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PARENTING THE GIFTED AND TALENTED CHILD:
A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF MOTHERS
REGARDING THEIR UNIQUE EXPERIENCES IN RAISING
GIFTED AND TALENTED CHILDREN

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

School of Education

by

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May 2017

I dedicate this to my sons, London and Colin, who remind me every day to smile and enjoy the simple yet profound things life has to offer. Their enthusiasm for joy invigorates me and help me know that nothing is impossible or beyond our reach.

and

I dedicate this to my parents, Vernon and Mary Hidalgo, who are never short of compassionate love, encouragement, and support and who inspire me daily to serve and offer the best of myself to others.

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ABSTRACT

The lived experiences of mothers raising gifted and talented (G/T) children can differ from the lived experiences of mothers raising non-G/T children, and these unique experiences may spark concern, impact choices, and exacerbate stress and anxiety. The purpose of this study was to gather data in order to illustrate the distinctly defining experiences and perceptions of mothers currently raising G/T children as well as to consider both the internal and external factors affecting and influencing perspectives and self-efficacy. Utilizing a qualitative, case study research design approach, the researcher conducted interviews with eight volunteer mothers willing to share their thoughts and feelings regarding personal experiences. Several themes and subthemes were presented in the findings: (1) emotional responses stemming from appreciation, discomfort, anxiety and frustration; (2) parent protective factors stemming from concern for child and misunderstanding of child; and (3) misunderstanding of mother and her role.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

My Journey

The gifted and talented (G/T) child is often misunderstood. I have taught for 16 years as a gifted classroom teacher to such students, and I have repeatedly observed unnecessary strife intrapersonally and interpersonally within struggling G/T youth and their families, resulting from societal unwillingness to discover and better understand this special population. Few seemingly grasp the complex mental, emotional, and psychological experiences within their narrative, and even fewer attempt to paint an accurate portrait that speaks truth in order to assist these individuals in reaching their full potential. This is unfortunate. However, what is equally unfortunate is the extended lack of discovery and misunderstanding of those parenting the G/T child. I have increasingly perceived their unique parenting challenges through observations as well as from communications and interactions with these parents in, for example, parent/teacher conferences where expressions of confusion, doubt, intimidation, uncertainty, and frustration were shared. I am fortunate that many of these parents were comfortable in voicing their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions to me, for I was better able to identify noteworthy parent/child relationships and dynamics as well as how the G/T label affects these families as a whole. Their shared commentaries opened a door that called for a much-needed awareness within the field of G/T education.

Interestingly, I myself humbly became a parent in 2006 to one tested, identified, and classified G/T child and one tested, identified and classified artistically-talented child – both currently enrolled in special G/T programs for such children. Hence, I have experienced first-hand the complex emotions and struggles that come from parenting G/T

children. I also better comprehend the varied societal attitudes toward such children and their parents as well as the challenges many parents face when struggling to articulate concerns, navigate through ambiguous options, and advocate for both the child(ren) and the G/T activities and programs the child(ren) deserves. Additionally, I further and more completely understand the discomfort, and even isolation, one may experience as well as the societal and educational contradictions present both inside and outside the academic environment. Subsequently, this knowledge and understanding has stimulated an overwhelming desire to help others better understand, articulate, and navigate through the lived experiences of both G/T learners and their parents. My hope is to rally a sparked awareness and a more positive perspective from both societies at large and the American educational institution.

Introduction

Parenting has changed as society has evolved, and the challenges and complexities seem to be more prevalent. Of course, all children are unique and have distinct experiences, and all children require special attention and treatment to grow and mature optimally. However, transformed cultural and societal values as well as the evolution of the American family, for instance, have created new challenges, requiring fresh considerations and parenting techniques.

Research shows that family size, structure, and dynamics have all changed as a result of delayed and failed marriages, cohabitation, and remarriages (Angier, 2013; Castelloe, 2011). It would seem that – in addition to the more traditional “nuclear” families – “blended” and “extended” families as well as “single-parent” households have also become the norm (Hoghugh & Long, 2004, p. 381). In addition to the developing

changes seen within the family structure, the U. S. Department of Labor (2014) reports that there are more working mothers (“Mothers and Families,” Chart 2). Consequently, families are becoming more financially dependent upon women in the workforce, and household lifestyles, environment, and domestic roles have shifted as a result. Moreover, technology, media, and social networking (Taylor, 2013) as well as a constantly “wired” portable and mobile office (Bandura, 2002, p. 11) have added complexity and problems (e.g., trust, human connection, distraction) and, in many cases, are affecting family relations, as well. Variants such as these have, therefore, left many struggling parents overwhelmed with the task of parenting and baffled over best practices for the betterment of both themselves and their child(ren).

Society’s awareness and shift in understanding and accommodating the cognitive and psychological development of the whole child has also added pressure for parents who feel an urgent need to attend to the inner experiences of the child. Consequently, there is a push requiring educators to consider the whole child rather than IQ and product alone when building curriculum. As a result, many expect and encourage school districts to not only offer traditional academic courses but to also offer courses that stimulate the growth and development of a more “academically, socially, and emotional well-rounded” learner and thinker who is “resilient, adaptable, and creative” and who can work well with others in finding solutions to problematic restraints and outdated paradigms (McCloskey, 2011, p. 80). For this to positively occur and for the school system to individualize instruction and deliver meaningful content, ideally, an understanding of the whole child and his or her personally distinct needs and abilities must be considered. It makes sense then that the lines of communication remain open between the parent and

the educator and that all those involved remain flexible in their approach and collaboration in order to provide the ideal curriculum, instruction, and environment for each child. This, however, will require an awareness, desire, and drive to break through current societal shifts and trends affecting the family. According to Hoghghi and Long (2004), the “shift [away] from multigenerational family units to individual family units” has had a direct impact on “the practical and emotional support available to parents” (p. 380). Time restraints are partly to blame for this since it has caused parents to shy away from organization and community involvement. Additionally, in an “increasingly competitive society” and market, many parents are compelled to work longer hours on the job, and this focus has created additional stress and further time restraints for quality family time (Hoghghi & Long, 2004, p. 380). Thus, the societal expectations that parents take a more active role in the education of their child may not be possible for some and this may create additional pressures for some parents to perform. Regardless, even with the sometimes limited time, resources, finances, and opportunities, many parents are still anxious to compassionately provide an ideal childhood with profuse educational opportunities that will enhance their current academic journey and future career path as well as have a positive effect socially and emotionally in interpersonal relationships. These parents may additionally be aware, on some level, that, living in the information age, they are also preparing their child for the demands of a global economy, market, and workforce, and this pressure to perform and mentor a child for these vast changes and large-scale societal enhancements can create anxiety for many parents who may feel inadequate or judged by others. Yet, in *Handbook of Parenting: Theory and Research for Practice*, Hoghghi and Long (2004) insist “that every aspect of a child’s

functioning – physical and mental health, intellectual and educational achievement and social behaviour – are all fundamentally affected by parenting practices” (p. 380).

Therefore, an effort to carve out time for parent-child communications is valuable for parents so that they may model and teach skills necessary in a revolutionary and global industry and job market.

Interpersonal support and relations can, therefore, have a positive impact on the well-being of both the parent and child. Intrapersonally, however, striving for confidence and a positive self-efficacy and self-worth – despite challenging events and stressful, emotionally-draining circumstances – is also important. Therefore, interpersonal relationships as well as therapeutic outlets where intrapersonal growth and development can occur are encouraged. Subsequently, articulating concerns and expressing challenging lived experiences may provide relief and reassurance to parents in their parenting role and prevent them from falling prey to depression (Aranda, Castaneda, Lee, & Sobel, 2001; Barnett, de Baca, Jordan, Tilley, & Ellis, 2015), which can have a negative impact on the family as a whole.

Exceptional Needs of Gifted and Talented Children

The American educational system classifies G/T children – those who possess an “outstanding talent... or show the potential for performance at remarkable high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, and environment” – and attempts to recognize their emotional and psychological needs (Feldhusen, 2003, p. 37). Nevertheless, a true understanding of these emotional and psychological needs escapes many, for, as Schmitz and Galbraith (1985) point out, “brighter does not necessarily mean happier, healthier, more successful, socially adept, or more secure” (p.

22). Although not all G/T children fit the same mold, there are unique distinctions within the lived experience of such a population. Equally, however, there are also misconceptions such as the erroneous belief that such children have a life of ease.

Characteristically, G/T children, for instance, develop asynchronously where “uneven levels of cognitive and social maturity” may exist (Lamont, 2012, p. 273), often resulting in being “out-of-sync” with oneself and others (Silverman, 2007b, para. 4). This mismatched development can affect positive self-esteem as well as social interactions and interpersonal relationships. These children and youth largely experience, as a result, heightened sensitivities and, what has now become known as, overexcitabilities (Dabrowski, 1964, 1966). Consequently, the subsequent and intense emotions often make these individuals seem immature or odd (Tolan & Piechowski, 2012), and additional problematic sufferings may occur such as apprehension, fear (Tippey & Burnham, 2009) and anxiety (Harrison & Van Haneghan, 2011; Lamont, 2012), stress (Peterson, Duncan, & Canady, 2009), and even depression (Jackson, 1998; Webb, 2008; Webb et al., 2006). Each of these mental states can consume the child emotionally and hinder academic performance and success. Subsequently and equally, both perfectionism (Greenspon, 2000a; Hewitt, Sherry, Harvey, & Flett, 2003; Huggins, Davis, Rooney, & Kane, 2008; Mofield & Peters, 2015; Perrone-McGovern, Simon-Dack, Beduna, Williams, & Esche, 2015; Roxborough et al., 2012; Zeifman et al., 2015) and underachievement (Blaas, 2014; Delisle, 2009; Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003; Ritchotte, Rubenstein, & Murray, 2015; Rubenstein, Siegle, Reis, McCoach, & Burton, 2012) are consequential results and have increasingly become a concern for both parents and educators as they can severely cause intensely upsetting reactions and self-damaging outcomes.

Parenting Gifted and Talented Children

Parenting a G/T child may bring an intensely unique set of obstacles, complexities, and difficulties. Often overwhelmed and isolated, these parents are left to deal with unexplained and unresolved emotional issues created and enhanced as a result of these distinct lived experiences. For instance, some parents might feel intimidated by their child's intelligence, some might feel overwhelmed with their child's potential, and some might feel inadequately equipped in their role as parent to such a child (Delisle, 2001). For this reason, proper resources of information as well as the social support from interpersonal relations becomes especially important for one's self-efficacy; however, parents of G/T children in particular may have difficulty finding such support, and, as Webb and DeVries (1998) expect, few have opportunities to discuss their perceptions, confusions, feelings, and concerns with others. Many may sense animosities from others and frustration with unsupportive school personnel, for instance, who do not truly understand their G/T child, and parents of non-G/T children may "have difficulty understanding, relating to, or even believing [their] parenting experiences" (Webb & DeVries, 1998, p. 2). Consequently, some parents may consciously or subconsciously "downplay or disguise" (p. 2) or even "deny" (Davis & Rimm, 2004, p. 399) the gifts, talents, behaviors, skill sets, opportunities, and accolades of their G/T children in an attempt to normalize them and/or normalize their own parenting experience in a society where they are knowingly the minority. Delisle (2001) has related these actions and experiences to what he calls *profoundly gifted guilt* to explain why, despite the excitement in raising such a child, these parents may feel, for instance, anxious, overwhelmed, and inadequate. Stifling emotions such as these may negatively affect

individual self-worth, but the challenges and uncertainties that come with parenting G/T children often leave struggling parents overwhelmed and confused. Moreover, the culmination of challenging lived experiences may negatively impact one's confidence and choices – both directly and indirectly impacting family life and dynamics.

