expected abilities, or, might it possibly have just the opposite effect?

Einstein said, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." Will we continue as we have, with so many students' futures at stake, or will we adopt a retrospective stance and attempt to learn from past mistakes? Working backward is an acceptable problem-solving method; we teach it to even the youngest children. Perhaps we ought to apply our teachings to ourselves, and work backwards through those who have already solved the problem. Studying their stories, listening to their retrospectives, delivered today in their more powerful adult voices affords us the opportunity to learn from their firsthand experiences of underachievement, why it occurs and what changes it. A personal communication (1999) with N. Colangelo, a practitioner and researcher in the field of gifted education, suggested that this study could prove useful to teachers, families, and students who are currently dealing with painful and persistent underachieving behaviors in a way I had not previously considered. By offering an opportunity to see and hear that current underachievement may not necessarily mean eternal underachievement, that people can and do change over time, we offer hope. That is the power of personal narrative: when we carefully examine others' lived experiences we more clearly see where we fit into our world, as well as how we can purposefully alter our places here.

3.8 Chapter Summary

Chapter Three explained the background of the narrative methods used to conduct this study. Purposive sampling was discussed and information provided regarding sample size and selection. Methods for collection of data from formerly underachieving gifted individuals were delineated. Aggregated data included personal characteristics, school experiences, family information and self-perceptions about all of the above. Trustworthiness and reliability were addressed, as were implications and importance of the study. Chapter Four introduces the participants in the study, Dawn, Karin, Casey and Guido, through their own (constructed) narratives. The appendix contains pertinent documents, including sample instruments and selected transcripts.

CHAPTER 4

Meet the Participants

4.1 Four Constructed Narratives

Mama I'm strange... the thoughts and the wants are the locks
on the back of my brain... I'm descending pretending I'm blending
I'm going insane and they want me to change...Mama I'm strange
if I could tranquilize...I might just vaporize... they couldn't supervise...
they couldn't criticize... I have no evidence... I have no reverence
it makes no difference... I have no innocence

Lyrics: "mama I'm strange", Melissa Etheridge
Breakdown, 1999

This chapter presents the study's participants. There were four: Dawn, Karin, Casey and Guido. Each of them voluntarily elected to participate in this study for his or her own reasons. Each shared his or her story by means of a life-story questionnaire and an in-depth, semi-structured interview.

Enjoy these stories; they are freely given and meant for sharing. As you read, do what all good readers do: note the repetitions, listen to the unsaid, fill in the gaps, make your own meanings, ponder word choices, predict outcomes, wonder why. And, one last thing: put yourself in the characters' places. Invoke your own sense of empathy as you read these narratives. After all, as human beings, are we not all more alike than different?

Breaking out of silence means more than being empowered to speak or
to write, it also means controlling the form as well as the content of one's
own communication, the power to develop and to share one's own unique voice.
Houston & Kramarae, 1991

Introducing: Dawn

> *That one's special.*

AGE?	*50*
Gender?	*Female*
Marital Status?	*Divorced- married twice.*
Occupation?	*Student in college honors program*
Educational Level?	*Approximately two-year degree.*
Mother's education?	*Bachelor's degree.*
Father's education?	*Bachelor's degree.*
Siblings?	*One male, one female.*
Sibling occupations?	*Educator, school principal.*
Parents Occupations?	*Mom, educator. Dad, advertising.*
Current family income?	*<$50,000.*
Childhood family income?	*$50,000-$100,000.*
Giftedness?	*Early admission, school & college, IQ=144, GT programs.*

Though we generally think of researchers choosing their participants, in the case of the woman known here as Dawn, it was more *vice versa.* She had received an unsolicited recruitment email on the network at the community college she attended. Though interested, before agreeing to participate she requested independent verification of the existence of this study and its aims.

Once her questions had been answered, we arranged to meet the following Saturday afternoon for a late lunch. Fair-complected, with graying brown hair and of medium stature, Dawn turned out to be a person of medium age, as well: 50 years old. For our meeting this chilly day she was casually dressed in a blue knit pullover and slacks. Lively, intelligent eyes shone behind large glasses.

We exchanged greetings, then took a table in the corner and set about getting to know one another. Rapport was easily established, and the interview commenced.

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Earliest memory of school? I don't know how useful it is to you…about the time of West Side Story… everyone had seen it and we were playing it in the schoolyard, being rival gangs. And, there were these big painted wooden boxes in the schoolyard in primary colors, and kids were in them pretending like they were forts, and different kids were playing in them; whatever. So, this one little girl, oh...kids were in the boxes, that was the other guys, and we were throwing rocks, at the kids in the boxes to get them to come out, and I didn't want to be in the boxes, and this one little girl popped out of her little box, stood up and said [little girl taunting voice] you can't get me. And, and… and hunkered down, and I stood there with a rock and waited. [voice lowers] And I felt *so* clever for standing there waiting, and when she stood up I threw it. It caught her in the forehead she had sixteen stitches, course, they…they called my mother, to come to school, and…

Mom didn't get mad…mom squatted down and [teary-eyed] and put her hands on my shoulders and said "Honey why'd you do it?"

And the idea, the *effect* of my impact on somebody else…that little girl probably had a scar for the *rest of her life* [voice raised]. I remember feeling proud of thinking that I was waiting and being patient, and what a *horrible* result that was. So that's the earliest memory, I'm sorry to say, of school. So then we moved to Florida a couple of years after that, and you ask later on in there [the questionnaire] about your growing up and [excited] I had the most *amazing* grandfather.

The other day, I started thinking about my grandfather, and I thought, I *don't know what you saw in me*…maybe that's just what love is…but I was [teary and choked up] so privileged. My dad's father, who, who probably didn't give him enough strokes, but he surely did love *me!* Umm, sorry, [small laugh]. I mean, I wish he'd been a better dad to his own son, but.... that would have had an effect on me… but, he was a great grandfather. Well, I remember the way he would talk to my dad, and it was a different generation, and he really loved his grandchildren and he especially loved me, or that's what everybody tells me…and I got that feeling too. I didn't do anything I know of to deserve it but I was very grateful for it and it was noticeable to me and he has been a model to me, but he really listens. Even when I was *five, six* years old and ...anything I said…he... *paid attention* to me. Well, that was just…I… When I was eight I decided that I wanted to be a doctor or a …bi- biochemistry was really my thing, and uh, he went out and bought me a stethoscope, not a kids' stethoscope- a stethoscope! When I was a kid, I wanted to be a biochemist, and I loved to catch bugs and stuff, and one time I caught about a hundred baby frogs [laughing] and put them into a box with sand and my mother said, "well you can't do that." Another time I came home with a mouse and she made me take it back. And I started taking Spanish in school and he got me the Spanish-

English dictionary, the kind with thumb tabs, and…he would take me to bookstores to pick out books, and …

Just the idea that a grownup would care… and that's why, when my sister had kids, I was like, well, I'm gonna be *that* kind of a grown-up, you know, I'm going to really *listen* to these children. I have an older cousin who's my dad's, my dad's younger sister's oldest daughter, who's a year older than me and we'd been out of touch for twenty years, and she's been like a soul-mate to me, and I didn't know this could happen, but it's been at least twenty years um, but it was so….

She said, "I remember Grandy saying,"… hmp… "Grandy saying, ' *that one's special*.'"

And I don't know why, why he'd *say* that, but I do remember feeling that kind of love from him.

I decided I didn't want to have children. I like them, but I didn't want to have to be the one to have to tell them, "put the top back on the toothpaste."

My oldest niece, is, it's amazing, she is my executrix of my estate, and we're very bonded, and we're so much alike, it can't just be proximity, *she's just like me*, and it's *absolutely* genetic, and I think of her just like me, only better. Maybe like my grandfather did with me. They all tell me [nieces and nephews] I have a profound effect on their lives, but they have a profound effect on my life too.

When I was eight, I wrote a paper, one finger at a time, a half-page typed thing, it took me all day to type, on why I was an atheist. And I thought I was an atheist because if you said God was the reason for everything, then that keeps you from trying to find out

what could else be a reason. And it stood in the way. It stood in the way of us finding more out about things. And I was really proud and I took it to my dad.

He said, "Well honey, that's very well written, but you better be careful who you show that to, 'cause somebody will stab you in the back for saying that."

I still remain to be convinced…I see a unity of life…the only way I can get by in this environment without expressing the views I hold, is to say, well, I'm not very religious. I do have *very deep* spiritual values, but I don't think religion and spirituality are necessarily the same things. I went to Sunday school, when I was like four and five, and in my second year of Sunday school I asked if I could not go anymore, and they said I didn't have to go. Both my parents, they were Jewish, they went to synagogue, they went but they didn't make *me* go. In Florida, I suspect we lived in an area that was predominantly Christian.

My mom said she had a twenty-year honeymoon. They were together for thirty-three years before they divorced. But that last *ten*, was while I was…was after the move to Florida, so I was eight…so there I am, it was my kind of…. from the time that I was *conscious* basically. As soon as we moved from Philadelphia where both parents' families lived, now they've lost… all the relatives were now gone, so they don't have any support, dad was not there for the first two years, mom's miserable, so those years I guess I would as soon not remember.

My sister said, my sister has been able to give me some pictures, cause even though she wasn't there, she liked to pop in…ummm…she said you could've cut the tension in that house with a knife.

She said, "I don't know how you survived."

You see, she was already gone…before it got ugly [long pause]. I usually had a knot in my stomach, and mom and dad they used to fight but they wouldn't fight publicly. I mean they would close the door and I could hear them quarreling; it wasn't a knock down drag out, it was quarreling, and the only word I could recognize was my own *name*. Every once in a while I'd hear my name. They'd usually be fighting over…discipline. Mom was one of those mothers who wanted, who was too chicken to, I mean she wanted, she would tell dad, she wanted to be friends.

And dad hated that, he'd say, "Well, that's not fair. I'm not supposed to come home and mow the yard, take out the garbage and discipline the kids…I mean what kind of a world is that?"

He didn't want to play the *hatchet* man. Umm, but mom made him, sort of, so mom would…I'd get in trouble with dad, but anyway, I'd hear some of this, and dad would get mad at mom for *putting* him in that position, and they'd fight about that. My mom was relating to the youth crowd, my mom's more liberal than my dad, this was the long-haired generation, and that's fine with mom, and dad couldn't stand them.

Both of my parents, whether treated or untreated, were victims of depression. My brother's an alcoholic, he wouldn't say he was an alcoholic, but he is. Mom took, mom took, uh, tranquilizers. I think…know, every parent, every *mother* in the fifties was on Valium. Dad was untreated, and well, my mom, when we were in Florida, dad was still working in Philadelphia, so he commuted, there was so much money in the family that my grandfather would send him home. Every weekend dad would come home.

Well, he did that for two years, and here's my mother, down in Florida, my sister was already out of the house, and she had this teenage boy and me and a husband who

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was never around. Mom was real unhappy, mom didn't have friends, so I didn't even have *modeling* of what it is to have friendships so…my brother wasn't an example, cause he didn't have…so I just didn't have, *know how*, to do it.

And I remember one time asking my mom, " How do you make friends?"

I mean, it was really perplexing to me, and she said. "All you have to do is to ask somebody to do you a favor."

And I'm thinking to myself, [voice raises] well, that's so gimmicky, that's so hokey [contempt]! I'm not doin' that! That's manipulative! [heavy tsk, tsk] I'm not gonna try to *make* somebody do something to you know, to make them feel…. oooh, no! And I rejected that and I didn't have anything else to put in its place.

I never…I never got…I mean I couldn't make friends and I didn't know how to make friends and this was … I wish it had been me and that I had been having more fun instead of studying but I was doing, I was just kind of *there*…there's a lot of dead years I don't really remember, not because there's any suspected physical abuse, but just because it was so painful there's nothing my psyche decided it *needed* to remember [laugh].

If you drove me up to the front of the school I wouldn't recognize it. I know it was in Miami. I don't know any of the teachers; I know the name of the school and that is all. It was Miami Palmetto Junior High School. I took Latin: that was good. 'Cause I have actually… I've retained some of my Latin.

One thing that surprised me when I was a kid was that parents didn't… always… know …what the right things to do were…that parents make mistakes. They weren't always right. That's a *really big* thing. From years of therapy, I wondered what was wrong with me that they didn't love me as much, or the same as they did my brother and

my sister. I know now it wasn't me…it was what they were going through. It was much easier [as a child] for me to look inward and say they must have seen something wrong…something I couldn't see…then to think they were *just wrong*. Them being wrong was a scarier thought, because if they're not right then who's protecting you? And that's…pretty…scary. They can't be wrong, because if they're wrong I'm dead.

No, …but my mom…those were the years I don't remember very well, anyway, whenever I remember back to those years, I was alone in the house.

My therapist says, " you remember being alone in the house, because you *wer*e alone in the house." [laugh]

 Ummm, they were not physically there, or, they certainly were not emotionally there, or they were not having interactions… were not having interactions. There lies the truth, so … I think I probably just watched TV, I think that I came home, if there were kids around I could play with them, but we moved around a lot. I probably just watched TV.

 I don't know that she was teaching then, I don't know what she [mom] was doing, I should have gone back and asked her to tell me everything about then before she died…oh, dad wasn't there. Well, mom, here's mom all alone… you don't see the angry side of me too much anymore.

Here's mom, dumped in Florida, with these two kids, her husband's coming home basically on weekends, sometimes. She doesn't know anybody; all her family and stuff are all in Philadelphia, so she's very isolated with these kids. And my brother, he's in high school, and I was this little *twerp*, and the only person she could have like an adult conversation with was my brother. So mom and my brother, they were *real* bonded, and I

was kind of this *leftover kid*. My mom said I was a gift from God. That wasn't family planning, she just didn't get pregnant easily…she said she dreamed me before I was born.

Yeah.

But I saw what my brother was doing and I knew I didn't want a life like that…well *right*…he would be up all night studying…and I… I… He's *smart*, and I don't think he *needed* to be. But I *have* realized this last year--when I had a crisis of confidence over not knowing anything-that… I realized that with everything *I learn* I realize how much more *I don't* know. And I think that, my brother's name is Geoff, I think that hit Geoff at a very young age and he was scared of the *not knowing*, which I have a little bit… I see in myself now too.

I hope, um, I'm determined to not follow in his footsteps but um…. He's seven years older…I wish it was as easy as… I wish I'd had more fun, I wish that had been the trade-off. He was nerdy, you know, and he didn't know how to talk to people. I remember that girlfriends…he was good-looking and smart. Girlfriends at this time… and this was like *really* not done, girl… respectable girls, would come over to the house and they'd be polite to the baby sister who was me, and he'd go up to his room and close the door! [laughing] These poor girls, what did they *see* in him?

So he didn't have much of a social life either. Umm, but I was re…I asked my mom shortly before her death, why did you switch me from school to school, why did I go to so many different schools?

She said, "Well, because we were always concerned about were you getting the best education here, there,"   bla bla bla.

Well, I went to something like, [quietly counting] first grade, second grade third grade, fifth grade, sixth grade, I went to eight schools in ten years!

My brother, who was already weird in high school, well, I think now, he's *completely* mentally disabled… it's a disorder, it's, it's narcissistic personality disorder. He's a recluse. He has his girlfriend, his wife…he doesn't, he can't relate, he's *never* been able to relate to people, but it's especially bad now. He has done a stint in a mental hospital, and he's just, he's paid a *tremendous* price for what mom and him…I'm a big believer in what people call psycho-babble, but *that* was 'surrogate spouse', and that screwed him up royally, and he was already not particularly mentally healthy.

I never made the connection before [now] between why I was underachieving and what was happening at home…I never thought of that. With my brother, he was a high achiever, driven, and he did it I guess for the love and approval, and he got it. That's scary, too, because the only way he'll ever know if people love him for him and not for what he does is to stop doing it…We should just be loved because we're worth loving, because we have wonderful qualities, not because of what we *do*.

Me? It was hidden underachievement, but it was…could masquerade as fair achievement. *Now* I don't want to miss a thing…but then…now *okay* isn't enough…it's got to satisfy me. Mom knew I wasn't working to my potential…I think mom didn't want to have to think about it. I think mom was not in a position where she could be concerned about my development. Dad wouldn't even have known to ask the question. But mom [discouraged quiet tone of voice] was an *educator*, mom had been a *serious student* herself, and I knew she….

Dad would come in and see me sitting five inches from TV with a book in my lap and say, "How can you do homework sitting in front of the TV?"

One night, mom kept me up all night memorizing the …which when I get really tired now…[reciting] About, above, across, after, against, along, among. Around, at, because, of, before, behind, below, beneath…there's forty-two of them, I know them in alphabetical order…and when I get really tired they play in my head… Can't I just *purge that* so there's more room for something more important? [laugh]

I didn't like the regimentation of school. It was a mass approach, and I'm not a mass type person. One side of your report card had grades, and the other had, I guess they called it conduct. There was this thing called self-control and if you got a check that was bad, and I always had checks all the way across self-control. If you challenged, or said anything, you were thought of as intrusive. I remember one time, there was that grit soap, a big-ole bar, I think it was called *Lava* or something, and I said "shut up" to a kid, and she [Mrs. Browning] grabbed me and dragged me into the bathroom. Well, she washed my mouth out with soap; she stuck it in my mouth and dragged it across…. She was mean, she didn't like me; she didn't like kids. Yeah, she was mean and old and ugly, like a *Mack* truck, and she didn't like smart-mouthed kids. I don't know *why* she was ever teaching.

I never did anything outside of school except for *Girl Scouts,* and it was kind of lame, I mean we only did one camp-out in someone's backyard and that was it. I don't know *what* was the matter with my girl-scout troop… I remember we had one one-week thing at camp where we got to do riflery and archery and things, and ride horses…and that was fun.

I liked my fifth grade teacher because he was young, and he was handsome, and he was fun… and fun counted for a lot. He was just pleasant… he seemed to genuinely like us. I really could, I mean I still do, differentiate between grown-ups who like kids and those who don't, and, and I could just spot that a mile away. And he was having *fun*. I don't remember anything we did in his class, but I remember I begged my mother, I found out he was having a birthday, and my mom let me bake him a birthday cake and we took it to his apartment, and his young beautiful wife, she answered the door and she thought it was sweet. You know, I was like ten…and oh, I had such a crush.

You know, I…there was… what I didn't understand was: at home there was tremendous cost for not knowing something. Ah well, so… there were *lots of points* scored for knowing something. One of our [family name] most common expressions was "look it up." You ask somebody something in my house, and we had the encyclopedias and everything, and you *go look it up*. You used the dictionaries and you go look it up. And so when my brother got these big points, for, you know, knowing, and, so I thought I was supposed to know things, or that it was dangerous to *not* know things, and when you're around relatives and stuff and they'd pat you and say, "oh, isn't she *bright*."

But at school, at school…people hate your *guts* for that! But I couldn't… I just didn't… and it's more of a problem with girls than the boys… but I just didn't know what to *do about that.* I didn't want to act, it seemed to me that, I've always been big on not lying and it *seemed like such a lie to act like I didn't know something*…when I did…but there was *such a price to pay for that knowing* and so I just, I *never knew how* to …I mean I *still don't*…. I mean I'm still mastering little tricks, and I've gotten much

more tactful, and I shut up a little more now, so that other people get to say what they think …but…?

I remember being different- I felt very out of things all though school, even when I was young. I never felt superior, but I knew things…and I felt different and not connected, and then I went home and I didn't feel connected there either. But I've always felt rather comfortable in my own skin, maybe because I spent so much time alone.

When people talk about…(and this'll stay with me 'til I die)…when people say the word *'intellectual'* I cringe because that word is so connected in my mind with *pain*…ummm. I mean I have a real anti-intellectual snobbery. Which, now, I'm coming… I'm trying to re-learn a new interpretation of that because in my life it played a *very disruptive* role. For example, I'm like, now wait a second- I'm going back to school now because I *want to learn*, I *want* to be intellectually challenged, and this isn't an *epithet*. And if I can get away without using the word intellectual it is because in my family, that's the way people… *distanced* themselves from other people. And, that's not *what I'm about* and my learning isn't to...to put myself above people, or to keep people away…or say that I'm better than somebody else...and to me that's all connected with what intellectualism is and that's unfair to intellectuals (ism) [laughing] that was just my family's screwy experience.

Once they left Philadelphia, I didn't have a real peer group, we were pretty well isolated. I was lonely, I was bored, and I think I wasn't well liked, but I think I always had one friend… not until tenth grade…in tenth grade I had one good friend that I credit with saving my life…from suicide.

I remember, as I entered my teens, I started drinking. Even when I quit drinking and I knew I was an alcoholic no one believed it because I hid it very well. I felt like *why bother, why bother*, was my mantra. My sister was gone, and my brother was getting tons of attention …[pause]…and there was something so… *humiliating* about that…I was too proud to be *groveling* for attention, you know what I mean? You heard it from… my family…to make somebody like me… I'm not gonna do things to *get approval…. to get accepted*…I'm not gonna go jump through hoops, I'm not a trick pony. [looking upset, sounding defensive]

When I was in high school, we used to pass notes, and we all had nicknames so if we got caught… I was TB "The Brain," and my best friend was PB for "Provocative Blonde." [laugh] She was the PB- provocative blonde, the daughter of the diplomat. She was very talented; she spoke many languages, and the people who interested her were the *odd* ones; she was very proud that who she picked to be her friends were the odd ones… In this weird high school that I was in, there were like eight fraternities and 15 sororities, and this was high school. And they all wanted to pledge her…because she was so talented and beautiful, and she didn't want to be part of that sorority crowd, she wanted these kind of odd-weird characters, like me. The fact that she wanted *us*, when other people wanted her, and that she was looking at who I was…brought me to life.

Andrea, Andy. I don't think I would have lived without Andy, I mean I was just… it had been too dark for too long. I think I came to life because Andy brought me to life. If it hadn't been for Andrea, well, I don't know… That was life-changing. That's the part where I start remembering things again. It was like…I put myself…made myself numb because it [my life] was too painful, and I came back to life then.

And the schools, the private schools in different parts of the country are different religions, and in Philadelphia, my brother and sister both went to Quaker school. My sister…she married a Quaker. My sister… now? The principal of a school for gifted kids…a workaholic, she's *manic* all the time…you have to be prepared to, like, keep moving if you're talking to my sister because she *won't* sit down. Sara is very… stoic so…if she was depressed… you wouldn't *know it*. She's not sharing that…she's not having…my sister doesn't *do* feelings. The Quaker in her says this is too egocentric. I tried to ask her about stuff.

She says, "I don't mind talking about *your* problems, but I *will not* talk about *me."*

It's not that she's trying to be selfish, it's just that she doesn't want to hear her own voice talking about herself. But my brother-in-law, her husband, he has a strong feminine characteristic of being more in touch with his feelings.

I went to New Jersey, well, I was with these newly married…my sister and her husband…in their twenties. My brother-in-law, who has been another very important adult in my life. My brother-in-law, has taken the role, has been everything that anyone could ever dream of … ever dream of in a brother. Sara had gone on to bed; Bill would sit up talking to me as one grown-up person to another grown-up person.

 I was living with my sister; she's twelve years older than me. That was in New Jersey, a town of about fifty thousand people, and they wouldn't skip me and I had taken all the classes they were offering in the eleventh grade. So they just thought it was *wrong* to skip me so they made me take *four* classes I had already had, over again. Out of seven classes I took four I had already had.

The best class I had there was a Spanish III class and I was the only Anglo there and it was GREAT. I mean it was very hard. I worked so hard for a "C!" We read *Don Quixote* in Spanish, we wrote papers in Spanish; it was good for me. I mean that was the one… oh! And there was a theatre class I really enjoyed. But eleventh grade, it was a throw-away. I went through a great tenth grade and a lousy eleventh grade.

 Sometimes Bill would get called into the office… at school, because I'd cut school… I was just cutting…it was terrible! *I would not go to class*…this was when I was taking four classes I'd already had [laughs] and I was cutting school, and he'd get called on me [laugh]; he was my *guardian*.

 He said that, " I will write you a note once a week, to have Fridays or one day to miss school, if you will tell me *something educational* that you will do with that day, and it can't be the same thing each Friday."

So, I volunteered… at the *Brownsville Development Training Center…* I did recordings for the blind; I did all these different things and I got to get out of school to go do them. Bill would write a note saying that I was sick…he was cool…but he was like in his twenties…by the time his own kids came along he already had practice with me. Except, his kids were a piece of cake, except Terry who is just like me…I do for her what Bill did for me. Yeah, yeah. There have been some very special moments, there have been some horribly gut-wrenching memories, and then there are some beautiful ones

And…and… and… after eleventh grade I *only needed* two credits to graduate sooo… I had signed up for night school. And my sister had found out I was like, not showing up, and found out that the University of South Florida had an early admissions program.

She said, " You should apply," and she really nagged me.

So, I remember the interview, the guy who had to decide, they had like one slot open. They had taken all their good people, they had all their really good people, they needed to fill this one extra slot. And they were a little worried about me because I had shown no real ambition…and…I was smart enough, but I was *very young* so they were worried about my maturity, and… and I didn't show any real academic motivation.

So they said, "Well, we'll take you and we'll see how it goes." [laugh]

I got in, and I was a kind of mediocre-good student, a B- student…B student. [Laughing]

"Nuh-uh, I don't know how to do that [study]; I never had tried that." [laughing]

This first year …well I did ok. I did my same B stuff …. they can't throw me out…it's not like I was failing or anything.

Later on, when I started college, in that last year of high school, that last year that turned into early admissions to college, I was dating a boy who was Catholic, we lived across the street from them, his parents absol…it was the first I'd ever come across anti-Semitism, that I was *aware* of anti-Semitism. They hated that I was dating their son…it was a real crisis in their household, and I broke up with him over it.

I said, "You know, you can't…you're gonna cut yourself off from them," and he would have picked me. His parents came over and talked to my parents. God, it was awful!

I got out of school, I should have been class of '70, I got out of school in June of '69, and I started college when I was 16, and I turned seventeen right after school started. I left full-time college at 17, but was in and out for about seven years. I was politically

active and that was the most important thing I did for the next ten years. I was active in the Women's and Anti-War movements…a whole different time….it was…but it was important that I felt like I made a difference and had something to contribute. I learned about collaboration. I learned about leadership. I learned about caring about things outside yourself. Making a difference in the world.

I didn't do any intellectual…not since the seventies…in fact I bailed out of school entirely in like '74 or '75…not reading or studying since. I was married from '75 to '78. I was married from 23-26. I was politically active. I was moving around. I was drinking a fifth a day and decided [parenthetically] this isn't a good idea, so just quit, so my body chemistry went to hell. And that's when I, that's when I had my breakdown.

I quit drinking…I quit drinking and I probably sent my…I decided it would be a good idea to quit drinking…and I didn't know you're not supposed to just do that… And…and the doctors actually thought it was chemical. Like we make it seem better by saying it was *chemically induced.* But… a breakdown's a breakdown whether it's something…the mind-body …whether it was in my mind or my …chemistry…well your chemistry is your mind…well you know my body chemistry caused the breakdown, *what*ever, ummm… Let's just say I was real sick for about a year and a half. So I had a breakdown; you're afraid to go out of the house. When you're crying all the time and you're supposed to be somewhere, and you can't make yourself walk out the door. That's when I went home [to my sister's house].

I still consider myself, still, an alcoholic and eating disordered…I just manage it. The eating disordered part was, uh, about six or eight years [duration]. I drove a city bus…13 years, here, Houston and San Antonio. After the political activity I was back

here, well… then I had the breakdown. Then I was back here. '82-'84 were sort of the breakdown years. I tried to commit suicide a few times. One time I woke up in the hospital and my brother-in-law was there and he was sitting beside the bed, and he was crying. To s*ee a grown man cry*!

 And I said, "Why are you crying?"

And he said, " Because I don't want to lose you."

I mean, *my brother-in-la*w! I didn't *meet* him until I was 13 .He's a great guy.

I know that people who have fallen in love with me, [small chuckle] have fallen in love with what they see as a passionate side of me. And people who [pause] whose lives are not exciting, which I guess are most people's, notice I'm *on a course*, and really dedicated to what I'm doing. To be in a house with someone like that- that can be nerve wracking-- and seeing me doing this [working hard in college honors programs] , and… I'm not having a lot of fun right now, but it *is* very satisfying. *Very satisfying.*   My first husband, he was a very quiet, unassuming kind of guy, and I'm exuberant I suppose, and I ….um… and I know he was attracted to that. On the other hand, I find being around someone who is *quiet* attractive to me.

I want to have someone who loves me, and the *me loving* part is even more important than the *me being loved*, but I appreciate both. But my self-image wasn't tied to that, never has… I count on myself, so…[some stuttering] …I do believe that people do need people…..but out of our greatest pains come our greatest strength, and I really am a self-reliant person, and I do have a core of close friends, and as far as intellectual stimulation, I get that from my classes, and fellow students, and let's face it…

I wouldn't say I actually enjoy reading, but I do it because I have to know what's in there. If I can look at it on the Internet, I am more of a visual learner, and I'd much rather look at pictures, because when I read I have to read it over and over to get it [laugh]. This will seem kind of roundabout…when I took my intro to psych class, I had to pick a book from a reading list, and there was one I had been meaning to read anyway. I can't think of a name right now, but it was a guy, a psychologist who had survived a Nazi concentration camp, and his story was about the need people have for a purpose in their lives, that the source of psychological trauma is that they haven't defined a purpose.

The reason that I bring this up is because…how you define success… achievement, many ways to define achievement… as far as the way *I* define achievement is ... having a sense of purpose and knowing one's place and what one has to contribute in the world and feeling satisfied…moving in that direction. So, in those terms of success, yes, I am absolutely successful. [long pause] It's a never-ending process, so you're never sort of like, at the end, there, but you're always in the big *becoming of …* My philosophy teacher would be happy with me.

They both died in 97…mom died in January and dad died in October. Dad died, I'm sure, because he couldn't survive on this earth without my mom. I was in my mid forties and ….I….decided that if I was gonna make a change I'd better get after it because I was gonna be too old to do it. I wanted to go back to school.

 My parents had left me some money, and I said, "You know, if I could take a cut in pay from my bus-driver's salary, I could afford to go back to school. I'm just gonna do that."

I just wanted *to know* things, I was getting *frustrated* with all the things that I didn't know, so I'm gonna go back to school, not to *do* anything, but because there's stuff, I wanna *know;* things that I don't know. Dr. C--- here at Montgomery College, I had her biology class, and we did that gene experiment, where we had a crime scene and two suspects, and I mean even now, genetics just fascinates me [excited demeanor]. I loved test tube stuff, and WOW, there's that part of me that….I remember lighting the magnesium strip in my chemistry set, when I was a kid; it was so bright.

And I'm going to take whatever I wanna take, I'm gonna follow wherever my interests lie. Right now I think it's…it's either…I had four majors initially: Psychology, Sociology, Biology, and Math. And, uh, after calculus, I took like four math classes, and I said, like oh come on now, you're not going to do anything with the math….it was taking too much time. I wanted to concentrate on this other stuff, let the math go, and if you change your mind you can always come back to it. So I'm still going to…I still can't decide between genetics and psychology, and I still haven't 100% decided that, but it's leaning toward the psychology. Forensic psychology, that's fascinating.

But I'm really concerned about these boys [3]. I'm interested in finding a niche for me that's not over-trampled. A lot of people are interested in this genetics stuff because of the money; I don't care about the money. There's lots of people who can do that, but there are *not* lots of people who can *do what I want to do* with these boys.

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Three hours after we started we were done. During that time emotions had run the gamut from joy to sorrow, admiration to contempt. Dawn's exuberance had shown itself

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[3] *These boys are what she refers to as "Columbine kids." These are the boys who are isolated, bright, at-risk boys who have the potential to act out in devastating ways. Dawn wants to make them her primary focus.*

throughout the interview in body language and a voice that sometimes got away from her.

We walked to our cars. Goodbye had a hesitation to it and our handshake spontaneously

turned into a hug. The sharing of stories often has that effect.

Introducing : Karin

Use my real name.

AGE?	*34*
Gender?	*Female*
Marital Status?	*Married, separated..*
Occupation?	*Art Teacher.*
Educational Level?	*Bachelor of Arts.*
Mother's education?	*Bachelor's degree.*
Father's education?	*Master's Degree.*
Siblings?	*1 sister, 1 brother.*
Sibling occupations?	*Brother: Air Force; Sister: Government Agency*
Parents Occupations?	*Mom, Teacher/Social Worker; Dad, Media specialist*
Current family income?	*< $50,000*
Childhood family income?	*~ $50,000*
Giftedness?	*H.S.Salutatorian, ,Creative production, Programming*

I met Karin Hall at a local pancake restaurant early on the morning of President's Day, a day off for us and all other employees of the local school district. She was a tall, slender 34 year old woman with wavy brown hair and a clear, fair, complexion. She looked very much the picture of what she was: a Midwestern-Protestant girl. Karin came accompanied with her daughter, an energetic and intelligent toddler. Though the child's presence led to a shorter than average interview due to fussiness, the work still got done.

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You know what? I think I *always* knew things other kids didn't. I think, though…
I was just remembering when we were in Australia…the babysitter was going to the
doctor… she was taking us with her, when she just wanted to ask the doctor a question
about nosebleeds and stuff. And I heard her talking with the lady that was in the front
with her. And I stuck my head in and said, "you get nosebleeds sometimes when you pick
your nose too much." They just dismissed that. Then the lady came back and said, "You
get nosebleeds sometimes when you pick your nose too much is what the doctor said,"
and they asked me *how* I knew that. I think I knew it because my dad probably said
something to me about picking my nose and my nose bleeding or something like that,
but, things like that… where I just knew something. I just *know* how to put things
together sometimes, where I can look at something and I can see… I can just instinctively
know how that might have been put together, or how I might go about….

There are three kids in my family: my sister and my twin brother. I'm the oldest
of the twins. I was in first grade 'cause we skipped kindergarten. So we were early. It
wasn't even really that we had skipped kindergarten, it was just that we'd already had
that, because we had started in Australia. So…I used to get made fun of
because…because I talked funny and because I was a twin, and I was younger than the
other kids.

I remember one time… that it was on the playground, I was still in elementary
school….fourth grade…third grade, fourth grade. This boy told me I was a *know-it-all*. I
think it surprised me but… it was… I didn't *want* to be. You know what, I think my
parents had also told me I was a little-miss-know-it-all all the time, but hearing it from a
peer was… it made me take stock a little bit. It really…kind of made me take stock a

little bit because I decided I didn't really want to be a *know- it- all*, you know, not in the sense of…of how it was of …of the connotation that was with it. I wanted to just kind of change that. I wanted to be smart, but I didn't want to be a *little- miss- know- it- all.* Fitting in, yeah. Yeah, especially with girls.

I think that being called a know-it-all is not cool. The boys can…they can get away with it more, but when I think about my class, well, it was the girls who were smart. Mostly it was the girls who were smart- I'm trying to think of who was smart, and I'm coming up with girls at the top of my list. We only had a few girls…we had a lot of boys…There were mostly boys, but it was the girls who were smart. One other thing, when I was in college, I remember this one guy who was…he asked me what my…no, he *saw* I was on the Dean's list, and he commented on how *surprised* he was, because he said, " you're *always* out doing something and I *never* see you studying." So, he was really surprised.

Yeah, I always had my hand up in class. My one teacher would say, "Can someone besides Karin answer?" I thought that was cool; I *liked* that. I usually picked up things pretty fast. Sometimes now I get frustrated with my students because, because to me it's so obvious I can see it, and I don't get how they can not see it! Sometimes I have to have a student explain it because I'm *obviously* not explaining it in a way that they can get it.

Just your traditional family. I mean I was always the most outspoken one; I talked back a lot, got in trouble for it a lot. But basically…well my mom taught me how to sew, and to cook, and I was always the one who cooked, and I was always the one who like baked pies and stuff. I was always the one who took care of the fruit 'cause we had these

trees in the backyard… because I would rather be outside doing that kind of stuff than cleaning in the house. So I would volunteer to mow, and we each had our own mowing chore 'cause we had a big backyard.

My dad taught me photography when I was a fifth grader not just that… well, he made a little pinhole camera that I could just go around and take pictures. Then, a couple of years later, he set up a darkroom in our cellar so I could learn how to develop film and how to print film…so when I got to college I had to take photography, but I already knew all that. It was kind of an easy class; it was kind of nice to have a class where I could just have fun. But, I just thought it was kind of *neat* that my dad taught me all that when I was still basically in elementary school, when here were people in college that didn't have that knowledge.

When I was in fifth grade we had to make a play… and I remember all the girls, and there were only five girls in my class… so all the girls got together and did the play *"Guardian Angels,"* and I wrote the play for that. Yeah, I like to write, too. I did write a lot of poems, especially in my junior and senior years of school. It's not…that I didn't even really think about it, I'd just start writing and they just came out, and there'd be a poem.

My mom was a teacher, my dad still is a teacher, my grandmother was a teacher, a lot of teacher oriented…and they're also farmers. When I was in…in elementary I got mostly all S's; we didn't have grades, and I just remember S's all the way across, but I wish I got more E's… *excellents* …I wanted to have more excellents, but I didn't know what the criteria was. I just kept getting S's. I can't remember what my grades were in junior high. At first I thought they were just average, but then…. I realized they were

probably more B's. Then when I got to high school I got mostly A's. I almost always got A's.

I called my dad recently and he said, "Well, all of you were like that; none of you ever brought books home really to study."

I know my sister and brother brought books home every once in a while, but he said, " You know, Karin, I don't remember you *ever* bringing a book home."

So….which kind of made sense because I remember my mother sometimes saying, " Why don't you guys study," and we said, "We don't have anything to study-we didn't bring our books home."

I'm surprised too! I'd think that with two parents who were teachers… I'm surprised they didn't push me to do more.

Oh, I knew I could do that… make B's without studying. I…I was salutatorian of my class. The only reason I wasn't valedictorian was because I never studied. I think I would have studied now. I realized that had I *just even*…the whole concept of being valedictorian or salutatorian didn't even *dawn* on me until… until I noticed that I was so close to being salutatorian that I might as well study a little bit, you know? In my school, the grading system was a little different, because an A was a 93 and above, and a B was an 86 to a 93, and that kind of thing so...I didn't usually get in the 80's, I usually got in the 90's, 90 and up so…

Nah, I didn't figure out what I was supposed to be doing, I was still doing the same things. I think I was just not as…I probably wasn't …well, I had my, my *friend*. I think on the side of the social issue maybe I felt a little bit more like I fit in. I was kind of easing into my role in the school.

Yeah, I was pretty much a loner through most of school, then I had a friend in high school. My friend was kind of like from a farm, from a farming family. So she lived…she wasn't involved in sports and I don't even know if she really would have been. She was kind of opposite me in that way. She was kind of quiet. We met at church. Her parents and my parents, we all went to the same church, so we were in the same groups and the same confirmation class and same Sunday school and that's how we were friends. So even before she started coming over to the high school we were friends and we got to see each other at least once a week. That was one of…the big *joy* of going to church is that I got to see my friend Audra. You know…we're still friends.

But, but it's not like we would…just sit around…we always had to have something constructive to do. And for me…if the TV was going to be on, especially on the weekends, then we had to be doing something constructive like folding clothes, or...you know, for me, I picked all these things like… I could fold clothes and have the TV on. I could pod peas or pit cherries and have the TV on. *But better than that*, I could *draw* and have the TV on. I could *get out of so many house chores just by sitting down with a pen and paper in front of the television and drawing.* And I remember my brother would get...get *really angry* …I remember him saying, " Why does Karin get to sit there in front of the TV, and *we* have to be over here cleaning the kitchen and stuff. And my mom would say, "Well, *you* have nothing else to do and *she's* using her time *constructively*."

Oh Yeah, I was really validated for doing my art! Unbelievably validated. That's why I think maybe they didn't push me harder. Plus, I mean, I wasn't…. I was getting

really good grades. I don't think anyone knew I was underachieving except me. You know what?

Even when we were little, we'd go to our grandparents for Christmas and they'd have Santa Claus. Santa Claus would actually come, I don't remember who the guy was. One of their neighbors came as Santa Claus, and we always had to do some sort of talent or something for Santa…a gift, and I always drew Santa pictures. And then when we gave him our presents…I think my sister played him her instrument.

I'm an art teacher and an artist. I love to draw and also I like to paint. I like drawing because I like to draw photo-realistically, but it takes a lot of time, and with her [the baby] I never get to do that, never get to the right brain shift. I never get quite to do what I want to do just yet, but she'll get older and I'll be able to do it again. I like sculpture, I like clay…I like all of it.

I've always drawn; I never really considered being an art teacher until at least I got to college. I didn't take very much art in high school . I took Art I. It just didn't fit into my schedule. I took two sciences and math and then I took all the academic subjects. Then when I got to college, I went to Concordia… a teacher's college which was geared to training Lutheran school teachers… and, this is going to sound really bad, I decided that I wanted to have the scholarship money for being a church worker, but I wasn't sure I really wanted to *be* a church worker. So then I decided, well, I'll go into art because it's not so easy to find art teacher positions and if they couldn't find a position then I could go into public school and could still keep all my money. So I started-out in art and decided I wasn't sure if that was really what I wanted to do, so second semester of my freshman year I decided I would go back to doing all my science and math stuff.

And the art professor goes, "Oh, well, you'll be back; I'm not worried about you."
And sure enough sophomore year I was back; he was right, so from there I discovered
that… I think I found art more challenging. And maybe the time and the patience in art
were just… more…a little more rewarding.

 I've always wanted to be a teacher, I just wasn't sure I wanted to be a teacher in
the Lutheran system. Of course…then by the time I was a senior, I was just *begging* God
for a job in the Lutheran system and I thought, "Oh my Gosh, what did I do?" And you
can't… art teachers for Lutheran systems don't come so easily, and all this stuff and
…He had a plan. So...it wasn't a problem. In fact I had my call for my job… I was one of
the first ones from my class that was placed.

I probably always wanted to be a teacher because my dad was a teacher; my mom
was a teacher. They were basically the sort of…*do what you're supposed to do, entertain
yourself, we don't drive you all over town, keep yourself occupied, do your chores,* and
we could go to the pool or the park, or do whatever we wanted. I think it's easier to do
that when you're in a smaller town. That's basically how it was. We rode our bikes all
over town. Of course, everybody in town knew us, too. There were only 1,000
people…and my dad's a teacher… and my brothers and sisters and I…we were…we
delivered newspapers when we were…my first job was when I was in third grade. I
started delivering newspapers, so everybody knew us around town. You couldn't get
away with anything, not that I tried to. It was like a big extended family.

For me, my dad has always been there. I mean, my mom was there too, but, I
mean…my dad has *always* been where I am …he's a schoolteacher, and my mom was
working in the welfare system so she was… she was what I would consider…had an

outside job. But my dad, because I was in school…so my dad was there because he was teaching in the school. But he became the media center specialist, so I would see him when we'd go to the library. My grandma was the library person too, so this was kind of funny. When we had basketball games or whatever, they always had him… the coaches would have him taping the games, so both of my parents were always there at all the games.

So when we came from school we would run home from school, we lived a half mile from school. I would run home from school, so that we could have a half hour of TV before we had to turn it off, 'cause my dad would get home, then we would have to start working on whatever…I mean it was funny, I mean we had a *half hour* then my dad would be home. And my mom would have a list of chores for us to do, and boy, we'd better have some of those done before my dad got home. But, you know, a *half hour*. No, their expectations weren't real high, but they weren't really low, either. They weren't checked out- they were actually pretty involved, and as long as we did what we were supposed to do, we stayed off their radar screen.

I don't know, I answered the study because it said something about being gifted and not having it recognized or something. And I just felt that described me. I don't think that I really verbalized…to myself…that I was fooling everybody, and, and that I wasn't doing what I was capable of until I was in college. Because when I was in high school, my life was so…full; I had sports. I mean, that was after school until 6:00.. sports and then, most people had to study but I could just go home and do my chores and go to sleep. I thought it was normal that…my brother and sister never had to pick up a book

either and my mom and dad never really told me to bring home my books and to study, so I thought it was normal. Which gave me *really* bad habits when I got to college

I know, but I know I can do that…which is good because right now…I know I'm not doing my top stuff, that I *could* be doing, but I've got *her* to deal with, so in that sense it's really nice 'cause with her, I can just get by, and people don't even know, and its nice.

I never got called to the office to see my test scores or anything. It wasn't like here, where you did all that test prep before you took the test. I remember I took the ACT, and I just did average on that. I've always wondered how I would do on the SAT because it's more a thinking and problem solving kind of thing. I took the MAT and I didn't really study for that, and I scored really high. I just kind of went with my gut, and I usually got it right.

I remember one particular thing: it made me so mad because I should have been in that group! It was a problem- solvers group in school. I didn't remember there was any criteria or anything, I don't remember anybody taking any tests to decide who was in that group. I remember asking the counselor if I could be part of the group, and he said it was for, "the gifted." I asked him how he determined who, "the gifted" were, and he didn't answer my question. I wanted to know if they took some test because I would like to take it. He just made it seem like only a certain number of people could be involved, and that I was *not* going to be one of them. I think I might have been a freshman or sophomore in high school. This was back in Nebraska, there wasn't any gifted education or anything. I remember it as being all the popular kids, and you either got tapped or you didn't; I didn't.

My schools didn't have different tracks, or any kind of special programs for gifted. It didn't have different tracks, but I took like … I took science…Chemistry and Biology II in my senior year, and *nobody* did that. I took math all the way up through calculus and trigonometry. I mean, my electives were…they were math and science and *hard* classes. And, I got… not B's, no… I got A's. If you need to have proof, you can call my dad and he'll tell you. The only time I studied was…my senior year…there weren't enough classes to fill up my schedule so I had to take study hall.

I'd say in college I was surrounded with lots of people who "got it." I was surrounded by all those *artsy* people…my roommate was really smart as well, and she was really gifted and talented in art. My husband is… incredibly gifted…creative….he's got two doctorates ….so… which, you know what? I've always had friends…my husband is… he's thirteen years older than I am. He's a lot older than me. Even when I was in high school, I tended to relate better with… to the older…. older people, even… even adults who had children. I felt that I related to them better. We could have conversations that were actually *real.*

I like things that are real, because anything other than that is only…a ...waste of time [laugh]. Because…I don't like to do things that are fun if they don't have any meaning to them at all. I think that I'm very…I look for *the meaning.* you know? I like…*authentic*. I don't like to be around people who, who…. I don't think it has anything to do with *intelligence*, really, but the ability to see the world for what it is. And to comment on it, no matter how…lacking their knowledge might be, they still, "this is how I feel about this and why," or " Hey, look, this is what I learned and what do you *think* about that." Yeah, it's a kind of intolerance for ignorance or stupidity. Yeah, and

sometimes that's *really hard*, especially with my …the students… because sometimes, they're just *not thinking*, and that frustrates me, and irritates me to no end. And I've started telling them…say, look! You are just being *lazy*, you need to *think* a little bit. That's my big word now: *you have to think!*

Maybe that's why I'm doing art- because I can actually explain that a little more. I've tried to help people with their math before, and I'm just not able to explain it…I can see it, it seems obvious, but I just get frustrated when I try to explain it. It's a whole other side of the brain; it takes me a little bit to even get into that.

I'm surprised at myself at how blunt I am with the students, but I just think they really need to hear… My big thing, my latest thing is 'lazy," is what I tell them. Or, I have said, "Look, you're *not dumb*," so don't pretend to be. They like to pretend they don't know, when they really *do*. Or, or they *don't even try*, they want you to think for them. I mean, I know not everybody is blessed with a great *processor*, but, I wish they'd just *turn it on*. That's what's frustrating to me, and that I find intolerant, is people who won't turn their brains on! They're just being lazy. I find that it's usually my really smart ones that I have to tell, "you're being lazy; you have to think a little bit."

When I got into college there was one lady who… I turned in a good, a really good project…at least I thought it was. She gave me a C.

She said, "You can do better than this."

She's the first person to ever call me on …you know she goes, "I know that you didn't spend the time on this that you wanted me to believe you spent," and so on and so forth.

No, no other professor, *none* of the other art professors *ever* did anything like that, and so, she…she…that was the best grade that I think I ever got was a C. She called me on the…my lack of…my *just get by* attitude I think. But *I worked hard* for her. Because that was…I thought that was a good thing. No, it never made me mad. I thought that was…pretty um, pretty insightful of her; I thought that was pretty good.

And, I turned in my final project. I turned it in and it was *really good*. I got an A-. I didn't get an A, I got an A-. Because… it was a book of poems that I wrote and I illustrated them. And I turned it in and she…there were a couple of the lines of the poem, when I pasted them in they were just slightly off. She gave me an A-. But it was ok. I think she…she knew she could do that with me because I was a slacker. And I worked hard for her.

If you asked anyone in my life if I was a slacker? They would say, *"NO WAY!"* You could ask anybody I worked for and …it's like… One time when I was teaching in the Lutheran system we'd go around and just say one thing that we'd like to work on, I don't know; we were doing this in-service thing, and one thing that I said… that I'd like to work on and I said, "Well, I'm lazy." And everybody's like, no really, you have to pick…it has to be something legitimate. They wouldn't believe me when I said, " No, you don't understand… I am *really* lazy." Nobody, nobody believes me when I tell them. They *don't get it*! And I still…when I was filling this out I was realizing, *oh my gosh*, I am *still* the *same* way. I mean, I need to…all the things I put on there at the end, what I would do if I was to go back and…teach myself self-discipline. I decided that, well, you better start *now!* 'Cause I don't want…she's [the daughter] not going to be able to get away with anything. She's going to…as far as …she's *not* going to be a slacker. And so

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I'm going to have to…I want her to be really self-disciplined, so I need to get my house cleaned and I want to get it all… to kind of be all organized and …it's just a skill I need to learn and that I never learned in high school. So my goal is to at least get a little bit better with my discipline…so that she will learn. But I have, you know, like organized mess…

 I think I'll always struggle with organizing myself. You know, I had people who, teachers who…we had to write…that same day, the in-service day, we had to pass around a piece of paper and write something nice about the person sitting next to you kind of thing. One of them said, " I have never seen somebody who had such an organized mess." Whenever somebody came in to get something from me, I just said, "Well, give me five minutes and I'll have it for you." I can't find things if people are right in my face, but, I don't even look for it. I just continue doing what I'm doing, and all of a sudden it just pops into my head, and oh, yeah here it is. And I'll just go over there and get it.

Sometimes getting started is hard to do. Unless I'm feeling motivated for it, or I get some kind of inspiration. Then it's really easy to get started. Sometimes…sometimes on other things it's hard to finish, because then it gets… I've solved the problem and it's just a matter of finishing. Probably so…I'd rather get started then finish…probably if I

I do like things to be really organized. But then, I do like having a routine. I like kind of planning and like knowing what's going to come up, but then if we deviate from that, that's fine. Just so there's a place to start. We don't have to end up doing what was planned, just so I kind of…have a …know there's something there. Generally it tends to deviate all over there, but I like…having a kind of routine.

was to take stock and look at my life, I'd probably have a lot of unfinished projects. You know, I start to clean, but I never finish it. [laugh] I have *lots* of things that I've started sewing but I've not finished them. So…A lot of my clothes I sew, but because I started at [the school she teaches at], and since I have her…Yeah, I just started there, but…I haven't quite found my routine, but I'm starting to. So once I've found *that* I'll be a little bit more…Yeah, I'm separated.

But, I did think that …I thought things were going to be different now. Over Christmas, I thought…he was going to go back home, but in talking to him just the other day, he says " We're just two different people, traveling two different roads." And I said, "well, marriage is also supposed to have a together road." And he says, " Well, I like to travel my road by myself. " He's a loner. That's the problem then, you can't have a marriage and travel a road by yourself. So I don'' believe that we'll remain separated. And he referred to me as a single parent, so I think that was a little clue… two. Ummmm, married two years. Hard? I don't know. She's such a joy… whenever I …whenever I might….sometimes it's been hard, but not really, not so much…I can't even regret one instant of marrying him, or knowing him, because then she wouldn't be here and she is, she is a joy. I'm the eternal hopeful person, so, I mean, he doesn't want to take care of the separation legally, so I'll leave him alone and he'll be back for a little while. I don't know what that means. We'll see.

We're totally opposite that way. He's *Mr. Spontaneous*; he doesn't have routines. But he's also a very creatively gifted person as well. He doesn't have routines. He writes poems and like, like…puts them to music…he and lives totally in the moment.

Yeah, that's right- any change that is happening with me is because of me. No one ever identified me as gifted; no one ever noticed I was underachieving. But I knew. Even now, I'm not ever really pushed. One of the reasons I married my husband is because he expected more. And, that's why, if …if we can just find a way to make it work between the two of us…so….

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The baby was fussy and wiggly after an hour's confinement in the high chair. It was time to leave and my instincts said something was missing; some element critical to the story. Despite a few long pauses in conversation, some puzzling over where to proceed next, and a few changes in direction, I was leaving the interview feeling quite incomplete. Listening to the tape later, while transcribing, I heard myself remark on that very issue during a moment when Karin was preoccupied with the baby.

Though Karin was obviously a very bright young woman, the picture she had painted simply did not work. She had been involved in extracurricular activities throughout school, had parents who were concerned and loving and present, and a close relationship with her siblings. From whence had her hidden underachievement sprung? Was it possible that in her case there was no obvious "cause" for her condition?

Careful questioning from numerous angles had failed to produce any new information, and it seemed there would be no more unless I crossed the line into prying, an act I was unwilling to commit. As Karin prepared to leave with her daughter, there was some small talk, *exit talk*, as it is known in narrative research. I asked her to email me if she later thought of anything she wanted to add to our interview.

Keys and check in hand, I switched off the recorder and gathered my things in preparation for leaving. Karin stood, then nonchalantly added, "I wasn't sure whether I

was going to share this or not; I'm not sure if it's important… when I was a child I was molested."

We walked out to the parking lot together, and continued talking with freeway traffic as our backdrop. Karin strapped the baby into the car seat, then continued.

" Looking back now, I see that I withdrew and showed all the signs we know to look for, and I was angry that my parents didn't see it. After all, my mom was a social worker and my dad a teacher, and *they didn't see*. I spent a lot of time in my room, not fitting in, and I guess now it was a good thing that I could still get good grades without ever doing anything because I don't know how I would have made it if I'd been failing school, too.

I spent a lot of time alone in my room, drawing and writing poetry, and I think that helped a lot. Looking back, I still can't believe no one saw what I was doing, and that I didn't tell anyone.

It happened when I was nine, and I just forgot about it until I was in high school, then I forgot about it again until I was in college. Then I had to deal with it, as a result of a relationship with someone, *some guy*, who took total advantage of me. One night, I sat in the closet in my dorm room for hours, first listening to my roommate talk about me with him, then waiting for her to turn out the light and go to sleep so she wouldn't know I had been in there listening. She fell asleep with the light on, so I had to stay in there awake for a long time, because I also didn't want her to find me sleeping in there when she woke up in the morning. When I finally came out, she was asleep with the light on. I sat down and wrote a poem about why suicide would be such a selfish thing because of

the hurt it would cause others. I told my mom sometime around this time, and she was surprised; hadn't known at all.

After that, I started to push myself a little harder, to have greater expectations for myself. I think…I didn't get it done *all* by myself, but I got through things with a lot of help from God. I'm still pretty lazy, and don't work to what I know I can do, but I do okay. Oh, and you can use my name; not the backwards name I made up, but my real name."

I explained that each of my participants was using a pseudonym, and asked her if she actually *wanted* me to use her name, or if she was just giving permission.

She said, " Yes! I *want* you to use it because I'm proud of who I am and what I've accomplished."

Introducing: Casey

    A signature of my brilliance.

AGE?   *30*

Gender?   *Male*

Marital Status?   *Married, 3 years.*

Occupation?   *Attorney.*

Educational Level?   *B.A. in English/Minor in Government; JurisDoctorate.*

Mother's education?   *Some college.*

Father's education?   *B.B.A.*

Siblings?   *1 sister, younger.*

Sibling occupations? *Assistant Manager. Bulk office supply company.*

Parents Occupations?   *Mom, LVN, substitute teacher; Dad, Property Tax Agent.*

Current family income? *$50,000-$100,000.*

Childhood family income? *$50,000-$100,000.*

Giftedness?   *Tests: achievement, IQ=140+, programming.*

    My first encounter with Casey was via email. It explained that he fit my profile exactly: enrolled in gifted programs from second grade, he had underachieved throughout his schooling. He was now an attorney, he said, married to a teacher, who thought it might be interesting for him to talk with me. We exchanged a few emails, a telephone call or two, then arranged to meet about a month after our first contact. I received his life-

story questionnaire a week before our meeting, and found his writing fluent, intelligent, and sprinkled liberally with barbs. He certainly had some opinions about education.

We met for lunch and interview at a sparsely populated German restaurant on a drizzly Sunday afternoon. Casey presented as a young man of average height and a non-athletic figure. Attired in a fresh white shirt and dress slacks, he wore glasses through which his light blue-gray eyes gazed directly.

We spent thirty minutes on *"entrance talk,"* building rapport before actually getting to the heart of his story. Although Casey had volunteered for this interview, he displayed some initial discomfort at the prospect of disclosing personal information to a stranger. Respecting his need meant proceeding slowly, which we did by busying ourselves with beverages and food and circling the central issue.

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I still remember… it was in second grade, Miss Clifton and Miss Morris. Miss Clifton told me to take a test. I asked her what for, and she said something to the effect of we just want to see how well you do, or something. It was a test, so I took it, and all of a sudden, the next semester, so I must have taken it in the fall, and so it was the next semester they took the students, they got divided up differently. Never said a word about anything. The next thing I knew I was in a different group of kids. When I was in the third grade, they identified it was gifted. Yeah, I got told I was gifted from the time I was in third grade until the time I graduated from high school. Once you put that label on there…being GT was tough, what they did though, was they put you in classes with the advanced kids.

Both the GT and the advanced students were smart, but not the same, but they *worked hard*. They were smart, but on a certain level, I like to put it, my computer worked a little faster. They're the ones who answered all 50 of the homework problems and *showed their work*. And I said, man, what they'd do that for? Didn't you figure it out after ten problems? They had that need, and the teacher told them to do it, so they did it, but those people are what we call in college, "beat the bull"… in college. So, they frustrated me on one sense because on some of them I, I know I can do these faster than you can, but they played the game and I was like, "why are you playing the game, you can go so much farther, stop playing their game, play my game. Do it like I do it and we can convince them to change the system." [laugh]

I was, like, how do I manipulate the system to benefit me? That was the nature of the idea. But there were these people who were *playing the game*, and I thought, *you're messing me up!* As I reflect back on that, I recognize what was going on and I wish I had been one of them. I almost wish I had just been that advanced student who had played by the rules and attempted to work within the system.

In all honestly, I think that in elementary school all of my teachers were up to teaching gifted students; they didn't have any problem doing it. Junior high is where I first started having problems. And that's when…. I think you *add* into that everything that comes with moving on to junior high. That's the hormonal stage, the whole world changed… in sixth grade…and that's when I started having teachers…I had teachers I was smarter than …and I was 12.

I usually responded by just shutting down and…. ignoring them. I don't need to deal with them, because you [they] *have no clue*. If I didn't respect them…I didn't

work…that'd be fair…. because…one of the stories I put in there, about favorite teachers, I have her name down as Graumann…I've heard she got married and everything else…*…I worked for her.* Yeah, and I'd say clearly   a) she earned my respect, b) she had the ability to…. give me the freedom…to be gifted, whatever I mean…but to also rein it in, to play to some of my strengths…. I guess that means she probably won, because she got me to do what I was supposed to do, but she also worked with me and how I was to get me to do those things.

Let win? I don't think I've ever *let* anybody win. I have an argument with my wife…I don't want to say argument… but, well yeah…. if we have a discussion/argument…I don't let *anybody* win…they may win. They may be *proved* to *be* my equal, and to be able to *think* like I do, and to present the different arguments. They may *win*; but I don't think I *let* anybody win. So that's why I would say…that with Ms. Graumann…she *did* win; it wasn't because I *let* her win…and chose to…I guess within that concept… the teachers that *didn't* win, that I *didn't* like, and that I didn't do anything for…it's not that *I didn't* play the game. We were *always* playing the game. It's just that…. they couldn't win. Oh, I won, with Ms. Graumann, I agree. Yeah, but in my mind back then…she won…but oh, yeah, I won, she enhanced what I knew and made me a better student and better person, so I agree….

Well, when I'd hit a wall, and instead of stopping and evaluating the wall and trying to go over the wall, I'd start looking for cracks in the wall and unfortunately the nature of the system and everything else, and what people *allow* you to do I was able to. So I didn't have to go *over* the wall, I went *under* the wall; I went through the wall. And not through the wall, not break down the wall, but if there was a *crack* in the wall, I'd fit

through it! And at one point, I used to think that was a *signature of my brilliance*, 'cause I didn't *have* to go over the wall, I could find another way through. I could beat the system. Then I realized, you don't really *beat* the system; if you don't work with the system, you get left behind. Yeah, I still like to… I still have some of that characteristic. Oh, hell, yeah. If I needed to dodge something, well, I can dodge it. I can dodge it with the best of 'em.

The truth is, I have some cases and some clients, don't like the clients, don't like the cases, really wish it wasn't on my desk, and I think, "how can I get away with not messing with this today," and I found that, what I *have* found that I can't ignore anything. That's what I used to do [pause]. Ignoring doesn't work, so you gotta figure something else out. What I find is that I usually… give the client a homework assignment. It's like, well you go find this out and when you're done, you come back and tell me about it. Because most people, when you give them a homework assignment, a) they don't run home and do it right away, takes them a few weeks, so when the client comes back…and why haven't you done this, and I say, "well you remember I needed this information, we talked about this two weeks ago, do you have that for me? " Oh, yeah, I remember that now. "OK, you get that information and get back to me." Oh, there's another two weeks. By this point, I've kicked it out a month, and maybe I'm ready to face it and maybe I'm not. Hopefully I am. But, I've learned to do that instead of ignoring it, and that's probably the main…

I was a band nerd. I have friends that were band nerds …who, the mere concept of that sent them into a frenzy…I think everyone needs a group…I think I see that in any extracurricular. But whether you're in any athletics or whatever else, you always fit in

somewhere… in your group. I think the students that don't have anything to belong to that are more of a problem …probably have less time…not less time… just more of a problem. I think that's what probably saved me in high school, because if I hadn't been in band, or tried to participate in extracurriculars   [pause] I don't know what would have happened. Because if I was left to my own devices, you know, go to school, go home, do nothing…. I probably would have made a fascinating criminal at some point.

One of the side stories to this is…I had a ton of benefits. My junior or senior year, there was an honors marching band and I decided I wanted to go. Part of being in honor band is that you have to, sort of, foot your own bill. So I told my parents I want to do this. Can we do this? And my mom said, "oh yeah, that's no problem"…And there's lots of little expenses. And so I got to go to Europe, got to travel Europe. And apparently, this drained resources that I wasn't aware of. Later on, I had gone to TCU, come back, gone on, my sister graduates, and she wants to go to college. And my mother tells her, "you *can't* go to college because we can't afford it." And in the meanwhile, my parents are still helping me pay for college. I didn't find out for years. But I found out that during that time, my mother had got my sister to cash all of her savings bonds that they had been buying her from the time she was little until she was about eight or nine years old. Cashed all of hers in to help pay for this. I didn't know.

Now, did I really know and just ignored it? I'm not sure. So my sister has gotten the short stick…forever. I can't say that she underachieved…but talk about overcoming somebody kicking you down every.. five times, and the person who's kicking you down is your mother. She amazes me; my sister amazes me. Oh yeah, she overachieved, she

overcame the things…I was able to escape it because everybody made an excuse for me, and…

When I hear that statement, that to me is… it's… looking back rationalizing, going, I *chose to be that way*. No… you didn't. I didn't set out to be an underachiever. Now, I may want to tell you, "Yeah, I *made* those choices…I was a *kid* and I was *independent*." *BS*… I was *not*! I underachieved for a variety of different factors…part of them…I think of one of the key ones underlying that was… I've always had a high level of self-confidence. Still do to this day, borderlines on arrogance…and my saying that I say to my wife, and… for these purposes one time is… *I hate stupid people.* Ignorance I can accept. The way I define ignorance and stupidity is… ignorance is just the person who doesn't know any better, and whether they go choose to go out and figure out the truth or not… I don't hold that against people. Stupidity is…. you know better and you *still* choose to repeat the same actions that caused your problems. *THAT, I HATE!* I do my best to tolerate it, but … what we're talking about is, I'm an underachiever and I'm thinking now… what did I do?

That self-confidence led me to probably *make* choices and determinations…. in. … math homework was a great one. I *hated* math homework. I *hated* math homework because they give you fifty problems, and they are dealing with the *same* concept. After I did about ten of them, I'm like, this is the same thing…so what if you *change the numbers*…ok…so I get a different answer, but it's the same concept. It really came out in Algebra, Geometry, Algebra II…. those were the *three absolute worst*…I was like, this was *retarded*…oh, *I hated showing my work*!

3 X=15; x is 5. Go to town; we're done. I don't need to show you divide by three on each side and give you your answer. Having married a teacher, I understand why they do it now, but… I guess that was part of my underachievement was that I'd go to the teacher and say, "I can *do* that; test me on it," and they would, and I'd take a test and I'd do *fine*. My grades were not reflective of knowledge or anything else. They were reflective of that the system said we're gonna put more emphasis on homework, because… I think because the stupid people are still stuck in your class with you, and they need all the practice and everything they get…they need the cheap, easy grades. I was like, just give me my grade on my tests. I think a lot of the teachers were just really frustrated with me when they saw how good I could do on the tests…I don't remember which of the teachers it was who said, "why don't you just *do* your homework," and I was, like, "because it's… *boring*."

I was in Aldine. They had gifted and talented and advanced. AP classes were just starting to be offered around then. I remember in my senior year I had the choice between taking AP English or gifted and talented, and I realized "something's wrong" with this system. I mean, I'm GT what the hell's with this AP crap? At the time I thought that by taking AP English I wasn't going to be with the same kids I'd always been with. I think there were fourteen of us. We were pretty much in the same classes together. There were a group or 4 or 5 of us who came out of elementary that went to junior high. In junior high the group expanded by about 2 or 3, and by high school, because there were more junior highs, we expanded up to about 14. We were the same groups of kids from 9th grade to 12th grade.

I think that at some level, you almost have to be a little bit gifted to understand another gifted person. I think the best teachers I had…I don't know whether they were

gifted or not, but they at least had the ability to understand who I was, and I think that, as I talk through this and understand more, maybe they were, so they understood some of what I was going through. And some of those, who were, for lack of a better word, regular teachers, they'd gone up and been smart, but they weren't at that next level. Those are the ones that I ran roughshod over and just bullied. Yeah, teachers who teach gifted kids need to be gifted.

My wife was telling me about a teacher in her school who's teaching the gifted students, and she's teaching a course, where she's not teaching the math part of it because she doesn't like math. When I hear stories like that, I tell my wife, God help me if anyone ever put me on the school board or put me in charge of the school, because I'd tear the place upside down. I'd probably alienate the kids who really need the help because of the way I think. Kids like me, I'd take all of them out and stick them in their own classroom. One of the things I hear through the grapevine is that for the gifted and advanced students, if you're not making an A or a B, you make a C, we're taking you out of the program. So if I make a C in a gifted and talented class, so I'm an average GT kid. One of the things they're teaching is about A's, B's,C's,D's. A is excellent, B is good, C is average, D is below average, F is failing. So if I make a C that means I'm an average gifted and talented student; what the hell's wrong with that? That still makes me smarter than half the other kids! They hadn't started that; those discussions started in high school. I couldn't believe it, I said, "You're going to take me out of the GT program if I don't make an A or a B. That's the most stupid thing I can think of!" I mean. I wasn't making the grade I was making because of…. whatever. Okay, so if I made a C, it was an average of everything else we were doing. It probably means I only did average work, but not

what I was capable of, if I even did it. So that's one concept I hear about that that I think …if you've identified a child as gifted and he has all the factors, whatever you want to define those factors as, don't punish the kid if he doesn't make the grades, because chances are if he's not making the grades, in my opinion, it's because the teacher sucks. And I can see why those teachers would take offense at those comments, because they think, well, I'm not a bad teacher. Well, maybe you are, but not for some kids. Oh, hell no; not all teachers are good for all kids!

By getting rid of gifted classes and making the classes pre-AP, and mixing up the high achievers and gifted kids, the kids that are truly gifted are going fall into regular classes. They're going to get even more bored, they're going to become the discipline problems, and at some point we're going to turn that on them and they're going to become the underachievers that we…filter out. That's what I see happening. They have to know, somebody needs to understand that the way I think, I don't think like a regular person. When I analyze a problem, there may be a standard solution, but chances are I've come up with 3 or 4 answers that aren't standard. Most people would think we can't do it that way. And I think, well, *yeah… you can*, you just have to be able to see it. I think that's part of what it is; that the truly gifted student- we have a different mold. Like I said, my computer runs faster.

I guess the part of it goes with the other side of that, which is gifted *and* talented, in that within that GT realm there's different people have different gifts at different times. Within educational systems it's about intellectual capacity but it's not just about intellectual capacity; it's about the applications that the child is able or the person is able to use that capacity.

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My wife is very intelligent, she doesn't like to think of that herself, but she was an advanced student, one of those high achievers I would have hated if I had met her in a high school class - the kind who was ugh- blowing the curve; stop! She plays by the rules. She goes to class, she does what the teacher says, that's how she expects it to be. Those people might have the brain capacity, but it's that ability to take that capacity and utilize it in different ways that most people don't use. I *have to* think outside the box.

The best example of thinking outside the box I can give you is that we had to take an ethics class in law school-which shocks most people--*ethical lawyers*! Like, you can't go back and sue your former client, unless he gives you permission. But the rules focused so much on the don'ts. Well, I answered that class, which means I got the highest grade in that class, because when I took the test, I didn't focus on what we *couldn't* do, but on what we *can* do. I turned the rules inside out. And I was talking to friends after that test and they said, didn't you see that, you couldn't do this, couldn't do that, yeah you *could*. I said the rules focused on knowledge, not belief. He didn't say that we couldn't.

Sometimes I don't wait to be told what I can and can't do; I just think, he didn't say we couldn't. Oh yeah, I've gotten in trouble for that one! I've walked that line…oh you did say I can't do that, well then I'm doing this. But I think that's where the gifted part is, is that ability to take the box, turn it inside out and find the answer.

Those students need, or at least I perceive I needed, they needed a teacher who needed to understand that when I turned the box inside out, I'm not turning the box inside out to make you mad or fight against you. I. I… came up with something new. One of the stories I talked about was the geometry teacher in tenth grade who was teaching gifted geometry. She was convinced that I was doing these things just to piss her off. But, *no*, I

wasn't! But it didn't help that in the end… that I realized she was moving sooo slooooow, and that was the other problem in that class. I was like, this is geometry man, let's go.

This is my GT mind at work. I was taking pre-calculus. Pre-calculus was tough; I had a great teacher. I regret the hell I put her through now. I also discovered, this is sort of an aside, that junior year I turned 16, and I never realized until I went to get my driver's license, that I needed glasses. I probably needed them a couple of years before that. I think that some of the trouble I was getting into was also related to not being able to see the board. It's amazing when you get glasses or contacts the first time, it's amazing what you can see.

So in pre-calculus, I was getting into trouble, probably just being GT, it was a lot of repetitive homework math and stuff, I was getting bored with it. I was doing ok on my tests. It was tough. I finally failed one of the six weeks for a combination of reasons. With band we had no- pass, no- play, which is maybe not so bad. I'm not against that concept, at least not as much as I used to be. Anyway, I realized all of a sudden I wasn't going to be able to participate, and I thought, *oh this is bad*, and we had this big competition coming up. I was a drum captain. And, oh, now I did it; I was mad at myself. So I started having fits; what am I going to do? Well, I went and checked my student handbook, because the students with no pass no play talked about if you were taking regular classes….

So I went and talked to my band director, and I said, "Hey, I got this idea.." Technically I had already taken all of my math credits, Algebra I in 8th grade, and I had taken through Algebra II, so that math class, it was an elective; I didn't *need* that math

class. Sure enough, we went to the principal, and …we were right. I wasn't disabled, I got to still participate even though I'd failed. That's the kind of thing…I'm fairly confident nobody else would have thought of. Well, what I realized that is if they told me well, you can't do that, but you didn't say, well, you can't do these things either, I went and figured out what I could do.

The one thing I've always had as a back up is that when I was 16 I got involved with the volunteer fire department. That was the.. biggest thing because…with that it was the opportunity to focus on somebody else's problems…you know…as a teenager learning…your worst day to have anything…while this poor schmuck's house just burned down. I think even within the fire department, I was recognized as being…having a little more intelligence…that I *got* things quicker. .. people didn't have to come through and explain to me 5 times how to do something, which… there were a number of people you had to explain things to *15* times…. so they got the concept. They explained to me once or twice, and boom! It was easy… In the fire house, it's a sort of the brother- sister relationship. Fight amongst each other, but if anybody in from the outside turns on anybody else, no, that just didn't happen.