Thus, in order to promote and encourage positive family dynamics for the healthy growth and development of productive future citizens, leaders, visionaries, and innovators, it is wise to consider the narratives of such parents in order to gain a broader and more complete picture of parenting complexity found within the modern American family. For constructive change to occur, society must advocate for and support these parents in their predicaments and struggles. In short, we must provide opportunities for these individuals to share their narratives – and we must feel compelled to listen.

Imperative for the Current Study: Preliminary Findings from a 2004 Pilot Study

“Curiosity connects you to reality.”

— Brain Grazer and Charles Fishman (2015, p. 76)

In 2004, I developed a pilot study to investigate the phenomenon of unique parenting issues related to raising G/T children. I wanted to better understand the emotional complexities resulting from these lived experiences. The qualitative study exposed similar feelings among three mothers of elementary G/T children and revealed that the unique challenges of parenting a G/T child can enhance or provoke emotional complexities, although varying, in the minds and hearts of such parents. After considering the convenience, time restraints, and personal preferences of the three participants, the case study was conducted in a variety of urban settings within the South Central United States, but the majority of these voice recorded and later transcribed

interviews took place in coffeehouses and participants' homes. Although the majority of the meetings were one-on-one interviews, several group discussions did transpire where participants, mothers currently raising G/T children, were encouraged to speak freely and to ask one another questions. Individually, however, each individual informant willingly volunteered to be interviewed at least three times, and during these times, I had several opportunities to observe family dynamics between mother and child(ren). There was no financial compensation for these services; however, small tokens of appreciation were given each time we met (e.g., small tubes of hand lotion, books, gourmet candies); other gestures of appreciation included paying for coffee at the coffeehouse and paying for dinner at the restaurant.

Tammy¹, mother to Robert (age eight) and Blake (age six), was the primary informant, and it was she who introduced me to the other two women. Tammy's sons, under state approved testing procedures and guidelines, had both been tested, identified, and classified G/T through the area school system and were currently enrolled in pull-out, enrichment classes. Tammy, an avid self-help type, had a variety of passions (e.g., food and nutrition; world religions and their psychologies; and environmental improvement practices, such as Feng Shui) and wanted to help create psychological and physiological well-being within her family. The 39-year-old displayed an animated personality and was easily excited to discuss areas of interest. For this stay-at-home mother, gifted programs and services as well as school choice was of utmost concern. For this reason, Tammy and her husband, Joe, had chosen to place Robert in a school renowned for its accelerated

¹ For the purpose of confidentiality, all identifying information has been fictitiously changed.

gifted program whereas Blake had been placed in a different school but in both an advanced enrichment class and accelerated math class with students a year his senior.

Cheryl became acquainted with Tammy when their children shared a gifted classroom. Their friendship evolved and strengthened as they found support and solace from the one another. The 33-year-old mother of two worked as a part-time secretary but was also extremely involved in her church community and was a year away from finishing a Master's Degree in Physical Therapy. Like Tammy, both of Cheryl's children — Andrew (age eight) and Julia (age six) — were considered highly gifted even though Julia had not completed the final phases of the testing process. Cheryl blames the school system for the delay, claiming the district encouraged her to wait an additional year in order to get the best test results.

Jennifer, a 40-year-old mother of three G/T children, was born and raised in China and received all of her formal education there — including a Master's Degree in biology. Both she and her husband's families continue to reside in China. A promising job opportunity for her husband, Mark, brought the couple to America, and, at the time of the study, they had lived in the United States for 13 years. At the time, Jennifer chose to stay at home while her children – all enrolled in accelerated gifted classes – were in school. Like Cheryl, Jennifer met Tammy when their children shared a gifted classroom.

Findings of the Pilot Study

All three participants were anxious to share their lived experiences, and common themes did surface from the shared communications and commentaries. The most common and noteworthy of these included: (a) feelings of frustration, (b) social insecurities, and (c) intimidation. A description of each theme follows.

Feelings of Frustration

A chief theme, frustration, was found on three levels: (a) frustration toward the self, (b) frustration toward the other, and (c) frustration toward the child. The first, frustration toward the self, was mentioned as asides during the interviews. These frustrations were primarily related to assorted parental decisions made by the participants that were later regretted. Also, many parents blamed themselves for their unwillingness to educate themselves on the gifted child and the various parenting techniques offered in suggestive books. The second predominant frustration, frustration toward others, was mostly directed toward teachers and administrators within the school system. Both certified and noncertified teachers of the gifted population seemed to cause the most stress to these individual parents. Participants indicated on countless occasions that few teachers understood their gifted child. When Jennifer (personal communication, April, 20, 2004) remembered one teacher's comment, "*Aren't your children overambitious?*" she suggested that there was an immediate defensive reaction and a personal desire to explain or defend herself and her children to the teacher. This was not uncommon, for each informant relayed at least one incident where a similar occurrence happened to them. The final frustration was directed toward the child, and it was the most talked about of the three. Perfectionism was a primary complaint. Cheryl (personal communication, March 8, 2004) shared the following about her son's seemingly perfectionistic manners:

It's very hard for him [Andrew] to accept his mistakes. We finally made a B on a test. And that was devastating to him... I'm so ready for him to make a B on his report card, so we can just get that over with and kind of alleviate some of that pressure that he's putting on himself. Because it's not that we have told him he has to make straight As. He's doing that on his own.

Many parents of gifted children struggle with similar problems; some may even recognize that their child may “hide the gaps in their knowledge, feel nervous about asking for help because they think they should know everything, and worry obsessively about pleasing the people who admire them” (Smutny, 2001, p. 42). Cheryl (personal communication, March 9, 2004) elaborates:

When we were studying for the spelling bee, he would get so upset if he missed a word... I told him, ‘Andrew, it’s no big deal if you don’t win.’ This first little girl when she didn’t spell her first word right, she came off the stage just hysterical. And I thought, *Oh, man, please don’t let Andrew do that. Please don’t let Andrew do that...* He ended up winning, and he was so excited. Then, the next day after that, he gets in the van (I had picked him up from school) he gets in the van and says, ‘Mom, when I win the state spelling bee, do I get to go to the national one in Washington, D.C.?’ I said, ‘Well, of course, Andrew... but you do not have to win these.’ ‘I know. I know, but I want to and that’s what I’m gonna do.’

As this example shows, many gifted learners may not know their own limitations and place undue stress upon themselves when they try to juggle too many things at once, for instance. When this occurs, mistakes happen, frustrations evolve, and the child overreacts emotionally, and this then creates frustrations for the parent. Additional frustration and disappointment may occur when a final product does not meet the self-imposed expectations and vision of the child (Davis & Rimm, 2004). This sometimes overzealous reaction often leaves parents at a loss, as well. For the parent, frustration is created when she feels as if her hands are tied and nothing said or done can remedy the problem.

Social Insecurities

Several social insecurities were also identified during the pilot study: (a) a fear of bragging and (b) negative societal reactions toward the self and/or the child. First, it seems that a fear of bragging was especially polarizing of these mothers. When asked to

explain why this was so, Tammy (personal communication, March 9, 2004) gave the following analogy:

I would never discuss financial problems with my housekeeper. I couldn't dare complain; you know, 'Oh, we can't afford this big vacation' or 'I have to wait a year before we can get new carpet' to someone who doesn't have enough money for either one. I feel the same about talking about my gifted children with other people even though I understand it's just who they are and how they are and it's not bragging. I feel that other people would see it differently — kinda like talking about what I have and you don't... I don't feel guilty, but it's almost — I would feel as if (maybe I'm paranoid) I would think that they would view it as my bragging almost.

Jennifer (personal communication, April 20, 2004) also "*tr[ies] not to brag*" to those parents of non-G/T children. She reasons that bragging hurts the other individual, for "*when you talk with a mom whose child is struggling in everything, you don't brag and you don't make her feel that her child is not doing so well in school.*" Negative societal reactions toward either the G/T child or the parent was another challenge that created insecurities. In fact, these mothers found themselves reacting defensively and, at times, even making excuses for their child's accomplishments. Tammy (personal communication, March 9, 2004) was able to recognize that "*in life people don't understand those that are different;*" however, she was still upset when Blake's teacher said she needed to learn "*there's more to life than flashcards*" and that she should "*spend more time playing*" with Blake. As Tammy stated, "*the fact that Blake, at one-year-old, knew all of his colors and shapes caused [her] to jump to the conclusion that I was drilling him at home.*" Cheryl (personal communication, March 9, 2004) had a similar situation:

The kids were playing together and one of them were trying to do something and she couldn't figure it out. And Julia went over there and was like, 'It's like this.' And she did it in a heartbeat. And the mom looked at me and said, 'What do you do with her all day? Do you make her tell you all of this and show you all of this

stuff?...’ You know, instead of grasping the concept — and still even for me it’s hard to grasp — that Julia taught herself to read.

Similar situations – where parents may sense animosity from others who do not truly understand their G/T child – often isolate parents and provoke them to react defensively. However, what is more surprising is that parents, especially when communicating with other parents not raising a G/T child, may actually feel a sense of embarrassment that their child is so bright and even make excuses for the accomplishments of the child rather than show parental pride. Tammy (personal communication, March 9, 2002) remembers:

Blake’s vocabulary is so big that it makes it blatantly obvious how advanced he is... When Blake was little, he was in a playgroup — he was in a playgroup from 18-months-old to four-year-old — sometimes there were — I wouldn’t say guilt, but sometimes I was almost embarrassed because he said something that was so profound that the other parents would look at me funny. And I found myself almost apologizing or trying to explain. It was weird. It took me a long time to come to terms with this.

Although parents may not have been cognizant of these emotions and how it affected them, a sense of social insecurity was present in all parents interviewed.

Intimidation

Finally, although hesitant to admit, parents periodically felt intimidated by their child’s intelligence. All parents, like Tammy (personal communication, March 9, 2004), indicated the voracious vocabulary of their children and even admitted that “*his vocabulary is larger than mine.*” Cheryl (personal communication, March 8, 2004) shared that she was intimidated by her child’s reasoning skills:

He can out reason me... it’s hard to deal with. And I’m sure all parents have that, but I think the gifted child can think through more and can actually rationalize and make sense of more than what a normal eight-year-old can do... I mean, I’m not embarrassed by it, but yeah, a lot of times I think he is much smarter than I am... but it can be intimidating — you know, you think, *Okay, my eight-year-old is smarter than me!*

Intimidation was also prevalent when parents were in awe of their child's intelligence, overwhelmed with their child's potential, or inadequately equipped in their role as parent to such a child. Jennifer (personal communication, April 20, 2004) explains how the intimidation of her husband, Mark, affects him:

The other day [Alex] asked [Mark] something about math, and [Mark] said, 'Gosh, I don't remember. It was so long ago; I don't remember'... but sometimes [Mark] has a real fear that there will be something that [*speaking as Mark*] 'I don't remember' or that 'I didn't learn myself.'

In the midst of such emotionally multifaceted lived experiences, these parents recognized that a special kind of parenting was needed in raising such a child; however, in their compassionate motivation and rational attempt at doing the right thing, these women simultaneously felt isolated and unsupported.

Discussion of Pilot Study

There were limitations found within the pilot study regarding diversity. For instance, all participants were Caucasian/Non-Hispanic mothers from middle-income households. Additionally, since their G/T children were classmates and all participated in an after-school Chess Club, the mothers all knew each other. Although their enthusiasm seemed to be positively contagious, the researcher understood the lack of diversity as seen in participant demographics and locale, and the researcher understood that discussions amongst the participants themselves may have influenced shared narratives and perceptions. The study, however, was beneficial in providing a glimpse into the lives of women raising G/T children and in inspiring future research necessary to solidify findings. The findings from the pilot study, however, presented parental challenges in raising a G/T child that can create emotional complexities and leave parents feeling puzzled over best practices (e.g., engaged dialogue with child; providing stimulating

extra-curricula activities and resources; advocating for educational rights within school system) needed in dealing with such unsettling situations. Thus, results from the pilot study suggest that, in order to foster healthy habits and environments that benefit both parent and child, it is essential to recognize the emotional needs of parents of G/T children. Further, it is best if the parents are mindful of these challenging lived experiences and are allowed an opportunity for self-expression.