Having sort of a higher intelligence, I got pushed into EMS, which was not a bad thing…and I have some stories…most of which I will not repeat onto your tape. From that I got into a dispatching position which was effectively in the 911 north service loop, through the North Houston area, and I was doing that at 17, working 6pm to midnight, which was against the Federal Labor Standards Act, but I didn't know that at the time. Didn't care at the time. This was '88-'89, and I'm making $5.00 an hour, which was like $2 above minimum wage, so I'm blowing away the salary, the paycheck, of all my other

high school friends and they're like WOW! I'm working 18 hours a week, making $100, that was a lot of money when you're in high school and I didn't have any other bills. I had all this excess money, but I got involved in that.

When I probably hit rock bottom was after high school, when I lost that. Well, I got a full scholarship to TCU, got up there …I'd starting experimenting with alcohol in high school. Typical…. but there it was completely access to …there was a party, Sunday through Sunday. I was still in band….. but even that environment had changed…it wasn't the same. You know, everybody wasn't just *band* there, you had music majors, not music majors, and I was somewhere in between…I kind of thought I wanted to be a music major, but I had a lot of things that I wanted to explore. I kind of tried to do too much at one time, and that on top of alcohol and everything else …I left there with a point zero three, point three. I think… one of the other ones was economic factors….. it was baaaadddd…so I came back, was gonna go to a junior college here, came back, signed up, never went to a class. At TCU? Oh, just one semester…one semester. So probably.. a full year that I was out of school. I just came home, and I felt like a failure…it was probably the *one* time….. because… all through high school I'd been telling myself I don't have to do this because I already *know* how great I am and I know what my *potentia*l is… *and leave me alone*… I don't need to show it to anybody. So I went off and then I completely fell on my face and went, well…maybe you're *not* the greatest swimmer in the ocean…oh yeah, I mean I was probably mildly depressed at that time .

So, when I came back from TCU, I went and got that job back and started working there full-time. I was working 6pm to 6am…I look back now and say, "that

really sucked." I was making $7 per hour, making no money, and I knew that was not what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. I left TCU and came back home for 2-3 months, from about January to March '91, in… was at home…and that was probably the worst time, living at my parents' house. It was either March or April when I got one of those live-in positions at the fire-house. Which was equivalent to …living in a frat house. I'd moved out and did my best never… to move back, and that's probably saved me too. I don't know how much I waited to…didn't want to answer. I would say my relationship with my parents has always been strained, but…my wife will tell you…my mother told her… when I was still in undergrad struggling to get through…

My mother said, "Oh, he's never going to graduate; he's going to move back home and live here…"

So, I fought it completely…so… I don't *need* you…leave me *alone*…yes, I *will* graduate. I mean that's probably what it was; some…the complex…that I was going to show my mother that I'm better than anything she thought I could be.

No, during '92 I went to Houston Baptist University, because… they had put the TASP test that you have to take to get into college. So, this is where my *gifted* side showed, is ..I'm *better* than this … I don't have to *take a test* to prove to you that I can get into college. I could have aced the test, but I don't need to take a test to prove that I can be in college. [laughing]

I don't need to take the stupid test. I had sort of gotten… even working at the fire department…at one point I was working at the fire department, I had a daily shift for being live-in I was living, that was how I'd pay my rent. I was working 4 nights a week, 6pm to 6am as a dispatcher, and when I wasn't doing those two things, I was working

basically as a med-tech for a doctor's office. But, I needed… to do all that to… pay what bills I had. Drinking……oh yeah. [pause] I probably didn't stop drinking until I met Stephanie, my wife. But, I hate using the tag 'alcoholic.' I still drink. I still …I guess that's where....because I had some of the medical background… you focus in and you define that alcoholic as a person who's dependent upon it and everything. I never thought of myself as being dependent upon it, but that would probably be myself lying to myself, looking back. But, I honestly want to say that I was never *dependent* upon it, but it was definitely a crutch…. I just didn't want to think about what was going on…that I didn't have to think of myself as a failure. When I think about it now, I just never wanted …I don't want to go back and …to think about before …and say, gee….if I wasn't working, or I wasn't on duty, I was drinking…hmmm….

During that time, what led me to San Angelo were two things. One, was I realized I wasn't going anywhere where I was; I had to get out. I had to get far. During that time, December '92, to February '93, somewhere in that winter period, there was a turnover at the fire department. Our fire department was not a civil service fire department, it was basically a political appointment and the political structure changed overnight. I backed one chief… new chief comes in.. and. I went from no rent and being able to do whatever the hell I want to…oh shit I don't have a place to live and I gotta go do something…and I was forced to go back home because I had nowhere else to go. And, that was like another failure, I can't …escape…I was being drawn back to 4615 XXXXvale, and no matter how hard I struggled…fought…to get the hell away from there….I was stuck. And I thought, what the hell do I have to do to get away from there?

I went downtown to have lunch with my dad, and I was talking to a secretary of his, and she said, "Oh, you should try San Angelo, Angelo State University…never heard of it…never heard of San Angelo. So one day I got in my truck and just drove….turns out it's about 6 ½ hours away…oh yeah, far enough, perfect far…small town, very friendly, and I thought, I could deal with this. So having no idea where I was, what I was going to do, I went back and got an application and filled it out and had to disclose TCU… I fought this until I graduated. So I started picking up classes that I'd failed…I re-took a math class and got a better grade so I could get the bad one off of there. Now… I don't want to paint the picture that I got to San Angelo and started getting a 4.0. Nah. Undergrad was still a fight. It was still some of the same stuff, but it was different.

I had a government professor there who was tough…mean…and he was a big bully. And I liked him. I thought he's cool, and he knew all his stuff, and I thought I want to be like him, so I took every class he offered. Did decent in his classes, and I mean his classes were *tough*, but he flat out said, when I give a test…he didn't have any homework…so he's already earned a bonus point and I'm thinking no homework and it's all about your test. Yeah, it's my environment here because it's all about the testing…but he said on all his tests, anybody can make a 70 on my test if you show up to my classes and just listen. If you want to make above a 70, you have to take the information and apply it. The best I could get in his class was a "B" and *I tried*. And it wasn't one of those ditching and dodging that "A" thing. I tried. Couldn't get above a "B."   WOW! You gotta work. It was one of those few classes where I started working because I had to work to just to get anywhere with him. Hell no, I never had to work any

other time in my life. I worked.   It became…….the people that were taking his classes…it…all his advanced classes were at 8 o'clock on Tuesday, Thursday mornings. Nobody takes that class unless they want to be there. You don't accidentally end up in an 8am class on a Tuesday/Thursday morning. You take that class because you want to self-mutilate yourself, because God knows if you do that Wednesday night you can't go to penny night at the local pub and make that Thursday morning 8 o'clock class. That's part of what that was. The people that were in there wanted to be in there, and the people that were in there tended to be above average in intelligence.

Yeah, I found a peer group in the fraternity, too. Were there were some of the stereotypical things in the fraternity? Hell, yes. Let's not kid ourselves, stereotypes are born of…. people doing the same things over and over again, and that's how we cause these stereotypes. Did it help the drinking problem? Oh, probably not, but it stopped become a drinking to forget, it was a drinking to celebrate, not that we needed much to celebrate. .. but it was no longer about drinking…I don't want to remember , I don't want to feel…it was hey, we're hanging out. But I also started assuming leadership positions within the fraternity. I started taking on responsibilities, started doing things. It sort of became a project …like how can I change this, how can I make this different, how can I make it better?

Three years, in June I guess; June 12th. I know the date; I'm not a typical American male in that respect. I know the date of our first date, we December 9th, 1994. June 12th 1999, so it'll be three years this summer. We met in the spring of '94, we were taking a class… *Contemporary American Novel*, I think it's what it was. She was in the class and there were 4 or 5 of us, and it was right before lunchtime, and we would walk

over from the academic building to the student services building to check our mail. We would walk and talk…never really dated…she was dating other people at that time, I wasn't really dating, I was doing other things. We just kind of chit-chatted. Over that summer I went away to New England to work and I came back , it was August and we saw each other passing on what I call the mall, and I stopped and we just stood there and started talking, about nothing, I couldn't tell you what we talked about, for about 45 minutes I guess. And then we just started seeing each other around, and we just kept talking and we clicked…and in December I finally asked her out. We had our first date and we've been together ever since.

We went to Angelo State University, in San Angelo in West Texas. I was born in New Orleans, but I grew up in Houston. I lived in Houston until I left to go to San Angelo in the fall of '93. I didn't used to think I had an accent. When I went up to New England… I was working for a football camp and for a tennis camp, you get those videos they give you, of extracurricular things for the campers recorded on tape, and I saw it later. Most of the kids were from that New England area, Boston. I never thought of myself as having much of an accent… but on video when you compared that conversation; me with their accents, I sound like a southern hick. And it was the most amazing thing to me. 'Cause I'm sitting there, thinking, "I am not a hick…I do not have a southern accent," but I finally realized…I talk slower, some of my colloquialisms were *totally* different than theirs, and I think that was the biggest difference, but even just the sound of my voice had a little bit of a twang, and that was weird.

Sometimes when the partners and I go out to lunch and we talk, they say, well, where are you from and I say, "I'm from Houston" and they say, "No, no, no, no, no; no

one's from Houston," and I say, "No, occasionally, a couple of us *do* stay here and grow up" just like me.

With Stephanie, she was support, but she was also, you can do this; get off your ass and you can do something. So it was sort of a combination. It wasn't just that she was not only the antithesis of my mother, my mother saying you can't do this, come home, and her saying yes you can, you can graduate from college, stick with it, keep doing it. When I still had those fluttering moments when I was thinking, oh, you can't do this, she'd say get up off your ass and do it, and that's part of what she's brought to me and to the relationship. On a certain level she's a sort of a savior, maybe she was my savior. To me that implies…oh, the intellectual side of me says wait, you're giving her too much credit! Some of this you did on your own, you didn't get to San Angelo…but I would never have gone all the way without her, and I fully give her credit for that. She got me into the door and I guess I did the rest. I wouldn't have gone into the door. Because when I was getting ready to graduate undergrad, and I had no idea what I was going to do, and I thought, law school! Hey! Another three years of school; can escape from reality!

For law school, I came back to Houston to South Texas College of Law, my parents aren't paying for anything; they had pretty much stopped paying for school. They were helping with rent, giving me three to five hundred a month. We, Stephanie and I, were trying to figure out when to get married, and we decided to get married between the second and third year of law school, so that's what we did. So, in order to save money, I decided I'm just going to move back home. My mother was fine with that , she was more than happy to have me there. My school schedule was pretty much… I was gone all day

until 5:30, 6:00 at night. It was rent-free, free food if I needed it. And , so I worked the system, it gave my mother the feeling that I was home, and maybe I was showing my mother that I could be successful. Of course, you can't show my mother anything; she doesn't believe it.

In the first semester of law school we do what's called recitations; we were divided up into three sections, so there was A,B, and C sections. We all had the same classes, because they give you your schedule the first year. So, those people who were in that section almost, well, slept together. The closest friends I graduated from law school with were all in that section. As we moved up and started taking classes, we started taking different classes because we had different interests, but that focus group, the group of four of us who all stuck together. We all broke off to study for the bar. We got together and got hotel rooms; we all got separate places to study, then we got together to study and we all passed.

My wife told me about this; she got the email on her school email and told me it sounded If I had gotten this on my email at work, to tell you the truth, I probably would have just ignored it. I was fascinated by the idea of doing this interview, I don't know why.

The questionnaire? Just the…. nature of the questions… and the nature of everything was sort of a reflection: was what does it mean? For a period of time you get caught up in the nostalgia, and start to remember. You remember all the good things; you keep thinking into it and you think, like, wow, and there were really some negative things, and you think: I don't really want to remember those …I'd like to… skip over that part and ...can we move forward? If I could go back …then…with the knowledge I

have today…*BOY*…I could do a lot of things differently. I guess what stings right now when I look back on that is that whole *you had potential crap*! Back then I *hated* that! It's just…"yeah, I know I have potential, leave me alone, I'm doing my own thing." But now, I guess part of it is I started realizing, nowadays, in the sort of 21st century late 20th century …that we stopped becoming what do you *know*, what can you *do*… and started asking questions: where'd you go to *school*, and *what was your major*? [spoken with a sarcastic drawl]

You know, I realize that the choices I made back then influenced where I *could* go to school, and what I was going to major in. And so, that's where I formed my biggest regret… I've met the…there's attorneys that I've met who went to… what I call a prestigious undergrad…went to prestigious law schools…and they're complete and total idiots. And I just want to go, "I'm *glad* you went to that great law school; now would you get your head out of your…" You know, focus on what we're doing here and stop tweedling around on the edges…. And that's the part that I regret, but then I…focus in on it and I say, "Well, Casey, you actually *did* some things…. you've *got* some background, you've got your *JD*….yeah you didn't go to the best law school…" and you realize that you know more than this guy does sitting across from you, and I ask myself, "would I know more than him if I had taken his route?" So, it sort of makes me feel better, but then again…boy, wouldn't it be nice to have a …Harvard Law degree, after all? But then again, I don't know that it would, because it's…what would I have missed out on?

So, in answering the original question, yes, it brought back memories, and…some of them are good and some of them are bad , and some parts are like… I've rationalized… realized…*ok I can accept that*… ok that was probably a *stupid* thing to

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do at that time, but, in the end…yeah, it's kind of worked out and maybe I *am* better for it. And part of that is just… I mean, deep down, I've always *accepted* what came down, whether it was good, whether it was bad…ok, I'll accept it…you, know *here's the cards you got dealt , deal with them.* I don't tend to whine, and I don't tend to complain…I'll take that back, my wife'll tell you that I *do* tend to whine… but I don't tend to *complain* if I know there's nothing to be done about it. If I think I have the ability to change somebody's mind, motivate someone so it directly benefits me, I may whine and complain just a little bit to get my way. But…I think that's human nature.

By doing all that, yeah, improving myself. Did I think about that at the time? No, of course not. It was all about , it was all outside… I didn't have to worry about my problems, it was all somebody else's problems. So…that's what it became, I started to get a support system. I guess that comes back to what did I have growing up? I didn't have a support system. You go back to…now I *do* feel like I'm in a psychiatrist's office… that I had never had that support.

I had a mother, love her dearly, hate her with a passion. It's funny…I've told people…when they ask about my mother, she's crazy…they say be nice…no she's probably crazy…she's slipped a few cogs… She became so… focused on what she believed to be support, she was actually more…stifling; suffocating. To me, I was pig-headed enough, and fought back against it, that I was able to develop some of my own personality and escape from that, but my sister wasn't; she had to leave. My mother never grasps the concept that my sister didn't want to leave and go to somewhere else to finish high school because the neighborhood had gotten so bad, but it was because my mother had gotten *crazy*.

My mother had been involved in PTA, and when we left elementary school, and went to junior high, the PTA thing kind of falls away for whatever reason, and it disappears in high school, so she had to find another way to get access, and she becomes a substitute teacher. Now, because she is extremely bossy…she doesn't take any grief off of anybody, is able with high school students. Specifically, she's not like your typical docile   substitute teacher, so the regular teachers are like *come on*, *use* her… she's able to keep the students in control. So by the time I hit freshman in high school, she's there everyday. By the time I'm a senior and my sister's a freshman, my mother is *entrenched.*

Oh, if I had an answer to that question…She would never say she was helping, hurting; she'd   say she was *working*. I think she was working so she could…be there. Most parents set up a parent teacher conference, [voice goes high and squeaky] they meet on the teacher's lunch hour and have a little conversation it's over in 30 minutes. But, nooo…she's talking to half my teachers every day, she's seein' them in the lunch room, what the heck…she wouldn't let me escape!

I think the other part …is …she began trying to live through our accomplishments. If we did anything…it was just as important to her. Because she was better at making excuses for us when we failed than we were. Of course, you know, I'd love to say I didn't use that to my advantage, but of course I did. And whether that failure was directly related to me trying to outsmart the system, or what, but, her excuses paved the way. To me it was easier to fail, because someone else was taking part of the blame. I didn't have to accept responsibility for it. And that probably *perpetuated* my ability to not do anything! *It wasn't my fault*, you know.

I guess deep down one of the things I hate, is I hate people who don't take responsibility for themselves. Am I being hypocritical? Probably. I would say that it was probably very true that we hate the things in others that we hate most in ourselves. Somewhere down the line I learned to accept responsibility for my mistakes. Then when I did that, I stopped worrying about avoiding responsibility for my errors, and instead learned how to fix them. Oh, yeah, some people tried to tell me that…but not my mother. My mother was a complete enabler. All I had to do was cast doubt someplace else and she'd back me 100% she had…it was never my fault, oh, no *never* my fault. Half the time, hell it was *completely* my fault. I wish my parents had told me…

My wife, Stephanie, her parents told them, "you WILL get good grades." I think part of that was, in elementary school, I was getting good grades because, I think, because it was just *too easy*. And even *not* playing into the system I was still able to get those A's and B's. It was only once I got into junior high and high school that that started to fall apart, that I could just skate the system and still get the A's and B's, and so, I started getting the C's the D's the F's, I'd fail one six weeks, get an A the next six weeks, and it pretty much made the teachers go nuts! I'd fail a six weeks, whatever it was, and I think mom sometimes was ready to go blame the teacher. On some level if I had pushed it she probably would have.

So I think that was part of what was going on. I guess on some level what I *hoped to be true*, on some level, even *I* recognized that was *wrong*; that the reason I'd failed is cause I didn't *do* what I was supposed to *do*. And, I did at some level, even when I make a mistake now and taking the responsibility, well, taking the responsibility became a different act. Now, because it became sort of a *show me* act, that I'm showing you that I

know that I did wrong. I think even then, somewhere underlying, I knew I was supposed to accept what was really my fault.

The past few years my mother's had really serious problems. And you can see them from the outside, and part of it is, I told my wife, I'm not ready to be a parent. I can barely take care of myself. I'm not ready to be my parent's parent, I'm not ready to a regular parent of my own kid. No. There have been some times when I need to go and sit down with my dad and tell him, we need to address some things, but I just never could. I kind of I'll give him a couple of questions, he'll answer, I'll see that he doesn't want to talk about it either and it's like ok, fine; I'm not ready to push it. And I think that on some level I'll do it some day. You know, I'll confront a total stranger, or an attorney, but I won't confront my father. No. I can't; not right now.

Ummm, he was….absent. He was doing what he needed to do to make money and, he basically had gone as high as he could go without getting into the politics of the corporate structure. He reached that level at a time when he could have moved on, but I think he made a choice to stop…I never asked him. About the time that he did that I had just started college. It's funny, even as I was filling this out and thinking about little league baseball and stuff, I thought, ok, he came to a couple of games. But, his first 10-15 years with Exxon, he was expected to travel 3 to 4 days a week. As an agent, he was expected to travel a lot, and to go to east Texas and stuff , so he just didn't go. He was always home on weekends, that I remember. He was there, but he was also tired. What I identify now is that, like my father-in-law, they were both men of their generation. The man goes to work, the man brings home the money, the wife stays home, the wife raises the kids. Both my father and my father-in-law felt like failures a little bit because my

mother worked and my mother-in-law worked, and I think, when they saw them working, they both sort of felt like they were failures. I'm reading…this is what I'm seeing, and that led to those relationships and how they developed. I told my wife I didn't feel like I started talking to my dad 'til I was 21. Yeah, we still talk about…bullshit. Occasionally we'll address a lot more serious issues, but they're still not in the context of, of…it's completely devoid of emotion and it's never the really hard-hitting stuff. No, my dad wasn't a disciplinarian….my mother was. Oh, my mother tried!

When I'm not dealing with things I know I have to do…I hate the word that comes to mind…it becomes, it reaches almost a point of paralysis sometimes, depending on what it is. The book, *Who Moved My Cheese*, that's when I feel like, like a 'hem.' I can't really quantify things, I worry what's gonna come next, if I don't want to face, I guess, the fear. What *used* to happen is that at some point I'd probably get sick to try to escape it, so that it wasn't my fault…I was sick…I couldn't get to it. But now, now I don't get ill, because I don't really let it go anymore. At this point…but don't get me wrong, I still *have* those things…at this point, I don't let it…my *goal* now is to not let it linger. I try to not let it fester so that it gets worse. And, I try to attack it.

Sometimes, one of the hardest things I have is telling clients bad news. And actually, it's usually not…it's the bad news of the kinds that says, "I've done everything I can, but you've made such a bad mistake there's nothing I can do to fix it, and you're going to lose." Guided by, I *hate* giving that news, I *hate* telling clients I *can't* fix your problem for you , I *can't* solve it, because in a way I almost become ingrained with that client that it's not only their position, it's *my* position too. And if I can't make them win, then it's that somehow I haven't *done what I was supposed to do*. I am getting better at

removing myself from that. I think in part when I do that I tend to eliminate other opportunities and do that. But then, I also have to recognize that sometimes the client was wrong, they shouldn't have done that, and what they want to do they can't do, and I just want to tell them *you can't do that.*

Oh, yeah, there's no question that… who I am today I like more than who I used to be, I'm more comfortable with myself, I still have my little issues. And yeah, I guess I'm starting to understand that we all have issues and as I've learned and started to figure things out, you can't have it all. But, I guess the one issue that I still face is that I don't like my background. I don't like what happened in high school, I don't like what was. We…don't tell the whole story. There's part of the drinking story I don't want to tell because I don't want to remember… remember…. and to be honest with you, I don't remember. Oh, I have heard third-account stories…But even as I develop my practice, I still flinch because the north side of Houston I grew up in was poor country. So there are still some economic issues that I face.

I was talking with a secretary in our office, and she grew up in inner city Houston, got that education, got that job and started making more money, and escaped where she had come from, but…we were stuck. We escaped what we came from, which was everybody being poor, uneducated. I mean my parents were educated, but, for whatever reason, they allowed themselves to remain trapped, in this area, this pocket of lower socioeconomic status. I've escaped from that, and I've started to enter this world of high socioeconomic status, and I don't feel like I belong here, and if I try to go back…I can't go back, those people won't take me back because I don't fit there anymore. So, you're going, where the hell am I? I can't go back to where I came from, and I live in this other

area where I don't like who these people are and I don't want to deal with them. On some days I get that lost paralyzed feeling.

Just like networking- as an attorney you're just expected to network, to get more clients, get to some of those networking functions, I listen to some of those attorneys talk and I think, "you're a complete idiot; there are more important problems in the world than this mundane thing that you're focusing on."

Yeah, that imposter thing, that's exactly what it is. It's when I've met somebody and we get along. It's when you get to the next level, they starting the, "where'd you come from, where'd you grow up, and where'd you go to school." It's when those questions come up and I think I can't lie to this guy, straight to his face so that I can avoid what I don't like to think about and those perceptions that I know will come about of that. Or, I can tell him the truth…and that's where the fear comes in. Am I now going to be rejected immediately because we didn't come from the same background, even knowing intellectually that I deserve to be where I am now?

But, I'm still bright, and I didn't learn because somebody… well in some instances I learned because people taught me things. I learned because I just had the desire to go out and know something. I've read stuff that…I'm an English major. A buddy and I who went to law school together, he and I had some similarities. We read some book, it was about physics, and some new theory of time travel. And he and I read that book in the middle of law school, it had nothing to do with anything, but because we just had to know.

One of the things about that email you sent out, underachievers who became successful, when I first looked at that, I thought, you know what? I haven't become

successful. I haven't done anything, I don't have the big house, I don't drive the fancy car. Because, I was defining success within a different realm. Then I realized that I have overcome enough challenges… I've gotten to the point where I don't underachieve, with the caveat that I don't underachieve…as often….I still have moments where I do underachieve. It's not…I guess the difference is between defining it as underachievement and defining it as failure. Sometimes the differences become blurred.

But, success is what I did. I got through law school. There was a point in 1994 where I've got my mother saying, "just move back home, you don't need an undergrad degree, come back here and you can live at home." I rebelled against that. That was one of those key turning points, and I took it to that next level, which was hell, not only can I get an undergraduate, but I can get a law degree.

That may have been the straw that broke the camel's back, but it wasn't the only straw, there were a million other straws on there. At one point I said, you've been telling all these people you can do it but you don't *try* because you don't *want to*, I started asking myself some of those internal questions like, maybe you *can't* do it. Maybe you're the fake that you don't want to admit to being. And I think that was another part of it: you know, you keep saying you can do it, but you never *proved it*. That became part of it, too; I started internally started asking myself those questions about how am I going to prove to myself that I can do it.

How did I change? I think that that comes from is, like I said earlier, I have always had a minimum level of self-confidence- sometimes it expands, sometimes it shrinks. And it's that whole… when you try to push me to go somewhere… I do what a lot of people do and say, no I don't want to do it. And, intellectually, it's when you're

trying to do that, I'd always get that feeling of being pitted, and I would avoid that. It's like that old adage of you can't put a round peg into a square hole; well, no, *yes, you can*; if you make the square peg hole bigger, you can get the round peg in there. And I guess that's my adage of saying with, being gifted and that classification, when you told me you *couldn't* do it, my first reaction is well, how the hell do I figure out how *to* do it? Some things may not be *probable*, but everything is *possible*. Just because you, you in the sense of the teacher, the persona who's saying it can't be done; just because you think it can't be done, doesn't mean that if you let me sit around long enough to think about it and analyze it and ponder over it, maybe I *can* come up with a solution! And I think that's one of the things I hated; don't tell me it *can't* be done.

Of the people I recall from my GT classes, there was only 3 or 4 of us who were truly gifted and the rest were the high achievers. Yeah, I think I can spot gifted people when I meet them. The irony is that the three guys I hung out with in law school, all 3 could probably participate in your survey. But I can't pass along your name because I'd have to admit I talked to you first. [laugh] On a certain level, we kind of congregate together.

One of the ways that I've succeeded so far is that if I had stuck to 'the box,' I wouldn't have graduated from college 'cause I'd have already been pigeonholed. Game might have been over. But because I thought outside the box and kept trying…when I stopped trying to fight parts of the system and started trying to work with the system and realized that if you work with it you can beat it, and that is a realization it takes a while to get. I guess one of the things I look back at is…if I had my wife's parents and their attitude toward education… WOW…I wondered where I could have gone?

When we do have kids, if they turn out to be gifted, may God help them. I already know the inside track on   that. I'd have to say, my mother is truly not gifted, and I wouldn't say my dad is either, so I was able to out-think them, on a number of different levels at a number of different times. So if we did have a gifted kid, he's not going to be able to out-think me, because anything he can think of I'll guarantee I'll be able to think of too.

Yeah, I've learned a lot from my experiences, and I understand who I am, That's sort of self-recognition, but I couldn't be honest with myself if I said I wouldn't mind having those things; a better background and more money. And that's where some of that self-regret comes in. But it's those what-if questions; that's the one down-side to being gifted. I ask more damn what-if questions than anybody else. Most people don't; I've noticed that. Having had conversations with other attorneys and I ask well, what-if this, and well, what-if this. And they ask, will you stop?! We finished, it's time to stop, and I'm still…well, what-if? I love what-if questions, because I start searching for that next level, but I realize I probably drive some people crazy and I probably drive myself partially crazy, because I don't stop! I don't stop; my mind is going 24/7 and it's a constant battle. The one thing that stops me I've found that stops me from thinking about everything else are computer video games, especially the ones that have multiple level thinking, and what are known as strategy games.

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The conversation segued from past to present*:* video games and how each of us would spend the remainder of the day. The last of the apple strudel had been consumed, the ice had melted in the drinks, and our interview was over. We walked slowly to the

door, stopped briefly in the foyer, chatted at the place where we parted to go to our respective vehicles. Casey had that exposed look of a wild creature that suddenly finds itself in an open area, with no shelter at hand. After having spent a couple of hours discussing intensely personal issues it was difficult to return to our prior relationship, that of virtual strangers. We each left with something valuable: researcher with an excellent interview on tape, and Casey with a new understanding of himself.

Several months have now passed, and we have maintained an email relationship. Though both busy, we manage to exchange intellectual emails from time to time. Casey has asked to read the completed dissertation and that we get together afterwards to discuss things. Casey recently told me he has enjoyed participating in this study. My sense is that he has benefited in not only the way stated in the research proposal, "No compensation will be offered beyond the satisfaction of advancing knowledge in the field of gifted education regarding underachievement," but also by advancing his self-knowledge.

Introducing: Guido

How to understand everything without doing anything.

AGE?   *41*

Gender?   *Male*

Marital Status?   *Married, 8 years.*

Occupation?   *Financial analyst.*

Educational Level?   *Bachelor's degree.*

Mother' s education? Bachelor' s degree.

Father' s education?   *High school diploma.*

Siblings?   *3 older brothers.*

Sibling occupations? Teacher, contractor, accountant.

Parents Occupations? Mom, nurse. Dad, deceased.

Current family income?   *$50,000-$100,000.*

Childhood family income?   *~$30,000.*

Giftedness?   *Tests: achievement & IQ=138-159, programming.*

We met at a pancake restaurant early on a Saturday morning. Guido was a tall, fairly trim man with a shock of swept-back gray hair. He wore a cream knit pullover and gray slacks, and seemed somewhat ill-at-ease. His skin had the pasty texture and tone of one who spends all his time indoors, while his nose was a spider's web of barely discernible veins. We met and shook hands, with Guido initially making only the briefest of eye contact. After about 15 minutes of conversation, he seemed comfortable enough to

begin the interview. The consent form was signed, the recorder switched on, and the interview commenced.

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How often do you actually run across somebody who says they have under a hundred IQ? I mean, for everybody that is over a hundred, there should be the same number under one hundred. I never ran into anybody that said they have under a hundred IQ. They're all one-ten, one oh five, a hundred and fifteen…

I… think … in third grade they put me in speech therapy. At that time they… came up with the association that if you're in speech therapy, they pretty much looked upon you as special education. I remember… it seemed like the first half, I think that was in… the Thanksgiving break, I got two "F's." It was English and something else, and I had to take that home and just knew that I was in *such* trouble. Take that home, and right after that they called my mother in and told her they revealed something, achievement scores or something. And so I was talking to them and I was rated at… at least twelfth grade. You know, I had at least a twelfth grade rating in English and I maxxed out the achievement test and I remember the first thing was that- I'm not applying myself.

No, I just didn't achieve up to *other people's* expectations. I used to say back in high school, I was going to be retired the first thirty years of my life and work the last thirty. [laugh] You know, when you *have to*. It's like when you see a Corvette being driven by a 65 year old man, you think it's just wasted on him. Give it to a 25 year old. If I was 25 and I had a Corvette I'd be something *different*. When you see a 65 year old man with it, you think…it's wasted, like retirement's wasted on when you can't get around any more. Pretty much, I traveled all over the world when I was younger, and did *not*

accept any responsibility. And, I thought of all the other stuff as something I could do *later*.

Seems to me like most, I guess, underachievers…and honestly…my honest opinion is. I think that gifted and talented, I'm not a big believer in that, I think that everyone has the same…. abilities. I think I always tested well because I expect a lot. Remember, I had told you about the neighbor that was working on her graduate degree? And, it's…. we took a *lot of tests.* Her whole thing was that if you took enough tests, that your scores were going to get better because you were used to taking the tests. IQ? Anywhere from 138 to 165, depending on the test.

Yeah, that was back in the time when they used to write your name on the board if you did anything wrong; you know my name was always up on the board for never trying to get homework in. And I honestly do not remember, *ever* in *any* of my school time, ever doing homework. I mean, I never even worried about it. I remember high school, the big biology notebook, which is the terror of all freshmen, well I had two pages and everyone else has like a.. a hundred and something pages of drawings of every …. drawing you do in the class, where you label all the insects and the parts and all and I had two pages. I mean, it was the night before it was due and I had, like, well, two things and you know …I *knew* I'd get in trouble for that.

Yeah, whatever I could sit down and do the night before a big project was due, I'd do. I remember these two big projects…there was this was high school physics project. They had a solar energy project, that's back in the… the green days, ecology; you had to create a solar energy project that worked. And that was the grade- if it worked you got an "A." We divided up into groups, and I got someone in my group that was the school's

'head.' You know just he and I. He would come to school high every morning, and he uh, I said ahhh don't worry about it. I wouldn't tell him what our project was and he was like shouldn't we be doing… and everybody else was like making these houses and making the piping and just everything you could imagine, and doing all kinds of things like solar cookers and doing the designs, and drawing 'em all, and I said, "don't worry about it …we got it handled…we got a solar energy project."

So you know the big day comes and everybody brings their projects up to school , and David and I , we don't have anything. I probably told David and he said, "Yeah, cool." And so…so, they did all their presentations and I told the teacher I want to do *mine* last. Let everybody else do theirs and I want to do mine last. My solar energy project. Now I didn't have anything with me, and he couldn't figure out why, uh, you know, how I was going to do a solar energy project when we were carrying nothing. And so everybody did theirs and they said, " Okay now let's see yours now , Guido."

So I pulled a string out of my pocket, we're up on the roof of the school, where everybody had their little things set up, there were probably ten or fifteen projects, and I tied the string between the two little fences they had, you know, the guard rails, and I hung a sock on the string, and I said, "there, a solar clothes dryer." It worked. He was very irritated. It worked, so he had to give me an "A" on it.

Yeah, I capitalized on being smart. Oh, *how interesting!* The fact that you could be anywhere… that if they had questions you could explain *anything* to them at the drop of a hat. But even to the point where… I'd spend time learning *inane* things that *no one* else could do. If you'll talk to people, most people can't …juggle. So, I'd juggle….teach myself some magic tricks…and learned *tons of trivia.* Yeah, I was….yeah…I ate it up. I

was a show-off without…being accused of being a show-off. What other people were good at…oh…*that* was not important.

Yeah, I've always been…I was the "peanut gallery." Even in high school, I remember manipulating a *cheerleader election*. I mean, we'd have big school meetings and I was always the comic in the back that yelled the funny comments, and that was expected of me. We couldn't have a school meeting without me yelling…well, not yelling, but…making a loud comment in the auditorium for everybody in the auditorium to hear it.

Oh, the one thing I haven't been able to overcome is *public speaking*. I can do small group all day long, but when I get up in front of a crowd…I'm comfortable, then when I realize I'm the center of attention…oddly enough, I go blank. In high school, I was in debate. I was the absolute worst debater *in the world*. I could do…the research and come up with the arguments and all, but… for some reason, when I realized that everybody was sitting there with their eyes glued to me, it just hits me and I freeze. Beforehand, I'm fine. Beforehand, I can know my speech *down,* and I'm fine *afterwards*, but right in the middle of it, I just go…well, I've done it…I knew I was that way and I gotta keep at it. I was *still* captain of the debate team, though, because I was the one who talked…none of the teachers wanted to debate *me*. So, I went and talked everybody into being on the team. The people I picked out…two of the teams won the state; I think I made a good choice as far as finding people who would be good at debate.

I mentioned that I was in speech therapy, and that was because, at that time, we lived in suburban Garland, Texas. That was, at that time, upper middle class. And you go to school, all the little suburban kids, and you just stand up the first day and say your

name, and I said, " my name be Guido Hone" [Horn] , in a very strong Black dialect. That just threw them off, and the kids laughed, and I was in speech therapy for *years* over that. [laughing]   Actually, I enjoyed it. Oh, I had a lisp, too, but I had to learn how to…but she was the one who…I learned how to talk based on how she [the nanny] talked. I was pretty much raised by the nannies during the day. But, you know, their whole goal was to get me out of the house.

My speech teacher went on later to become my high school counselor. I had two speech teachers. The first one became my fifth grade teacher, and the second one went to becoming a choir teacher, and then went on to become a counselor. It was a very strange school district. You might get a teacher in, say, fourth or fifth grade, and you might have them again in high school. Because they wouldn't progress, or switch over, and I don't think they worried so much about certification. That's why my fifth grade science teacher was also in high school. When we were… I was in high school…she was in high school also, and she was my aunt's roommate in college. Most of the teachers…they knew either my mother… my family…my aunts.

My teachers really hated me because they hated that I refused to buy into everything. Like I say, most of my teachers were… they dreaded having me in their classes. They loved me while they didn't have me, and I usually… if any of them had any extra-curricular activity or club, I tended to be in that. Like the one act play. The teacher who was in charge of the one-act play for U.I.L. She needed…people to be in the one-act play, she needed black people, and she didn't really…converse with them, but I ran around with every group, every group in the school. And I would spend, you know, evenings with Blacks, and weekends sometimes with the cowboys, then I spent time with

the heads; I smoked. I'd do…with the jocks- I played football. And so, she needed Black

people… so she wanted me to get Black people to be in this part, and that was the big

thing. I was in charge of that, I wasn't *in* the one-act play, I didn't have *a job*. I was like

the manager, 'cause she was not used to dealing with Black students.

I crossed over between groups, because I was interested in what each group did. I

was the school lush. I drank a ton. I mean, I was the one staying out all night in bars

when I was thirteen, fourteen years old. We were going to Oklahoma. I remember the

first time I stayed up all night I was thirteen years old. We went and played pool in a bar

in Oklahoma. In Oklahoma, we had these little, you know, dump bars and I was thirteen

years old and we got some sixteen year old guy and he took us up there and we were just

gonna get us a beer. We go inside and we start playing pool and the next thing we know,

it's four o'clock in the morning. So, we had to go, and I got about two blocks away from

the house, and my mother had a very set routine, so I had to wait until she left Saturday

morning before I snuck in the house. My brothers wanted to know why I was dressed so

early, "Well, we went camping last night." You know I was big into scouts and camping.

Well, we were camping- honest as the day. We were *camping;* I just didn't tell you-

forgot about it. She didn't have a clue.

It goes to the pictures of children, the baby pictures…[pronounced Texas drawl]

the first kid, there's tons of them. The second kid: ahh, not *quite* so many. Third

kids…there's, there's a few. [changes to fast, normal, speech] And I don't think there's a

picture of me 'til I was *three.* Oh yeah, well. That's normal, that's not uncommon. I don't

…don't feel too sorry…I looked upon my role as… I was lucky to slip through the cracks

and do what I wanted to do. I remember that every now and then she kind of questioned

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whether we smoked, or drank, or…you know. But not too hard. Oh, we'd deny it. I

smoked when I was ten. I still smoke to this day. I had a place that I could get cigarettes

on the way home, and I had a routine before I walked in the house. I'd pour a little gas

on my hands so that way I just smelled like *gas*. [laughing]

I remember… my eldest brother, she was like very… somewhat worried about

him being drunk one night, and I was in bed drunk, because I'd been out drinking that

night and came in and I was…ninth grade. She was in *the hallway* questioning him about

drinking, and I thought, oh yeah, isn't this nifty [laughing]. No, she never drank or took

drugs or tranquilizers or anything. My mother was, very … very strongly against drugs

and drinking. Very strongly.

Yeah, ……yeah………I think on some level she knew…and just faced what she

could.

Is that unusual for me to be like this when I'm the baby in the family?

There's only four years between all four of us [boys]. I remember very little of my

father. When my father died…it didn't affect me a great deal. I took it as an academic

fact. So my thought was…. well, that's a …*good* thing. My father was a hard working

person… my father was an alcoholic and he would come home and beat my mother.

Yeah, I remember them taking us [my brothers and me] back in a room, and a

bunch of people came over to the house that night, and they took us back in a room and

they told us he was dead and everyone was crying and carrying on. To me, it didn't affect

me that much. To me, I was thinking, you know, there's probably a *bright* side to this.

I do remember one thing that affected me was… that one time when he was

chasing my mother in the house with a knife so…and so and we…we kinda got in his

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way and all…and he… put the knife down and said , "if you don't like it, why'nt y'all *stab* me," so I got the…great idea and I…stabbed him in the leg, because that was as high up as I could reach. [laughing] It was like nothing, I was probably … four at the time. To him it was just a scratch. I don't even know if it… I mean I think our family changed quite a bit. Life improved somewhat. Mom had to work hard, but, well, she always did.

My mother… well you have to go back to… .warm? Well, you know she was *busy.* I mean…. but she took us camping which was very unusual for a single mother. And she was actually, she would get us a camper… she would get a camper…she would always have a camper… she would go stay in the camper we would be out in the woods and she would take us back to deer camp when we were kids. Every game we were in she went to, so she was supportive in that. Ah, the daily grind? She, I'd say, usually get home about four o'clock every day and she would make, she always had dinner at the table and it was pretty structured, and then after that we always wanted to leave.

She just left for work very early, before we got up. So, when she'd call the house several times to wake us each up, I would tend to…as soon as she got up, the phone was upstairs, in her bedroom. As soon as she left, when the first call came…I've got this really good talent. I can be sound asleep when the phone rang, and I can answer it immediately and make it sound like I've been awake for days. [laughing, talking fast] "Hello, this is Guido." And so that was, I would get up and go lay down on her bed right next to the phone, and that way as soon as the phone rang I would reach over and grab it and make it sound like I was awake, then hang up the phone and just continue to sleep. We were late to school all the time. We were usually, ahhh, I'd say at least once or twice

a week we'd be late to school. The school secretary, the attendance secretary at the high school, she lived two doors down and she…she started calling the house….to make sure we were up. When she left and she noticed the car was still there, she'd call to make sure that we got there. [In a lilting falsetto drawl] "This's Mizz *Weathersby*, ya need ta get up."

No, I think I mentioned in there [the questionnaire] that there were adults that would like to try to cling , you know… the church choir teacher…they would try to cling to young kids, and I kind of find that…I don't know…kind of sick. I really don't …I thought, why don't they have adult friends? Why would they have a bunch of ten year olds up at their house? It occurred to me that these people didn't *try* to have friends. I remember, one of the high school youth directors, she got to be buddy- buddy with everybody, and then came to find out… we found out she was supplying some kids with dope, helped another girl get an abortion and…..

No, I never did any kind of work or volunteering with kids. I don't have kids, and I liked Scouts, I'm an Eagle Scout, and it all goes back to…the social matters and …it's strange when somebody doesn't have…children…and they want to spend time…To me that looks….you know…

I never had any kind of a close relationship with any of my family; still don't. No. It's real odd, my wife still thinks it's funny that…the only person I have physical contact with as far as hugging, with anybody really except my mother…or a couple of friends because they're Europeans and they get into that. When my family gets together, there's absolutely no hugging, there's no, you know, kissing hello, or ….You know, most of them get along, they know the doings, the daily goings-on in each others' lives. And I

love to talk to them, as far as the rumors, but when it comes to what's going on in *my* life, I'm like, that's okay, nothing's changed.

They used to think I was a psycho because I would go to family gatherings… and…. not say a word. I mean, they used to figure that would be that I'd be like…a postal worker someday because.… I think that stemmed too from my father dying. I think they thought, well, he just keeps everything inside. And something really weird happened, one of my brothers made the comment, "you just keep everything inside," blah, blah, blah, blah. But it's like*, no*…you just don't let 'em *know* how I feel. Yeah, *I* know how *I* feel…I think my life's very well adjusted… yeah… I didn't worry about…you know, bad things happen to everyone and you just have to deal with it, and there's things you can affect and there's things you can't affect.

When I went off to college, that's been when I became the 'fixer of the problems' in the family. So, I did that for probably two years. They'd have a problem… they would call me and I would come up from College Station. Fix whatever problem the family was having. That's...that's when I found out that they had all realized that it didn't, didn't affect me as much when our father died. He was telling me how… I was the strong one of the family blah, blah, blah… I think… my brothers, too, whenever they have major difficulties….they…what they tend…That's the only time I *ever* hear from them is when they are having major difficulties they call me for *help*. Which always may seem kind of helpless, but… is it?   I did not then, and I don't now talk about anything in my life to my family.

I tend to let people take things … one thing I found out is the more somebody does something for you, the more they're willing to do. That's one thing that goes back to

the car business…The more you get from somebody, the more they're *willing* to give. I'm a B.F. Skinner behaviorist, you know? I mean, you can adjust *anybody's* behavior. And there are some people…they just have a tendency to break that mold…they're going one way, and suddenly they can break a conditioned response and other people can't or won't.

I used to tell the new guys… keep all the plaques and things you get…soccer stuff, ribbons, pictures, awards…put them all up. Even if they're not yours, put them up. Then when someone's in your office, you can, you can wait 'til they identify with one of them or something, and that will give you a direction to go in with that person. That'll give you a … a personal connection, and once you have that, you can sell anything to them. After all, selling is well, yeah, the personal connection…make 'em believe you like them. Make them believe in you.

Well, I am the… let's see… most places I've worked, they call it *"The Puppetmaster."* [laughing] Oh well. I think the reason my wife and and I did not work [when we worked together] is that I work on a…at a sublevel. You know, you approach a subject. You get their opinion. Wait 'til later and tell your opinion on it, then ask…spend time giving the arguments for it, then eventually they adopt that. Yeah, as far as that question goes, you can learn, you just have to have faith that you can eventually get everybody to do a particular *thing* that you want them to do if you just spend the time and the effort…to do that. Because, a lot of times, if I really take any position…I also have to explain it to the head of the dealership, and, you have authority, but not…there's always like three or four people that want to kick you down and put you back in your place.

So you learn to manipulate them, because if you ever say, "I want to do this, or I want to change that," everybody fights it. So you learn right off the bat to get *them* to make that suggestion, or just show the need and say, [raised, high pitched voice, hands raised palms up next to ears] *"Well, what are we gonna do?"* you know?

Oh, I've *read* a lot [of psychology], but it also, it seems… it's just common sense too. I'm familiar with…there's not a thing…my wife just finished her master's and I did a lot of things that she read and I had to read as far as …. but, yeah, I've had tons of psychology. Not anything probably in the last ten years, I haven't delved that much into. All through college I took all the abnormal psychology, childhood development, regular psychology courses.

I waited a long time to get married…my wife and I have been married eight years, and we, my wife and I, have literally never had an argument. I mean , it's very odd, up until the first seven and a half years of our marriage…we never spent a night apart. This summer I had a business meeting she couldn't go to, in Canada. Usually when I go to business meetings, any business meetings, or anything like that that has an overnight stay she would just go with me. Or, if she had to go somewhere, I would go with her. So, we have a very good relationship. Everybody makes a comment about it, most of our friends who haven't experienced it think it's *very odd* how compatible we are. I think we're lucky in that, most married couples argue about …it all boils down, I think…to money. We never have had any problems; we're lucky in that. And we don't have desires to spend beyond our means…

My wife considers me a success. To me, a successful person is a happy person. They're doing something…they're doing what they *enjoy*. I don't …ever remember a

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part of my life that I think was *unhappy.* When I went to Corpus it wasn't because I was unhappy, but because I couldn't see my future. I enjoyed every bit …I don't think there's a period of my life that I didn't enjoy what I was doing.

If you'd have told me when I was in college that I'd be…that when I was… 42 years old that I would be working, staring at a computer screen in an old office, that I'd make most of my decisions based upon what I see on the computer screen or on a financial statement, I'd say, *"NO WAY!"* There's no way I'm gonna sit there. And that's what *I do*. That's what I do for a living; I don't think that's what makes up *my life*, that's just a *part* of it. And I think that goes back to compartmentalizing… your life as if… I'm a composite…the problems with my father were like that…that was *his* problem, it wasn't *my* problem, and honestly when he was out of the picture, it was…one problem resolved.

That's what you have to do. You got one part here, and another part there.

It's like personal friends at work, friends: I don't cross over that line. But I never have, I always had different groups. It goes back to high school: I had those people I hung out with at school, some I hung out with at night, if I was going to just hang out. When I was in junior high I hung out at the tennis courts, it was a few blocks from our house. And that was a semi-hang out and that's where I got to know the Blacks. They always thought it was funny when they saw me. They used to call me… they had a nickname for me, "Sad David." I'd go there at night and sit at the tennis courts and smoke, and not do a whole lot and everyone there knew me as "Sad David." I don't think so…but that's how they referred to me. I guess I was just kinda moping around; I didn't do a whole lot, I wasn't very active…

I kind of compartmentalized my life, so that no one ever knew all about me. Oh, let's see…I think that's why I switched groups [of friends]. Because if I wanted to do one particular thing, I'd go with another group, and the groups didn't mix well…I still find that. I'd get one group of friends that I like and…. I have one guy that I go and I'll watch Aggies and go to A & M baseball games with. Yeah, we'd get season tickets…and I've tried to introduce him down to some of my other friends and *they* just… he just can't stand them and they don't like him…and…you know… or his wife or his kids. Most of *my* friends don't tend to mix, 'cause they're from different groups. So I've learned not even to even try.

I had different friends for different things and to this day no one knows a whole lot about me. When I was in college one of the things I did was to run for Justice of the Peace. I was like 25 years old…just as a lark, I spent maybe three, four hundred dollars on my campaign. But, I'd go to the bar that I go to after work, and that was when all this…I was going to school, I think I was in my last semester of school and I was working at a car dealership and at the bar I went to at night, people would ask my name-they'd just met me- and I didn't want to say my name because there were signs all over town with my name on them, so I'd just say "Guido." My name is Guido. So, there are still quite a few people who know me as Guido.

I was a social drinker. I don't think I ever…I still have never in my life had a drink alone. Even when I was in college I never kept any real beer in my place, I just drank when I was hanging out.

My third brother just passed away. He drank himself… he became an alcoholic. He drank himself to death. He died, I guess, when he was about thirty-eight? So….she

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[mother] got to where she would…she did what she could for him…she took him in and tried to send him to halfway houses and all like that. He would stay, and then she'd end up trying the tough-love thing and kicking him out of the house, and all he would do is wander around the streets by where she lived. She just couldn't take that, so she just took him in. And, she tried, she didn't… want to give him anything to drink, but he'd go the neighborhood store, and he'd drink Listerine in the aisles of the supermarket.

My third brother, the one who did eventually die, drank himself to death, it started with agoraphobia….but he had a few other problems. He had asthma when a child… very bad, and they sent him off to C---R, which was the child Research Institute…in Denver, and that…always had an effect on me. He was always…very… dependent . He would cry every time…my mother took us anywhere and left us for the weekend. I guess he was always afraid she was going to disappear. He had a lot of… I guess it could have been….*abandonment* problems. Yeah…when he got into… college he got a very severe case of agoraphobia and… to the point where it was real obvious. So, no, he…he died of …liver failure, I'd say about three-four years ago.

And then, right after that is when I got out of the car business. That's when I kind of realized that I'm spending…I've been working fourteen, fifteen hours a day for, six days a week for twelve years…there's other things *to life* than the car business. Yeah, I make a…it was a strange transition because I make a third of what I used to make. When you think about it, how many forty-five or fifty year old people do you see in this business anymore? They're all divorced, bankrupt. You know…I'm serious! Even the best, most powerful people in the business are on their third wives….their kids hate 'em. The only time they have any sort of relationship with their children is when they're thirty,

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and they want to come and work for their dad. So… I decided it wasn't a life I wanted to pursue into my golden years.

The way I initially got in the car business was because I tended to lose my jobs during finals week, because I actually had to *study, or do something*. Usually it was turning in papers, so I'd miss work, or be late for work, or something like that so I would tend to get fired. I got fired for sleeping on the job. I kind of lost jobs, or just quit jobs, I'd always have another job in two-three days. It didn't matter what, I'd go in and *lie*, you know because on the applications it was… *you know*…

I remember going into the International Shoe company, in Grimes. It was a factory, about two blocks away from my house, and I needed something for the summer. And I would just take whatever jobs they had, *hell yeah*, without telling them I was going back to school… because they wouldn't give you a job if they knew you were going as soon as the summer was over.

So I went up there and they said, "I'm sorry, but the only thing we need was a printing press operator."

And I said, "well, what a *coincidence*, because I happen to *be* a printing press operator!"   Actually, my father was a printing press operator, and I remember a picture of him with a big printing press next to him, and right on the side of the printing press was 'Gossamer.'

So I looked at them and said, "Do y'all use the Gossamer printers?"

And they said, "Oh, we used to but we just switched over to this other system."

And I said, "I'm familiar with it, but I don't know the exact workings of that one; I'm more familiar with the Gossamer printer."

They made me a foreman, I was over people, so I was like… "y'all turn it on, y'all do that."

I needed a job for a while. I went into a rental place. They said they needed a heavy equipment operator. I said, "what to dig post holes?" They needed someone to move around the stuff that people turn in here…need someone to take the heavy equipment and clean it and store it and put it on the trailers it needs to be on, and I thought, well, I've driven a tank from the *Army, I'm* a heavy equipment operator, so I can *do that*. I put their backhoe into the side of a building and they fired me, and that was the only time that everybody ever figured it out.

You can adapt. If you can go into an interview …and see somebody that's interviewing you, and you know what they want to hear, you can just give them the answers they want to hear.

The only difficult time I had was, let's see…I think I was eight? Seven or eight. I did try to kill myself, and I forget, I don't remember the *reason*. I hung myself on the chinaberry tree in the backyard …over something minor like not getting a dog, or not getting my way over something. You know, but I always *remember*… it was gonna *teach them a lesson…they'll be sorry*. I do remember I tied the rope around… it was a swing we had in the backyard…when I came out of the tree with the rope around my neck that started choking me, I realized that, *at that very moment,* that no matter *how bad* life *got,* it wasn't *near* as bad *as dying*. So…so… I was able to s-scramble back up the tree and pull the rope off my neck, and it gave me some pretty good rope burns [laughing], and I lost two fingernails getting back up in the tree. I pulled them off. And I explained to my mother when they got home…

Oh, they weren't even *there* when I did this. And, I had the rope burns around my neck, and so they…you wanna know how I got this? I got my neck caught on a rope and I managed to get the rope off, I told them.

*That's very important, because it's...*if I …whenever I got to feeling… if ever I got depressed... from to time… *dying really sucks!* When men try to commit suicide they're more successful   because they use quicker methods, whereas women use other methods. And I think that anybody who to tries to commit suicide at one point in time, they realize that, oh this is not what I want. And women, they can back out because they'll take pills, or they'll use… use something… a slower method, whereas men use… tend to use a gun, or jump off something, so…You know, death may not be that bad, but *dying* is bad!

Wouldn't you find that some people who have had problems become self-reliant and others become more dependent? But haven't most of those people [who had these big problems] been happy most of their lives? I've always considered myself luckier than most. Like I told my wife, I think I have the same mental attitude that I had when I was about six years old.

You know? As far as…growing up...there were a lot of people who were in a lot worse condition. I must say, that because my mother had the position she had…*now granted,* she worked…but we all had all the financial support that we needed. There were other people that had… both parents …and they didn't have a….happy home life. But ours was, for all intents and purposes, a happy home life. We didn't necessarily like each other, but…we got by. Don't you get bored listening to some of these stories?

At some point I decided there was a little more I needed to do to get more out of what I wanted out of life, and I did. Anything I could do… I wanted to experience everything I could, that's why the Army thing came up. At some point, you'd think that going to the Army would… establish more discipline and all of that…it did to a certain degree…but then, it didn't. . I took a little break and let other people tell me what to do. Yeah, but I did learn this: brainwashing, *no matter how smart you think you were, it works!*   Know what I mean. It really does, if you've ever been just absolutely broken down… but you can see the process and you know what's coming. When I went there, I was a Socialist. My dog tags say Druid; they asked me what my religion was and I said, "well, I'm a Druid." Once you spend thirteen weeks going to bed at nine o'clock, and getting up at four thirty in the morning…..

You know, I found this book in the garbage can when I was there, by Walter S. Kessler, J.S.P.S.   "Satan and his Psychoanalysis." I've never been able to find it anywhere else. It was in print for just a short time. It was really neat…it was about a computer-scientist who has a dream to make a particular circuit to put into a computer system. He puts the computer all together just in a kind of a dream trance. The computer, when he turns it on…it says its Satan. A psychiatrist comes in and tries to psychoanalyze it. They live in a town that's built in circles, like the nine circles of hell, and right in the middle of it is where the computer is. I had to hide that book in the army…tape it under my bunk…because you weren't allowed to read anything during that period of time, no movies, no newspapers, no TV. I tried to look it up, but couldn't find it.

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Our interview had taken about an hour and a half, and we parted much more comfortably than we had begun. Still, there was a sort of social awkwardness to Guido; timing just a little out of synch with his actions and words. We left with some questions unanswered, yet answered in their own way. Though Guido had never stated that he felt successful, he said his wife did. And, though Guido disavowed belief in gifted and talented, he *had* come to this interview, did know how he had been identified, and obviously took pride in his intelligence and ability to manage people. Though his responses were a mass of contradictions, he had displayed only sincerity when making them. And that was the point of this study: what did participants feel had made the difference   for   them   between   underachievement   and   success

4.2 Chapter Summary

Four individual stories, each told in its owner's voice. Each examined by its teller for veracity, for inconsistency, and for tone. Each story was created from interview and questionnaire information either spoken or written by a study participant, then constructed by the researcher to flow in a loose chronological fashion. The words are the participants'; they have not been changed, simply had their order rearranged for improved readability and flow.

CHAPTER 5

Findings

5.1 Setting the Stage

Compare the best of their days with the worst of your days
You won't win with your standards so high and your spirits so low
At least remember…This is you on a bad day, you on a pale day
Just do your best and don't…Don't worry, oh…
The way you watch yourself is so unfair…

Lyrics: ©Morrissey, Do Your Best & Don't Worry
Southpaw Grammar, 1995

In this study, therapeutic effects of narrative were seen when each participant voiced a sudden clarity regarding their underachievement, a deeper understanding of some family issue or new insight into their own behaviors or ideas. And, each of the participants also appeared drained, but satisfied after his or her story telling session; leading me to believe each had experienced some of the cathartic effects of narrative.

Questionnaires and transcripts of semi-structured interviews from four individuals' experiences of underachievement and subsequent success formed the database for this study. The goal was not to answer *a priori* hypotheses, but to strive for *emic* understanding of the phenomenon of underachievement transformed into success; understanding drawn from participants' own stories and their interpretation of the truth embedded within those stories.

The purpose of this study was to uncover, through life-story research, how some gifted individuals (who significantly underachieved while students) were able to eventually overcome their problems and become high achieving adult citizens. What factor (s) did they perceive as critical to their success? Was there some particular

moment when they suddenly decided to change? *Did* they change, or did factors outside

themselves change? Did they attribute their current self-fulfilled state to their own hard

work, or to others' interventions?

To what did they attribute their former achievement problems? Were there

particular environmental, intrapersonal or societal factors they felt "caused " the

problem(s)? Why did they feel interventions aimed at reversing the underachievement

failed? If they had the opportunity to go back and be students again, would they? If they

were able to control all external and internal factors, would they do anything differently?

Did these individuals wish they had become achievers at earlier ages, or did they perceive

benefits from their experiences, no matter how negative?

With these questions in mind, data were analyzed by case, by gender, and across

all four cases. Similarities and differences were investigated, and the findings drawn from

questionnaire data (semi-structured researcher developed questionnaire and the

Overexcitability Questionnaire II (OEQII, Falk, Lind, Miller, Piechowski & Silverman,

1999); recorded interviews, and their subsequent verbatim transcripts; interviewer notes;

and telephone and email contacts. Interviews ranged in length from one-and-a-half to

three hours, and questionnaires from eleven to twenty-four pages. Data analysis began

with the first questionnaire returned, and proceeded throughout and beyond the data

collection period, with inductive analytical procedures utilized on questionnaires, field

notes and transcribed interviews.

This chapter consists of five sections: individual characteristics of the

participants; familial characteristics; educational factors seen as relevant; the choice to

change; and the lessons learned. Each section includes both individual and cross-case

findings. These results have been organized into a framework logically drawn from the data, and not designed to fit a particular pattern. The discussion of Dabrowski's *Theory of Positive Disintegration* (1964) is provided to help explain some of the participants' personal characteristics considered germane to this study.

5.2 Individual Characteristics of the Participants

Individual Demographics

	DAWN	KARIN	CASEY	*GUIDO*
Age	50	34	30	41
Gender	F	F	M	M
Education	2 yr-college	4 yr-degree	J. D.	4 yr- degree
Employment	Student/Honors	Art Teacher	Attorney	Financial Analyst

Figure 1. Participant age, gender, education and occupation.

Participants ranged from 30 to 50 years old, and included two men and two women. All participants were white, middle class individuals currently residing in a suburb of Houston, Texas. All had completed at least two years of college, two had bachelors degrees, and one a juris doctorate.

Giftedness.

In accordance with current multi-measure, multi-factor standards for identification, giftedness was established by the aforementioned existence of at least three of the following twelve criteria: formal identification of high-ability as measured by

standardized mental ability and/or achievement tests, individual psychological educational examination, self-identification (based upon an awareness of differences in ability to understand people, ideas or content knowledge with greater ease than peers), through high grades, academic awards, inclusion in special educational programming for gifted students, grade acceleration, early-admission into school, early college enrollment/dual enrollment in college and high school, demonstrated creative ability, and/or inclusion in accelerated classes. All information, though supplied by participants, remained consistent across questionnaires, interviews and discussions

Guido had, "scored well on standardized tests all of my life. Most people use that as the criteria for 'gifted.' It has given me confidence to try anything I've desired, and afforded me with opportunities throughout my life."

Once Casey was, "placed in the 'gifted' class I just thought I was gifted and acted accordingly. I think my teachers thought I was gifted. Being gifted got me, I'd say it got me a better education than normal and it probably at least kept me on track. This is complete arrogance, but if I had not been segregated I don't believe I would have passed or moved forward in any way. I would have been bored to death and probably dropped out."

	DAWN	KARIN	CASEY	*GUIDO*
IQ	≅144	Unknown	≅ 150	≅ 138-165
Achievement	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Creative	Yes-Interpersonal	Yes-Artistic	Yes-Thinking	Yes-Interpersonal
Program	Yes-Honors	No	Yes-K-12	No
Courses	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Self-ID	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Acceleration	Yes	No	No	No
EarlyAdmission	Yes	Yes	No	No
View Gifted As Different	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

Figure 2. Criteria for identification of each participant as gifted.

Dawn was considered as "gifted" in several ways: "… in the college-bound track at school. Early admission to school, early admission to college, and an IQ of 144, I believe. It got me high-expectations and confusion about why. It was a contradictory blessing." Throughout childhood, Karin was never considered gifted by anyone except herself.

Underachievement.

	DAWN	KARIN	CASEY	*GUIDO*
Overt/Covert?	Usually Covert	Covert	Overt	Overt
Defined As:	Not playing The Game. Not doing useless work. Masquerading as fair achievement.	A-B work without ever studying. Not working to my potential. Fooling everybody.	Playing The Game my own way. Refusal to show what I knew, or do boring work. Refusal to fit into The Box.	Not working to others' expectations. Doing work the night before it was due. Energy spent on subverting The System.

Figure 3. Participant experiences of underachievement.

The single most commonly encountered definition of underachievement in the gifted literature was that of Joanne Rand Whitmore, who referred to "Students who demonstrate exceptionally high capacity for academic achievement and are not performing satisfactorily for their levels on daily academic tasks and achievement tests" (1980). Olenchak (1999) offered a more inclusive definition, stating that, "underachievement among gifted students, like giftedness and underachievement separately, is not a clearly defined construct " (p. 294), and that our definitions of underachievement need to include more than students' academic work, because, " regardless of its context, underachievement eventually produces the same [negative] outcomes for gifted young people who experience it" (p.293). Fehrenbach (1993) looked for, " established, self-defeating patterns of behavior," while Ford (1997) relied on psychometric definitions, qualitative, and/or subjective measures. The participants in this study defined underachievement in different ways:

Casey remembers, "It seems trivial to look at one "B" in the fifth grade as some kind of catalyst, but this may have been the first time I was truly challenged and I didn' t

just buzz through. However, once I was able to accept a lower grade from that point forward my grades did not improve, but only got worse. In 6th grade I failed a couple of six weeks and was generally making B's and C's. I discovered (or someone told me, I don't know) that you could keep climbing the school ladder with B's and C's. You didn't need A's.   The emphasis on making grades was gone. This is where I developed bad habits with regards to homework and the educational process entirely. I didn't have to work as hard as my fellow classmates in order to make a "B" or a "C". I could do half the work they did and still keep going. I think I may have annoyed a few people along the way."

Like her gifts, Karin's, "underachievement went undetected by my teachers. My parents know I didn't study at home. And my dad just [recently] told me none of us kids did. And neither did he when he was young. He said we all could have studied more. By grading standards I was successful. By true measure of potential I was a far cry from what I could have been. Looking back, it's surprising, that my parents never saw what was really going on with me- hiding out in my room, terrible attitude, depression, writing poem after poem." And, she added, "I was, just lazy."

Guido, " never considered myself an underachiever, other people did. In college, there was a time when I was tired of making decisions that everyone said would have major impacts on my life. So, one day, on a whim, I joined the army and let them make my decisions for me, for a while. I enjoyed the experience." There, he learned that no matter how smart you were, even when you saw it coming, brainwashing still worked. He did not choose to serve a second tour in the Army.

Dawn discussed, "Hidden underachievement all my life. Made B's without studying, but no one dealt with it. Mom didn't do anything about it, Dad didn't know or care."

Developmental potential and overexcitabilities.

Coding the data for this study a second time, discussed in Chapter Three, uncovered findings neither initially perceived nor expected: those of intensity and introspection. Each of these four individuals had intense personality characteristics; a passionate sense of how the world should be, as opposed to how it actually was. This intensity, intertwined with deep and early introspection are hallmarks of what Dabrowski (1964) calls overexcitabilities (OEs), and Kitano (1990), overintensities. Piechowski (1979) has described OEs as conduits of information flow and modes of experiencing, varying from barely present, to narrow, to wide open.

OEs are personality characteristics that, when particularly intense, cannot be suppressed (Dabrowski, 1970, p.32), though their possessors often attempt to conceal them. Dabrowski theorized their basis lay, in part, in greater than average response to stimuli, and a larger field of consciousness. He called overexcitability a, "tragic gift," that caused people to experience higher highs and lower lows, and noted that OE was not appreciated by others or society. Consider that, "One who manifests several forms of OE, sees reality in a different, stronger and more multi-sided manner." (1972, p.34) Shaine, (1999) stated,

> the most difficult situations arise for the child with a strong emotional OE. Intense sensitivity can lead quickly to feelings of rejection, inadequacy, guilt, and loneliness… followed by the disapproval of the teacher and classmates for being

too sensitive - which makes the seeming rejection even more real to the sensitive youngster.

Overexcitability is only one part of what the participants displayed, their characteristics and words just pieces of a larger puzzle: that of Developmental Potential, described as,

> The constitutional endowment that determines the character and the extent of mental growth possible for a given individual. The developmental potential can be assessed on the basis of the following components: psychic overexcitability, special abilities and talents, and autonomous factors (notably the third factor). (Dabrowski, 1972)

In other words, developmental potential is the nexus of three factors: psychic overexcitabilities, specific talents, and autonomous factors, most notably the dynamism of conscious choice. Dynamisms are, " instincts, drives and intellectual processes combined with emotions (Dabrowski, 1972, p.294)."

Dabrowski characterized the development of the personality throughout the lifetime until attainment of the personality ideal as an evolutionary process occurring through five levels, with three influential factors. At the first level are the organism's biological drives, what Dabrowski refers to as the first factor of personality. At this primitive level of integration self has primacy, socialization is achieved, and little internal turmoil exists. It is merely an acceptance of life as it is. When environmental factors are less desirable, individuals at this level may exhibit more impulsive, biologically driven behaviors. The existence of psychic overexcitabilities, however, when acted upon by the second factor, environment, creates the potential for advanced development through positive disintegration, potentially culminating in the eventual attainment of the personality ideal.

The second factor involves the influence of environment on organisms; at the first level of personality, a simple unconflicted existence of virtually complete social conformity. This unthinking acceptance of the social milieu is seen, for example, when young adults continue in their parents' religious practices without closely examining the foundations of that religion, or their own motivations for remaining there. According to Dabrowski the vast majority of human beings remain at this stage for most of their lives. Though some may try to evolve to the next level, most simply undergo a partial disintegration and finish at the same level at which they started.

The greatest conflict, inner turmoil, and change occur between the first and second levels. Strong first (genetic) factors, or overexcitabilities, are less likely to be permanently influenced by either positive or negative second (environmental) factors. At this stage, individuals experience intense feelings of fragmentation, moodiness, confusion and general dis-ease, resulting in an eventual disintegration of the old self. When disintegration leads to the falling away of the old self and (re) integration at a higher level of development, it is known as *positive disintegration*; a new, improved personality emerges through conscious choice. For some, however, a protracted period of chronic negative disintegration leads to reintegration at the former level, suicidal tendencies, or a transformation to mental illness (psychosis).

During this process, OEs work in combination with mild psychoneuroses, not in a pathological sense, but as protective factors that immunize individuals against later psychoses. That is, although these psychological characteristics of perfectionism, self-consciousness, hostility, anxiety and depression (among others) may appear to be symptoms of dis-ease they are actually a healthy, conscious, evolved response to turmoil.

In an experiential loop, the neuroses help drive the change from old self to new, while the change drives the neuroses.

Disintegrations at the second level are marked by internal conflicts on a horizontal level, so are referred to as unilevel. They result from competing values and desires, and the internal struggles that ensue.

The third level, like the second, is marked by conflicts and disintegrations, but with a difference: the internal conflicts now exist on a vertical level. Rather than simple unilevel choices, there is now an understanding of a higher order to life, and that choices must be made regarding how it will be lived. Dabrowski calls "this spontaneous multilevel disintegration." This heightened awareness, driven by neuroses fed by overexcitabilities can lead to powerful internal dissonance when behavior fails to coincide with expectations.

Spontaneous disintegration does not typically occur beyond this stage. Individuals who have reached this place rarely regress, but moving forward requires commitment and hard work. The second, third, and fourth levels all entail varying degrees of inner conflict but the fourth level and above are strongly influenced by the third factor, the dynamism of conscious choice. This, "dynamism of conscious choice (valuation) by which one affirms or rejects certain qualities in oneself and in one's environment," (1972, p.306) is the key to change. Without it, lasting personality development cannot occur. And, the greater the developmental potential, the longer the developmental period until eventual full expression of the personality ideal is achieved. During the period of change, internal dissonance results when inner and outer realities fail to mesh, leaving one feeling as though he or she is living life on several different planes simultaneously, though one's

values continue to move gradually toward a higher ideal. For example, the process of multilevel disintegration may result in fully evolved moral values, while firm belief in intuitive power is still lacking. Or, like one of this study's participants, intellectuality may be advanced while emotional intelligence is not, leading to internal incongruity and the external facade of arrogance.

At the fifth and highest level of personality development there is marked by internal harmony and a fully integrated personality; the individual displays constancy of personality regardless of the setting in which he finds himself. At this level, one few ever achieve, values are shared regardless of nationality, religion or ethnicity. The person's emphasis has shifted from level one self-focus to level-five societal focus. Emphasis is on greater good, social justice and helping others, and is accompanied by a deeply felt sense of responsibility.

Life crises precipitate conflicts and disintegrations, thus providing opportunities for personal growth through hardship. Dabrowski characterized crises as, "periods of increased insight into oneself, creativity and personality development" (1964, p.18). Though this can be an intensely painful process, the third factor of developmental potential, autonomous self-determination, pushes through disintegration, reaching for gradually higher levels of integration, until full self-development has occurred.

This personality ideal has been noted by other researchers: Sternberg called it the state of wisdom (2001), where actions are driven by a combination of intellect and emotion. The peak of Maslow's hierarchy of human needs is known as self-actualization and is similar to the top level in Dabrowski's theory, though attainment is predicated on

all subordinate needs being met. Kohlberg's (1984) sixth stage in his Theory of Moral Development is described as attainment of universal principles.

OEQII	DAWN	KARIN	CASEY	*GUIDO*
PSYCHOMOTOR	<25th	45th	40th	N/A
SENSUAL	75th	85th	50th	N/A
IMAGINATIONAL	<25th	99th	75th	N/A
INTELLECTUAL	95th	85th	99th	N/A
EMOTIONAL	90th	89th	<25th	N/A

Additional Relevant Individual Characteristics

Figure 4. Participants' Overexcitability Questionnaire II scores, (in percentiles).

Dawn.

Dawn was a child who had a strong sense of how the world should work. In both story and demeanor she demonstrated several psychological intensities, including sensual, intellectual and emotional. Strong emotions ran through her narrative, as did Dawn's love of learning. Wide gestures, fast speech and a voice that got away from her when she was on an interesting topic, all indicators of psychomotor intensity, were not borne out in Dawn's OEQ II.

In school, Dawn was frequently in trouble for challenging her teachers, blurting out information and refusing to play the game when it involved mass regimentation, rote, repetitive work, or acting in non-authentic ways. Even when she knew the stakes were

high for not conforming, she chose to do things her own way and suffer the consequences.

Dawn's grandfather was an important adult figure in her life until she moved away from him at age eight. He encouraged Dawn's interest in becoming a scientist, supplied her with "real" science materials, and important materials in other areas of interest. Later, her brother-in-law Bill filled the role, being a reliable mentor, and treating her with unconditional regard. Bill encouraged Dawn's social activism and helped her find outlets for her drive to help others.

Dawn always felt different; knowing things others did not, even as a young child. By age 8, she had decided she was an atheist because, " if you said God was the reason for everything, then that keeps you from trying to find out what else could be a reason, and it stood in the way of us finding out more about things." She was not a popular child in school, was lonely at home and had no real role models for appropriate social behaviors. She learned early on that there were costs to knowing too much at school, and had to work hard to suppress her natural intellectual exuberance.