The Current Study

Since the researcher was alerted to and understood from the pilot study that emotional complexities and uniquely challenging situations might exist for parents raising G/T children, it was important to seek additional narratives to support and expand upon these findings. Thus, the current study attempted to confirm the findings of the pilot study by highlighting narratives that more thoroughly addressed and developed those ideas thematically. The ideas presented in the pilot study, therefore, informed the basis for the current study by guiding the researcher to ask questions that would highlight challenging experiences and emotional complexities that would lead to a better understanding of specific situational triggers that might exacerbate stress, frustration, and anxiety as well as highlight how those experiences and complexities might instigate action and reaction. Therefore, in order to delve deeper into the lived experiences of parents raising G/T children, the qualitative, case study gathered evidence through interviews and observations from mothers currently living in the southern parts of Louisiana and raising at least one tested and classified G/T child between the ages of five and seventeen enrolled (or with the option to reenroll) in either public or private gifted and/or talented education classes. Since the purpose was to examine and later describe the

lived experiences of such parents, the case study research method allowed the researcher to better understand those shared experiences of such parents without adding the philosophical aspect of a phenomenological research method. The study addressed the perspectives and experiences of mothers only in order to reasonably narrow the focus and field. The study was open to volunteers willing to share their narratives, and, unlike the pilot study, this study was open to a more diverse group of women (e.g., urban and rural; private and public); additionally, none of the participants knew each other. It was hoped that the current data would strengthen the findings from the pilot study but also offer new insight and awareness on a deeper level regarding the mother's interpersonal relationships and dynamics – including that with her child(ren) – and the mother's perspective and awareness of challenging circumstances and stressful situations. It was also hoped that the mother, when reflecting upon her interpersonal relations, would articulate her perception of societal acceptance, views, and expectations of both herself and her parenting role as well as her G/T child(ren) and that these results would simultaneously reveal the emotional world of experience within her narrative. It was assumed that the results would reveal similarities and patterns among participants. The study was designed to answer the following questions:

Research Question One: What are the lived experiences and social, emotional, and educational concerns and challenges of mothers raising G/T children?

Research Question Two: What perceptions might these mothers have regarding society's opinion and understanding of their G/T child as well as them in their parenting role to such a child?

Research Question Three: What are the coping mechanisms used in significant socially, emotionally, and educationally challenging situations?

Procedures

Once permission is granted by the Institutional Review Board, participants will learn of the nature of the study and then partake in interview questions designed to better understand the unique situation of the informant in both her home and work environment as well as her support network; habits and behaviors of her G/T child and his or her relations with siblings and peers; the educational environment in which her child is enrolled and the opportunities provided; and any conflicts, struggles, and concerns the mother may have regarding societal expectations and the demands of both her and her child. The researcher will be especially sensitive to the wide-range of emotional intensities that the sharing of such information may generate, and it is understood that the amount and intensity of information shared as well as the description and explanation for the lived experience will vary among the participants. Additional interviews will take place on an as-needed basis and will vary among parent participants as a result of the participant's needs as well as her willingness and enthusiasm to continue the discussion regarding the parenting of a G/T child. All oral communications with parent participants will be audio-taped and transcribed by the researcher; the shared experiences of the participants will be kept confidential. Thus, all distinguishing characteristics that may identify a participant and her G/T child will be masked with pseudonyms and other false identifications. Voice recordings will be destroyed immediately, and transcriptions will later be processed and analyzed but field notes and analytic memos (as both hard copies and on an electronically-saved, password-protected thumb drive) will be filed and stored

safely in the home office of the researcher. Common themes are expected to surface from an analysis where the researcher will attempt to identify (through observable body language and gestures as well as through shared oral communications) reasonably sound emotional complexities described by parent participants and sort these emotions into functioning coded categories that allow the researcher to generalize common emotions experienced by mothers raising a G/T child.

Chapter Summary

In summary, the purpose of this study is to add vital information to the field of gifted and talented education by revealing the emotional experiences and unique challenges some parents raising G/T children might encounter. From the collected data, the researcher hoped to identify and consider common threads that might explain stresses and individual thought patterns caused by raising a G/T child and dealing with perceived societal expectations and opinions of the self and child. The researcher also hoped to identify and consider how these interpersonal relations affect one's choices and decisions as well as the distinct internal and external reactions initiated by the words, thoughts, and actions of others. Finally, the researcher hoped to recognize and consider the image and understanding of self the participants have in their parenting role and how this might affect the family as a whole.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

All parenting is difficult. Although it may be intrinsically rewarding, it can also be equally punishing when personal doubts arise, frustrations build, and positive motivation and a sense of direction is lost. Marques (2014) notes that it is difficult for parents to know just what to do in their role as parent, and this is part of the challenge. It would seem that after reeling from constant questions, uncertainties, and doubts; sifting through seemingly contradictory sources and possibilities; dealing with frustrations regarding child behavior, discipline issues, and the instillation of consistency and rules; staggering through exhausting days after sleepless nights; and persevering despite feelings of failure and disappointment, overwhelmed and fatigued parents might wish for the metaphorical genie in a bottle, a magic mirror, or, at the very least, a handbook with all the answers. Alas, all parents are left to find the strategies for parenting their unique child(ren) as a personal journey.

One of the issues creating this parenting complexity is that all children have distinct personalities and temperaments, interests, skills, challenges, strengths, weaknesses, learning styles, and lived experiences. As is true of snowflakes, no two are alike. Even within the same family structure and environment, parents of multiple children quickly realize that parenting styles, choices, and actions for one child may be completely wrong and unproductive for another and, as a result, parents must consider diverse parenting options and styles for each child. In sum, parenting is inherently complicated because children are unique and require disparate approaches such that there is no particularly right way to parent.

Second, the evolution of the American family, as well as dynamic changes to other social institutions and systems, is also forcing historical paradigm shifts and presenting further complex challenges to the parenting experience. Family size, structure, and dynamics have all transformed as cultural values have shifted and changed. Striking variations commonly seen within the family structure alone include “cohabitation rather than marriage, ‘blended’ families of both gay and heterosexual design, and children born out of wedlock” (Castelloe, 2011, para. 2). Indeed, Angier (2013) insists that millennial families are more diverse than ever before. Marriage, for instance, has seemingly been rejected completely or delayed for various reasons (e.g., economic, cultural); however, this parallels an increase of out-of-wedlock births, and the staggering 40% seen today is significantly higher than the five percent seen in 1960 (Wilcox, Wolfinger, & Stokes, 2015, p. 112). Additionally, the almost 170% increase from 1996 (2.9 million) to 2012 (7.8 million) in cohabitation is also noteworthy (Angier, 2013, para. 24). More specifically, in regards to those cohabiting couples with underage children, the *Child Trends Data Bank* reports in “Family Structure: Indicators on Children and Youth” (2015) that the nation has seen an increase from the “1.2 million” in 1996 to the “3.3 million” in 2015. For those married, U. S. Census Bureau data analyzed by the Pew Research Center indicates that America is home to nearly “42 million” remarried adults; this number has almost doubled since 1980 (“22 million”) and tripled since 1960 (“14 million”); in fact, of all presently married Americans, “roughly a quarter (23%)” are on a second or third marriage (Livingston, 2014, p. 4; 8). The *Child Trends Data Bank* report also reveals that there has been a significant decrease – from 85% in 1960 to 65% in 2015 – of underage children (children under 18 years of age) living with two married parents

("Family Structure," 2015, p. 3), even though Amato (2005) asserts that children living with both parents "have a higher standard of living, receive more effective parenting, experience more cooperative co-parenting, are emotionally closer to both parents... and are subjected to fewer stressful events and circumstances" (p. 89). Despite this clear and persuasive assumption, there has been a significant increase – from eight percent in 1960 to 23% in 2015 – of underage children living with the mother only ("Family Structure," 2015, p. 3), and, of the blended and married American families, a Pew Research Center survey reveals that 40% of "adults have at least one step relative – either a stepparent, a step or half sibling or a stepchild" ("Portrait," 2011, para. 1). Subsequently, these varied circumstantial structures may affect and alter the pulse of the familial environment and add further complications to family dynamics. Additional variations can be seen in adoptive families where parents are increasingly choosing to adopt children differing from their own nationality and demography; in fact, Vandivere and Malm (2009) claim that 40% of all adopted children are "of a different race, culture, or ethnicity" to their adoptive parent(s) (Key Findings). Moreover, of the "nearly 1.8 million" adopted children in the United States, 43% lived with a biological family member before the adoption (Vandivere & Malm, 2009, Introduction). Same-sex couples are also choosing to adopt; in truth, they "are four times as likely as straight ones to be raising adoptees, and six times as likely to be caring for foster children, whom they often end up adopting" (Angier, 2013, Baby Boom for Gay Parents). Hence, each of these variants to family structure and make-up have affected parenting options and choices as well as parent and child relations. Likewise, they have also complicated our understanding of how to work

effectively with parents in educational settings (e.g., whom to invite to parent teacher conferences).

Another major modification to both the family and society at large is that the majority of American women now work and in some cases work long hours and multiple jobs; increasingly, they are the primary income providers for the family (Angier, 2013). The U. S. Department of Labor shows that in 2013 roughly 70% of women with underage children were employed in the labor force (“Mothers and Families,” Chart 1). The 2013 report indicates that of those working mothers, 57.3% have a child under one year of age, 61.1% have a child under three years of age, 63.9% have a child under six years of age, and 74.7% have a child under 17 years of age (“Mothers and Families,” Chart 3). The 2013 report also maintains that, of those families financially maintained by single working mothers, 61.6% have children under six and 72.7% have children under 17 (“Mothers and Families,” Chart 10). Additionally, the report claims that, in 2012, when both parties had earnings, 29% of wives earned more than their husbands whereas, in 1987, only 17.80% earned more (“Mothers and Families,” Chart 13). Additionally, based on Pew Research Center data analysis from both the Decennial Census and the 2011 American Community Surveys from the United States Department of Labor website, families who either solely or primarily depend on the working mother’s financial contribution has risen from 11% in 1960 to 40% in 2012 (Infographic on Working Mothers); consequently, many families have come to depend upon this added income. However, mothers away from home and in the workforce have contributed greatly to changes in the lifestyle, environment, and male and female roles within the home and made parenting for many more complex and challenging. Struggling to adjust and cope

with the daily pressures, many parents may hope to find a mentor and may even reach out naturally to older family members (e.g., mothers, aunts, grandmothers) for assistance; however, because their world and lived experience as a parent was so different, many “mentors” may lack a true understanding of millennial children and contemporary parenting, resulting in enhanced feelings of isolation and unease for the parent.

Part of this generational and lifestyle change involves our understanding of the cognitive and psychological development of the whole child. Wagenhals (n.d.), suggests that, unlike parents of yesteryear whose measure of parenting success was based on the “outward behavior” of the child rather than on his “inner emotional world,” contemporary theories of child psychology have paralleled a societal shift where parents’ measure of success is based on the inner child and his physical, social, emotional, and intellectual growth (para. 3). This shift in understanding has added pressures for parents themselves to perform in such a way or to put their trust in others (e.g., teachers, coaches) who can perform in such a way that enhances the emotional well-being, cognitive development, and potential success of the child.