Being comfortable in her own skin came naturally because she was frequently home alone. She calls this both a great strength and a great source of pain. She moved frequently so never had many opportunities to develop friendships. Her siblings were much older, and did not share many experiences, though her older sister took her in when Dawn was 14 years old. Her brother served as the role model for the "grind" she did not choose to be.

Dawn struggled with issues such as how to make friends, organizational skills and learning how to get by smoothly in the world, but refused to resort to what she considered

manipulative behaviors in order to get what she wanted. Though tacit knowledge was desperately needed, she refused to "grovel" for attention. Intellectually, Dawn always possessed self-confidence, knowing she learned well and quickly and that intelligence was valued at home.

Though she started school, then college, early, she was in and out of college for seven years before she eventually left altogether. Finding school repetitive and meaningless, she chose, instead, to pursue a life of social activism where she could make a difference. There, she learned leadership, collaboration, and caring about things outside herself.

Dawn struggled for many years with alcoholism and eating disorders, and though she no longer suffers from these disorders, she says she is, "managing" them. She has experienced times when she has either contemplated suicide or actually attempted it. She had a nervous breakdown about 18 years ago, hitting rock bottom.

Karin.

Karin was another person who felt she "just knew" things others did not, even from an early age. She was never identified as gifted, but chose to include herself in this study based on characteristics she knows she possesses. He underachievement was entirely hidden and remains so to this day. She is able to produce quality work with little effort, both academically and vocationally speaking.

Her schools never provided formal gifted programming, though they did have occasional opportunities for "the gifted" students. When she attempted to ascertain how

to become a part of these groups, which she perceived as being peopled with the "popular kids." Her questions went unanswered.

Karin became the salutatorian of her high school class, even without studying. She made good grades throughout school, and took every academically challenging class available in her small mid-western town. Blessed with artistic ability, she drew and painted from an early age. These behaviors were rewarded at home, where she was excused from household chores to pursue them.

Karin scored very highly in all five areas of overexcitability on the OEQII questionnaire. In person, she appears to be a deeply passionate, yet composed person. She comes from a traditional family of schoolteachers, living as a child in a small town with her sister and twin brother, a cat and a dog. She learned independence early in life, as children in her family were expected to do their chores, earn adequate grades in school, and entertain themselves without getting into trouble, though she often did have problems from challenging authority and talking out in class.

This self-sufficiency prevented her from speaking out when, at age 9, she was molested by a someone outside her family. Suppressing the memory, she suffered in silence until the middle of college, using sports, other extracurricular activities and poetry to quell her internal dis-ease[4]. She has always somewhat resented the fact that no one noticed what was happening with her, though she would not "stoop" to explicitly asking for help. She, too, suffered from thoughts of suicide, though never acted on them, telling herself it would be a selfish act that would only hurt others.

Her unwillingness to ask for assistance carried over into the areas of developing

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[4] A Dabrowskian term for how we feel when we are off-balance or have that feeling something is just not right. Dis-ease is not meant here as a sign of physical illness, though dis-ease occurring over a protracted period of time can lead to the development of physical symptoms.

friendships and learning how to "do" school the right way. She always wanted to be the child who got all "Es" instead of "Ss" on her grade reports, but no one ever told her how to do it.

Karin was also a fairly isolated child in school, having an Australian accent, starting school a year early, and because of her intellectual precocity. When called a "Know-It-All," at school, she tried to take her intelligence underground. Called the same at home, she learned early that even though there were many more smart girls than boys at school, showing intelligence was not valued by peers, though teachers sometimes reinforced it.

Karin never really had adult mentors to lean on, though she occasionally spoke with a coach about things that were bothering her. Her family was a fairly close-knit one, however, with parents attending children's outside activities, and grandparents living nearby as well.

Claiming that no one knows how lazy and disorganized she really is, Karin considers her method of staying organized, "organized mess." She loves to begin new projects, especially of the creative sort, but always has lots of unfinished projects lying around. She likes routine, but also has a high tolerance for ambiguity, and can change plans at a moment's notice.

Like many bright individuals Karin possesses an intolerance for ignorance, becoming frustrated or irritated by what she perceives to be others' laziness or unwillingness to even attempt to think. She drives herself hard, and has great expectations of herself and others.

Casey.

Self-confidence has always been both a blessing and a curse for Casey. He has always had at least a, " good minimum of confidence," though it has waxed and waned during different stages of his life. Identified as gifted in second grade, Casey felt that it has allowed him a better education and more opportunities; that without the better education he had, he would have made a, "fascinating criminal," at some point in his life. He has always been able to think outside the box, often going beyond to where he, "turns the box inside out," and just "gets" things faster; what he calls, "my computer just works faster." He says he, " just doesn't think like a regular person."

On the OEQII, Casey displayed overexcitabilities in the intellectual, sensual, and imaginational areas, though he scored below the 25th percentile in the emotional arena. He said he asks more "what-if" questions, even at age 30, than anyone else he has ever known.

As a child, he refused to play the game, would not even consider dealings with people he perceived as ignorant, or doing the same stupid things over and over. He does his best to tolerate them, but has a difficult time. This carries over into his practice of the law, when he wishes that he would not feel so responsible for winning all the cases for his clients, even in cases where they have obviously done something wrong.

Casey knows he never had to work as hard as others to accomplish the same ends, and actually looked down upon those who were high achievers for their compliance with what he viewed as useless rules and regulations. He has always felt he was not obligated to prove his knowledge to others, that they should just recognize his brilliance for what it is.

He was involved in some extracurricular activities- primarily the high school marching band where he was a section leader for the percussion section. He considered his band director an important adult in his life, and band a place where he was challenged to move forward. He also developed a peer group from the students with whom he shared gifted and talented classes throughout school, beginning in second grade.

Like Dawn and Karin, Casey went through some low periods in his life, as well, including several years when he drank heavily and experienced suicidal thoughts. He felt like a failure after a lifetime of telling himself, "I don't have to do this because I already know how great I am and I know what my potential is…leave me alone…So I went off on my own and went, well, maybe you're NOT the greatest swimmer in the ocean." He experienced depression at this time.

Guido.

Guido was a bit different from the other participants. Though his story contains many of the same elements as the others', he denies being different from anyone else, and considers "gifted" to be a state anyone can attain; that the more tests one takes the better one can score on them, and that anyone could do what he did, given a neighbor in graduate school who practiced her testing skills on him. He claimed, " I knew things other kids did not because I read, observed, or experienced them. I also felt that I analyzed everything as to cause and effect to better understand it. I used the knowledge to amuse myself and other kids."

He also never explicitly stated that he considered that he felt he was successful, just that his wife did. As for underachievement, "he just didn't achieve to *other people's*

expectations," having decided to, " be retired the first 30 years of his life, and work the next 30." Even so, he had specific words based upon experience about both underachievement and reversal of it.

Guido was identified as being especially bright in about third grade, when this student who received special education speech services for a lisp and articulation problem was discovered to have achievement scores nine grades above his chronological grade-level. This immediately led to his being labeled as "not working up to his potential."

He, too, was a student who refused to play the game, even when it led to problems at home or in school. He worked hard to subvert the system, taking pleasure in showing off "inane" knowledge, and "tons of trivia" with which to impress others. Torturing lesser mortals with intellectual swordplay, and finding ways to gain entry into every clique in the school were favored pastimes.

Guido's story demonstrates that he has consistently maintained strict privacy about his life, saying that he has always compartmentalized various parts of his life so no one ever knows/knew all about him. Claiming popularity, with friends in many groups, he always referred to them as "The Blacks," "The Cowboys," "The Jocks," and never by name. He claimed that the groups were never inter-mixed; that they would not get along with one another. Guido has long been known as "The PuppetMaster" in his place of employment, due to his unique ability to find ways how, "you can adjust *anybody's* behavior," if you want to.

Guido has read widely in the area of psychology, though not for many years. He views his entire life as generally happy, especially since his family has never wanted for material things or money, then or now. Despite that, he has attempted suicide on at least

one occasion, at about age 8. Since then, he says, he has never reached a point that low, because, "No matter how bad life got, it wasn't near as bad as dying."

He discussed frequent experiences with alcohol, beginning at an early age, though claims no dependency problem. He said, " I was a social drinker; I don't think I ever had a drink alone...I just drank when I was hanging out." Guido's story is replete with hanging-out stories, as this was a favorite activity throughout teen and adult years.

As a teenager, Guido found and lost jobs on a regular basis. He proudly explained why this was not a problem: he ably fabricated his way into whatever line of work he chose to pursue. He was very effectively able to utilize prior knowledge, context clues, and interpersonal intelligence to get these jobs. His primary line of work for about twenty years has been the automobile business, where he has worked different jobs, most notably as the dealership "F & I" [5]man. He is now a financial analyst, a job he claims that, "If you'd told me when I was in college that I'd be…42 years old and that I would be working in, staring at a computer screen in an old office, that I'd make most of my decisions based upon what I see on a computer screen or on a financial statement, I'd say, 'NO WAY!' There's no way I'm gonna sit there." But, he said this is just a part of his life now, and that's part of the compartmentalizing he does, "That's what you have to do. You got one part here, and another part there."

Despite gentle prompting, Guido neither returned a completed OEQII, nor an edited narrative. As a researcher who has administered, scored, and analyzed many measures of overexcitability during the past decade, I can hazard an educated guess about Guido: that he exhibits characteristics of overexcitability in at least the intellectual area,

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[5] Finance and Insurance. This is the individual to whom a prospective customer is often "turned over" for the final hard sell to close the sale.

and probably in the imaginational category, as well. From his story, it is apparent that Guido loves to learn, he appears to become bored with sameness and repetition and to get excited about opportunities to both acquire and display new learning. He appears to possess a playful side that takes over occasionally, causing him to create and enact scenarios just for fun.

Summary of Individual Characteristics

All four participants displayed characteristics of overexcitabilities in at least two areas, indicative of higher than average developmental potential. All revealed experiences of substance abuse and expressed either suicidal ideation or actual attempts at suicide, indicative of sensitive individuals' attempts to deaden the pain experienced during the disintegrative process. All four had several other similar characteristics: an intolerance for ignorance or stupidity, intense perfectionism, for both themselves and others, a sense of "just knowing" things others don't, feeling different from an early age, characteristics pointing to an understanding of how the world should be, and not accepting how it was.

Casey remarked, "Yes. I was usually smarter than most other kids. Not all kids, but most of them. I didn't have to work as hard as a lot of students did to accomplish the same results. I tended to be the first one done with a test and still score the highest grade. I was then and continue to be in a race with myself. How fast can I get it done? Can I beat the other guy? The key factor was learning there wasn't a race.

"I always 'just knew' things other kids and teachers didn't know. I have an innate ability to read and understand the basic facts, to interpret and to forecast. It's a great skill to have, but what I did to deal with it is nothing. I didn't try to explain it or fight it. I

'just knew' and I was content with my own knowledge. I never felt a need to show off my knowledge or smartness, but I did feel the need to be included and wanted to be liked."

Each expressed the sense that not knowing everything was not ok, and that asking for help was a sign of weakness, as demonstrated by the use of words like Karin not "stooping" to ask for help, or Dawn not "groveling" for attention. Karin explained that she wanted to be a good student and to be organized but that, " no one told her," how to do it, and she would not ask. Dawn wanted to be loved, but would not grovel for the attentions of her parents, whom she perceived loved and attended to her brother more. Casey reflects back on his resistance to playing the game and wishes now that he had listened when people tried to tell him to play by the rules, and that his parents had insisted on high academic performance. Guido professes no regrets. Adults were similarly expected to achieve at these high levels, and the children were frustrated, angry or disappointed when they did not.

One interesting and unexpected finding was that of all participants expressing self-confidence even in the midst of trouble. The gifted literature traditionally depicts underachievers as lacking in self-confidence, yet all four of these people discussed self-confidence as an important part of them; part of what drove them to act as they did. My four participants all gave unsolicited reports of high self-esteem in childhood; strong self-confidence that helped them know they were intelligent and different from many of their chronological peers.

Casey said, "I've always had a high level of self-confidence. Still do to this day, borderlines on arrogance…and my saying that I say to my wife, and… for these purposes

one time is… *I hate stupid people.* Ignorance I can accept. That self-confidence led me to probably *make* choices and determinations… about life."

All four people felt compelled to do what they needed to do, even when there were stiff consequences for following their own minds. This seems to fit with the concept of self-confidence; having a belief in self so strong that you just have to follow your conscience and do what you know to be right, even when others damn you for it.

Self-reliance appeared as a strong theme in this study. Early and well-developed self-reliance born of necessity was a finding that appeared in the pilot study three years ago, so was not unexpected here. All four discussed it, all four had conflicted feelings about it: though happy they had this self-reliance to fall back on, and knowing from an early age they could always rely on themselves, each wished he or she had not had to develop so much of it early on.

Dawn was virtually always left alone to work and play, cook and clean with no one to share her time or life or who had resources enough to provide her access to the activities and materials she really enjoyed. Karin learned to take care of herself by living with a shameful secret while appearing to lead an outwardly normal life. Guido had to rely on people outside his family for any type of friendships or emotional support. Casey, who considered his mother to be overly involved in a self-serving rather than constructive way, also creatively acquired emotional support: friends' families, marching band, and a job that not only provided money but also a surrogate family.

All four participants appear to harbor some anger related to this forced self-reliance. Dawn calls it her greatest pain and her greatest strength. Karin, clearly proud of all she has managed to accomplish, remains angry with her parents allowing her to be

so alone and self-reliant. Casey had self-reliance, but his father was never there and his mother refused to relinquish attempts to wrest power from him. Guido had self-reliance, yet delighted in the trickery to which he resorted to keep his secret life secret, claimed love and respect for his mother, yet boasted of the deceit to which he resorted on a regular basis.

Dawn and Casey both had supportive adult mentors for at least some part of their lives; Dawn's her grandfather and brother-in-law, Casey's his band director. They appreciated the wisdom shared with them, and the small but important acts of love, spending, communication, and support committed on their behalves. Karin did not have any particular adult role models, but she had a fairly close relationship with her parents, compared with Dawn and Casey. Guido had no adult mentors, and, as he mentioned on several occasions, has always felt strong distrust for adults who attempt to get close to children, causing me to wonder whether there had been some particular issues with adults.

Both female participants shared experiences of covert underachievement, with their contempt for the system barely camouflaged. They also both found it necessary to attempt to hide their intelligence early on, as they discovered being overly intelligent led to severe social consequences. They both experienced intense sadness at not having friends until high school, confusion about not understanding the whole social game and frustration at not having anyone to teach them how to succeed socially.

While the girls went underground, both boys took the opposite route, finding showing off their superior intelligence rewarding and socially more acceptable than had their female counterparts. Both boasted of their attempts to win others over to their

worldview of school, Casey in his non-conformist fashion and Guido in a more blatant manipulative role.

Each of the four participants expressed awareness of certain deficits in knowledge or skills, and their wishes that someone had helped them in those areas. Whether how to make friends, be more organized, or better play the school game, tacit knowledge has been pointed out as being critical to the success of gifted underachievers. These individuals were no different. And, once they figured out what they needed to do, they assimilated the knowledge quickly, in typical gifted fashion.

5.3 Findings Related to Educational Issues

School, for all four individuals, was a mixture of both positive and negative, but was primarily negative. Each of the four reported problems from beginning to end with getting in trouble for perceived lack of self-control, talking out in classes, challenging teachers, or coming across as "smart-mouth" kids. All four persistently suffered for not completing homework, or for not playing The Game, trying instead to beat The System, in spite of knowing that they would be punished for their transgressions.

Dawn remarked, " I didn't like the regimentation of school. It was a mass approach, and I'm not a mass type person…One side of your report card had grades, and the other had, I guess they called it conduct. There was this thing called self-control and if you got a check that was bad, and I always had checks all the way across self-control. If you challenged, or said anything, you were thought of as intrusive."

Karin said, " I think that I'm very…I look for the meaning, you know. I like…authentic. I don't like to be around people who, who…. I don't think it has

anything to do with intelligence, but the ability to see the world for what it is." To her, school was full of phonies.

Guido's contempt for the system and how it applied to him could be seen in his repeatedly waiting until the last minute to do projects, then doing them in some way that would trick teachers into giving him for minimal effort. He was also repeatedly in trouble for not doing the ubiquitous homework and for talking out in class.

Casey was contemptuous of, "cheap, easy grades," that emphasized compliance over learning. He hated constant repetitions of the same concept, and showing his work, feeling that these were not at all reflective of knowledge.

The game was repeatedly seen as us against them. It was the teachers, and the system pitted against the student in order to get him or her to function at *their* level according to *their* rules, which, by the way, were not the student's rules. If *they* could find a way to force *their* bidding, the students perceived *them* as having won, and the student as having lost, even when it was for the student's own good. Great lengths would be traveled to avoid losing, even when it would hurt in ways that mattered, such as low grades, loss of privileges, social punishments, or withdrawal of affections of parents and teachers.

Speaking of grades, grades were not really important to any of these four people. Though good grades were nice to have, they did not really motivate these students one way or the other. There was little anyone could do to motivate them because their motivation then, as now, was primarily intrinsic, thus more difficult to increase. In fact, motivation, though acted on by external factors, was a strictly personal affair, increasable only by the individual student and not by others. Traditional methods of inspiring

motivation, such as rewards or punishment tended not to work, while personal attention, mutual respect, being challenged with meaningful work and a strong sense of humor all had a greater likelihood of success.

Teachers came in three general varieties: benign, best and worst. The benign teachers were those who, particularly in elementary school, had adequate skill to teach all children and the desire to do it with compassion. These were the okay teachers, usually whose names could not be remembered, but who also did no harm.

The teachers rated as best by all four people were those who were invitational in their teaching (Purkey, 1978). They accepted each child as a person, for better or for worse. They did what was necessary to teach, and challenge, providing opportunities to learn something new, even when it meant abandoning the usual methods and subject matter. They viewed students' learning as a personal obligation and adopted a what-does-it-cost attitude about going above and beyond on the student's behalf.

For example, Casey's 7th and 8th grade math teacher did whatever she needed to do to help him be successful. She alternately encouraged and pushed him, keeping a, "tight rein," on him. She also happened to be the first teacher on whom he had a crush.

Dawn's fifth grade teacher was a favorite, not just because he was cute, but also because he genuinely liked kids and was fun in class, sentiments echoed by Karin regarding one of her teachers. Both girls discussed disliking adults who pretended they liked kids when they really did not.

Guido found his Mr. Beard to be a great teacher. This man allowed Guido to do math at his own pace, letting him compact several years of math into one.

Casey asked, " The question that comes to my mind is 'Does the teacher make the student good or does the student make the teacher good?' My answer: Its both and that's what nobody tends to address."

The worst teachers were those perceived as mean, uncaring, or threatened by bright children. They were the ones who demonstrated poor pedagogy, who did not know their subject matter, did not teach effectively, who demeaned children, who did not appear to like them and who had no respect for children as human beings, or.

Guido's 7th grade math teacher was, "totally oblivious to the world around her, unable to explain anything, taught by example and rote. She was an object of pity. … Many teachers hated me with a passion. I looked upon this as fair competition. I pursued and enjoyed the encounters."

One of Dawn's teachers, " was mean, she didn't like me; she didn't like kids. Yeah, she was mean and old and ugly, like a *Mack* truck, and she didn't like smart-mouthed kids. I don't know *why* she was ever teaching."

Karen found her chemistry teacher to be her worst because, "he had low expectations, didn't really teach, and I just remember thinking I didn't want to be like him as a teacher."

Casey's 10th grade geometry teacher was, "charged with teaching the gifted class. She had been teaching for moons…she taught at such a slow pace that I was ready to burst. I got into more trouble than at any other time." She believed that Casey, a percussionist, used to deliberately drum his pencils or fingers just to irritate her. At age thirty he no longer has that teacher but he still drums his fingers.

Each of the study's participants reported an ability to see beyond the false congeniality sometimes displayed by teachers trying to fool kids into thinking teachers liked them. The message to these teachers: if you respect me, I'll respect you, and if I respect you, I'll work for you. And: accept students' behavior, not as threatening or deliberately provocative, but merely as a manifestation of their true gifted, sometimes overexcitable, selves.

Casey further explained that in junior high school he, "started having teachers…I had teachers I was smarter than …and I was 12. I usually responded by just shutting down and…. Ignoring them. I don't need to deal with them, because they *have no clue*. If I didn't respect them…I didn't work…that'd be fair." And, "I *have to* think outside the box. I perceive I needed a teacher who needed to understand that when I turned the box inside out, I'm not turning the box inside out to make you mad or fight against you. I [just] came up with something new."

The two boys went about their daily school business openly, defying authority, finding ways to subvert the system and attempting to recruit others to their points of view. They readily admit to torturing certain teachers and using their gifts and talents in negative ways. They found showing-off their intellectual abilities to be socially acceptable and personally rewarding.

Guido, " Yeah, I capitalized on being smart. Oh, how interesting! The fact that you could be anywhere… that if they had questions you could explain *anything* to them at the drop of a hat. But even to the point where… I'd spend time learning *inane* things that *no one* else could do. If you'll talk to people, most people can't …juggle. So, I'd juggle…. Teach myself some magic tricks…and learned *tons of trivia.* Yeah, I was….

Yeah…I ate it up. I was a show-off without…being accused of being a show-off. What other people were good at…oh…*that* was not important."

Casey said he recognized during junior high school that he was a lot smarter than most other kids. He calls this both his arrogance and his downfall and says he has to work to keep it in check.

Extracurricular activities were the highlight of both boys' school experiences, (band for Casey and school clubs and Boy Scouts for Guido) providing both challenges and opportunities for success amidst the daily drudgery of school. Paradoxically, the very challenge of school was the lack of academic or intellectual challenges experienced there. Though peer connections were sometimes made in gifted classes, they were also found in band and clubs, and without the strings of academic achievement attached.

The girls both perceived school as a place they could function and appear successful without much effort, but as a psychologically dangerous place, fraught with social and emotional perils. School to them was a place with its own rules; rules that required lying about their true selves in order to be accepted. One of the most hazardous was the trouble that came with being perceived as too smart, a know-it-all or as smarter than the boys. This in an environment where boys generally got the majority of the attention teachers paid their students. Dawn, with her continual change of schools and lack of extracurricular activity, fared much the worse, feeling alone and socially isolated. Karin, despite her psychological baggage and lack of friends, at least had her sports and clubs to help her feel successful.

Karin and Casey were the two who did not find school intolerable, though she did find it too easy and not requiring much attention. Karin said she liked school because it was, "easy to do well without working hard." Casey called it "cool."

"It was too easy. I could make a "C" and put forth no effort at all. I am the ultimate in great test takers. I can absorb, compile and apply most things that I learn especially in a testing situation. However, homework sucks, especially math homework. My arrogance with homework is because I can figure the pattern out and determine what the method is and then it just becomes rote. Adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing different numbers just for practice bores me to death and I hate it. School was 'cool', but that's only because I was segregated from other 'regular' students."

Talking to Karin after the others, I found her not to be considerably different from the other three participants as regards intelligence, articulation, or experiences of giftedness. Yet, Karin was not labeled as gifted, so expectations may have been different for her than for the other three people.

5.4 Familial Characteristics

The impact of family and the home environment on achievement and motivation cannot be discounted. As noted in Chapter Two, research has reliably demonstrated that students' achievement and their families are inextricably bound to one another.

These four individuals shared a trait beyond underachieving behaviors; they all had similar family configurations. Each family was one that espoused solid middle-class values regarding behavior and expectations, yet which expected children to essentially

fend for themselves. Each family was parented by intelligent, educated and successful parents, and who valued intelligence in the home.

Dawn shared that, "One of our family's most common expressions was 'look it up.' You ask somebody something in my house, and we had the encyclopedias and everything, and you *go look it up*. You used the dictionaries and you go look it up. And so when my brother got these big points, for, you know, *knowing*, and, so I thought I was supposed to know things, or that it was dangerous to *not* know things, and when you're around relatives and stuff and they'd pat you and say, 'oh, isn't she *bright.'* But at school, at school…people hate your *guts* for that!"

In Karin's family, " I thought it was normal that…my brother and sister never had to pick up a book either and my mom and dad never really told me to bring home my books and to study, so I thought it was normal."

Casey provided thoughtful reflections, " What is family? My definition of family extends beyond my parents and my sister, but does not include other relatives. My father traveled extensively from my birth until I was about 15 or 16. My recollection is that he was home on weekends, but gone two to three days a week. My mother and I have fought on and off for as long as I can remember…I would not say my parents were bad parents, but I'm not going to be recommending either one of them for parent of the year awards….. I cannot say that I hate my parents, but I believe that in some situations what they thought was the best was not the best. There was no emphasis on education besides go to school. My father was never around when I needed him (both literally and figuratively)." Several times during our interview he referred to his wife's parents, whom

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he felt promoted high achievement, and wondered "what-if…" he had been raised by them within their educational value-system.

The children were left to survive on their own, not in an abusive or negative sense, but in practical ways; children were expected to do their chores, achieve at some reasonable level in school, and then keep themselves occupied with constructive activities. In three of the homes, fathers were absent. One had died, one was a commuter father, and the third traveled frequently and was unavailable even when at home. The fourth father, Karin's, was a teacher and was home, while mother was the one who was more heavily involved in her outside career.

While fathers were essentially absent, mothers were either in survival mode, dealing with their own relationship and emotional issues, or busy working, providing for the material needs of their children. They were outwardly available, supplying food and shelter, spending the daily dinner hour with children, but not emotionally accessible to their them. Once again, school was seen as the child's responsibility, something to be valued, but not necessarily in an active role. Parents were essentially unavailable to meet emotional needs for intimacy or to provide necessary supervision beyond the most basic type. Though education *per se* was valued, time spent actively engaged in educational pursuits or on homework was unheard of in every one of these families.

Sibling relationships were similar to other family ties, ranging from barely involved to distant. Karin and her siblings forged the closest alliance among them. Guido and his brothers essentially hated one another, and still have distant relations. Dawn and her siblings were far apart in age and inclination, which left her virtually an only child

until she went to live with her sister at age 14. Casey and his sister enjoy a cordial relationship now, though he considered it one of typical sibling rivalry during childhood.

Interestingly, only one of the participants (Karin) has a child at this time. Dawn made a deliberate decision not to have any. Guido hastily changed the subject when it was broached, and Casey alluded to the possibility of having children later, though says a child of his would never be able to "put anything over on him."

5.5 Change As Choice

I still don't know what I was waiting for and my time was running wild
A million dead-end streets everytime I thought I'd got it made
It seemed the taste was not so sweet So I turned myself to face me
But I've never caught a glimpse Of how others must see the faker
I'm much too fast to take that test…Ch-ch-ch-changes….

Lyrics: © David Bowie, Changes
Hunky Dory, Ryko, 1971, 1990

Preceding sections of this chapter discussed personal, school, and familial factors affecting school achievement of four capable individuals. Consequences designed to extinguish underachievement, negative teacher and parent attitudes, and minor attempts at intervention did not create lasting changes in behavior during the decade or more each person underachieved. And, though many underlying factors remained static, change occurred nonetheless with each individual reversing underachieving behaviors and undergoing transformation to achiever. But how, and why?

Reversal to Success

Success is a personally-defined construct. For the purpose of this study, success was established by asking potential participants three questions: are you personally

capable and fulfilled? Have you attained competence in your chosen discipline? Do you feel self-fulfilled? Answers varied among the four participants:

Karin attributed her change to, "More responsibility, more challenge," and that, "I think it is just the profession I have chosen. I want to be a really good teacher. You can't be that if you are in 'just get by' mode. I want to be a really good mom and role model for my daughter. How can I expect her to live up to whatever her potential is if I refuse to even try to live up to mine?"

Casey, on the other hand said, "The biggest reason is my wife not allowing me to slack off when things got a little tough. Secondly, I didn't want to be just a nothing. I have always believed in my mental capacity and I got tired of telling people 'I could do it if I want to, I just choose not to.' At some point, I began asking myself 'Can I really do it?' I decided it was time to prove it to myself."

He credited, "Sixty percent my wife and forty percent myself to begin the process. Forty percent my wife and sixty percent myself to sustain it."

Guido attributed his changes to, " The decision to stay with one thing long enough to succeed. Most people who considered themselves underachievers have a higher than normal self-image. Therefore, they can only credit themselves for any reversals. Other people may have contributing effects, but it is ultimately the individual who must decide to change."

Dawn, too, attributed her positive changes to, "Myself. Once you've laid bare yourself, you are stronger, braver and invincible. Parents died in my mid 40's. I decided I'd better make the change then- they left a little money so I could afford to go to school. I developed self-reliance early on."

	DAWN	KARIN	CASEY	*GUIDO*
Successful?	Yes	Yes	Yes	My wife thinks so
Definition?	Having a sense of purpose, knowing one's place, contributing to the world.	Facing & overcoming your challenges	Overcoming your challenges; something you do	Happiness, financial security, doing what you enjoy, but able to compartmentalize

Figure 5. Participants define success.

For Dawn, Karin, Casey and Guido, change followed years of chronic underachievement, in both educational and other arenas. Learning, though largely informal and unstructured, continued throughout life. Each of them experienced a series of attempts at formal education, relationships, and employment, all generally unsuccessful. Bouts of intense depression, self-medication with drugs and/or alcohol to blunt the pain experienced in everyday life, and the occasional suicidal close call led to the eventual decision to change. Reversal from underachiever to achiever was for these four not accidental, coincidental or anything other than deliberate choice.

These choices were made after at least one incident of what is commonly known as *hitting bottom*. Casey's was returning home penniless, drinking heavily and having failed school. Dawn's alcoholism, eating disorder and failed marriage contributed to a nervous breakdown. Karin's unexpected remembrance of childhood trauma created such intense pain she felt, briefly, that suicide was her only option. Guido, after a stint in the Army, discovered that brainwashing worked, no matter how smart you think you are.

The die was cast, the decision to change made. The death of Dawn's parents brought financial opportunity and the realization that if she was ever going to change,

she'd better get on with it before she got too old. Guido, employed in a lucrative but stressful career, watched his brother drink himself to death after years of mental health problems, and decided he needed to make changes in his own life. Casey decided it was time to prove to himself that he was as smart as he'd always said he was; and to his mother that he was not a failure. Karin wanted to live up to the expectations of her brilliant, creative husband, and model excellence, not mediocrity, for her baby daughter.

Opportunities to help others arose and were embraced. Dawn's political activism in women's groups and anti-war activities helped her feel she made a difference, while she simultaneously sharpened leadership and collaboration skills. Casey experienced success in his work with the emergency medical service, and was promoted through the ranks, then found additional opportunities for leadership within his fraternity. Karin's students, then her baby, instilled a desire to help others achieve excellence. Guido, after extending behind-the-scenes assistance in school clubs became the problem-fixer within his family after years of being considered pathologically secretive with them. These altruistic opportunities were described as lifesavers that helped provide recognition of each as a competent individual.

And, after years of isolation, either literal or figurative, support systems began to be built. True friends, those with shared characteristics and not just shared proximity were acquired and cultivated. Meaningful relationships developed, deep self-confidence emerged and recognition as a talented, passionate, valuable human being occurred.

Formal education, once reviled, was revisited. Failure was averted by persistence, hard work, and a newly developed understanding of the rules of the academic game. Success, driven by the occasional demanding professor and their own high expectations,

became a sought-after commodity. Values instilled in childhood: respect for learning, responsibility, self-efficacy, all worked together to help ensure that change, once initiated, became lasting.

Dawn said, " I'm going back to school now because I *want* to learn, I want to be intellectually challenged, and this [word: intellectual] isn't an epithet." Dawn recently shared with me that she had been accepted into a highly competitive honors program at University of Texas, Austin for the fall of 2002.

5.6 Lessons Learned

Of course, change can be internal or external, or some combination of both. Although each of these individuals now considers himself or herself an achiever, and successful in life, they do not believe they have actually changed at their cores. Instead, they have learned you cannot beat The System unless you first work within it; that to play The Game you need practice it; and, though they may not buy all the establishment is selling, they do not have to broadcast their skepticism. They all claim that while they still possess many of the same traits that got them into trouble in the first place: perfectionism, intolerance for ignorance, intellectual elitism, and oversensitivities in many areas, they have learned to manage those traits better now, or at least to hide them when it is safer to do so.

When asked about regrets, all participants except Guido expressed regrets at wasted time and opportunities, though not to the point of wishing they had never borne their hardships. All felt their experiences had contributed significantly to the development of inner strength, self-efficacy, and their identities. When asked about what they would

change if they could go back to their pasts, responses were mixed, but all contained the same final message: Nothing. Yes, there were regrets about certain aspects of their lives: not asking for help when they needed it so badly. Casey wished for "learning self-discipline and not get by just because I can. It is too easy to slip into autopilot when things come easily. And when you go on autopilot you miss out on a lot of life just because of missed opportunities. I would find a way to challenge myself." Additionally, these individuals are no longer anything resembling underachievers; instead, they are highly self-motivated individuals who continually drive themselves to perfection.

When asked about causes for his underachievement, Casey said, " If I am to cast stones, I cast them first at myself. While I would not expect a seven or eight year old to really be able to learn good habits without being taught, I have always expected more from myself, but continued to allow myself to fail. I do not wish to blame anyone for something I believe I should have control over. At the end of the day, my personal philosophy is one of believing that everything a person achieves or fails to achieve begins with that individual…my underachievement at the beginning of my life and especially through high school and college made me who I am today. I appreciate my goals more today than some of the same people I know from law school.

If there are any other causes, I would throw a stone at the school system. But that stone is aimed at what I see *today* and not what I saw when I was going to school. I believe that a reason behind the decline in performance today is directly related to the integration of the classroom. The belief that having a melting pot of students is beneficial is a negative. I believe that there are students that can be identified as 'gifted' or advanced. These students should be pushed farther and farther, but there should be no

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grade determination. Grades do not make a 'gifted' student. A 'gifted' student can just as easily fail a 'regular' class as a 'gifted' class if the student is bored or doesn' t care. I can identify with the 'gifted' student that doesn' t care, because if you can figure out what the teacher is saying before she has said it, then why pay attention? There are other things to investigate.

I underachieved in terms of grades and performance. I added alcohol to the mix in high school and college and got a failing result. I drank and I squandered a lot of my ability. I then escaped from Houston, my parents' home and my mother' s grasp. I tried to stand on my own two feet and fell down a bunch. I met my wife and my life changed. My wife doesn' t coddle me when I don' t do what I' m supposed to do, but she also doesn' t demean my self-esteem to get her point across. She gave me enough of a boost to sustain some of my own self-belief and pushed me forward.

Once I stepped into law school I was challenged and pushed from the first day to the last. I responded to the challenge and it has made all the difference in the world.

> Two roads diverged in a wood, and I
> I took the one less traveled by,
> And that has made all the difference.
> *Robert Frost*
> I took the least traveled path and it has made all the difference."

5.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented findings in five sections: personal traits of the participants, including experience of giftedness, psychic overexcitabilities, underachievement and success; family characteristics, similarities and differences; school factors including

teachers, environment and curriculum; choosing to change following intensely low periods of existence; acceptance of past negative experiences as integral to later successes.

During the process of inductive analysis, open coding uncovered numerous issues known to relate to gifted individuals, as well as unexpected information. These findings revealed commonalities amongst the cases and areas for further examination. The presence of overexcitabilities was noted in the data, and OEQII questionnaires were administered to help validate the qualitative findings.

In Chapter Six, findings are related directly to the original research questions. Limitations of the study are discussed. Implications for practice in several fields are suggested. Directions for future research are proposed.

CHAPTER 6

Discussion & Implications

6.1 Back To the Beginning

I began this study with two main questions, with the first question examining how it was that some gifted individuals (who significantly underachieved while students) were able to eventually overcome their problems and become high achieving adult citizens? Related to that question are others: What factor (s) do they perceive as being critical to their success? Was there some particular moment when they suddenly decided to change? *Did* they change, or did factors outside themselves change? Do they attribute their current self-fulfilled state to their own hard work, or to others' interventions?

Figure Six, Success the Game, provides a graphic representation of the process by which participants' proceeded from underachievement to success. The data show that change happened when each individual was ready to embrace it, after having "hit bottom" psychologically, financially and otherwise.

These individuals attributed improved performance primarily to their own behaviors and the choices they made later in life. Love of learning and a desire for challenge led to formal education acting as a yardstick by which to measure success as well as a means of achieving newly developed goals.

Secondary attribution was granted to significant others, challenging teachers, the opportunity to help others, and the general development of a personal support system.

LF

SUCCESS

Play The Game

CHANGE

Emergence of Altruistic Behaviors

Creation of Personal Support System

As a conscious choice

To escape current circumstances

To prove capabilities to others

Incorporates internalized family values

Education plays key role

Acts as means for comparison

Transformative process

To prove capabilities to self

Responsibility

Work Ethic

High Personal Standards

Choice To CHANGE *Reversal*

Serious Disintegration

Protracted period of underachievement

Periods of intense psychological pain

Substances abused to numb pain

Suicidal Ideation

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Figure 6. Success, the game. Factors contributing to current success.

All four individuals lacked mentors throughout childhood, though several had significant adults available at one time or another.

Change was described as a conscious and memorable choice, with each participant able to clearly remember and articulate both the time and context of the decision to reverse achievement status. Yet, despite choosing to reverse their underachieving characteristics to achievement oriented behaviors, core personality attributes such as overexcitabilities (OEs) and values remained the same. The decision to change came after periods of intense internal conflict and *hitting bottom,* including thoughts of suicide and substance abuse led to what Dabrowski called *positive disintegration.* The four participants were at various levels of personality development. Each has attained a different degree of *positive adjustment* in his or her life.

The second question is: to what do they attribute their former achievement problems?   Other, related questions are: Were there particular environmental, intrapersonal or societal factors they felt "caused " the problem(s)? Why do they feel interventions aimed at reversing the underachievement failed? If they had the opportunity to go back and be students again, would they? If they were able to control all external and internal factors, would they do anything differently? Do these individuals wish they had become achievers at earlier age, or do they perceive benefits from their experiences, no matter how negative**?**

UNDERACHIEVEMENT

Familial Issues

Individual Characteristics

- Precocious Self-Reliance
- Unwillingness To Prove Self To Others
- Intellectual Self-Confidence
- Awareness of Being Different
- Psychic Overexcitabilities
- Motivated To Learn
- Thrives on Challenge

- Intelligence Taken For Granted
- Appropriate Behaviors Expected
- Value System In Place
- Respect & Love For Learning
- Disinvolved Family Network

Educational Issues

- Lack of Intellectual Peers
- Rejection of Rote-Repetitive
- Intolerance for Ignorance
- Belief in Mutual Respect
- Resistance to Doing Meaningless
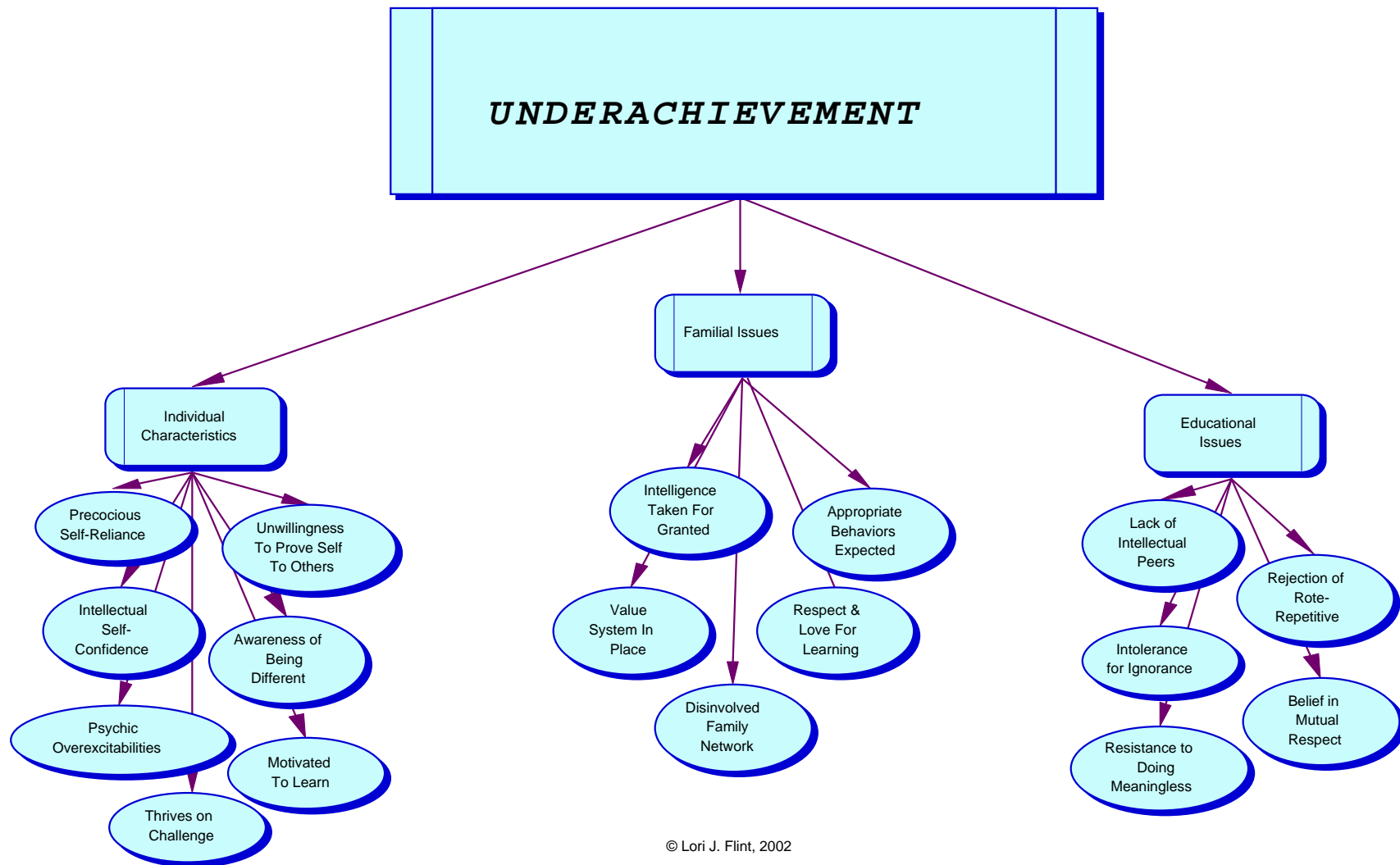
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Figure 7 The complex composition of gifted underachievement.

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Figure Seven, Underachievement, gives a snapshot of the three major factors that play

into achievement status: individual characteristics, familial issues and educational issues.

Each category is further reduced to the sub-categories revealed through the narrative

analysis process.

All participants reported early onset problems related to the expression

of psychic overexcitabilities in school and lack of ability to adapt to the social norms,

otherwise known as *positive maladjustment.* Three of the participants expressed problems

with social issues, while the fourth claimed popularity, though his relationships were not

particularly close. Each came from a family where intelligence, learning (though not

necessarily formal education), good behavior and work ethics were valued, though little

actual time or effort was spent developing those values. Self-reliance was a valued

commodity in each family. Tacit knowledge was desired, though not taught either in

school or at home. Additionally, each mentioned a lack of educational goals in childhood

and youth. Locus of control, or attribution for success and or failure, was strictly internal;

all blame for failure and credit for success was theirs alone. Motivation was also internal,

leading to a lack of success with typical external motivators such as grades, punishment

or rewards.

All four participants held exceedingly high standards for themselves, which could

be considered perfectionism. Each also discussed high self-confidence, and not the usual

low self-confidence generally mentioned when discussing underachievement. At the onset

of this study, only one of the participants, Casey, was able to state what factors caused his

underachievement. He felt it was due primarily to his own inability to conform, and

secondarily, his mother's behaviors. The others had moments of illumination arising from

the narrative process: Dawn explained that she had never before thought of her school performance as being related to her family's issues. Guido's reaction when he realized through narrative process that his mother had been in survival mode most of the time, and that he might have a drinking problem, after all, was a startled look and a quick transition to the next subject. Karin, though upset with her family's non-recognition of her traumatic experience, had never before linked her school performance to that issue. She had always previously put the blame on herself.

Interventions were minimal, and never succeeded because they did not address the particular areas of need of each student. Though each is retrospectively aware of the help they needed, as children they were less clear on the subject, and appeared to feel that asking for help was a sign of weakness.

Though all participants except Guido expressed regrets over lost time and experiences, none of them would go back and eliminate those hardships. Each felt their struggles had made them stronger, more capable individuals, again, consistent with Dabrowski's theories and the concept of personal growth through conflict.

6.2 Synthesis and Discussion

In a world where people have problems, In a world where decisions are a way of life…
Other people's problems they overwhelm my mind. Compassion is a virtue,
but I don't have the time…I guess I've experienced some problems...
It takes a lot of time to push away the nonsense…I've heard all I want to.
I won't listen any more…There's nothing cool about having a problem...
Go talk to your Analyst, isn't that what he's paid for…be a little more selfish.
It might do you some good.

Lyrics: ©David Byrne, No Compassion
Talking Heads '77, SRE, 1977

Life can be difficult for gifted children and adults who possess psychic overexcitabilities (OEs) or intensities (Kitano, 1990). Expression of intellectual intensity,

often manifested in an impatience with peers, desire for non-conformity, and focus on abstract ideas can be frustrating for teachers and other students. Psychomotor OE and concomitant perceived hyperactivity and talkativeness are definitely not valued in the classroom. Emotional lability, "immaturity", and silliness may be signs of emotional intensity. Imaginary friends, perfectionism in creative production and preoccupation with the "what-if"'s" of the world can signal imaginational overexcitability. Sensual OEs can contribute to extreme stubbornness in young children with their refusals to wear certain clothing, eat particular foods or walk into a room that smells bad. The intense experience of life seen *through a clearer lens* brings with it a comprehension of how life *should or could* be relative to how it often *is*.

Young gifted children begin school motivated and excited about new opportunities to engage in a favorite pastime: learning. Instead of being a haven for learners, school often winds up being a place where learning takes a back seat to the teaching of social conformity, with offerings designed for the masses and not tailored to students' particular needs. Good self-concept and appropriate social and emotional adjustment, when combined with overexcitabilities, may lead to conflicts with other individuals in school (Kitano, 1990), especially when respect for individuals and their differences is lacking. The resulting internal disharmony can make life very uncomfortable for the child.

Intellectual peers are often in short supply, as exceptional children are frequently divided into many classrooms rather than clustered together in a few in order to share the intellectual wealth. Feeling different, socially isolated, and sometimes ostracized as know-it-alls, these children attempt to develop protective-coloration so as to better blend

into the background of school. The stronger the intensity, the more difficult it is to conceal successfully. Girls learn to silently underachieve while appearing to be successful while many boys openly perform intellectual feats for which they receive validation from others.

Unfortunately, though these children may attempt to apply protective strategies in an effort to salvage their psyches, they oftentimes are not inherently equipped with the *tacit knowledge* (or survival skills) such as self-regulation or self-discipline, metacognitive thinking or study skills with which to effectively do so (Reis, Hébert, Diaz, Maxfield, & Ratley, 1995; Baum, Renzulli & Hébert, 1995). The idea that children who possess high intelligence will intuitively acquire necessary survival skills is now considered to be one of the myths of gifted education (Berger, 1989). Those in the know realize that bright children need to be taught strategies for success just like everyone else. Assimilated quickly into the student's strategic repertoire, deliberately taught survival skills, including metacognitive strategies, self-regulatory strategies, or study skills addressing such areas as organization, time management and leadership can make the difference between a successful gifted child and an unsuccessful one.

Once considered a single global construct, self-concept is currently viewed as multidimensional in character (Pyryt & Mendaglio, 1994;Piers, 1984; Fitts, 1991), encompassing various domains such as academic, intellectual, physical and social. For students with high intellectual self-esteem, whose families value intellectual pursuits, low-level rote and repetitive educational offerings do not inspire a joy for learning, but instead instill contempt for the educational system. McCoach and Siegle (2001) also found that many gifted underachievers have high academic self-concept combined with

negative school attitudes and poor survival skills, or skills like metacognitive strategies, self-regulation or study skills that are needed for school success. Those home environments where intelligence is a predictable commodity, education is valued, responsibility is expected, and a firm value system is in place would seem to promote high academic motivation.

Emotional growth can be facilitated when parents act as mediators between children and the rest of society (Robinson, 1998). But, when families are too busy, parents are overwhelmed with outside responsibilities, are busy simply surviving, or otherwise disconnected from their children, achievement motivation suffers. These families, described earlier as *disinvolved*, or, in psychological terms, as uninvolved, neglectful or *laissez-faire* families appear normal and well adjusted to the casual observer. The truth, however, is that as long as everyone is maintaining an appropriate social profile and being at least moderately successful, the parenting style is generally hands-off. Typically occurring within healthy parent-child interactions, the deliberate teaching of survival skills such as metacognitive strategies, study skills, or self-regulation does not occur because the parents do not recognize the need for it and the children view asking for help as a sign of weakness. The statistics are grim for children in these families: higher levels of high-school drop-outs, more substance abuse and lower performance across all domains, not just academics, is often the result (Darling, & Steinberg, 1993; Baumrind, 1989), particularly for boys (Weiss & Schwarz, 1996).

Elementary school years, though not particularly intellectually challenging, tended to be socially challenging. Fairly easy work, relatively low expectations and easily maintained grades allowed the child to appear successful with little effort. Homework,

however, was a major sticking point, with male students refusing to do work they perceived as useless, and females doing the barest minimum to maintain the appearance of achievement. Participants in this study discussed teachers and students engaging in what was familiarly known as *The Game*. Increasingly draconian techniques for forcing conformity pitted teachers against students and their maddening methods of work avoidance. If the teacher was able to make the child work, she won. If the child avoided doing his work, he won. Teachers were generally capable and decent, though some bitterly resented students who refused to play The Game. According to study participants those teachers were considered to hate children, leading students to wonder why they were ever teaching in the first place. Students who displayed negative attitudes toward school, negative feelings about teachers, and little goal-directedness were found to be at greater risk for underachievement (Reis & McCoach, 2000).

Family life was outwardly normal, often with both parents working and father largely absent. Children became self-reliant as a result of hours spent alone in an empty house, or after stressed mothers retired early, leaving no one in charge of the house. Junior high school brought its own set of issues: typical adolescent concerns coupled with OEs that, though marginally better concealed, made life difficult for their owners. Those who were in gifted classes fared somewhat better socially due to inclusion in an established group with which they traveled through school. Academics became increasingly difficult to master without doing homework. Students invented even more devious methods for avoiding compliance, patterns of underachievement were firmly established, and ignorant or intolerant teachers were considered fair game. Students were sometimes aware of being smarter than their teachers during these years.

Greater variety in academic offerings and the occasional inspired teacher made high school a somewhat better place for all four participants. New students assimilated into the existing peer structure meant a greater likelihood for locating like-minded friends. Described as lifesavers, students' involvement in clubs and other extracurricular activities provided opportunities for challenge and success outside the classroom.

Way and Rossman (1996) called the family the place where children learn to interpret reality. *Laissez-faire* parenting, with its minimal supervision and few questions asked, provided little opportunity for interpretation of reality. It also provided possibilities for increased independence from home, and more occasions for mischief, such as drinking and unproductive hanging-out. Older siblings, friends' families and extracurricular activities such as Scouts and marching band sometimes served as home bases, though entrenched negative behaviors and lack of coping skills contributed to cognitive dissonance that carried beyond school and into the world at large. Intense psychological pain and pervasive feelings of wrongness were dealt with through substance abuse, eating disorders, frequent moves, and continual changes in peer groups to the point where suicide was either considered or actually attempted.

First attempts at college were dismal. Lack of study skills or other effective, achievement promoting behaviors finally caught up with these individuals. Deep-rooted patterns of underachievement led to failures in school and in life. High school extracurricular activities disappeared with nothing to replace them. The realization dawned that career, formerly considered a matter of choice, *might* be limited by previous flawed decisions. Continued substance abuse, financial troubles, intensifying psychic

pain and lowered parental expectations regarding academic ability introduced other elements to the mix: anger and doubt.

Students' anger was the result of others' predictions that students would *never* become achievers. The potent mix of anger, alcohol, self pity and financial and academic problems created their own problem: *hitting bottom.*

Hitting bottom meant crawling back to the family home after failing college. Hitting bottom was having a nervous breakdown after years of hidden alcoholism and eating disorders. Hitting bottom was reaching a state of such psychic pain, such internal dissonance that suicide was considered the only means for alleviating the pain. Hitting bottom meant standing by helplessly while you watched your brother drink himself to death.

But doubt born of anger saved the day. Doubt led to metacognitive thinking: "maybe I *have* got prove I am smart; maybe I *cannot* really achieve whatever I set my mind to. Maybe I need to change. And, just maybe, I need to do whatever it takes to effect permanent lasting change and prove to myself and everyone else that I am a success." Reversal to achievement status happened in a particular crystallizing moment: a moment when the need for both change and a new direction to follow became clear. A significant person could help provide motivation to continue in the right direction.

The high personal standards, sense of responsibility, and strong work ethic internalized in childhood worked in combination with the autonomous choice (Dabrowski's *Third Factor)* to change. Personal inventories were taken, and deficits remedied. Hard truths and tacit knowledge gleaned through the school of hard knocks provided self-assurance.

Education, once reviled, played a key role in change. College was successfully completed, sometimes only after multiple attempts. Newfound determination led to a refusal to quit no matter how difficult things got. The high expectations of at least one special professor, and his or her refusal to accept less than the student's best helped push the student, first grudgingly, then gladly, into achievement. Self-directed learning, often disregarded in lower schools, was a valued commodity in the colleges where students eventually achieved success. *Andragogy*, the science of adult learning, promoted more equal relationships between teacher and learner, included more varied learning experiences, more choice in materials and methods, and most of all, mutual respect (Robles, 1998). Negative behaviors, abandoned at great personal cost, were replaced by newly synthesized core values. Success bred success, and self-efficacy born of surviving the worst life had to offer gave birth to newly integrated, more highly developed personalities. Individuals once mired in their own personal pain began to seek opportunities for altruism. Personal goals were set, despite new self-doubt, and goal-oriented persistence and intellectually appropriate risk-taking emerged as strategies for success. Individual factors, such as life experience, self-monitoring, positive (self) reinforcement, quality college experiences and self-motivation all contributed to school success, a finding echoed by Donaldson, Graham, Martindill & Bradley (2000). External factors like quality and form of the college courses, degree of friendliness toward adult learners, faculty members appropriately credentialed and committed to teaching adult learners and access to a wide range of services designed for adults all promoted college completion, as well (Taylor, 2000).

Together these characteristics point to a special type of personal growth known as *transforming* growth. Transforming growth involves self-awareness and self-acceptance, but also moral questioning, self-judgment according to internal values, and a sense of responsibility toward others. While transformation does occur, its primary goal is not a complete change of the self, but increased self-awareness (Robert & Piechowski, 1980; Robert, 1984). Women who undergo this transformation tend to change their view of success to one that reflects service to others as the primary goal (Cohen, 1998).

Social networks were formed and often included a significant other who was willing to alternately push and encourage during the change process. Instantly recognized gifted peers who shared intensities, or kindred spirits, were integrated into the social network. Psychic overexcitabilities, though still present, were submerged when their presence was less than desirable. Combining original core values with new strategies and intelligence resulted in empowered individuals who were ready to successfully confront new challenges. No longer foolish or naïve, individuals now approached The Game far more effectively, with an understanding of how to beat The System with its own rules.

Life continued, bringing with it the usual challenges. Better equipped to deal with crises, individuals were no longer afraid of them. Having endured excruciating hardship, people knew they could do it again and still survive. The disintegration and reintegration from first level to second level was the most severe, most painful experience each had ever known; the equivalent of trial by fire. Instead of being consumed, however, each emerged with newly forged strength tempered by that heat, and a burning desire to succeed.

Gifted underachievement examined within the life-story context provides both big-picture and microscopic views of the myriad elements involved in the phenomenon. Fullest understanding occurs when a large theoretical framework that includes literature in both the gifted and general education domains and far beyond is applied. Theories of motivation, attribution, learning styles and disabilities, general psychology, cognitive theory, personality theory, and more help explain the factors that engender achievement, but it is the interrelationships between the factors that helps us understand precisely why things go awry. Current information does not fully explain the transformation from underachiever to success; only continued collection of individual stories gathered together within this massive framework will accomplish that goal. One life carefully examined can sometimes provide deeper understanding than a whole host of theories.

6.3 Contributions to the Field

Hattie (1992) asked which came first: low self-esteem or low achievement? Underachievers have traditionally been depicted as lacking in self-esteem, but the individuals in this study did not lack confidence in their talents or intellectual capacity; they were well-aware of their capabilities, even when others were not. McCoach & Siegle (2001) arrived at this finding as well, calling it surprising. These findings caution us to first examine a student's characteristics, including overexcitabilities, then consider the context within which the underachievement is occurring before attempting to reverse it. Only when we understand those factors can we develop appropriate interventions because one-size-fits-all intervention plans have little effect on achievement. High intellectual self-esteem coupled with underachievement represents a built in opportunity

to help students, as the best remediation plays on student strengths (high intellect, personal integrity) while working toward eliminating weaknesses (poor self-regulation and other survival skills).

No interventions are effective without the most important one of all: student buy-in to the process. Until a student genuinely wants to succeed, nothing we do will make any permanent difference. Thus, parents, students, and educators must work together, selecting an appropriate variety of techniques and modifications specific to the particular individual and his or her needs. Efficacy of the interventions should be monitored, and changes made as needed, discarding those that are not proving effective, and substituting new ones.

Positive maladjustment results when individuals with high developmental potential refuse to conform to standards set by others, and choose to adhere to their own canons, even when it means standing out in painful ways or having to accept undesirable consequences. If the function of the behavior is to preserve the internal integrity and intellectual self-confidence of the individual, a psychologically healthy response, should we pathologize it as underachievement, or instead examine what we could do to change the standards? Whether admirable or reviled, psychic overexcitabilities in gifted individuals are not psychological problems to cure, or even highly sought after personality characteristics. They just are.

Divorce, isolation from extended family, poorly developed or nonexistent social support networks, two-working parent families, families struggling just to make ends meet, materialism in affluent homes and the general speed at which life is lived today all share one result: that of creating disunity within homes and family which, in turn, makes

it harder than ever to stay connected as a family. Less time spent as a family often means decreased awareness of individual needs, and reduced time for modeling and teaching survival skills such as those parents have learned and employed to become successful in life. Children with high developmental potential, particularity those with intellectual and emotional overexcitabilities, who do not get the help they need are at risk for long-standing and significant underachievement. Individuals suffer the consequences, but society does too, in terms of undeveloped talent and financial potential.

The choice to change occurs in a crystallizing moment, a moment always recalled as decisive: *I will do whatever it takes to become successful, thus growing closer to my personality ideal.* Permanent change, or positive disintegration, does not happen casually, however; it arises from pain born of crisis or long-standing problems. Sometimes a special teacher, professor or significant other happens along at just the perfect time to help cement the decision to change.

Gifted adults who decide to change often choose academia as a means to their end. Driven to succeed, with high intellectual capacity, large schema born of years of varied experiences, adults who return to school tend to be self-directed, goal oriented learners who happen to have something to prove: that they can be successful students.

Nietsche said it best, "That which does not kill me makes me stronger." Anyone who has experienced extreme challenge and lived to tell the story knows what Dabrowski knew: people grow through crisis and hardship and evolve into something better. If the opportunity arose to change the past would these individuals go back and do things differently? No. Even with the pain and challenges, individuals asked whether they would go back and change the way they lived, given the opportunity to forego their crises and

hardships, people do not choose to go back and relive their lives without having had those hardships, painful though they were.

6.4 Implications for Practice

Teach your children well, Their father's hell did slowly go by,
And feed them on your dreams, The one they pick, the one you'll know by.
Don't you ever ask them why, if they told you, you will cry,
So just look at them and sigh…. and know they love you…….
Teach your parents well, Their children's hell will slowly go by…….

Lyrics: Teach Your Children Well, Graham Nash
©1971, Déjà Vu, Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young

Families

Time spent teaching survival skills at home is time well spent. Physically and emotionally available parents serve as teachers, and their behaviors, words and attitudes the teaching tools. Children taught to be responsible integral family members learn their help is required for the operation of their homes. Necessary household chores done as a family create opportunities for togetherness, with parents modeling appropriate work habits and attitudes rather than simply assigning chores and expecting the child to complete them on his or her own. In addition, interdependence, not total self-reliance, fosters development of the social skills needed for successful interpersonal interactions.

Fear of failure and perfectionistic thinking in gifted children can lead to inability to seek assistance in difficult situations. Parents who calmly model personal struggles, admit to mistakes, and accept their children as they are teach appropriate risk-taking within the safety of the home. These children respond best to authentic *behaviors* of others, not what people *tell* them; *do as I say and not what I do* is not an adage adopted by these intense individuals.

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Empower, but do not enable children. Remove excuses for avoidance of responsibility such as boredom, or the teacher is not being very good, and instead teach social adaptability for successfully playing The Game. Praise achievement not ability; a gifted child with a strong worth ethic is an unbeatable quantity. Goal setting can be learned by both watching parents' efforts and actually practicing the skills by working toward progressively larger personal and family goals. Other survival skills like problem solving and persistence on task can be learned in various ways. For example, household chores, challenging games and puzzles, and delaying gratification of desires teach children that not giving up leads to rewarding experiences. Creative problem solving can be taught with genuine household, personal, family or community problems in mind, beginning with uncritical brainstorming and culminating in successful problem-resolution.

High intelligence, creativity, and OEs are characteristics of gifted people. Highly academic gifted programs that ignore intellectual and/or affective needs can be just as damaging as low-level schoolwork, sometimes creating more problems than they solve. Appropriate placement allows for acceptance of all students, and teaches to more than students' academic needs. It also works to develop interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, such as empathy and altruism, metacognition and self-efficacy.

Counselors

A gifted school psychology intern recently-graduated from a prestigious university enquired of his supervisor when he would have the opportunity to meet with some gifted students. She laughingly explained that he would never see one, as licensed

specialists in school psychology are employed here to help children in special education and receive no training in working with gifted children. A reserved person, he cautiously shared his discomfort at this state of affairs: that we reserve our limited educational resources for students in special education programs, but do not allocate any for attending to the social and emotional issues faced by gifted children.

Few school districts in this country, and only one of which I am personally aware, currently provide in-depth instruction about gifted individuals' social and emotional needs to counselors. If psychologists and school counselors are not informed, and gifted programs are targeted solely at academic needs, where do gifted students with OEs find assistance?

Specific information provided to educational counselors during university training and directed staff development would help them and others realize that gifted does not equal perfect, but may mean asynchrony between intellectual and emotional development. Sensitivity of gifted children may signal a need for intellectual coping mechanisms for times of emotional overload using appropriate counseling techniques.

Learning disabilities, ADHD, and mental health issues exist in the gifted and talented population at approximately the same rate as the general education population, a fact recognized by few educators. With counselors increasingly involved in initial referrals for educational interventions, informed personnel could more accurately and readily identify those students in need of additional instruction and services.

For Teachers

Teachers set the tone for their classrooms. When they model appropriate

behaviors, accept individual differences, and eliminate rude, disrespectful behaviors students will follow. Learning of many types occurs in a safe classroom environment; stress inhibits learning and creativity.

Gifted students tend to be more internally motivated than their non-gifted peers thus respond more favorably to personally relevant rewards than to external rewards such as grades. Little can entice, encourage or push students who are *internally* motivated into working at something they find meaningless. Instead of trying to *compel* students to work, teachers can help create internal motivation by deliberately building personal relationships between student and teacher as well as establishing the relevance of curriculum to the student's existence. Understanding how to use existing internal motivation to both teachers' and students' benefit provides opportunities for success. Taking time to humorously or matter-of-factly model motivational processes, especially for unpleasant or dull tasks, can result in great dividends in the classroom. Simple honest discussion of how the teacher deals with dull meetings, repetitious classes and onerous tasks can lead to some students' acceptance of the inevitable.

Eliminate power struggles and words like "should," "you can't…," " if you don't I will…," they are just shots fired over the bow. Instead, create student buy-in, give choices and encourage development of appropriate negotiation skills, not argumentation. Teach debate skills through any content area, and self-regulation techniques learned along your educational journey, helping to equip students to manage life's challenges. Accept that gifted students are not aiming to make life difficult for teachers, but to get what they need from school. Finally, concede that affective needs for very bright children often supercede academic needs. Remember: they tend to learn easily and

quickly with few repetitions. Be flexible about setting academics aside during times when

important life lessons arise; use those teachable moments. Finally, remember: teachers

may make the child, but the child also makes the teacher.

For Policy Makers & Administrators

Take the time to critically examine your campus climate(s); a school climate that is inviting to parents, teachers, students and visitors encourages mutual respect. Parents of gifted students tend to be a giving, involved group who willingly contribute talents and time. Be proactive and help channel this energy into your school and programs.

Gifted students can amaze and delight us with their ability to assimilate new information, create products and solve problems. Allow these students to experience real-life problem solving, teamwork and altruism through authentic opportunities that naturally arise within schools and communities. These are future leaders; help them gain leadership experience by treating them as the natural resources they are.

Invest capital in educating all campus/district personnel regarding characteristics and needs of the ten to twenty-five percent of your population who are gifted, in much the same way you expend resources for other special needs students. Encourage development of funded mandates for gifted education, or at least help locate funds. Encourage those most interested in teaching gifted students; gently guide others to an acceptance of individual differences. Provide resources on campus, such as journals, curriculum units, and out-of-level materials. Encourage involvement of gifted instructional and administrative personnel in parent groups, creating gifted parent-teacher associations, instead of us-against them associations.

Model intelligent behaviors, communicating that intelligence is socially acceptable. Many of today's administrators are graduates of gifted programs who have firsthand knowledge of the needs of their students.

Provide affective support to students and their parents. Teach parenting classes for parents of gifted students, always keeping in mind that intelligence is a heritable trait, so these parents tend to learn quickly and apply what they learn. They are also parenting during this increasingly challenging time in our society, however, so may have difficulty finding time or emotional resources to provide the parenting they could or should. Given increasingly high standards for academic performance and the increase in families under stress, it can only benefit us to put affective, coping skills and high level curricular components into our gifted and talented programs, all programs. Whether or not students receive the information they need at home, we, as educators, are *obligated* to help our students be successful. High-stakes accountability and a free appropriate public education apply *to all students* in the United States.

For Higher Education

Competition is fierce among colleges for adult learners, who comprise nearly half of today's college population. These students are frequently self-directed, exceptionally motivated, and have substantially different needs from traditional college age students. They have little patience with bureaucratic organizations that operate under traditional rules, choosing to go elsewhere without qualm. Flexible programs for adult learners, including credit-by-examination, credit waivers and experimental-learning credit options facilitate speedy completion of programs. Current adult education research and literature indicates that opportunities for adult learners to be with other adult learners, and faculty and staff trained and interested in the needs of adult learners improve retention and

graduation rates (Donaldson, Graham & Martindill, 2000; Kaufman, Harrel, Milam, Woolverton, & Miller, 1986; Robles, 1998; Taylor, 2000).

Directions for Future Research

This study suggests several directions for future research. Little is known about families of gifted students of types other than cognitively gifted. Studies should focus on families that produce high achievers and those that produce underachievers. These should also be studied in relation to families without gifted students to examine both similarities and differences, answering the question about whether underachieving gifted students are more like underachievers in general than like other gifted students.

Effective counseling and family therapy for gifted students and their families is hard to come by. Counseling and effective intervention for underachieving students is nearly impossible to acquire. Close examination of interventions currently being employed, those that are considered successful and application of new methods of counseling and interventions all need to be studied and communicated throughout the educational community.

Since most research on underachieving gifted students has examined white, middle class males from traditional families, there is very little from which to draw regarding other underachieving gifted populations. Further research could examine families of divorce, underachievement in other racial and cultural groups, and gifted girls. Further, with identification of students with other exceptionalities such as ADHD and learning disabilities on the rise, studying the impact of a doubly gifted child on the family and the family on the child, could help us design specific counseling and academic

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interventions. We also need to examine interventions, specifically ways in which to increase self-regulation, acquisition of appropriate tacit knowledge, and goal directed behaviors.

Further examination of the recently identified phenomenon of gifted underachievers possessing high intellectual self concepts also appears to be warranted. Examination of currently underachieving students for overexcitabilities and high intellectual self-concepts, as well as interventions designed to work within that framework rather than more traditional models might provide useful insights and opportunities to reverse underachievement before it reaches a chronic stage.

Other questions could examine: are there actually more gifted underachieving males or do females just learn to hide it enough so as not to get into trouble? What do the crystallizing moments, moments of change, look like, and what are the contexts within which they occur? Do the reversals *always* happen after hitting bottom?

What effect, if any, is the current push to certify teachers, sometimes involuntarily, to teach gifted students having on students, their achievement, and performance? Will program effectiveness research uncover useful information regarding underachievement, and will it include the students' viewpoints? What is the frequency of stress-related illness in highly academic gifted programs? What is the effect of a gifted program designed only to teach higher academic skills? How can we teach social skills to gifted students? Do we need to?

 If we examined reformed underachievers later in life, would we find they remained driven to succeed, and do they ever catch up to their peers who started on the

path to success earlier in life? Finally, what do the parenting styles and children of formerly underachieving but now successful adults look like?

Limitations of the Study

This study indicated a high degree of consistency among the four stories with more similarities than differences between them. It stands to reason that when four people with entirely different experiences of giftedness, representing both sexes and with a 20 year spread in age tell stories of such similarity, they must be of some merit.

Casual comparison with data outside the bounds of this study has revealed findings remarkably similar to those of this study. This data included pilot-study data, yet-to-be-analyzed questionnaires, and conversations with other gifted individuals.

These four stories, purposefully selected, cannot be generalized to all gifted children and adults, but may be considered trustworthy enough to teach important lessons. Each individual's narrative had a high degree of internal consistency between the interview material, questionnaire data and follow up questions and answers; their stories did not change according to what they thought I wanted to hear, nor were they scripted, pat responses.

6.5 Chapter Summary

Intelligent young people possessing psychic overexcitabilities and high intellectual self esteem, but lacking in survival skills needed for success in life, experienced chronic underachievement in school and elsewhere. Isolation and intense personal pain eventually led to positive disintegration of the self: a decision to change

and the opportunity to become stronger, better people. Altruistic behaviors, formal education and social support systems provided positive reinforcement during transitions to permanent change, and continued beyond that time.

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Appendices

THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
Educational Research

Qualitative researcher (Ph.D. Candidate) seeks volunteers for the following study:

RESEARCH ON GIFTED UNDERACHIEVERS

Seeking adult men and women 30-60 years of age who were considered to be gifted while in school. Candidates must have had achievement problems leading to academic failures or other difficulties over a protracted period. Potential participants should now be successful self-fulfilled adults, interested in sharing their stories in order to help others. No compensation will be offered beyond the satisfaction of advancing knowledge in the field of gifted education regarding underachievement.

Research will include a questionnaire, personal interview, and follow-up interview, all to be completed within 6 months. All replies and data will be held in strictest confidence.

Contact researcher at SchoolSmarts@aol.com, or 832-692.4223 .
All calls or emails will be promptly answered.

THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
Educational Research

Did your report cards consistently read " Could do better," or "Not living up to potential"? Were you considered to be gifted as a child? Are you now a successful member of society? Qualitative Researcher (Ph.D. Candidate) seeks participants for a study of gifted individuals who formerly underachieved but are now successful. Both female and male candidates between the ages of 30 and 60 are sought. Research process involves completion of life-history questionnaire, person-to-person interview, and follow-up interview. No compensation is offered for participation, beyond the satisfaction gained from advancing knowledge regarding gifted underachievement. All replies and research data will be held in strictest confidentiality.

If interested, please contact SchoolSmarts@aol.com, or 832-692-4223.

All calls and emails will be promptly returned.

Participant Selection Script

Step One;   Send out recruitment emails to network

Step Two: As people reply via email, send one back asking about a convenient time to get back with them via telephone.

Step Three: Telephone each participant. Briefly explain study, reiterating that I am looking for gifted people who were underachievers as young people but who are now successful adults. Conduct mini-interview to assess suitability for inclusion, using script below.

    Screening Interview:
        Do you consider yourself a successful person (do you feel self-fulfilled, relatively happy, doing what you want to do, etc)?

        Were you ever in a gifted program in school? Identified as gifted? If yes, tell me more about it. If no, were you ever included in special classes for advanced/creative students? Grade accelerated? Started school early? If yes, tell me more. If no, do you consider yourself a gifted person? Why?

        Have you ever had an IQ test? Know the results of your achievement tests in school? Are your school records available? What other evidence do you have of giftedness?

Step Four: Ask if he or she would like to participate. Explain informed consent, confidentiality issues.   Ask permission to either mail or email questionnaire and consent form.