The anxiety parents may feel toward their own actions and those of others and how it may impact their child’s development can be staggering. As Bown (n.d.) points out, where parents of yesteryear were teaching skills needed for future domestic roles and a handful of core disciplines (e.g., sewing and farming), today’s technological, information-age children are being trained for a global market and “jobs that [may] not even exist,” and this can be frightening (para. 10). Parents no longer are preparing their child(ren) for opportunities in the proximity of their geographic setting but now must prepare their child(ren) for the expectations and demands of the global workforce and the

challenges of a global economy – areas in which parents themselves may lack strength, understanding, content knowledge, and skills. Additionally, in this “knowledge-based global society that is rapidly changing,” parents must encourage their child(ren) to be “adaptable and proficient self-directed learners” (Bandura, 2002, p. 4), and this may be intimidating for some adults who may not have the necessary strength, desire, capabilities, or resources to foster such actions; however, Bandura (2002) insists that these young learners need mentors who can help build their confidence, esteem, and self-efficacy as well as provide guidance and supervision. It would seem that many parents would hope to take a more active role in mentoring their child[ren]; however, a true understanding of how to be successful in such a role escapes many struggling parents who find it difficult to see clarity in options that continue to seem vague and ambiguous.

As a result, one of the ways in which many parents hope to assist child(ren) on their maturation journey into adulthood and to prepare them for inconceivable and astonishing future possibilities is to offer as much experience and opportunity as possible, as there is so much to learn, so much to do, and so much to see. In an attempt to prepare these children for the rapidly evolving and unknown future and promote excellence in a multitude of expertise and skill sets, *All Joy and No Fun* author, Senior (2014), explains that parents involve themselves in what she describes as “concerted cultivation” where excessive time, energy, attention, resources, funds, and opportunities may be required and where, according to Bown (n.d.), an unfortunate “undercurrent of competition” has developed among families who hope to best the other (para. 11). Additionally, it seems that there is an internal drive for parents to prove their parenting success and showcase “stellar children” (Marquez, 2014, para. 13). Unfortunately, relationships are sacrificed

when some parents are so concerned with over-involving themselves and their children in order to reach such high and impossible standards that they become the drivers in the minivan depicted on the cover of *It's Your Kid Not a Gerbil* (Leman, 2011), going round and round yet going no where in the spinning wheel of life.

The sheer volume of choice, information, and opportunity available today can also be overwhelming for many parents. Despite these availabilities, however, some may feel that too much time, energy, attention, resources, funds, and opportunities have been provided by such parents and society at large, for it would seem that as parents sift through and choose from an endless array and excessive amount of choices, ranging, for example, from food to extra-curricula to vacation destinations, it can become overwhelming for both the parent and the child, resulting in added pressure and stress that may later affect family relationships. Additionally, helicopter parenting, where the parent becomes overinvolved in decision-making and has an overbearing presence in the child's life, for instance, has become especially problematic. Inadvertently, parents may hinder independence and maturation for the child, and this can overwhelm the youth and possibly affect parent-child relations and dynamics, as well (Van Ingen et al., 2015).

Another societal variation that has added to parenting complexity is technology, media, and social networking – all of which have distanced family relations and affected the family structure. Bandura (2002) asserts that working men and women are “wired” to a disrespectful, mobile office that constantly encroaches upon family time and interferes with interpersonal relations (p. 11). Moreover, children and adolescents are not without their own technological devices (e.g., Smartphones, iPads) causing a problematic stir in both society and at home. Taylor (2013), suggests that participation and even complete

“absorption” in technological advancements and social networking (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram) as well as video games, YouTube, and smart phone web surfing and texting has created a further divide between parent and child (para. 2). Subsequently, researchers recognize altered behaviors when one communicates orally versus electronically (Bandura, 2002). For instance, Bandura (2002) points out the vague obscurity that is present when one hides behind a screen; in such a setting, thoughts and opinions may be shared that would otherwise not be shared in a more “restrained” environment (p. 11). Television watching continues to be a problem. For some time, “messages from popular culture telling [children] that parents are selfish, immature, incompetent, and generally clueless” have caused a familial divide (Taylor, 2013, para. 1). Thus, the breach continues to grow, and some struggling parents may feel helpless in their attempt to close the gap and keep up with technological advancements in order to keep a watchful eye over their child(ren). Unfortunately, children may recognize this and take advantage of the situation by doing things without the parent’s knowledge and/or consent, and this too can create further problems (e.g., trust, human connection) and put added strain on the parent-child relations and dynamics.

Each of these societal shifts have been widely examined as they have generated challenges and complexities for the modern family, and the difficulties of parenting remain clear. However, as an interviewee, Jennifer Senior, recognizing the evolved gender roles within the family structure, asserts that the challenge for women is especially trying. In terms of parenting participation, Senior claims that “*anything...* [a father does today is] so much more than his own dad did” (italics in original, as quoted in Marques, 2014, para. 13). In other words, appropriate for that era, fathers of previous

generations tended to (with the exception of discipline) take a more backseat, hands-off approach to parenting whereas fathers today are embracing the more domesticated practices traditionally performed by women. Thus, it is not unusual to see fathers today performing activities such as cooking, cleaning, counseling their children, chaperoning, transporting, and even in some cases choosing to be a “stay-at-home-dad” – all of which were rare or unheard of in the past but are being praised in the present. For this reason, Senior believes that men “have the luxury of having not had impossible standards preceding them” (as quoted in Marques, 2014, para. 13), whereas this is not the case for women.

Additionally, men and women have different stresses and handle those stresses differently. From studying Mexican American men and women, Aranda, Castaneda, Lee, and Sobel (2001) suggest that women tend to fall prey to stressful events *inside* the home (e.g., children, spouse) whereas men typically fall prey to stressful events *outside* the home (e.g., work, external societal relations), and Cronkite and Moos (1984) argue that women may actually be more mentally and emotionally vulnerable to these stresses than their male counterparts. Parenting efficacy is defined as “the extent to which a parent feels confident and effective in her abilities as a parent to shape her child’s development” (Barnett et al., 2015, p. 18). Consequently, when confronted with stressful events and circumstances, it can have a positive impact on one’s thoughts and choices (Barnett et al., 2015). For this reason, when experiencing stressful events, women might consider seeking social support from family and friends, for Monroe, Bromet, Connell, and Steiner (1986) insist that, without this interpersonal support, these women may become victim to depression. In fact, researchers suggest that when mothers simply *perceive* this social and

emotional interpersonal support, parenting efficacy is given a more positive boost and parenting frustration and stress are eased (Barnett et al., 2015).

Regardless, child-rearing issues and complications often leave perplexed parents at a crossroads as to optimal actions needed for best results. However, for a parent raising a gifted and talented (G/T) child who is often “more intense, more extreme, more intelligent, and more persevering” than the average child and who “may learn differently, act differently, and react differently” from same-age peers (Walker, 2002, p. 2; 45), additional perplexities and a profoundly unique set of experiences, situational elements, and challenges may present themselves. Thus, it is wise to consider the lived experiences and family dynamics of such parents in order to gain a broader and more complete picture of parenting complexity found within the modern American family.

The Gifted Child

Identification of a G/T child is a three-phase process even though the operation, resources and tools utilized for each phase varies by school districts. The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) maintains that the identification process includes three phases: (a) nomination, (b) screening, and (c) placement (“Identification”). In the nomination phase, anyone (e.g., parent, teacher, friend, administrator) may recommend a child for screening. There are frequent obstacles, however, to this recommendation; oftentimes, the general public is not made aware of the policy and the submission is left to the professional, namely the classroom teacher who is often undertrained in understanding and recognizing G/T characteristics. This has been problematic in the past, and many have been underrepresented or excluded when unruly

behavior, apparent apathy or shyness, poor grades, lack of community support, and language barriers, for instance, hinders one's judgment.

The screening phase can also be unsettling for some, and some may question the appropriate and best age to screen a child. Again, districts vary in their opinion, and some parents are encouraged to test their child as early as three-years-old while others are encouraged to wait until the summer after kindergarten while still others are told that it is impossible to get an accurate IQ score before the age of six. Silverman (1998) proclaims "the earlier the better" since "early detection enables early intervention" (p. 207).

Regardless, once screening has been agreed upon and accepted by the parent, the child will be assessed in a number of ways. Although experts (NAGC) insist that a multitude of both subjective and objective assessments should take place so that no G/T child is overlooked ("Identification"); tests alone are mostly the determining factor. These tests may occur at the school-district site (oftentimes group testing) or at another location with a trained professional (oftentimes individual testing). Finally, in the placement phase, parents, educators, and other professionals ideally should collaboratively discuss available services and those services can help meet the needs of the G/T learner. Services are not necessarily equitable or evenly distributed and they vary among districts and among urban and rural areas. Not all areas support G/T programs and oftentimes, it is difficult for parents to advocate for their child.

This inequality has been a contentious issue for some time as it has caused many advocates to either successfully or unsuccessfully fight for greater equity in G/T services. Accordingly, in December of 2015, President Obama signed The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 – the

last iteration of which was the No Child Left Behind Act (“Jacob Javits”). This updated revision federally supports the high-ability students of America and includes new and revised measures to support the G/T learner. One such accommodation was a reauthorization of the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act which financially aids the U.S. Department of Education – and all its affiliates – to execute programs designed to meet the educational needs of the G/T population (“Jacob Javits”).

The NAGC website (n.d.) recognizes the “three to five million” gifted and talented students in the United States (“Gifted Education in the U.S.”) and defines the gifted child as one who can

Demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains. Domains include any structured area of activity with its own symbol system (e.g., mathematics, music, language) and/or set of sensorimotor skills (e.g., painting, dance, sports). (“Definitions of Giftedness”)

For the purposes of this study, however, *talented* (rather than *gifted* only) must be included in the identification of the G/T child since talent is a key concept in the field of gifted education and is an essential part of giftedness as the definition above reflects artistic and musical talent as well as kinesthetic talent found in athletes and dancers. Moreover, since *talented* has been recognized nationally and is simultaneously used in many areas to classify such children who have outstanding ability and competence (although varying levels and ranges are understood) in any or all of those areas mentioned, it is important, therefore, to consider both the academic aspect as well as additional intelligences identified (i.e., musical, bodily-kinesthetic, logical-mathematical, linguistic, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal) by Howard Gardner (1983) in his *Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. Gardner’s theory insists that all individuals have a “full range of

intelligences” that are influenced by personal lived experiences as well as various biological and environmental factors, and these influential factors uniquely distinguish one individual from another (Gardner, 2006, p. 23). Since its conception, educators have been particularly intrigued with this theory and many now recognize that IQ alone is not sufficient in recognizing one’s intelligence and true potential and capability for success.

In a report to Congress on the education of the gifted and talented, Commissioner of Education, Marland (1971), identified six specific areas where one might find gifted and talented exhibited: (a) “general intellectual ability,” (b) “specific academic aptitude,” (c) “creative or productive thinking,” (d) “leadership ability,” (e) “visual and performing arts,” and (f) “psychomotor ability.” Appropriately recognized, creativity continues to be considered a gifted domain (Sternberg, 2010). Although, for classification purposes, the G/T child is normally tested either on his or her IQ (120 or higher) and cognitive ability or on his or her skill and artistic byproduct, intelligence and skill alone do not completely define a G/T child as recent research has favored the highlighted inner workings of the child by recognizing how emotional development may enhance or hinder cognitive development. Reflecting this more comprehensive understanding of the G/T child, Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius and Worrell (2011) have created a more updated definition of giftedness which reads

Giftedness is the manifestation of performance or production that is clearly at the upper end of the distribution in a talent domain even relative to that of other high-functioning individuals in that domain. Further, giftedness can be viewed as developmental, in that in the beginning stages, potential is the key variable; in later stages, achievement is the measure of giftedness; and in fully developed talents, eminence is the basis on which this label is granted. Psychosocial variables play an essential role in the manifestations of giftedness at every developmental stage. Both cognitive and psychosocial variables are malleable and need to be deliberately cultivated. (p. 7)

Parents, teachers, and counselors are encouraged, therefore, to not ignore the “qualitative difference[s]” of such children, for it is these differences that make them socially and emotionally vulnerable (Bailey, 2011, p. 208). For this reason, research and development must continue in order to better understand and support the population – and, by association, their families.