Step Five: Wait for materials to be returned. If delayed, gently nudge participants into action.

Step Six: Thank people for returned questionnaires. Negotiate a time and place to meet. Remind about time involved.

Step Seven: Conduct interview, using guide questions. Generally approximately 2 hours, + or -.
Complete questions, allow participant a final chance or two to add whatever he nor she pleases. Take your time at the end; some of the best data usually comes at the very end of the interview.

Step Eight.   Transcribe tapes. Produce narrative; Share with participant. Ask him or her

to check it for accuracy. Invite them to change what they feel is inaccurate, or not well stated. Reiterate that it is their story.

Step Nine: Share final copy of narrative, in some attractive form, as a keepsake.

APPENDIX C

I. I _____ agree to take part in a research study titled

   Self-interventions of gifted underachievers: Stories of success, which is being conducted by Lori J. Flint, University of Georgia, Department of Educational Psychology, 832-692-4223, under the direction of Dr. Bonnie L. Cramond, University of Georgia, Department of Educational Psychology, 706-542-4248.

II. I understand that I do not have to take part in this study. I understand that I can stop taking part at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have information related to me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

III. Explanation of the study:
   Underachievement by bright individuals is a big problem in this country. Educational experts believe that somewhere between 20 and 50 percent of all gifted students fail to achieve to their expected potential. Though this problem has been studied extensively for many years, no one has been able to solve the problem so that all students are achieving as they might.

   Gathering stories from people is a sound and accepted way of learning about some phenomenon
   (in this case, underachievement). To-date, no study has approached adults who used to be underachievers and asked them to share their experiences.

   The purpose of the study is to examine the stories of people who were underachievers when they were students but who became successful as adults. How did individuals who looked as though they would never become successful, become self-fulfilled, and competent citizens?

IV. I understand that there are no direct benefits associated with my participation, and that I will not be paid in any way for participating. However, my participation in this research may lead to information that could help others who experience underachievement like mine understand that people can change for the better over time.

V. If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do some or all of the following things over a period of not more than six months:

   A. Complete a life-history questionnaire. This will be mailed to me, and I will mail it back to the researcher after I have filled it out. This questionnaire asks about childhood family and educational experiences. It takes a minimum of two hours to complete.

   B. Participate in a face-to-face interview with the researcher at a mutually agreed upon meeting time and place. This interview usually takes two to three hours to complete, and will be recorded on audiotape.

   C. After participating in a face-to-face interview, I will be asked to look over the researcher's version of the interview results in order to check them for accuracy. This will most likely take about two to three hours.

   D. I will be asked to make an effort to provide school records (test results, report cards, or other available documents) that show that I was considered to be gifted and/or illustrate my former underachievement in school.

VI.   No discomforts or stresses are expected as a result of my being a part of this study.

VII.   No risks are expected as a result of my taking part in this study.

VIII.   My participation may be terminated by the investigator without my consent if I fail to proceed through the steps of the research process listed in number V (above) after I have agreed to do so.

IX.   Once I agree to participate in this study, I will choose a name (pseudonym) by which I will be known from then on. Only the researcher will know my real name, and she will keep that information locked away, separate from all other research records. Only my pseudonym will appear on research notes and audiotapes, and in the finished research products.

   A.   My interviews will be audiotaped. These tapes will have only my pseudonym, and not my real name on them. They will only be accessible to the researcher and her advisors. Tapes will be kept secure, and will be erased or destroyed once the dissertation has been published, except for ten minutes or less of excerpted audiorecordings from each participant which may be used to enhance a multimedia presentation of the research findings. This audio will be used in short snippets only, and not as one ten-minute block.

   A.   All information concerning me will be kept private. If information about me is published, it will be written in such a way that I cannot be recognized. However, research records may be obtained by court order. Possible, but highly unlikely in this particular study.

X.   The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at: 832.692.4223.

   My signature below indicates that the researchers have answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to volunteer for this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____
Signature of Researcher   Date

_____
Signature of Participant   Date

For questions or problems about your rights please call or write: Chris A. Joseph, Ph.D., Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-6514; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu.

Checklist For Review Of Consent Forms

CHECK	ELEMENTS
X	Statement that activities are related to research
X	Title of research
X	Name(s), Address, Phone number of Investigator(s)
X	Name(s), Address, Phone number of faculty advisor (if applicable)
X	Statement that participation is voluntary
X	Freedom to withdrawal without penalty
X	Purpose of research
X	Description of procedures in lay terms
N/A	Appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment that may be advantageous (if applicable)
X	Expected duration of subject's participation
X	Description of any reasonably foreseeable risks and/or discomforts
N/A	Contact in case of distress or discomfort related to research participation (If applicable)
X	Statement regarding expected benefits to subject or others that may be reasonably expected
X	Compensation (if applicable)
X	Explanation regarding the extent of confidentiality
X	Procedures for maintaining confidentiality or anonymity.
X	Disposition of tapes/photos (if applicable)
X	An explanation of the circumstance that could lead to the subjects' participation being terminated by the investigator without regard to the subjects consent (if applicable)
N/A	Deception Statement (if applicable)
X	Offer to answer any questions or to accept any comments & a phone number for that contact.
X	Subject's Signature and date line
X	Investigator's Signature Line
X	Final agreement and consent form copy statement

APPENDIX D

GUIDE QUESTIONS
Actual questions will vary from person to person, and will arise from responses on questionnaires.
Clusters spring from known factors related to underachievement.
Flint, 2001

1. What prompted you to respond to my advertisements for this research?

2. What do you hope to gain from participating in this research?

3. **<u>Current:</u>** Tell me about yourself as you are now: your family, your job, your life in general? If you have children, what is their experience of school? Do you/how do you work with your children & their schools in order to promote achievement?

   Discuss your career(s) from school days to the present.

4. **<u>Past/Family:</u>** Talk about your family during your growing up years. Tell me about your parents? What are/were they like? Have they changed since then? In what way(s)? How about your siblings? Did they experience achievement problems in school, too? Are they still experiencing problems, or have they, too, lifted themselves to a successful status? Topics will include family structure, level of support, discipline/punishment, relationships, etc.

5. **<u>Past/Giftedness:</u>** Do you remember being identified as "gifted"? What was that like? Did it change you or your approach to school or life in any way(s)? How about others' perception of you? How? What? What has been your lifelong experience of being gifted?

6. **<u>Past/School:</u>** What about school? How did you like/dislike it? Did you always feel this way, or was there a time when things changed, either gradually or suddenly? Tell me about where you went to school? Was your school a good place to be? What made it good (or not)? Were you part of the dominant culture group? Grades? Were they consistently poor, or did they vary according to class/teacher/other variable? Can you or a family member supply documents from your school years that illustrate what sort of student/person you were?

7. **<u>Past/Teachers:</u>** In your survey you said *X* was your favorite teacher. Why do you think this was so? What did he or she do differently from other teachers that made you feel positively toward him or her and/or toward school? Tell me more about this. And your worst teacher? Expand on this topic as well….

8. **Past/Social:** Discuss yourself as a child, then teen. How do you remember yourself? Popular, got by, unpopular? Why do you believe this was the case? How long were you cast in this mold? Has your social standing changed since then? How, why? For the better/not? Talk about the clubs, groups, sports organizations you belonged to in your youth? Did being there help you during your more difficult times in school? Did being there help you to eventually reverse your underachievement? How do you think it did?

9. **Past/Peers:** Tell me about your peers in school: at what age did you start having a "group"? Were they more like you or unlike you as regards school? Looking back, do you think your peers, especially in middle and high school, helped or hurt your achievement in school? Think about one or more special friends you've had. What made them special? Are you still friends? Was that/were those friend(s) an underachiever too? Have they become successful later in life as well?

10. **Past/Gender:** Do you think your gender has affected your affected your achievement status at any time during your life? How? What do you think your teachers/schools could have done to better serve you and others of your sex?

11. **Past/Cultural:** How do you think your cultural background has affected your achievement status? Do you think students with cultural backgrounds similar to yours have it easier today than you did as a child? Why or why not? How could schools better serve people from diverse cultures/backgrounds?

12. **Personal Underachievement:** What was it like to not be a high achiever in school? Was your underachievement overt or hidden? How did teachers and parents treat you? How did you feel about yourself then? What did your parents and teachers do when you did not achieve to your potential, or their expectations? Was their treatment of you kind? How did you respond to their efforts to change you? Looking back, was there some other way you could have handled things? What was your worst period of underachievement? Why? How long did it last? How did you survive it?

    At this (current) stage of your life, do you believe there was any particular reason (reasons) for your underachievement? Why do you think that? What are your feelings toward those reasons? Did you ever try to get help to change how you "did" school? What kinds of help did you get/were offered to you/were imposed on you? Do you believe any of these interventions made any difference in either the short run or the long run? In what way(s)?

13. **Reversal of Underachievement:** So what happened? Was your transformation from underachieving to successful deliberate or serendipitous? Gradual or sudden? Why do you think it happened- or did you make it happen? At approximately what age do you consider that you became an achiever? Did you experience conscious recognition of this change? Do you like yourself better now

that you're an achiever? Do you consider yourself an overachiever? If you could go back to your childhood, would you change things so you were an achiever all the way through school, or did your past experiences make valuable contributions to your current level of development? Talk about how your experiences have worked to shape you into the person you are today.

14. **Advice/Responsibility:** Have you ever worked with underachieving students? In what capacity? How do you feel toward them? If you could tell them something that might help them during difficult times, or help them reach better times, what would it be?

    And what about school administrators, teachers, and parents? What would you like to say to them regarding your personal experiences, and those of others like you? What do you think of the current wave of school reform? How do you think it will affect student achievement in the coming years?

15. **Final Comments:** Have you anything to add to this interview? Some thoughts you might like to add, something I've missed, something others need to know…? Has/how has sharing this information affected you?

Respondent ID: 3

Question No. 1
AGE?

Response to Question 1
30

Question No. 2
Gender?

Response to Question 2
Male

Question No. 3
Marital Status

Response to Question 3
Married three years.

Question No. 4
Occupation?

Response to Question 4
Attorney.

Question No. 5
Educational Level attained?

Response to Question 5
B.A. in English/Minor in Government; J.D. (Juris Doctorate).

Question No. 6
Mother's educational level?

Response to Question 6
Some college.

Question No. 7
Father's educational level

Response to Question 7
B.B.A.

Question No. 8
Number and gender of siblings?

Response to Question 8
One female, younger.

Question No. 9
Sibling occupations?

Response to Question 9
she works as an Assistant Manager for a company called Fasental. Fasental
supplies bulk materials to contractors. Her primary duties are sales with
secondary duties related to office management.

she was a LVN, then she began substituting for the school district, till
she finally accepted a permanent position as a para-professional working
with special ed children in developing life skills; currently she is
"retired".

Father's Occupation: he worked for Exxon Co. U.S.A. for thirty-three
years in the Property Tax division; his highest position was supervisor
for the eastern United States; as I understand it, he was in charge of
reviewing and assisting all property tax agents in the Eastern United
States with preparation and reporting of property tax for Exxon.

Question No. 10
Current family income?

Response to Question 10
$50,000 - 100,000

Question No. 11
Childhood family income?

Response to Question 11
$50,000 - 100,000

Question No. 12
Briefly discuss your family during your growing up years: configuration,
interactions, other relevant information:

Response to Question 12
What is family? My definition of family extends beyond my parents and my
sister, but does not include other relatives. My parents have been
married since 1969 and remain married today. My father traveled
extensively from my birth until I was about 15 or 16. My recollection is

that he was home on weekends, but gone 2-3 days a week. We all lived in the same small house. My sister and I got along as well as any siblings could, I suppose. She and I fought occasionally and occasionally some blood was shed, but not a lot. My mother and I have fought on and off for as long as I can remember. My father and I didn't really start communicating (again this is my perception) until I moved out of the house at 18. My sister moved away her last two years of high school in order to graduate and to have a stable home life. I would not say my parents were bad parents, but I'm not going to be recommending either one of them for parent of the year awards. My mother is probably has some form of addiction to prescription medications and my dad is a complete enabler. These problems continue to exist today and may color how I remember and interpret my childhood. I can not say that I hate my parents, but I believe that in some situations what they thought was the best was not the best. There was no emphasis on education besides go to school. My mother did not believe I would ever graduate from college or even go to law school. I think she may not have even wanted me to graduate, but to move back home and help her.

Question No. 13
Were your parents: a) so involved in my life I felt stifled
supportive and there when I needed them, but allowed me some space
never around when I needed them (literally and/or figuratively speaking)

Response to Question 13
Was your father: never around when I needed him (both literally and figuratively)
Was your mother: so involved in my life I felt stifled

Question No. 14
Were you ever considered as "gifted"? In what way, by whom? Do you know your "IQ"? If so, what is it?

Response to Question 14
"? I recall being tested during my second grade year and was then placed into a different class. I believe at first it was just for Language Arts and then it became Math also. From Third grade till I graduated from High School I was in a class labeled "gifted and talented."

I'm not sure I have a direct answer to this question. Once I was placed in the "gifted" class I just thought I was "gifted" an acted accordingly. I think my teachers thought I was "gifted".

Nope. 140 something.

Question No. 15
Did you ever receive gifted, or other special, educational services in school? If yes, what were they?

Response to Question 15
I recall being placed in the "gifted and talented" class in 2nd grade and remained in a class with that designation through high school. As I recall, the only classes were Language Arts and Math through about 9th grade. Beginning in the 9th grade there was also gifted and talented science classes. Do to scheduling conflicts, I was only in the "Advanced" science classes. The conflict was with Band.

Question No. 16
What is your earliest memory of school?

Response to Question 16
My earliest memory of school is my first grade teacher, Ms. Charlotte Benson. She's currently a principal at an elementary school in Aldine I.S.D. I just have a general memory of her teaching the class. As I sit here and think about this question, I can perceive some memories of Kindergarten but just faces and not any names.

Question No. 17
Did you like elementary school?

Response to Question 17
Yes. I'm not sure anybody could really hate elementary school. I don't recall anything tragic, expect getting Mrs. "Dressed to Kill" in the 5th grade. It is not an accurate statement. Mrs. Driscoll was tough and she had high expectations. But it was Mr. Collins who "gave" me my first "B". I made straight "A's" up until 5th grade. While I am loathe to blame any one incident for causing a downfall, I believe this was the first indication that things at home and at school were starting to slip. It seems trivial to look at one "B" in the fifth grade as some kind of catalyst, but this may have been the first time I was truly challenged and I didn't just buzz through. However, once I was able to accept a lower grade from that point forward my grades did not improve, but only got worse.

Question No. 18
Middle/Junior High School?

Response to Question 18
No. And I don't think anybody really likes Junior High School. I have gone to elementary school K-5th. Then I'm in Junior H.S. 6th - 8th. The world got a little larger and I got a lot smaller. More kids and more competition (not scholastically). In 6th grade I failed a couple of six weeks and was generally making B's and C's. I discovered (or someone told me, I don't know) that you could keeping climbing the school ladder with B's and C's. You didn't need A's. My mother was now working, my dad is still traveling and there wasn't anyone to tell me any different. The emphasis on making grades was gone. This is where I developed bad habits with regards to homework and the educational process entirely. I didn't have to work as hard as my fellow classmates in order to make a "B" or a

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"C". I could do half the work they did and still keep going. I think I
may have annoyed a few people along the way. Junior high was my first
exposure to drugs. Didn't try drugs, haven't tried drugs and won't be
trying drugs. (For clarification, I am not calling alcohol a drug.
Different category and different story.) But I believe I started trying
to impress people by not making good grades. I don't know how this happen
. . . the too be "cool" you have to be stupid thing. It bugs me to this
day, but I think it may relate to self-esteem. I don't believe I had any.
Not that I think anyone between the ages of 11 and 13 does, but I think
it is a influential factor. Junior High was my first exposure to band.
Band is what enabled me to be challenged and to move forward.

Question No. 19
High School?

Response to Question 19
Well, I'm going to go with a Yes. High school was the coming of age and
where I first recognized that there are a lot of people who are not as
smart as I am. This is my arrogance and it's also my downfall. I have to
keep it in check. I adopted a buddies family as my own and did my best to
spend more time with them then with my own parents and relatives. They
were poorer then we were, they had a smaller house, tighter quarters, but
they had fun. They laughed and poked fun at each other. They also fed me
home cooked meals. (Digression) My mother doesn't cook. It's a running
joke with my friends and sometimes I hate the joke, but it's the truth.
When I started eating with my friends family, they all ate at the same
table and talked to each other. No TV, nothing. You had better been
prepared to talk and defend yourself or you were in trouble. My mother's
idea of a home cooked meal was a dish she called "rum-dum-diddle". It was
ground beef, rice, corn and some other stuff. I hated it and still hate
it. Other than that, eating at my parents house was about eating
McDonald's, Pizza Inn, KFC, Burger King, Taco Bell or Luther's Bar-be-que
(special night). I had more carry out food when I was growing up that
it's a wonder that the weight problem I do have is not totally out of
control. (End Digression). My friend and I are still friends to this day.
In fact there were three of us. Each of us has served as the best man
for each other. Robert served for Rodney. Rodney served for me. And I
will serve for Robert (again). I liked High School and I could write my
own dissertation on High School.

Question No. 20
Did you ever think school was "not my thing"?

Response to Question 20
No way. It was too easy. I could make a "C" and put forth no effort at
all. I am the ultimate in great test takers. I can absorb, compile and
apply most things that I learn and especially in a testing situation.
However, homework sucks, especially math homework. My arrogance with
homework is because I can figure the pattern out and determine what the
method is and then its just becomes rote, adding, subtracting, multiplying
and dividing different numbers just for practice bores me to death and I
hate it. School was "cool", but that's only because I was segregated from
other "regular" students. This is complete arrogance, but if I had not
been segregated I don't believe I would have passed or moved forward in
any way. I would have been bored to death and probably dropped out.

There is no way I could handle some of the spoon feed methods that teachers implore today. For the record, I was lucky and had some very good teachers. The question that comes to my mind is "Does the teacher make the student good or does the student make the teacher good?" My answer: Its both and that's what nobody tends to address.

Question No. 21
What sort of grades did you consistently get in elementary school: (circle one)
Mostly A's & B's consistently average   usually near failing   all over the charts
Middle School?
Mostly A's & B's consistently average   usually near failing   all over the charts
High School?
Mostly A's & B's consistently average   usually near failing   all over the charts

Response to Question 21
Mostly A's and then a couple of B's.

All over the charts.

All over the charts.

Question No. 22
What was the best thing about school?

Response to Question 22
It took me away from my parents, until my mother began working at the high school. My mother working at the school is a complete story unto itself. School was great when I was being challenged and pushed to my limits. In hindsight, the problem was probably my limits exceeded those of the students around me and in some cases my teachers as well. I've heard teachers make the statement about a child being smarter then they are (not in a true sense, but because the child has had exposures beyond that of the teacher), and that prevents the teacher from being able to challenge the student. I think this all the teacher (as a reflection of society) saying she does not want to be challenged and that prevents the teacher from moving forward

Question No. 23
What was the worst thing about school?

Response to Question 23
See my answer to the best and that would be the worst. I have never (I usually avoid that word) really identified anything has being good, best, bad or worst. I am and continue to be even keel. I usually avoid hyperbole or overstatements, they tend to get me in trouble. If I say something is "good", that is usually the highest praise from me. Most things are just "O.K." and I accept things as they are. I do not try to impose my will through force or coercion; if I can convince you of something then I've succeeded and if I can't, I move on and go about my

life.

Question No. 24
As a child were you:
extremely organized and motivated
somewhat organized, but needed help to keep myself together
basically a mess, needed help, but didn't get it.

Response to Question 24
basically a mess, needed help, but didn't get it.

Question No. 25
As a child, did you like to learn? Anything specific?

Response to Question 25
Yes, I liked to learn and I continue to like to learn. That is probably
why the practice of law suit me. I am in a constant learning mode. The
application of law to facts is a critical concept that takes attorney's a
life time to perfect, because the facts are always changing. My parents
one contribution (and probably the most important) was reading and the
great exposure to books and computers that I had. I had access to a
computer since I was 6 or 7. I had access to the first dial up services
(AOL, PRODIGY, etc.). I was exposed to different things and I had a
chance to learn about anything I wanted to. Reading was very important
and I continue to read fairly voraciously to this day.

Question No. 26
What academic goals did you hold as a young person?

Response to Question 26
I didn't have any academic goals. That is probably what led to all the
foundering and in ability to accomplish things. I would venture to say
that until I met my wife I didn't really know what goals were.

Question No. 27
Were you conscious, as a child, of being or feeling "different" from other
children your age? In what way(s)?

Response to Question 27
Yes. I was usually smarter than most other kids. Not all kids, but most
of them. I didn't have to work as hard as a lot of students did to
accomplish the same results. I tended to be the first one done with a
test and still score the highest grade. I was then and continue to be in
a race with myself. How fast can I get it done? Can I beat the other
guy? The key factor was learning there wasn't a race.

Question No. 28
Did you ever feel you "just knew" things other kids didn't? How did you deal with that?

Response to Question 28
? I always "just knew" things other kids and teachers didn't know. I have an innate ability to read and understand the basic facts, to interpret and to forecast. It's a great skill to have, but what I did to deal with it is nothing. I didn't try to explain it or fight it. I "just knew" and I was content with my own knowledge. I never felt a need to show off my knowledge or smartness, but I did feel the need to be included and wanted to be liked.

Question No. 29
What was the most common remark on your report cards as a child and/or adolescent?\

Response to Question 29
I don't recall any remarks on my report cards. Beginning in Junior High they were all computer printouts and there was no where on the card to make remarks or no teacher made any remarks.

Question No. 30
Do you have (or can you obtain) your report cards and/or other school papers from your youth?

Response to Question 30
I've tried but without success. The school stores the records off site and does not maintain elementary records.

Question No. 31
Tell me about your favorite teacher.

Response to Question 31
I have three. They each fit a different time. First, Ms. Zimmell. She taught me in the 7th and 8th grade. She was, if anything, the first teacher I had a crush on. But more importantly she kept a tight rein on me and kept pushing me forward in math. By the end of 8th grade, I think she had reached her brink, because I started getting in trouble in her class also. Second, Mrs. Grahmann. She was my English teacher in 10th and 12th grade. Great lady. She had a sense of humor and she was afraid to punch big holes in my sometimes inflated ego. She helped me learn and developed my desire to write. My going away present in the 12th grade was our final project. I have always skimped and just "gotten by". She knew

it, hell everybody in my classes knew it. Final project I went all out.
It was a presentation on Hevry VIII's wives. I prepared not only a poster
board with pictures of the wives, but also a handout. The irony was that
because it was the final project of our senior year no one else did half
as much. They did what I had been doing. It was funny. Third, Mr. Jose
Diaz. He was my band director from 9th through 12th grade. He taught me
about life. He challenged me musically and intellectually. He explained
the differences between "ship of friends" and the "ship of business". It
was and continues to be an important disctinction

Question No. 32
Tell me about your least favorite teacher.

Response to Question 32
I do not remember her name, but she was charged with teaching the "gifted"
geometry class in 10th grade. She had been teaching for moons and
forgive, but she was not a good teacher and I think she bordered on
"dumb". She taught at such a slow pace that I was ready to burst. I got
in to more trouble in that class than at any other time. Give side story.
 I was a drummer in high school. I had been a percussionist since I was
in the 6th grade. I was also pretty good. But I tapped on everything.
If I had pencils or just my fingers. I'm thirty years old and I haven't
"played" the drums since I was 20. I still tap. It's a nervous habit.
She began accusing me (and I mean accusing me) of tapping intentionally.
My classmates even defended me. It was a subconscious habit that had
developed. Anyway she sent me to the office on enough occasions over the
first few weeks, that the asst. principal knew me on a first name basis.
It wasn't good. I finally convinced the counselor to move me to the
advanced class. After the fact, I found I probably did learn more in the
advanced class and none of the teachers like the other teacher.

Question No. 33
Were you: (circle one)
a)a very popular child;b)well-enough liked;c)tolerated by peers;d)usually
rejected

Response to Question 33
well-enough liked.

Question No. 34
Did you generally have at least one good friend during your childhood or
adolescence? Explain.

Response to Question 34
I would say I have always had at least one good friend since childhood if
not more. Since the sixth grade, Rodney, Robert and I have kept in touch.
 We still go out to eat and hang out together to this day.

Question No. 35
You said in our phone discussion that you were considered to be "gifted."
Tell me about how this happened, what it was based upon, and what it got
you.

Response to Question 35
It happened in the second grade. I remember taking a test and then being
segregated into a different section of students who all took the test. We
were the smarter kids and most of us had already congregated together in a
sense. For clarification, I'm talking about all the nerds getting
together or something. Most of us all the way through high school
participated in some form of extracurricular or another. As far as what
being "gifted" got me, I'd say it got me a better education then normal
and it probably at least kept me on track.

Question No. 36
Tell me about a special adult you could go to when you needed help, or
just to talk.

Response to Question 36
. I don't know that there was a special adult. Mr. Diaz, in high school,
was good for just talking to. My downfall, weakness (I'm not sure what to
call it) was I very rarely went looking for help. I usually just tried to
figure things out. It usually got me in trouble, but I always felt better.

Question No. 37
To what social institutions, clubs, sports teams, or other groups did you
belong in your youth?

Response to Question 37
Band since 6th grade, Jazz Band beginning in 10th grade, played little
league baseball and football till High School. Cub scouts and Boy scouts
(never really got far). For whatever reason, my parents wanted to allow
my sister and I to participate any everything possible, but then for
whatever reason we would have to stop. I realize to today it was a money
thing.

Question No. 38
What are some of your success stories from your youth?

Response to Question 38
As I sit here and ponder, my quick answer is none. I received some awards
for individual performance in band. I made the little league all-star
team. But I don't have any true defining success stories.

Question No. 39
What were your biggest challenges?

Response to Question 39
Going to school. Ironic at first glance, but school was tough on a social
level more than anything else. My mother was everywhere and involved with
everything. She was the parent that is so involved that she becomes more
well known than the child.

Question No. 40
Knowing what you now know, what, if anything, would you change about your
past if you could go back?

Response to Question 40
First, in seventh grade I would have gone and tried out for the football
team instead of walking away. Second, I would get someone to explain to
my mother that being in the same school as your child everyday is not a
good thing. Third, I would have tried harder in school so I could go to
better schools. I do not have any regrets about how my life is beginning
to turn out, but I would definitely like the opportunity to change the
time from 17 to 23.

Question No. 41
Describe your underachievement: when it began, how it affected you and
your family, how it made you feel, how ,long it lasted, what you did when
things got really bad, how you survived those years...........

Response to Question 41
My underachievement began sometime in junior high continued through high
school and until I left Houston moved to San Angelo to go to undergrad.
My underachievement is directly related to my inability to set or achieve
goals. As I referenced earlier I didn't really learn about goals till I
met my wife.
        In some ways my underachievement continues today. I have met success in
life, but there are always little reminders of what I didn't do and could
have done. Even during undergrad I didn't make the best grades. My first
venture into college was a complete failure. I attended TCU for one
semester finishing with a 0.35 G.P.A.
        My underachievement is a product of so many factors that I'm sure which
to identify first. I never learned how to push through a challenge. It
was far easier to give up and find a way around then to complete a
project. That was probably one of the key reasons I wasn't able to
succeed in college the first time.
        By the time I got to Angelo State, I knew what I didn't want to be and

that was some high school graduate working a dead end job to nowhere. I have always believed in my ability to get things done. I learned to apply those same beliefs in practice. The exterior was all macho but the interior was scared. I probably still fight this battle to this day.

I survived by waking up each morning and getting out of bed. Sometimes that wasn't until 3 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon, but I got up.

Question No. 42
When you look back at that time in your life, is there anything that surprises you?

Response to Question 42
I am not surprised by anything in particular. I only have regrets about what could have been. But those regrets do not overwhelm my ability to be thankful for today and to look forward to the future.

Question No. 43
Looking back, is there an obvious "cause" for your underachieving behaviors? What?

Response to Question 43
My parents. My mother. My environment. I place the most blame on my parents and specifically my mother. But in the end, I have only myself to determine the "cause" of my underachievement. I needed more discipline and less understanding from my parents and my mother. Then again I don't know that there is a "cause", but maybe only symptoms for underachievement.

Question No. 44
If you have siblings, were they also underachievers? Are they now successful, too?

Response to Question 44
I would not classify my sister as an underachiever. But I would say she is successful. She has her B.S. degree and a good job. My sister also had the benefit of escaping my mother for two years during high school. However, she returned and began living with our parents and basically took over as parent for fiscal matters, which is where my parents have always failed.

Question No. 45
What efforts, if any, were made to help you become more successful?

Response to Question 45
? I learned from my mistakes. I set a goal to do something and began trying to achieve those goals. Encouragement from wife at the time. She believed it my ability to be productive and to make something of myself. She seems to have been right.

Question No. 46
What do you think is/are the reason(s) you reversed your underachievement?

Response to Question 46

What do you think is/are the reason(s) you reversed your underachievement? The biggest reason is my wife not allowing me to slack off when things got a little tough. Secondly, I didn't want to be just a nothing. I have always believed in my mental capacity and I got tired of telling people "I could do it if I want to, I just choose not to." At some point, I began asking myself "Can I really do it?" I decided it was time to prove it to myself.

Question No. 47
Do you credit only yourself for this reversal, or others, as well?

Response to Question 47
Sixty percent my wife and Forty Percent myself to begin the process. Forty percent my wife and sixty percent myself to sustain it.

Question No. 48
Feel free to add any other thoughts here, and on the reverse.

Response to Question 48
As I have been going through putting these answers together, I have been ignoring my phones at work and with the exception of one interruption by a partner concentrating on what to write. I am not convinced that I have thoroughly answered every question and each question seems to bring about different thoughts and ways to answer the questions.

If I am to cast stones, I cast them first at myself. While I would not expect a 7 or 8 year old to really be able to learn good habits without being taught, I have always expected more from myself, but continued to allow myself to fail. I do not wish to blame anyone for something I believe I should have control over. At the end of the day, my personal philosophy is one of believing that everything a person achieves or fails to achieve begins with that individual.

I recognize numerous factors that probably contributed to some of my problems. My mother leads the parade, but she has enough problems of her own to cause me to have more pity for her than for me. Hindsight is a very powerful tool that allows you to see things today that you missed when you were actually experiencing them. The Monday morning quarterback syndrome. I don't know that anything would have really turned out differently, but I sure would hope so. Yet I have no way to change the past.

My underachievement at the beginning of my life and especially through high school and college made me whom I am today. I appreciate my goals more today than some of the same people I know from law school.

If there are any other causes, I would throw a stone at the school system. But that stone is aimed at what I see today and not what I saw when I was going to school. I believe that a reason behind the decline in performance today is directly related to the integration of the classroom. The belief that having a melting pot of students is beneficial is a negative. I believe that are students that can be identified as "gifted" or "advanced". These student should be pushed further and farther, but there should be no grade determination. Grades do not make a "gifted" student. A "gifted" student can just as easily fail a "regular" class as a "gifted" class if the student is bored or doesn't care. I can identify with the "gifted" student that doesn't care, because if you can figure out what the teacher is saying before she has said it, then why pay attention. There are other things to investigate.

I underachieved in terms of grades and performance. I added alcohol to the mix in high school and college and got a failing result. I drank and I squandered a lot of my ability. I then escaped from Houston, my parents home and my mother's grasp. I tried to stand on my own two feet and feel down a bunch. I met my wife and my life changed. My wife doesn't coddle me when I don't' do what I'm suppose to do, but she also doesn't demean my self esteem to get her point across. She gave me enough of a boost to sustain some of my own self belief and pushed me forward.

Once I stepped into law school I was challenged and pushed from the first day to the last. I responded to the challenge and it has made all the difference in the world.

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.
Robert Frost

I took the least traveled path and it has made all the difference.

OEQ 11 Inventory'

Directions: Please rate how much each statement fits you. Respond on the basis of what you are like now, not how you would like to be or how you think you should be. <u>Circle the number</u> under the statement that most accurately reflects the way you see yourself.

	Not at All Like Me	Not Much Like Me	Some-what Like Me	A Lot Like Me	Very Much Like Me
1. I like to daydream	1	2	3	④	5
2. I am a competitive person	1	②	3	4	5
3. The varieties of sound and color are delightful	1	2	3	④	5
4. My pretend world is very real to me	1	②	3	4	5
5. I am an independent thinker	1	2	3	4	⑤
6. I feel other people's feelings	1	2	③	4	5
7. If an activity is physically exhausting, I find it satisfying	1	②	3	4	5
8. Viewing art is a totally absorbing experience	1	②	3	4	5
9. I worry a lot	1	2	3	④	5
10. I love to be in motion	1	2	3	4	⑤
11. It makes me sad to see a lonely person in a group	1	2	③	4	5
12. I can take difficult concepts and translate them into something more understandable	1	2	3	4	⑤
13. I get great joy from the artwork of others	1	2	③	4	5
14. When I get bored, I begin to daydream	1	2	3	4	⑤
15. When I have a lot of energy, I want to do something really physical	1	2	3	④	5
16. I question everything--how things work, what things mean, why things are the way they are	1	2	3	4	⑤
17. I can be so happy that I want to laugh and cry at the same time.	1	2	③	4	5
18. I am more energetic than most people my age	1	2	③	4	5
19. I can form a new concept by putting together a number of different things	1	2	3	4	⑤
20. Sometimes I pretend I am someone else	1	②	3	4	5
21. The longer that I have to sit still, the more restless I get	1	2	3	④	5
22. Things that I picture in my mind are so vivid that they seem real to me	1	2	3	④	5
23. I observe and analyze everything	1	2	3	4	⑤
24. I find myself mixing truth and fantasy in my thoughts	1	2	③	4	5
25. Theories get my mind going	1	2	3	4	⑤

	Not at All Like Me	Not Much Like Me	Some- what Like Me	A Lot Like Me	Very Much Like Me

26. I have strong feelings of joy, anger, excitement, and despair 1 2 (3) 4 5
27. I feel music throughout my whole body 1 2 3 (4) 5
28. I enjoy exaggerating reality 1 2 3 (4) 5
29. I feel like my body is constantly in motion 1 2 (3) 4 5
30. I love to solve problems and develop new concepts 1 2 3 4 (5)

31. I am deeply concerned about others 1 2 (3) 4 5
32. I delight in colors, shapes, and textures of things
  more than other people do 1 2 (3) 4 5
33. I believe that dolls, stuffed animals, or the characters in books
  are alive and have feelings . . . . 1 2 (3) - 4 5
34. Words and sounds create unusual images in my mind 1 2 3 (4) 5
35. My strong emotions move me to tears 1 (2) 3 4 5

36. I like to dig beneath the surface of issues 1 2 3 4 (5)
37. I am moved by beauty in nature 1 2 (3) 4 5
38. I am not sensitive to the color, shape, and texture of things like
  some people are 1 (2) 3 4 5
39. When I am nervous, I need to do something physical 1 2 (3) 4 5
40. I try to analyze my thoughts and actions 1 2 3 4 (5)

41. I can feel a mixture of different emotions all at once 1 2 3 (4) 5
42. I am the type of person who has to be active--walking,
  cleaning, organizing, doing something 1 2 (3) 4 5
43. I like to play with ideas and try to think about how to put
  them to use 1 2 3 4 (5)
44. I am an unemotional person 1 2 (3) 4 5
45. I enjoy the sensations of colors, shapes, and designs 1 2 (3) 4 5

46. The difference in aromas is interesting 1 (2) 3 4 5
47. I have a talent for fantasy 1 2 3 (4) 5
48. I love to listen to the sounds of nature 1 2 (3) 4 5
49. I take everything to heart 1 2 3 (4) 5
50. I thrive on intense physical activity, e.g. fast games and sports . . . 1 2 (3) 4 5

APPENDIX G

Salient Coding Pattern Report

Study - Gifted Underachievers
Project - Dawn

ID Based Statistics

Salient Codes	# of times in a ID Code Combination	Weight
ACCEPTANCE	17	20%
ALCOHOL	1	1.18%
ALONE	16	18.82%
AVOIDANCE	1	1.18%
BROTHR	1	1.18%
CHALLENGING	2	2.35%
CHOICES	4	4.71%
COSTKNOW	8	9.41%
COSTNOTKNOWNG	7	8.24%
DADABSENT	4	4.71%
DEADYRS	2	2.35%
DEPRESSION	4	4.71%
DIDITANYWAY	3	3.53%
FAILURE	1	1.18%
FEAROFFAILURE	2	2.35%
FeltDiff	1	1.18%
FRIENDS	7	8.24%
GIFTED	3	3.53%
GRIND	1	1.18%
HIACHVERS	1	1.18%
HIDDENUNDERACH	1	1.18%
HITBOTTOM	4	4.71%
HOMEENVIRON	7	8.24%
HOMEWORK	1	1.18%
IFICOULDGOBACK	1	1.18%
INTELLECTUAL	10	11.76%
INTROSPECTION	7	8.24%
LEADERSHIP	5	5.88%
LEARNFRMISTAKES	2	2.35%
LEARNING	6	7.06%
MeansToChange	1	1.18%
MEDIOCRITY	4	4.71%
MODELNG	6	7.06%
MOMDEPRESSED	3	3.53%
MotiveChange	1	1.18%
MYOWNTERMS	12	14.12%
PAIN	12	14.12%
PARENTSURVIVAL	3	3.53%
PLAYSTRENGTHS	6	7.06%

RATIONALIZATION	1	1.18%
REGIMENTATION	4	4.71%
REGRETS	4	4.71%
REPETITION	1	1.18%
RESPECTME	9	10.59%
RESPECTYOU	6	7.06%
RESPONSIBILITY+	2	2.35%
RoleEdChange	1	1.18%
SCHLFUN	2	2.35%
SCHOOL	7	8.24%
SELFCONFIDENCE	14	16.47%
SELFCONTROL	5	5.88%
SELFDOUBT	6	7.06%
SelfReliance	1	1.18%
SHOWOFFFUN	2	2.35%
SHOWOFFNEGATIVE	4	4.71%
SHOWYOU	1	1.18%
SHUTDOWN	4	4.71%
SISTER	1	1.18%
SocialSkills	1	1.18%
SUCCESS	7	8.24%
SUPPORTSYSTEM	11	12.94%
SURVIVAL	9	10.59%
TACITKNOW	1	1.18%
TALKINGOUT	3	3.53%
TEACHERS-	1	1.18%
TEACHERS+	1	1.18%
THEGAME	9	10.59%
THESYSTEM	6	7.06%
THROWAWAYYRS	2	2.35%
UHAVPOTENTIAL	1	1.18%
WHOWINS	1	1.18%

Number of distinct code combinations	85
Lowest number of codes in a combination	2
Lowest combination frequency	0
Highest number of codes in a combination	12
Highest combination frequency	17
Average number of codes in a combination	3.6
Average combination frequency	3.6

Salient Coding Pattern Report

Wednesday, March 20, 2002 6:18:26 PM

Study - Gifted Underachievers
Project - Dawn

Source Based Statistics

Number of distinct code combinations	1
Lowest number of codes in a combination	77
Lowest combination frequency	1
Highest number of codes in a combination	77
Highest combination frequency	1
Average number of codes in a combination	77
Average combination frequency	77

Sample Transcript (Excerpt)

5   Karin

TRANSCRIPT (TAPE ONE, SIDE A):

Three. There are three kids in my family: my sister and my twin brother. I'm the oldest of

the twins. I was in first grade cause we skipped kindergarten. So we were early. It wasn't

even really that we had skipped kindergarten, it was just that we'd already had that,

10   because we had started in Australia.