The first step in better understanding and supporting the G/T population is to recognize that not all G/T children fit the same mold; traits, abilities, and interests, for instance, are seen in various ranges and intensities. In fact, in terms of temperament, thought, personality, drive, talent, and effort, Robinson (2002) asserts in the introductory pages to *The Social and Emotional Development of Gifted* that there is no group more diverse. Despite the differences, there are commonalities across the population as well as common misconceptions pertaining to the lifestyle, life experiences, and academic journey of such children. Possibly the biggest misconception of all is that life for such children is one of ease; however, problems exist for this population, as well.

Consequently, although exhilarating at times, parenting such a child can be difficult and challenging, and it is for this reason society must consider supporting these families.

Although not exhaustive, the traits identified and discussed below are commonly observed among and attributed to the G/T population.

Asynchronous Development

Characteristically, G/T children develop asynchronously, and – rather than the tangible products the child is capable of producing and the achievements the child is capable of claiming – leading theorists, experts, and researchers in the field of giftedness (Columbus Group, 1991) argue that it is this trait that is the distinguishing characteristic

of the G/T child. The Columbus Group (1999) understood that this asynchronous development included “advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine[d] to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm.” The intensity and range of the asynchrony tends to parallel the child’s IQ, so a *profoundly* G/T child will display a higher level of asynchrony than a *highly* G/T or *exceptionally* G/T child. The asynchronous gaps may be noted, for instance, in the child’s maturity. He or she may be “*more* mature than expected for chronological age, but *less* mature than the child’s mental or intellectual age” (italics in original, Robinson, 2002, xvii). Thus, because of their asynchronous development, gifted children are often “out-of-sync” with oneself and others, and awkward or difficult social situations may result (Silverman, 2007b, para. 4). Consequently, the level of asynchrony may also affect one’s intrapersonal self-image as well as hinder one from forming positive interpersonal friendships. Although many G/T children are well-liked (Neihart, 1999), make friends easily, and have a positive self-image, highly asynchronous individuals are sometimes considered “bizarre, odd, difficult, or crazy” (Tolan & Piechowski, 2012, p. 6). The classroom setting can become increasingly challenging for the emotional self-identity and experience of a G/T learner. For example, when the G/T learner continues to noticeably excel beyond his or her peers and feels guilty or feels that he or she cannot communicate frustrations to one’s classmates, Greenspon (2000b) explains in “The Self Experience of the Gifted Person” that the resulting negative emotions can drive a G/T learner to adjust his or her speech and behavior in hopes of fitting in and avoiding rejection. However, when differences in thoughts, feelings, abilities, and interests of non-G/T peers are revealed, it is oftentimes a problematic and negatively damaging self-image that is the

obstacle preventing one from forming interpersonal relationships and not the erroneously perceived rejection.

The Columbus Group (1991) recognized that such a child “requires modifications in parenting, teaching, and counseling in order for [one] to develop optimally.” It seems these modifications may be necessary because there are disturbing behavioral patterns seen within asynchronously-developed children such as, to name a few, anxiety and stress (Harrison & Van Haneghan, 2011; Lamont, 2012; Peterson et al., 2009; Tippey & Burnham, 2009), oversensitivity and overexcitabilities (Alias, Rahman, Majid, & Yassin, 2013; Bailey, 2010; Harrison & Van Haneghan, 2011; McHardy, Blanchard, & deWet, 2009; Mofield & Peters, 2015) and (in some adolescent cases) depression (Jackson, 1998; Webb, 2008; Webb et al., 2006). After studying the qualitative differences, thoughts, and lived experiences of such children, Bailey (2011) encourages parents and professionals to positively intervene and “promote ego development” in order for these G/T individuals to reach their fullest potential (p. 217). This may also prevent negativity and poor performance as well as additional and unnecessary stress, anxiety, and depression.

What makes recognized asynchronous development particularly challenging for parents and professionals is that this population differs so vastly, and one positive integration or solution, for instance, will not accommodate all. Understandably, concerned parents may be apprehensive because they may not know how to successfully communicate with and support their own child. They themselves may not understand the unique thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of such a child, and they may not understand the affects that societal reactions and peer opinions may have on him or her. Positive proactive methods that may help alleviate the child’s stress and anxiety may escape these

parents and professionals, and the consequences may be ambiguous, vague, or completely unknown to the adult. For this reason, educating the self about asynchronous development to better understand these differences as well as voicing one's own fears and anxieties as well as challenging concerns can be vastly and advantageously enriching and rewarding for both parent and child.

Heightened Sensitivity

Partly resulting from asynchronous development, these oversensitive children experience such intense emotions that they are often seen as immature, and some may feel this heightened sensitivity makes them vulnerable to additional problematic life experiences (e.g., unhealthy self-image; bullying) that may be difficult for parents to recognize or handle with ease. Others may see such intense emotions as overdramatized or silly, and, for this reason, G/T youth might struggle for fear of being negatively viewed or judged; however, this internal discord might exacerbate problems and create added and unnecessary stress.

In spite of this, for those G/T youth who do not have a clear understanding of self, who are critical of their gifts and talents, who doubt their potential, and/or who just want to be *normal*, Mendaglio (2003) believes such heightened sensitivity could negatively affect the way one views self and others. Already feeling separated from peers as a result of the G/T label, the G/T youth may struggle to find someone who he or she can share, for example, a fear of death, empathetic pain for another, and concern for the environment – all of which can be intensely crippling for the G/T individual who can vividly imagine elements, problems, and possible threats otherwise unseen or unbeknownst to the average individual. Yet, interpersonal connections and

communications as well as the opinions, expectations, and acceptance from these external sources regarding one's gifts and talents are profoundly important to one's self-image, self-acceptance, and self-understanding (Greenspon, 2000b).

It may be difficult for parents to witness such intense fears and anxieties within their child; however, it is important for parents to allow open communication and expression of self. Parents are also encouraged to comfort without "patronizing... or minimizing" the distressing fears and apprehensions of the child since this is vitally important for the emotional growth and development of the child (McHardy et.al., 2009, p. 16). Moreover, there are steps parents can take to help alleviate such apprehension. For those who may experience death anxiety, for instance, Yolan (2008) suggests – despite the possible discomfort – that disclosure be encouraged and allowed, for, when such communication occurs in a non-threatening and accepting environment, relationships are strengthened. Furthermore, Lamont (2012) encourages families to consider community service activities. However, limited time and resources may make it difficult for some and this can be emotionally draining for some parents.

In his ground-breaking *Theory of Positive Disintegration* (TPD), Dabrowski (1964, 1966) describes psychomotor, sensual, imaginal, intellectual, and emotional overexcitabilities (OEs) – sensitivities that are found in varying degrees among the G/T population. According to Piechowksi (1979), the five OEs represent the way in which one interacts with stimuli. Psychomotor OEs are classified as "movement, restlessness, action, and excess of energy;" sensual OEs are classified as "a need for sensory stimulation, including sensuality;" intellectual OEs are classified as "analysis, logic, questioning, the search for truth, and a need for continuous and intense intellectual

stimulation;” imaginal OEs are classified as “vivid dreams, daydreams, fantasies, images, and strong visualizations of experience;” and emotional OEs are classified as “attachments and bonds with others and feelings of empathy, loneliness, and the happiness and joy of love” (Tieso, 2007, p. 12). Table 2.1 represents a sampling of possible ways in which the five OEs, as identified by Dabrowski, may be manifested within an individual (adapted from Bailey, 2010).

Dabrowski’s OEs, seen in both internal and external conflict, are influential to one’s development, but in order for positive growth and optimal development to take place, a disintegration process must occur where “a higher-level personality structure replaces a lower-level structure” (Ackerman, 2009, p. 82). Ackerman (2009) explains that TPD differs from other developmental theories in four ways: (a) TPD can happen at any age, (b) TPD focuses on the emotional roles to development as well as the “cognitive, societal, [and] physical contributions,” (c) growth is dependent on “conflicts and forms of mental illness,” and (d) one’s “levels of psychological development” lead to and can be seen in one’s “goals, actions, and value system” (p. 82-83). It is important to note that even though the theory is unrelated to age, Mróz (2009) does suggest that the process often occurs during the adolescent years when anxiety may develop over G/T differences and conflict can spark negative emotions.

Dabrowski (1966) recognized both the biological and environmental/societal factors that play a part in one’s development; however, he also recognized a third factor that, according to him, was not characteristic in all humanity but was certainly influenced by the other two. This third and, due to individual choice and conscious, most important and influential are the “autonomous factors” that aid one in his or her developmental

growth (Ackerman, 2009, p. 83). Dabrowski's theory (1964, 1966) uniquely describes five levels of this development, and interestingly it supports asynchronous development as one does not necessarily have to begin at the bottom level (although the bottom level is not necessarily bad); however, it also supports the idea that growth may be inconsistent and an individual can even regress at times.

Table 2.1 Examples of Overexcitability Manifestations

| Psychomotor | Sensual | Imaginational | Intellectual | Emotional |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|---|--|
| energetic animation; full of life | love of beauty and the opulent; | creative; imaginative; resourceful | inquisitive and curious | intense relations and attachments |
| impulsive; compulsive sharing | indulgence in culinary delight | perceptive; instinctive | love of learning and knowledge | deep fears and powerful anxieties |
| anxious; jumpy; restless | enjoys companionship | visual; appreciation of multilayered ideas figurative and meanings | attention to detail; methodical; systematic reasoning | forceful desire for love, belonging, safety |
| enjoys hands-on activities; skillful | pleasure in the luxurious; sensual | visionary; inventive; dreamer | concentrated focus and intent absorption | empathic compassion for others and the environment |

Level 1 is “self-serving” and any perfectionistic desires equates to “having everything one wants” regardless of the thoughts and expectations of others (Silverman, 2007a, p. 240). Individuals at this level, furthermore, may have no tolerance for the flaws

and idiosyncrasies of others if they do not “serve the narcissistic individual in some way,” and when this dissatisfaction occurs, Silverman (2007a) points out that there is “no inner conflict, no remorse, no reflection, and no real impetus to change” (p. 240). The expectations of others may be recognized in Level 2, and this may create some awareness of needed change; however, a lack of direction and a temptation to conformity still represents an individual who may not have a clear sense of self or one who lacks a basic understanding regarding necessary steps for self-improvement. At this level, individuals may “engage in self-deprecating behavior” and it seems that “their self-concept is weak and easily shaken,” especially if they feel judged by others (p. 240; 241). In Level 3 individuals may attempt to connect with one’s higher self and a “desire for self-perfection becomes a burning force;” however, in the process, they may experience frustration with self or “shame” as well as concern that they may be unable to fully “achieve one’s potential” (p. 241; 242). There is a compassionate concern for others as well as a “commitment and strength of will to make one’s vision a reality” in Level 4; this level inspires positive change and action for others (p. 242). At Level 5 individuals have reached an apex and inspire great compassion and optimism in others. Silverman (2007a) claims that

At the highest level of development, the term ‘perfectionism’ does not seem to apply. The individual is no longer striving, no longer plagued by doubt or fear, and there is no inner conflict. This is the level at which the personality ideal is attained: one consistently acts in accordance with one’s highest principles, in harmony with universal good. There is no polarity here. The most evolved beings on the planet recognize the Perfection that exists in all things, and appreciate every human being as a part of that Perfection [e.g., Peace Pilgrim (1982)]. These individuals are here as teachers to show us what is possible in our own development. (p. 242)

Dabrowski considered such multilevel individuals “capable of bringing humanity to a higher set of values” even when they are simultaneously “at great risk of being destroyed by society because of their inherent differences” (Silverman, 1994, para. 7). His colleague, Michael Piechowski (1979), is credited for introducing TPD to the field of gifted education, and it is Dabrowski’s TPD (1964, 1966) that has been the revolutionarily change to our understanding of the G/T child’s interpersonal and intrapersonal communications and development as well as his education and counseling. Before Dabrowski’s TPD (1964, 1966), the G/T child was defined by his or her expected product rather than by one’s inner world and experiences. Now, however, the *whole* G/T child is valued, and parents as well as professionals must recognize that the intense sensitivities and overexcitabilities of a G/T youth are “an asset in developing the students’ potentials” (Alias et al., 2013, p. 123).