I'm an art teacher and an artist. I love to draw and also I like to paint. I like drawing

because I like to draw photo-realistically, but it takes a lot of time, and with her [the

baby] I never get to do that, never get to the right brain shift. I never get quite to do what

15   I want to do just yet, but she'll get older and I'll be able to do it again. I like sculpture, I

like clay, I like all of it.

I've always drawn; I never really considered being an art teacher until at least I got to

college I didn't take very much art in high school . I took Art I. It just didn't fit into my

20   schedule. I took two sciences and math and then I took all the academic subjects. Then

when I got to college, I went to Concordia, a teacher's college which was geared to

training Lutheran school teachers and, this is going to sound really bad, I decided that I

wanted to have the scholarship money for being a church worker, but I wasn't sure I

really wanted to be a church worker. So then I decided, well, I'll go into art because it's

25 not so easy to find art teacher positions and if they couldn't find a position then I could

go into public school and could still keep all my money. So I started out in art and

decided I wasn't sure if that was really what I wanted to do so second semester of my

freshman year I decided I would go back to doing all my science and math stuff. And the

art professor goes, oh, well, you'll be back; I'm not worried about you. And sure enough

30 sophomore year I was back, he was right, so from there I discovered that, I think I found

art more challenging. And maybe the time and the patience in art were just, more, a little

more rewarding.

I've always wanted to be a teacher, I just wasn't sure I wanted to be a teacher in the

35 Lutheran system. Of course, then by the time I was a senior, I was just begging God for a

job in the Lutheran system and I thought, "Oh my Gosh, what did I do?" And you can't

art teachers for Lutheran systems so easily and all this stuff and …He had a plan. So..it

wasn't a problem. In fact I had my call for my job , I was one of the first ones from my

class that was placed.

40

I probably always wanted to be a teacher because my dad was a teacher; my mom was a

teacher. They were basically the sort of…do what you're supposed to do, entertain

yourself, we don't drive you all over town, keep yourself occupied, do your chores, and

we could go to the pool or the park, or do whatever we wanted. I think it's easier to do

45 that when you're in a smaller town. That's basically how it was. We rode our bikes all

over town. Of course, everybody in town knew us, too. There were only 1,000

people…and my dad's a teacher… and my brothers and sisters and I we were…we delivered newspapers when we were…my first job was when I was in third grade I started delivering newspapers, so everybody knew us around town.   You couldn't get
50   away with anything, not that I tried to. It was like a big extended family.

For me, my dad has always been there. I mean, my mom was there too, bu, I mean my dad has always been where I am …he's a schoolteacher, and my mom was working in the welfare system so she was, she was what I would consider, had an outside job. But my
55   dad, because I was in school, so my dad was there because he was teaching in the school. But he became the media center specialist, so I would see him when we'd go to the library. My grandma was the library person too, so this was kind of funny, and when we had basketball games or whatever, they always had him, the coaches would have him taping the games, so both of my parents were always there at all the games. So when we
60   came from school we would run home from school, we lived a half mile from school. I would run home from school, so that we could have a half hour of TV before we had to turn it off , 'cause my dad would get home, then we would have to start working on whatever…I mean it was funny, I mean we had a half hour then my dad would be home. And my mom would have a list of chores for us to do, and boy, we'd better have some of
65   those done before my dad got home. But, you know, a half hour. No, their expectations weren't real high, but they weren't really low, either. They weren't checked out- they were actually pretty involved, and as long as we did what we were supposed to do, we stayed off their radar screen.

70   I never got called to the office to see my test scores or anything. It wasn't like here,

where you did all that test prep before you took the test. I remember I took the Act, and I

just did average on that. I've always wondered how I would do on the SAT because it's

more thinking sand problem solving kind of thing. I took the MAT and I didn't really

study for that, and I scored really high. I just kinda went with my gut, and I usually got it

75   right.

Yeah, I always had my hand up in class. My one teacher would say, "Can someone

besides Karin answer?" I thought that was cool; I liked that. I usually picked up things

pretty fast, Sometimes I get frustrated with my students because , because to me it's so

80   obvious I can see it, and I don't get how they can not see it! Sometimes I have to have a

student explain it because I'm obviously not explaining it in a way that they can get it.

Maybe that's why I'm doing art- because I can actually explain that a little more. I've

tried to help people with their math before, and I'm just not able to explain it…I can see

it, it seems obvious, but we just get frustrated when in try to explain it. It's a whole other

85   side of the brain; it takes me a little bit to even get into that.

LONG PAUSE: INTERVIEWER: UMMM, I FEEL LIKE I'M MISSING SOMETHING

When I was in fifth grade we had to make a play, and I remember all the girls, and there

were only five girls in my class, so all the girls got together and did the play guardian

90   angels, and I wrote the play for that. Yeah, I like to write, too. I did write a lot of poems,

especially in my junior and senior years of school. It's not…that I didn't even really

think about it, I 'd just start writing and they just came out and there'd be a poem.

I think that being called a know it all is not cool. The boys can…they can get away with it

95   more, but when I think about my class, well, it was the girls who were smart. Mostly it

was the girls who were smart- I'm trying to think of who was smart, and I'm coming up

with girls at the top of my list. We only had a few girls…we had a lot of boys…There

were mostly boys, but it was the girls who were smart. One other thing, when I was in

college, I remember this one guy who was…he asked me what my…no, he saw I was on

100   the Dean's list and he commented on how surprised he was, because he said, " you're

always out doing something and I never see you studying" So, he was really surprised.

I don't know, I answered the study because it said something about being gifted and not

having it recognized it or something. And I just felt that described me. I don't think that I

105   really verbalized…to myself…that I was fooling everybody, and, and that I wasn't doing

what I was capable of until I was in college. Because when I was in high school, my life

was so full, I had sports. I mean that was after school until 6:00 sports and then , most

people had to study but I could just go home and do my chores and go to sleep. I thought

it was normal that…my brother and sister never had to pick up a book either and my

110   mom and dad never really told me to bring home my books and to study, so I thought it

was normal. Which gave me really bad habits when I got to college. I know, but I know I

can do that…which is good because right now…I know I'm not doing my top stuff, that I

could be doing, but I've got her to deal with, so in that sense it's really nice 'cause with

her, I can just get by, and people don't even know, and its nice.

115

309

CROSSCASE MATRIX (EXCERPT)

N A M E S	DISINTEGRATION	HELPING OTHERS	SUCCESS	SPECIAL ADULT/PERSON CATALYST
DAWN	Lots of "dead" years Nothing worth remembering Early and frequent alcohol abuse Nervous breakdown Eating disordered	Political activism from early age Want to help the Columbine Boys	Need to make a difference in the world Need to contribute something important	Grandfather- listened, talked to like adult, Especially loved me Modeled relationships Bro-in-law took me in That a grown up would care so…Paid attention to me (even when I was little)
KH	Suppressed traumatic event(s); molested as child. Sporadic memories. Considered suicide.	Validated for doing my art. Chances to try many new things.	I push myself harder; I fixed myself. Want to be a good role model	Two professors in college. Husband- expected more of me.
CASEY	Felt like a failure, Economic factors Maybe "not the greatest swimmer in the ocean" Completely fell on my face Decided I didn't want to be like this the rest of my life Depressed, Suicidal Used alcohol to forget Avoid thinking of myself as a failure Never wanted to move back home Parts I don't remember: don't want to remember	Stopped worrying about my problems Even on my worst day, I never had a day as bad as theirs Opportunity to focus on somebody else's problems Change this, make this difference How can I make things better?	Originally defined as financial/material Is what I DID Was to overcome challenges Means not underachieving as often I can do it now Feel like an imposter- caught between worlds	WIFE: Antithesis of those who said I couldn't, esp. Mother Supported **and** pushed Encourager Savior No doubt a change agent
GUIDO	"Sad Guido" , Moping around "Social drinker" only drinks when hanging out- hung out daily or more, Early alcohol use Suicidal, Depressed	Fixer of family problems	UA as a choice-Achievement as choice Needed more from life My wife says I am	2 Speech teachers- reappeared throughout school School secretary looked out for him Considers adults who hang out with kids "clingy", or as having devious motives

NAMES	REGRETS	LESSONS LEARNED	IF I COULD TURN BACK THE HANDS OF TIME
DAWN	Wished she had help figuring things out. Wished she had asked for help.	Leadership, Collaboration Being outside yourself . That boys and girls get treated differently re: smarts.	Would not go back. What I learned helped make me who I am today.
KH	Doesn't have a lot of time to do art. Never told/asked for help, That no one told me the "criteria," and I couldn't figure it out. That not organized or self-disciplined.	Being able to slide by isn't too bad sometimes. That I can rely on me. I am a gifted person. How not to be seen as a know-it-all. Taking the time & patience to be excellent is rewarding.	I wish I had told about the molestation and gotten help. I'd find a way to be in "that" group where I belonged.
JK	Wish I had been like the advanced students, worked hard. Some people tried to tell me. Now don't like my background. Choices then influenced opportunities now. What did I do?	Recognize I had legitimate reasons for UA Strength from adversity, I did it on my own! Self-reliance Don't whine, don't complain, Maybe I AM better for it Learned to accept the cards you get dealt, Still get disappointed when I can't fix all problems- feels like haven't done all he could do Not to let things fester, We all have worries Now understand who I am; To take the attack, not wait to be attacked; More comfortable with myself; understand who I am	No, but if I could go back with the knowledge I have now…,
GUIDO	No regrets, I've had a happy life.	Never tell them how you feel, even if you know Life is something to be endured Powerlessness in face of problems Accept what you can't change	Everything is fine.

Coded Text Report

Wednesday, March 20, 2002 8:34:51 PM

Study - Gifted Underachievers
Project - JK

*ACCEPTANCE
Text Segment ID:41
Number of Codes applied:1
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
 think even within the fire department, I was recognized as being…having a little more intelligence…that I got things quicker. ..people didn't have to come through and explain to me 5 times how to do something, which there were a number of people you had to explain things to 15 times….so they got the concept. They explained to me once or twice, and boom! It was easy…

*ACCEPTANCE   *CHOICES   *DIDITANYWAY   *INTELLECTUAL
Text Segment ID:101
Number of Codes applied:4
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
I think that that comes from is, like I said earlier, I have always had a minimum level of self-confidence- sometimes it expands, sometimes it shrinks. And it's that whole when you try to push me to go somewhere, I do what a lot of people do and say, no I don't want to do it. And, intellectually, it's when you're trying to do that, I'd always get that feeling of being pitted, and I'd would avoid that. It's like that old adage of you can't put a round peg into a square hole; well, no, yes, you can; if you make the square peg hole bigger, you can get the round peg in there. And I guess that's my adage of saying with, being gifted and that classification, when you told me you couldn't do it, my first reaction is well, how the hell do I figure out how to do it. Some things may not be probable, but everything is possible. Just because you, you in the sense of the teacher, the persona who's saying it can't be done; just because you think it can't be done, doesn't mean that if you let me sit around long enough to think about it and analyze it and ponder over it, maybe I can come up with a solution! And I think that's one of the things I hated; don't tell me it can't be done.

*ACCEPTANCE   *COSTKNOW   *DIDITANYWAY   *MEDIOCRITY
Text Segment ID:122
Number of Codes applied:4
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
 believe I started trying   to impress people by not making good grades. I don't know how this happen   . . . the too be "cool" you have to be stupid thing. It bugs me to this   day, but I think it may relate to self-esteem. I don't believe I had any.

*ACCEPTANCE   *DIDITANYWAY   *TEACHERS+
Text Segment ID:97
Number of Codes applied:3
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
I guess the part of it goes with the other side of that, which is gifted and talented, in that within that GT realm there's different people have different gifts at different times. Within educational systems it's about intellectual capacity but it's not just about intellectual capacity' it's about the applications that the child is able or the person is able to use that capacity. My wife is very intelligent, she doesn't like to think of that herself, but she was an advanced student, one of those high achievers I would have hated if I had met her in a high school class – the kind who was ugh- blowing the curve; stop! She plays by the rules. She goes to class, she does what the teacher says, that's how she expects it to be. Those people might have the brain capacity, but it's that ability to take that capacity and utilize it in different ways that most people don't use. I have to think outside the box. The best example of thinking outside the box I can give you is that we had to take an

ethics class in law school-which shocks most people-ethical lawyers! A Like, you can't go back and sue your former client, unless he gives you permission. But the rules focused so much on the don'ts. Well, I answered that class, which means I got the highest grade in that class, because when I took the test, I didn't focus on what we couldn't do, but on what we can do. I turned the rules inside out. And I was talking to friends after that test and they said, didn't you see that, you couldn't do this, couldn't do that, yeah you could. I said the rules focused on knowledge, not belief. He didn't say that we couldn't . Sometimes I don't wait to be told what I can and can't do; I just think, he didn't say we couldn't . Oh yeah, I've gotten in trouble for that one! I've walked that line…oh you did say I can't do that, well then I'm doing this. But I think that's where the gifted part is, is that ability to take the box, turn it inside out and find the answer. Those students need, or at least I perceive I needed, they needed a teacher who needed to understand that when I turned the box inside out, I'm not turning the box inside out to make you mad or fight against you. I..I came up with something new. One of the stories I talked about was the geometry teacher in tenth grade who was teaching gifted geometry. She was convinced that I was doing these things just to piss her off. But, no, I wasn't! But it didn't help that in the end…

*ACCEPTANCE *FRIENDS *HOMOGROUPING *PLAYSTRENGTHS
Text Segment ID:146
Number of Codes applied:4
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
t happened in the second grade. I remember taking a test and then being segregated into a different section of students who all took the test. We were the smarter kids and most of us had already congregated together in a sense. For clarification, I'm talking about all the nerds getting together or something. Most of us all the way through high school participated in some form of extracurricular or another. As far as what being "gifted" got me, I'd say it got me a better education then normal and it probably at least kept me on track.

*ACCEPTANCE *FRIENDS *HOMOGROUPING *SELFCONFIDENCE *SUPPORTSYSTEM *SURVIVAL
Text Segment ID:100
Number of Codes applied:6
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
They had gifted and talented and advanced. AP were just starting to be offered around then. I remember in my senior year I had the choice between taking AP English or gifted and talented, and I realized somethings' wrong with this system . I mean, I'm GT what the hell's with this AP crap. AT the time I thought, that by taking AP English I wasn't going to be with the same kids I'd always been with. I think there were fourteen of us. We were pretty much in the same classes together. There were a group or 4 or 5 of us who came out of elementary that went to junior high. In junior high the group expanded by about 2 or 3, and by high school, because there were more junior highs, we expanded up to about 14. We were the same groups of kids from 9th grade to 12th grade. In the first semester of law school we do what's called recitations; we were divided up into three sections, so there was A,B, and C sections. We all had the same classes, because they give you your schedule the first year. So, those people who were in that section almost, well, slept together. The closest friends I graduated from law school were all in that section. As we moved up and started taking classes, we started taking different classes because we had different interests, but that focus group, the group of four of us who all stuck together. We all broke off to study for the bar. We got together and got hotel rooms; we all got separate places to study, then we got together to study and we all passed.

*ACCEPTANCE *FRIENDS *HOMOGROUPING *SUPPORTSYSTEM
Text Segment ID:54
Number of Codes applied:4
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
I found a peer group in the fraternity, too. Were there were some of the stereotypical things in the fraternity? Hell, yes. Let's not kid ourselves, stereotypes are born of…. people doing the same things over and over again, and that's how we cause these stereotypes. Did it help the drinking problem? Oh, probably not, but it stopped become a drinking to forget, it was a drinking to celebrate,not that we needed much to celebrate.

*ACCEPTANCE *FRIENDS *SUPPORTSYSTEM
Text Segment ID:123
Number of Codes applied:3
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
Junior High was my first exposure to band.   Band is what enabled me to be challenged and to move forward.

*ACCEPTANCE *FRIENDS *SUPPORTSYSTEM
Text Segment ID:126
Number of Codes applied:3
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:

My friend and I are still friends to this day.   In fact there were three of us. Each of us has served as the best man   for each other. Robert served for Rodney. Rodney served for me. And I   will serve for Robert (again). I liked High School and I could write my   own dissertation on High School.

*ACCEPTANCE   *HOMOGROUPING   *INTELLECTUAL   *SURVIVAL
Text Segment ID:129
Number of Codes applied:4
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
School was "cool", but that's only because I was segregated from   other "regular" students. This is complete arrogance, but if I had not   been segregated I don't believe I would have passed or moved forward in   any way. I would have been bored to death and probably dropped out.   There is no way I could handle some of the spoon feed methods that teachers implore today.

*ACCEPTANCE   *INTELLECTUAL
Text Segment ID:96
Number of Codes applied:2
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
They have to know, somebody needs to understand that the way I think, I don't think like a regular person. When I analyze a problem, there may be a standard solution, but chances are I've come up with 3 or 4 answers that aren't standard . Most people would think we can't do it that way. And I think, well, yeah you can, you just have to be able to see it. I think that's part of what it is; that the truly gifted student- we have a different mold. Like I said, my computer runs faster.

*ACCEPTANCE   *INTELLECTUAL   *INTROSPECTION   *MODELNG   *PLAYSTRENGTHS   *RESPECTME   *RESPECTYOU   *SUPPORTSYSTEM
Text Segment ID:91
Number of Codes applied:8
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
I think that at some level, you almost have to be a little bit gifted to understand another gifted person. I think the best teachers I had…I don't know whether they were gifted or not, but they at least had the ability to understand who I was, and I think that, as I talk through this and understand more , maybe they were, so they understood some of what I was going through. And some of those, who were, for lack of a better word, regular students, they'd gone up and been smart, but they weren't at that next level. Those are the ones that I ran roughshod over and just bullied. Yeah, teachers who teach gifted kids need to be gifted.

*ACCEPTANCE   *INTROSPECTION   *RATIONALIZATION   *REGRETS   *RESPONSIBILITY+
Text Segment ID:10
Number of Codes applied:5
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
 And that's the part that I regret, but then I…focus in on it and I say,

*ACCEPTANCE   *INTROSPECTION   *REALLYCHANGED?   *RESPECTME   *RESPONSIBILITY+   *SELFCONFIDENCE   *SUCCESS
Text Segment ID:85
Number of Codes applied:7
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
ven knowing intellectually that I deserve to be where I am now. One of the things about that email you sent out , underachievers who became successful, when I first looked at that, I thought, you know what? I haven't become successful. I haven't done anything, I don't have the big house, I don't drive the fancy car. Because, I was defining success within a different realm. Then I realized that I have overcome enough challenges… I've gotten to the point where I don't underachieve, with the caveat that I don't underachieve…as often….I still have moments where I do underachieve. It's not…I guess the difference is between defining it as underachievement and defining it as failure. Sometimes the differences become blurred. But, success is what I did. I got through law school.

*ACCEPTANCE   *INTROSPECTION   *REGRETS   *SELFCONFIDENCE
Text Segment ID:106
Number of Codes applied:4
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text: yeah, I've learned a lot from my experiences, and I understand who I am, That's sort of Self-recognition, but I couldn't be honest with myself it I said I wouldn't mind having those things; a better background and more money. And that's where some of that self-regret comes in.

*ACCEPTANCE *MODELNG *PLAYSTRENGTHS *REPETITION *RESPECTME *RESPECTYOU
Text Segment ID:142
Number of Codes applied:6
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
Mr. Jose   Diaz. He was my band director from 9th through 12th grade. He taught me   about life. He challenged me musically and intellectually. He explained   the differences between "ship of friends" and the "ship of business". It   was and continues to be an important disctinction

*ACCEPTANCE *PLAYSTRENGTHS *RESPECTME *RESPECTYOU *SELFCONFIDENCE *SUCCESS *TEACHERS+ *THEGAME
Text Segment ID:30
Number of Codes applied:8
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
favorite teachers, I have her name down as Graumann…I've heard she got married and everything else……I worked for her. Yeah, and I'd say clearly   a) she earned my respect, b) she had the ability to…. give me the freedom…to be gifted, whatever I mean…but to also reign it in, to play to some of my strengths….

*ACCEPTANCE *RESPECTME *RESPECTYOU *SHUTDOWN
Text Segment ID:29
Number of Codes applied:4
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
I usually responded by just shutting down and…. ignoring them. I don't need to deal with them , because you [they] have no clue. If I didn't respect them…I didn't work…that'd be fair….because…

*ACCEPTANCE *TEACHERS+
Text Segment ID:141
Number of Codes applied:2
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
Mrs. Grahmann. She was my English teacher in 10th   and 12th grade. Great lady. She had a sense of humor and she was afraid   to punch big holes in my sometimes inflated ego. She helped me learn and   developed my desire to write. My going away present in the 12th grade was   our final project. I have always skimped and just "gotten by". She knew it, hell everybody in my classes knew it. Final project I went all out.   It was a presentation on Hevry VIII's wives. I prepared not only a poster   board with pictures of the wives, but also a handout. The irony was that   because it was the final project of our senior year no one else did half   as much. They did what I had been doing. It was funny.

*ALONE *HITBOTTOM
Text Segment ID:36
Number of Codes applied:2
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
When I probably hit rock bottom was after high school, when I lost that.

*ALONE *OPP *RESPONSIBILITY+
Text Segment ID:56
Number of Codes applied:3
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
By doing all that, yeah, improving myself. Did I think about that at the time? No, of course not. It was all about , it was all outside… I didn't have to worry about my problems, it was all somebody else's problems. So…that's what it became, I

*AVOIDANCE *HOMEENVIRON *RESPONSIBILITY-
Text Segment ID:64
Number of Codes applied:3
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
 I think the other part …is …she began trying to live through our accomplishments. If we did anything…it was just as important to her. Because she was better at making excuses for us when we failed than we were. Of course, you know, I'd love to say I didn't use that to my advantage, but of course I did. And whether that failure was directly related to me trying to outsmart the system, or what, but, her excuses paved the way. To me it was easier to fail, because someone else was

taking part of the blame. I didn't have to accept responsibility for it. And that probably perpetuated my ability to not do anything! It wasn't my fault, you know. I guess deep down one of the things I hate, is I hate people who don't take responsibility for themselves. Am I being hypocritical? Probably. I would say that it was probably very true that we hate the things in others that we hate most in ourselves. Somewhere down the line I learned to accept responsibility for my mistakes. Then when I did that, I stopped worrying about avoiding responsibility for my errors, and instead learned how to fix them.

*AVOIDANCE   *INTROSPECTION   *LEARNFRMISTAKES
Text Segment ID:80
Number of Codes applied:3
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
When I'm not dealing with things I know I have to do…I hate the word that comes to mind…it becomes, it reaches almost a point of paralysis sometimes, depending on what it is. The book, who Moved My Cheese, that's when I feel like, like a hem. I can't really quantify things, I worry what's gonna come next, if I don't want to face, I guess, the fear. What used to happen is that at some point I'd probably get sick to try to escape it, so that it wasn't my fault…I was sick…I couldn't get to it. But now, now I don't get ill, because I don't really let it go anymore. AT this point…but don't get me wrong, I still have those things…at this point, I don't let it…my goal now is to not let it linger. I try to not let it fester so that it gets worse. And, I try to attack it.

*CHOICES   *COSTKNOW   *UHAVPOTENTIAL
Text Segment ID:75.1
Number of Codes applied:3
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
I'd fail one six weeks, get an A the next six weeks, and it pretty much made the teachers go nuts!

*CHOICES   *DIDITANYWAY   *INTELLECTUAL
Text Segment ID:121
Number of Codes applied:3
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
was generally making B's and C's. I discovered (or someone told   me, I don't know) that you could keeping climbing the school ladder with   B's and C's. You didn't need A's. My mother was now working, my dad is   still traveling and there wasn't anyone to tell me any different. The   emphasis on making grades was gone. This is where I developed bad habits with regards to homework and the educational process entirely. I didn't   have to work as hard as my fellow classmates in order to make a "B" or a   "C". I could do half the work they did and still keep going. I think I   may have annoyed a few people along the way.

*CHOICES   *FEAROFFAILURE   *INTROSPECTION   *SELFDOUBT   *SHOWYOU
Text Segment ID:87
Number of Codes applied:5
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
At one point I said, you've been telling all these people you can do it but you don't try because you don't want to, I started asking myself some of those internal questions like, maybe you can't do it. Maybe you're the fake that you don't want to admit to being. And I think that was another part of it: you know, you keep saying you can do it, but you never proved it. That became part of it, too; I started internally started asking myself those questions about how am I going to prove to myself that I can do it.

*CHOICES   *MEDIOCRITY   *REGRETS   *THEGAME   *THESYSTEM
Text Segment ID:9
Number of Codes applied:5
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
You know, I realize that the choices I made back then influenced where I could go to school, and what I was going to major in. and so, that's where I formed my biggest regret… I've met the…there's attorneys that I've met who went to… what I call a prestigious undergrad…went to prestigious law schools…and they're complete and total idiots. And I just want to go, "I'm glad you went to that great law school; now would you get your head out of your…" You know, focus on what we're doing here and stop tweedling around on the edges…. And that's the part that I regret,

*CHOICES   *REALLYCHANGED?   *REGRETS   *RESPONSIBILITY+
Text Segment ID:19
Number of Codes applied:4
Number of Sources applied:1

316

Segment Text:
what we're talking about is, I'm and underachiever and I'm thinking now… what did I do?

*CHOICES   *SELFCONFIDENCE
Text Segment ID:20
Number of Codes applied:2
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
That self-confidence led me to probably make choices and determinations…

*COSTKNOW   *DIDITANYWAY   *HOMEWORK   *INTELLECTUAL   *MEDIOCRITY
*PLAYSTRENGTHS   *REGIMENTATION   *RESPECTME   *THESYSTEM
Text Segment ID:24
Number of Codes applied:9
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
They were reflective of that the system said we're gonna put more emphasis on homework, because… I think because the stupid people are still stuck in your class with you, and they need all the practice and everything they get…they need the cheap, easy grades. I was like, just give me my grade on my tests.

*COSTKNOW   *INTELLECTUAL   *RESPECTYOU   *RESPONSIBILITY+   *SELFCONFIDENCE
Text Segment ID:18
Number of Codes applied:5
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
borderlines on arrogance…and my saying that I say to my wife, and… for these purposes one time is… I hate stupid people. Ignorance I can accept. The way I define ignorance and stupidity is… ignorance is just the person who doesn't know any better, and whether they go choose to go out and figure out the truth or not… I don't hold that against people. Stupidity is…. you know better and you still choose to repeat the same actions that caused your problems. THAT, I HATE! I do my best to tolerate it, but …

*COSTKNOW   *INTELLECTUAL   *SHOWOFFFUN
Text Segment ID:124
Number of Codes applied:3
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
High school was the coming of age and   where I first recognized that there are a lot of people who are not as   smart as I am. This is my arrogance and it's also my downfall. I have to   keep it in check. I

*COSTKNOW   *SUPPORTSYSTEM   *UHAVPOTENTIAL
Text Segment ID:95
Number of Codes applied:3
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
By getting rid of gifted classes and making the classes pre-AP, and mixing up the high achievers and gifted kids, the kids that are truly gifted are going fall into regular classes . They're going to get even more bored, they're going to become the discipline problems, and at some point we're going to turn that on them and they're going to become the underachievers that we…filter out. That's what I see happening. T

*COSTNOTKNOWNG   *INTELLECTUAL   *LEARNING   *MEDIOCRITY   *PLAYSTRENGTHS
*RESPECTYOU   *SCHLFUN   *SELFCONFIDENCE   *SHOWOFFFUN   *TEACHERS+   *TESTS
Text Segment ID:52
Number of Codes applied:11
Number of Sources applied:1
Segment Text:
 I had a government professor there who was tough…mean…and he was a big bully. And I liked him. I thought he's cool, and he knew all his stuff, and I thought I want to be like him, so I took every class he offered. Did decent in his classes, and I mean his classes were tough, but he flat out said, when I give a test…he didn't have any homework…so he's already earned a bonus point and I'm thinking no homework and it's all about your test. Yeah, it's my environment here because it's all about the testing…but he said on all his tests, anybody can make a 70 on my test if you show up to my classes and just listen. If you want to make above a 70, you have to take the information and apply it. The best I could get in his class was a "B" and I tried. And it wasn't one of those ditchin and dodging that "A" thing. I tried. Couldn't get above a "B."   WOOW! You gotta work. It was one of those few classes where I started working because I had to work to just to get anywhere with him. Hell no, I never had to work any other time in my life. I worked. It became…….the people that were taking his classes…it…all his advanced classes were at 8 o'clock on Tuesday, Thursday mornings. Nobody takes

that class unless they want to be there. You don't accidentally end up in an 8am class on a Tuesday/Thursday morning. You take that class because you want to self-mutilate yourself, because God knows if you do that Wednesday night you can't go to penny night at the local pub and make that Thursday morning 8 o'clock class. That's part of what that was.

Codebook

1. Acceptance
2. Age
3. Alcohol
4. Alone
5. Ambition
6. Avoidance
7. Boring
8. Brothr
9. ChalengFun
10. Challenging
11. Change
12. Choices
13. Costknow
14. Costnotknowing
15. Dad-
16. Dad+
17. Dadabsent
18. Dadjob
19. Deadyrs
20. Extracur
21. Failure
22. Friends
23. Gender
24. Gifted
25. Grades
26. Grind
27. Heterogrouping
28. Hiahvers
29. Hiddenunderach
30. Hitbottom
31. Homeenviron
32. Homework
33. Homogrouping
34. Ificouldgoback
35. Intellectual
36. Leadership
37. Learnfrmistakes
38. Learning
39. Mediocrity
40. Mentors
41. Modeling
42. Mom-
43. Mom+
44. Momdepressed
45. Momjob
46. Myownterms
47. Opp
48. Pain
49. Parentsurvival
50. Playstrengths
51. Rationalization
52. Reallychanged?
53. Regimentation
54. Regrets
55. Repetition
56. Respectme
57. Respectyou
58. Responsibility-
59. Responsibility+
60. Schlfun
61. School
62. Selfconfidence
63. Selfcontrol
64. Selfdoubt
65. Showyou
66. Shutdown
67. Sister
68. Studying
69. Success
70. Suicide
71. Supportsystem
72. Survival
73. Talkingout
74. Teachers-
75. Teachers+
76. Tests
77. Thegame
78. Thesystem
79. Throwawayrs
80. Uach
81. Uhavpotential
82. Whowins

FAMILIAL	EDUCATIONAL	INDIVIDUAL	SELF-RELIANCE	HITTING BOTTOM	CHANGE
Dad Absent	Boring	Pain	Alcohol	Challenge Fun	Support System
Dad -	Cost Knowing	My Own Terms	No Goals	Intellectualism	Goals
Mom-	Cost Not Knowing	Responsibility	Failure	No Self-Control	Ambition
Mom Depressed	Grades	Survival	Self-doubt	Talking Out	Learn Fr Mistake
Parent Survival	Regimentation	Alone	Shutdown	Gifted	Studying
Dead Years	Repetition	The Game	Suicide	Love Learning	Show You
No Modeling	Uhavepotential	MomJob	WhoWins	Extracur	OPP

-No one to show me how	-I was called a 'know-it-all'	- He let me go at my own pace	-Spent hours alone every day	-years my psyche says it doesn't need to remember	-Now, ok isn't enough, I don't want to miss a thing
-Dad traveled all the time	-girls were not supposed to be smart	-Challenge was fun	-Wouldn't stoop to asking for help	-you could've cut the tension in the house with a knife	-Set some goals for myself
-Even when he was home he wasn't available	-I liked showing off my inane knowledge	-I love to learn new things	-Didn't need to grovel for attention	-why bother, why bother was my mantra	-Decided to show her I COULD do it
-Mom was too busy working to pay much attention	-teachers who acted like they hated kids	-When I challenge it's because I have to do that	-I was leery of adults who 'bonded' with children	-I was drinking and I was an alcoholic no one knew, I hid it well	-Maybe I wasn't the strongest swimmer in the ocean
-She came home and did what she needed to but had to get up early	-teachers who thought I was out to get them I hated the regimentation of school-	_ Always in trouble for talking, challenging	-Always had a higher than normal self-image	-when I lost my activities and group I felt alone	-I have only myself to take credit for my change
-I was home alone all the time	I'm not a regimentation kind of person	-Always felt different	-more than a little self-confidence led me to go my own way	I thought about killing myself & decided that would be selfish	-My wife- she gives me a kick in the behind, but also doesn't put me down
-At home there was a cost to not knowing	-Teachers who don't teach except by example and rote	-Knew things other people didn't	-Didn't understand how other people just couldn't get it	-I felt like a failure when I had to go back home	-Made the decision to change before I got too old
-We were expected to do our work and entertain ourselves	-Homework was the cheap easy grades	-Just knew things	-Didn't really have friends until 10th grade	-Flunked out of school, no job, no money	-I learned that to bet the system you have to play the game by THEIR rules, then
-Everyone in the house was smart	-Never did homework	-When it was wrong I just wouldn't play their game	-Didn't understand how to make friends	-I realized that I had made a lot of bad choices and had regrets	beat 'em
-None of us studied, my dad said he never studied either	-Why do 50 when you get in in 3 tries?	-Even when I was at my lowest I never stopped learning	-Spent a lot of time alone in my room writing poetry	-Dead end job to nowhere	-In college I could take more control over my learning
-We moved a lot so didn't have a support system	-Got good grades without even trying	-Had to find something that meant something to me	-I was alys comfortable in my own skin, maybe because I spent so much time alone	-Could I really "do it if I really chose to?"	-I didn't want to be just a nothing
-We were expected to 'look it up'	-Their expectations were not really high, but not really low either	-Always involved in new activities	-		
	-Wouldn't do their meaningless work	-Loved the hard classes			
		-Teacher was mean, a bully, but made me work- I respected him			
		-I'm very passionate			