Although Tolan’s reminder (1994) that “mind makes us human; mind makes us individuals” is true to some extent, it is the new awareness of the *whole* child that reminds us that emotions and OEs are the traits that make us truly humanly and humanely individual (Honoring the Self, para. 15). Fortunately, this comprehensive understanding of one’s heightened sensitivities and development may help the G/T child better identify the emotional OEs within his or her own lived experience and anticipate ways in which he or she might improve one’s coping and management practices in order to live a life of contentment and peace (Ackerman, 2009). With more confidence, the G/T child may have a more positive social presence and improved communications may follow; additionally, he or she may better appreciate his or her own gifts and talents and not feel pressure to conform. For the adults in his or her life, this knowledge and understanding

may help bridge gaps between parent-child lines of communication and offer new approaches for counselors and educational professionals who hope to assist and nurture this very special population (Bailey, 2010).

Fears, Anxiety, and Depression

Although fears vary depending upon gender, culture, ethnicity, and socioeconomic factors (Tippey & Burnham, 2009), it is the five OEs defined by Dabrowski's TPD (1964, 1966) that seem to be, largely, the stimuli causing psychological health concerns manifested as fear, anxiety and possibly depression experienced by sensitive G/T youth who react intensely to personal, environmental, and societal issues. Nevertheless, although "up to 10% of children and up to 20% of adolescents" experience some form of anxiety disorder, many do not seek or receive needed help or services (Essau, Conradt, Sasagawa, & Ollendick, 2012, p. 450) This may be partly due to unidentified anxiety disorders. Moreover, since the G/T learner models behavior that, at times, diverts attention, anxiety may go unrecognized by those who could possibly help (Albano, Chorpita, & Barlow, 2003). Additionally, the G/T individual may choose to alter or hide one's ability and skill if societal resentment and opposition may otherwise result (Geake & Gross, 2008), or, on the opposite end, as Webb, Meckstroth, and Tolan (1982) reveal, when family members in particular focus solely on the gift or talent and make it "the only arrow in the child's quiver" (p. 19). Scenarios at both ends of the continuum and all those in between may create a disconnect from one's true self and initiate problematic anxiety.

The Tripartite Needs System specifies a basic need among, more specifically, G/T adolescents (a) to know deeply and be true to self and others as well as to understand the

spiritual and physical universe and its phenomena; (b) to be able to share communion (thoughts, feelings, emotional ties) interpersonally; and (c) to be able to express one's emotional self orally or through some other artistic form (Jackson, 1998, Figure 2).

Without these needs met, the G/T adolescent is, in fact, at risk for anxiety and depression.

One common type, existential depression, often threatens those highly intelligent, passionate individuals who “recognize [the] injustices, inconsistencies, and hypocrisies” of the world as well as the “duplicity, pretense, arbitrariness insincerities, and absurdities in society” but who are driven by futuristic possibilities and change (Webb, 2008, p. 7). It often occurs when one experiences a traumatic (e.g., death of a loved one) or highly disturbing event (e.g., natural disaster) or when one experiences a loss or confusion of self (Webb, 2008). Thus, since adolescence is a time that many experience such a loss or confusion, teenagers may be vulnerable to such emotions. Consequently, adolescent depression has become an increasing societal concern even though some (Webb, 2008) still insist it can, in fact, become a catalyst for positive change and personal growth.

For those who, in times of need, can not make positive adjustments, negative manifestations may make this population particularly vulnerable to mental illness (Neihart, 1999) and more at risk for suicidal ideations (Webb, 2008). Findings from a recent study indicate that “58.1% of anxiety-disordered youth endorsed the presence of suicidal ideation on a continuous measure” (O’Neil Rodriguez & Kendall, 2014, p. 59). Despite the overwhelmingly varied internal and external pressures causing suicidal ideation, Roxborough et al. (2012) suggest that a large component is a “social disconnection as evidenced by experiences of being bullied or social hopelessness” (p. 225). Therefore, in order to be proactive and help ease or eliminate such disorders and

ideations, parents must encourage their youth to openly share disturbing issues and experiences in order to seek the necessary help.

In all cases, depressed G/T youth are dependent upon the love and support of those who can connect them with proper sources and venues for information and support as well as provide assistance in finding appropriate outlets for stress relief such as counseling, mediation, and exercise (Harrison & Van Haneghan, 2011). Parents are encouraged to be proactive by becoming more aware of how the environment and culture play a part in the psychological, emotional, and physical well-being of their child. When communication and awareness take place, parents can help their child avoid the breeding grounds for unstable, negative emotions and not fall victim to depression or worse – suicide (Cross, Gust-Brey, & Ball, 2002; Jackson, 1998). This may be challenging for many parents who are unaware of what their child is thinking and feeling, but it is important for adolescents to have this reflective time to cope with stress and build confidence and self-efficacy (Rodriquez & Loos-Sant', 2015) since efficacy can be instrumental in one's growth and development. Therefore, parents may want to diligently keep open available lines of communication so that the adolescent can express fears and anxieties (Portzky, Audenaert, & van Heeringen, 2009) for healing to begin.

Unrealistic Expectations

There are many unrealistic expectations regarding the intelligence, grades, and skill set of a G/T child. In fact, research indicates that much of the general public holds several erroneous beliefs and opinions regarding the G/T population. In *Guiding the Gifted Child*, Webb et al. (1982) assert that commonly-believed myths insist that G/T children (a) “have everything going their way,” (b) “can succeed without help,” (c) have

“special abilities [that] are always prized by their families,” (d) “should be valued primarily for their brain power,” (e) “are more stable and mature emotionally,” (f) “have gotten ‘something for nothing’,” and (g) “naturally want to be social isolates” (p. 9).

Consequently, these inaccurate and flawed myths affect the social and emotional needs of such children and adolescents, and internal and external reactions while coping with such emotional stigmas (Coleman & Cross, 2014) may also add to the challenge of parenting such an individual.

Largely, the problem resides in society’s misunderstanding of the way in which a G/T child thinks and learns. One of the most commonly misunderstood and erroneous expectations is that learning comes with ease to such a child. The child may be expected to understand or master something quickly (Lamont, 2012), and not only is a sufficient amount of time to learn a concept or skill seldom allowed but mistakes are not tolerated. As abstract thinkers with vast knowledge (as compared to non-G/T peers), these children think outside the box, see the big picture, and sense abstract, metaphorical, or symbolic meanings in complex things (Lovecky, 1994). This type of thinking, however, may become problematic in the learning process when students are expected to show work or elaborate and concretely explain how they reached an idea or solution. It would seem that such students must find the lesson and activity “meaningful and valuable” for them to feel the benefit to completing the task (Rubenstein et al., 2012, p. 680). Repetitive exercises and unnecessary tasks for understanding, therefore, might feel like a punishment to a G/T child, and, in some cases, grades may suffer when the child defiantly refuses to do the work. In middle school especially, before students have really met with challenge and lack organizational as well as study skills and habits (Ritchotte et

al., 2015), many may feel impatience and frustration with either themselves or others. Throughout their academic journey, they may even sense resentment or disapproval from teachers (Geake & Gross, 2008) and peers, and this may cause some to withdraw and have a negative attitude about school in general. Subsequently, resulting emotional reactions, as seen in anger or academic boredom and apathy, may develop from stigmas as well as from the intensely emotional weight of performance expectations on, for example, standardized tests which may create additional stresses and become increasingly challenging for both parent and child to cope.

Often, adults don't understand or recognize the emotional conflicts and challenges facing these children because they seem to be resourceful and they seem to persuasively meet the demands and expectations of others (Bailey, 2011). Understanding asynchronous development may allow one to not fall prey to the unrealistic expectations of others; however, it is still important to recognize that one's measurable skills and abilities in the classroom, for instance, do not necessarily parallel one's ability to cope emotionally (Litster & Roberts, 2011). Thus, open communication is necessary for these children to develop optimally.

Pfeiffer (2012) makes several good points in his article, "Current Perspectives on the Identification and Assessment of Gifted Students," that may help explain how unrealistic expectations may lead to negative emotions and manifest in undesirable actions for G/T learners and the adults in their lives. For example, although Pfeiffer values IQ to some extent in defining a G/T child, he believes the methods of identification must be reconsidered entirely. He considers the label a "social construct" and he blames this societal misconception as a leading cause to the underrepresentation

of G/T minority (Pfeiffer, 2012, p. 4). He also questions the erroneous notion that “[o]nce gifted, always gifted” and supports the idea of a periodic reevaluation process in order to determine whether the educational programs continue to appropriately match the student’s academic capabilities and skills throughout his academic journey (p. 4). These fresh ideas may result in less fear, anxiety, and depression for the student and less frustration and concern for the parents and teachers when the learner is appropriately matched with curriculum that suits his needs, knowledge, and skill set and allows for optimal learning to occur.

This may also ease or completely eliminate a predominant frustration and complaint among parents – frustration directed toward teachers and administrators within the school system. These parents often feel as if they must defend themselves and their G/T child to educational professionals who have either misread, misunderstood, or misdiagnosed their child. Overexcitabilities (OEs) and possible dual exceptionalities may also enhance these complexities since Webb et al. (2006) emphasize these children are often given common and problematic misdiagnoses including but not limited to ADHD, Bipolar, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Asperger’s Disorder, and other mood and sleep disorders. Furthermore, OEs and misdiagnoses may exacerbate additional classroom dilemmas. For instance, a G/T child will spend, according to Webb et al. (2006), anywhere from a quarter to a half of all instructional time waiting for peers to “catch up” (p. 84). When this happens, it is important to recognize the need for stimulating, challenging work and welcome such flexibility and change; unfortunately, however, when these learners either directly or indirectly ask for this challenge, many times “instead of praise and encouragement, these

students hear one word – no” (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004, p. 1). Consequently, this denial for one’s needs can incite boredom within the learner, and many frustrated parents may feel that little is being done to challenge their child or appropriately enhance cognitive development.

Another complication may exist in the classroom when the student naturally seems to go against or overtly ponder the traditional classroom norms (Webb et al., 1982) or when the student naturally has a stronger knowledge base, ability, or skill set than the teacher and when OE such as “high curiosity and creative suggestions sometimes challenges the teacher capabilities” (Alias et al., 2013, p. 123). When this occurs, the teacher may then unconsciously feel threatened or feel that the student is a threat to classroom structure and authority. When a student either intentionally or unintentionally (with ill-intent or not) calls attention to this in front of the class, a teacher may “unconsciously undermine” the child or “[send] subtle signals to the other children that the gifted child is a threat and should be ostracized” (Alvarez, 2013, *Envy Affects*, para. 5). Moreover, the independence and clear vision of a G/T child may overwhelm teachers and academic peers who may consider the child bossy. Regardless, this rejection might cause anxiety and affect the G/T child’s confidence and esteem and encourage either perfectionism or underachievement to result (Alvarez, 2013).

Despite classroom boredom and academic frustration, G/T children are often so intensely driven and focused in an area of interest that they can tune out all else (Coleman, Micko, & Cross, 2015). This intensity can oftentimes create additional stress for exhausted parents. Moreover, although this commitment to excel may be healthy and productive for some, it may create problems when, for instance, G/T children and youth

mask or conceal feelings and exhaustion in order to seem prepared and confident (Bailey, 2011; Delisle & Galbraith, 2002). This may cause additional parental concern when the child chooses to isolate himself to the detriment of finding friends.

Perfectionism

There is a fine line, however, between the desire to excel by high achievers and the perfectionism as is often seen in the G/T population, and although it can encourage excellence and productivity, perfectionism is a time-consuming and exhausting problem since, as their own worst critic, G/T youth can mentally punish themselves if their product (e.g., homework, project, test, grade) – even when recognized as wonderful in the eyes of others – seems less than perfect. For this reason, perfectionism is considered an impediment and is normally linked with low self-esteem and self-stigma (Zeifman et al., 2015), anxiety and depression (Essau et al., 2012; Huggins et al., 2008), and suicide (Roxborough et al., 2012). According to Smutny (2001), “a perfectionistic child believes she can *never* fail, must *constantly* do the absolute best and most, [and] should *always* receive praise and approval” (italics in original, p. 42), and Greenspon (2000) further adds that this is “not for the joy of accomplishment,” (“Self Experience,” p. 42) but rather for the love and acceptance of others (“Healthy Perfectionism,” Transforming Perfectionism).

Silverman (1999) insists that perfectionism is a gifted trait because (a) it is “an abstract concept” requiring “an abstract mind” to comprehend its significance, (b) it is a “function of asynchrony,” (c) G/T learners “set the same standards for themselves as their older friends,” (d) G/T learners “have succeeded in the past, so they expect to be successful in the future, no matter how difficult the challenge,” (e) G/T learners want

“challenge and stimulation,” and (f) G/T learners have a “drive for self-perfection” and expect meaningful life experiences (p. 217-218).

Of course, there are different types of perfectionism noted. Hamachek (1978) identifies ‘normal’ and ‘neurotic’ perfectionism, and others even lay claim to a “healthy” form of perfectionism; however, in “‘Healthy Perfectionism’ is an Oxymoron!” Greenspon (2000a), asserts all perfectionism to be problematic. Silverman (2007a), however, explains:

Perfectionism is an energy that can be used either positively or negatively depending on one’s level of awareness. It can cause paralysis and underachievement, if the person feels incapable of meeting standards set by the self or by others. It also can be the passion that leads to extraordinary creative achievement – an ecstatic struggle to move beyond the previous limits of one’s capabilities (‘flow’). (p. 234)

Thus, perfectionism can, in fact, inspire great things if one is cognizant of one’s feelings and motivation and can move beyond the negativities that external expectations may create. Consequently, despite the high achievement (e.g., test scores, grades) and seemingly positive work ethic and product that may result, perfectionism detected within one’s child can be difficult for some parents to handle, and many may feel the prize is not worth the entry fee.

Recently, researchers have considered how self-control can combat stress; in some studies, it has been praised for inspiring positive results such as “goal achievement,” “impulse control,” “emotion regulation,” and the “control of procrastination” (Achtziger & Bayer, 2013, p. 415). Possibly, self-control might help one maintain balance in one’s life (Adderholdt & Goldberg, 1999). This balance may ease stress that may detract from positive motivational drive and overshadow the pleasure of one’s work and product (Greenspon, 2000b). Therefore, if balance and self-control can

play such an important role in adjusting to stress in and outside of the classroom, parents might consider supporting this balance through encouraging their G/T learner to find therapeutic outlets, for instance, in order to help reduce stress and anxiety that can so often lead to perfectionism. Adderholdt and Goldberg (1999) further suggest that parents be cognizant of not falling into the subconscious perfectionistic trap themselves where pressure to be the “perfect” parent to the “perfect” child clouds judgment (p. 9-10). Parents too must find a proper balance in their parenting role where one can positively affirm and appreciate the adolescent and his or her special gifts and talents without placing undue pressure to perform. For some, however, this can become burdensome when they are the only source of comfort for their child.

Some identified forms of perfectionism have been noted, but there have also been distinctions made concerning the internal and external force driving perfectionistic tendencies. Hewitt and Flett (1991) have characterized a self-oriented, an other-oriented, and a socially-prescribed perfectionism. For a self-oriented perfectionist, the internal pressure is self-induced whereas, for the other-oriented and socially-prescribed perfectionists, the pressure to perform perfectly is from a perceived external force (Zeifman et al., 2015). More specifically, it is the pressure from “unrealistic expectations” and “harsh evaluations of others” that is a driving influence for other-oriented perfectionistic tendencies whereas the external stress causing socially-prescribed perfectionism is the perceived external demand for perfection (Hewitt et al., 2003, p. 373). Regardless, all internal and external forces influence one’s attitude, motivation, and behavior (Hewitt & Flett, 1991) as well as one’s emotions (Stornelli, Flett, & Hewitt, 2009; Zeifman et al., 2015).

Despite the internal and external forces, many G/T learners do not know their own limitations, and when they try to juggle too many things at once, frustration builds. When this occurs, mistakes happen, emotional exhaustion increases and the child overreacts emotionally. Also, as Davis and Rimm (2004) point out, these children have a perfected vision in their minds of what they hope to achieve and when the completed product is not what they had envisioned, dissatisfaction occurs. This sometimes overzealous reaction often leaves parents at a loss. For the parent, frustration can build when he or she feels as if one's hands are tied and nothing said or done can remedy the problem. Adults must be mindful of adding additional external stresses to the lived experiences of a child or adolescent by forcing or expecting perfection from them or through "harshness, criticalness, demandingness, intrusiveness, punitiveness, and use of psychological control" (Huggins et al., 2008, p. 190).

Silverman (1999) recommends that parents and G/T learners, among other things, "appreciate the trait" of perfectionism and its "useful purpose" (p. 222). She also recommends that parents encourage their child(ren) to be "set priorities" and "maintain high standards" for themselves as well as to be gentle with themselves when faced with challenge or when their plans and actions seemingly fail (p. 222). Giving up should not be encouraged, and Silverman recommends that parents encourage their child(ren) to envision "future successes" and persevere despite seemingly fruitless actions and communications (p. 222).

Underachievement

At times, one will recognize underachievement in a G/T learner. Oftentimes sulky or apathetic within the classroom environment, they are those students whose school

performance in no way matches their ability. Resulting from a variety of influences, underachievement is defined as “the ‘incongruence between ability and performance’” (Blaas, 2014, p. 244). The exact number of G/T underachievers varies (Siegle, Rubenstein, & Mitchell, 2014), but, since innumerable social-emotional issues are a contributing factor and since additional and more problematic ones usually follow, this underachieving population continues to concern researchers in the field of gifted education, educational professionals, and counselors (Blaas, 2014). More specifically, many underachieving youth see an unfortunate, climatic end as manifested in school dropout, and, of this total number, Lemov (1979) reports in *The Washington* that the G/T population account for fifteen to thirty percent of these (as cited in Webb et al., 1982, p. 8). Consequently, it is agreed that caring and supportive attention must be given to the well-being of this population since negative consequences are possible for the student, his or her family, his or her teachers and the school system at large.

The move to address the inner worlds of G/T children calls one to address and encourage the social and emotional well-being of these individuals which include, according to Pollard and Davidson (2001), knowing, understanding, regulating, and trusting the empathic and sympathetic self; coping with stressors; and maintaining positive relationships. With an established and positive sense of well-being, one will feel better prepared and able to put forth effort which is a key element to one’s success (Worrell, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Subotnik, 2012).

The Achievement Orientation Model (AOM) identified essential stimuli needed for student motivation and academic achievement. It would seem that a positive attitude is necessary in the following areas: (a) self-efficacy, (b) goal valuation (or task

meaningfulness), and (c) environmental perception (Siegle & McCoach, 2005, Figure 1, p. 6; Rubenstein et al., 2012, p. 679). In other words, the way students judge their ability (self-efficacy); the way students feel about required tasks (task meaningfulness); and the way students perceive lived experiences, the expectations and support of others, and social interactions (environment perception) all contribute to achievement (Rubenstein et al., 2012) or, in the case of many, underachievement. A recent study by Siegle, Rubenstein, and Mitchell (2014) supports this idea. More specifically, amongst their participant student population, the researchers found that when a positive teacher-student rapport was present, students felt that the lessons were both meaningful and challenging, and self-efficacy was shown, for example, in satisfaction of both the self and the product. As such, these “self-regulated” and “academically engaged” students were able to successfully retain a positive attitude and avoid underachievement (Siegle et al., 2014, p. 46). The study further identified that effective teachers were both knowledgeable and passionate about the subject and their pedagogical strategies were inspiring to the young minds; additionally, these teachers cared about both the student’s personal and academic growth.

According to Delisle (1992), “underachievers” differ from “nonproducers.” Kanevsky and Keighley (2003) define these nonproducers as students “at-risk academically but not psychologically,” for, although they are seemingly “self-assured” and “independent,” they consciously choose to disengage from “boring or irrelevant” lessons (para. 3). Underachievers, on the other hand, are “at risk academically and psychologically” because “they have low self-esteem and are dependent learners” (para. 3). There are a number of contributing factors that create such a lack of engagement and

academic disinterest, but boredom seems to be the most common theme, and a curriculum void of challenge is usually what spurs the child to lose interest. Delisle (2009) claims there are five things that can be done within the academic setting to avoid student boredom, disengagement, and, ultimately, underachievement. The Five C's include:

control over at least some aspects of their learning process; *choice* in the selection of learning methods, materials, and content; the *challenge* to be invited to explore interesting topics in depth; *complexity* in sharing their emerging knowledge in meaningful ways; and *caring* teachers who encourage them and understand their drive to learn. (italics in original, Delisle, 2009, p. 5)

If these things are not in place; if individual moods, actions, and reactions are left unchecked; and if the learner feels unsupported, these students are at risk for academic boredom, underachievement, and failure, and they may even opt to dropout of school completely. Suldo, et al. (2009) credit the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2006) for recognizing the strong link between “social-emotional health and academic success” (p. 68). Christle, Jolivette, and Nelson (2007) agree that caring, supportive teachers are a must; however, having an affirmative and progressive academic climate that promotes “high, yet achievable academic and social expectations” is also necessary in reducing underachievement and dropout (p. 334). From a phenomenological case study of rural gifted students, Zabloski and Milacci (2012) further identified both domestic and academic factors contributing to school dropout. Of the G/T participants studied, both relational trauma (e.g., divorce, custody battles, bullying, abuse) and relational loss (e.g., death, abandonment, rejection from friends) found in both the domestic and educational environments were found to be major influencers in the student's choice to leave one's traditional academic journey. Although the participants

enjoyed their elementary school experience, the unsettling events experienced during middle school and the lack of support from either a mentor or confidante left the youth at a loss. Maslow (1943, 1954) suggested in his Hierarchy of Needs theory that in order for one to reach self-actualization, the highest level of achievement, one must satisfy the lower levels in the climb up the hierarchical ladder to complete personal fulfillment and success. As such, meaningful human connections are a necessary component for what Maslow describes as the basic need of love and belonging. In verification of this, Zabloski and Milacci (2012) found that love, acceptance, and belonging in form of positive, caring, supporting relations with family, friends, and teachers – or lack of them – was, in fact, a determining and influential factor for engagement and academic success.

One productive placement option is to group G/T students together in order to enhance the psychological well-being of the child and provide opportunities for positive and supportive relations amongst peers. According to Rogers (2002), this opportunity will not only enhance one's "social self-concept" but it will also decrease "negative self-criticism" (p. 4). Neihart (2007) defines this peer ability grouping as "any arrangement that attempts to place students with similar levels of ability in instructional groups" (p. 333). In order to support their social and emotional needs, Rogers (2002) maintains that schools must do three essential things: (a) place G/T students in core classes with peers who have similar intellect and ability, (b) provide challenging and "progressively more complex tasks... based on mastery and readiness," and (c) deliver "flexible progression at an appropriately rapid pace" (p. 4). Vogl and Preckel (2014) examined the affect such groupings had on one's self-image and efficacy as well as on one's overall school experience, and they found that ability grouping positively benefitted learners and

enhanced one's academic success. Moreover, they found that academic interest and student-teacher relations of those G/T students in ability groups did not worsen over time as in regular classes (Vogl & Preckel, 2014). With improved psychological well-being, resulting from these ideal educational placement and curriculum enhancements, boredom, underachievement, failure, and dropout are less likely alternatives for the G/T learner. For those students not placed accordingly, it remains essential for G/T children to find healthy, productive human relationships in order for them to thrive. In order to accommodate such students and enhance the curriculum and learning environment, teaching professionals must learn more about the characteristics, behaviors, learning style, and needs of the G/T child. Through positive, open lines of communication, parents can play a vital role in helping these teaching professionals better understand the social and emotional needs of their child, and – especially in those pivotal middle school years – take proactive steps to assist and encourage their child in his academic journey to success.

An awareness, however, of one's intellectual and artistic strengths might create a sense of guilt or pressure for the G/T child who may think he or she is undeserving or who is saddened that others do not have equal gifts and talents. Additionally, although these children may appear confident, shyness or low self-esteem may hinder them from making friends. They may even struggle to connect with classmates who, ironically, see them as braggarts, show-offs, or snobs as well as classmates with whom they have little in common. As a result, they may struggle to form positive peer relations (Peterson et al., 2009). At times, a G/T child may sense these negative attitudes and even contempt from others interpersonally. The child may consequentially attempt to conceal or deny his or

her gifts in order to be approved and accepted by others even when such actions may create vulnerability to more alarming and detrimental behaviors (Olenchak, 1999).

Parents of Gifted and Talented Children

Parenting a G/T child is a unique experience that often brings its own intense set of emotional challenges. The needs of G/T children are often difficult to recognize, but Morawska and Sanders (2009) assert that, without proper support and recognition, such children “may become withdrawn, depressed, or exhibit behavioral problems, leading to a loss of potential for both the individual and society as a whole” (p. 163). The parents who do recognize the special gifts and talents of their child and want to support them both socially, emotionally, and academically, however, are often seemingly overwhelmed and left to deal with ambiguous choices, unexplained concerns, and unresolved sensitive issues created and enhanced as a result of their distinct parenting experience.

Accordingly, some parents might feel intimidated by their child’s intelligence, overwhelmed with their child’s potential, and inadequately equipped in their role as parent and advocate to such a child (Delisle, 2001). Some recognize the complexities; however, as Morawska and Sanders (2009) point out, there continues to be both “a lack of research about the nature and extent of difficulties experienced” and “a lack of empirically supported parenting strategies to help parents in parenting their gifted child” (p. 163).

In *Gifted Children: Myths and Realities*, Winner (1996) claims that these parents might have self-efficacy concerns and feel unprepared in their role as parent to such a child. Without proper support, Renati, Bonfiglio, and Pfeiffer (2016) recognize that “intense loneliness and frustration can and often does lead to parental stress” (p. 5). In

their recent study, “key stresses included a lack of parenting alliance, difficulties managing family routines, challenges handling sibling relationships, and less-than-adequate family communication” (p. 11). Keirouz (1990) also found specific areas of concern for these parents that included (a) “family roles, relationships, functioning, daily life, and lifestyle;” (b) sibling relationships regarding “the roles and relationships of siblings with each other and with others in the family;” (c) parental self-concept “relative to their child’s abilities and accomplishments;” (d) neighborhood and community issues “created between the family and the community or friends;” (e) educational issues “that may develop between the family and the school;” and (f) development of the child issues “dealing with the child’s cognitive, social, and emotional development” (p. 62). These findings were consistent with previous findings from Hackney (1981) with the exception of the added sibling relationship concerns. From such findings, it would seem that parents raising G/T children are uncertain and indecisive in their thoughts and feelings regarding the G/T label as it can affect their relations with their non-G/T children and spouse.

Delisle (2001) coined the term *profoundly gifted guilt* (PGG) to explain why parents of such children often struggle. It would seem that feelings caused by PGG may create obstacles that affect both interpersonal and intrapersonal relations as well as stifle positive self-efficacy, hinder appropriate parental goal setting and productive steps toward desired advocacy, and obstruct successful family dynamics that may damage self-actualizing opportunities for every family member involved. Thus, although most parents of G/T children are excited by the awe-inspiring gifts and talents of their children, their joy in having a bright child is often “overshadowed by a sense of responsibility, uncertainty, and isolation” (Smutny, 2001, p. 1). Additionally, few have the opportunity

to discuss their feelings, confusions, and concerns with others, and many feel judged and sense animosities from others who may not understand their circumstances (Webb & DeVries, 1998). Consequently, in an attempt to normalize their child and their own experience, some parents may “downplay or disguise” (Webb & DeVries, 1998, p. 2) or even “deny” (Davis & Rimm, 2004, p. 399) the gifts, talents, behaviors, skill sets, opportunities, and accolades of their G/T children. These sacrifices, unfortunately, are not healthy or productive and do not enhance an environment where children can grow and develop optimally. Therefore, it is essential for parents themselves and society at large to recognize the emotional needs of these parents and the complex challenges that arise from such a narrative.

According to Delisle (2001), there are several commonly expressed PGG statements. One in particular, “I’m not smart enough to help my child,” is commonly heard from parents of profoundly gifted children (p. 17). Since G/T children seem to innately know various “fact[s],” “theor[ies],” “concept[s]” and “truth[s],” many intimidated parents feel unable to assist their child in his or her academic pursuits and may feel a frustrating sense of detachment from their parenting role (Delisle, 2001, p. 17). This detachment as well as the misleadingly mature knowledge, vocabulary, and presence of the G/T youth may trick some parents – even those with the best of intentions – into excessively empowering their child by allowing weighty decision-making opportunity and choice. Davis and Rimm (2004) avow, however, that this allowance is detrimental and can become increasingly problematic when the G/T child and his parents begin to “compete for the power that parents give too early and try to recover too late” (p. 402). Possibly, part of the temptation swaying vulnerable (yet probably not cognizant)

parents towards such options is a type of parent-child envy (Masse & Gagne, 2002). Eventually, such thoughts and perceptions may overpower one's emotions and lead to a sense of hopelessness that can enhance feelings of inadequacy for the parent who may already be taking a more low-key role in assisting the G/T child in his academic pursuits and personal interests. To the irritated child, though, this seemingly indifferent attitude and dispassionate interest from a parent may also make one feel as if the parent has taken a back-seat-only approach to one's personal endeavors — leading to additional rifts between parent and child.

Often, however, raising a child with such mind-boggling capability and potential is frightening. So that they do not reduce the child's academic and career opportunities, some parents may feel compelled to seek available resources that may educate and inform them on parent-child communication strategies and how best to encourage and foster a healthy academic drive as well as well-rounded academic interests. Thus, the PGG statement, "I'm sure if I do the wrong thing, I'll just ruin this child," is another insecurity commonly felt among parents raising a G/T child (Delisle, 2001, p. 18). Habitually, these parents are so afraid of not doing the right thing for and in the best interest of their child that they long for instructional information and support. If there are other non-G/T children in the family, the parent may also feel guilty for either allowing the G/T child a more significant, decision-making role in the household or for a lack of balance in giving more time and attention to a demanding G/T child (Webb, Gore, Amend, & DeVries, 2007). These choices may also become detrimental to the esteem of a non-G/T sibling who may begin to feel like a failure in comparison to her G/T brother or sister. In such cases, parents must be ever-diligent in recognizing the special needs and

concerns of each child, but these feelings as well as the dissatisfaction a parent may feel in his or her own parenting role can be draining, and parents may find the challenge of moving past such emotionally-depleting dilemmas impossible.

Morawska and Sanders (2009) recognize additional concerns (e.g., behavioral challenges from the G/T child, motivation and drive of the child, peer relations, lifestyle and family balance, school relations) for some parents. In addition, they claim that some study participants overlooked their own needs in order to “meet the needs of their child in the context of often being uncertain as to how best to parent their child” (Morawska & Sanders, 2009, p. 170). Self-efficacy, therefore, seemingly plays a large role even for parents in one’s motivation to perform (Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Gerbino, & Pastorelli, 2003) and self-control (Bandura, et al., 2003; Bandura, 1997; Bandura, Pastorelli, Barbaranelli, & Caprara, 1999). However, although there are hundreds of books on parenting, overwhelming thoughts and stressful feelings may cause some parents to overlook available resources that could be enlightening and beneficial. Further, although written resources can offer a wealth of information and helpful suggestions for common dilemmas between parent and child, it should also be noted that these resources are limited in their information since rarely do they address the lived experience of such parents and how one may deal with emotional complexities (Kabat-Zinn, 1997). Moreover, as stated before, little information is provided on parenting a G/T child since few understand the unique challenges inherent in such a task (Webb & DeVries, 1998). Therefore, although there are resources available to help in some way, parents are often required to be open-minded, flexible, and sometimes even imaginative in how they incorporate ideas and suggestions from written words since many lack a proper

understanding and offer limited information and support — giving these parents unhealthy and often unfounded reason to focus on their primary concern, ruining their child.

Additionally, parents may feel discontent with the lines of communication between themselves and society at large. Although bragging rights among parents are a social norm, parents of G/T children often seemingly feel that they can not share personal stories with others who already have unfair misconceptions about their job as parent to a gifted child. To them, recipients find their discourse incredulous (Delisle, 2001; Webb & DeVries, 1998). It seems, unfortunately, that the suspicions and fears felt by parents of G/T children are not completely unfounded. As mentioned, research indicates there are several societal myths regarding the way in which G/T children think, learn, feel, communicate, and adapt among other things (Webb et al., 1982). Understandably, groundless myths such as these would make the job of parenting such a child seem easy and uncomplicated. However, these mistaken societal assumptions may only add to the already fueled emotions and insecurities of the parent. Although it has been suggested that one can minimize these harsh emotional feelings by being — among other things — non-judgmental, patient, and accepting to personal experiences with others, parents experiencing such intense social and emotional complexities may have a difficult time achieving this without proper education and training. In other words, it's easier said than done.

It has also been suggested that it is one's *changeable* thought patterns that create reality; however, one may have difficulty recognizing one's mental power in altering personal attitudes toward various life experiences (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 199). Further, for

the parent of a G/T child, experiences and discourse with society at large can create feelings of paranoia. In fact, some parents — who have the best interest of their G/T child at heart and only attempt to motivate and guide the child to accomplish academic tasks — even feel that others must view them as “evil parents who push... their child for their own selfish satisfaction” (Delisle, 2001, p. 18). Often, erroneous societal beliefs such as these do enhance the frustration of the parent and sometimes lead to another commonality among parents who announce, “I’d rather have a child who is ‘normal’ than one who is gifted,” (Delisle, 2001, p. 18). It seems that felt animosity from others make some parents “believe that giftedness is more of a burden than a blessing” (p. 18). Moreover, this belief — whether founded or not — and these emotionally-charged situations can cause many parents, feeling others do not understand their plight and distress, to emotionally isolate themselves from those who can potentially help them understand and move past hindering feelings of frustration, fear, confusion, and doubt. Consequently, without sympathetic and compassionate relations, one’s confidence can deteriorate, making lived experiences much more difficult to get through.

The selfless and challenging task of parenting calls one to live “as fully as possible” while simultaneously “nourishing [one’s] children, and in the process, growing [oneself]” (Kabat-Zinn, 1997, p. 3). However, the challenges and uncertainties that come with parenting such children often leave struggling parents feeling frustrated and confused. Morawska and Sanders (2009) recognize that such parents must make decisions without “knowing what strategies, approaches, and activities are most helpful to their child” (p. 165). Such intense feelings can easily create or enhance feelings of helplessness for the overstimulated, overwhelmed, and frequently overworked parent

who repeatedly feels pulled in numerous and sometimes conflicting directions. Such hindering feelings can damage confidence in one's parenting ability, harm productive decision-making skills and techniques, limit positive options and opportunities, and damage or even ruin healthy relationships between parent and child. However, if one could recognize such feelings and identify common actions and reactions resulting from such feelings, parents may gain awareness of how best to advocate for themselves and their G/T child.

Theoretical Framework

During the mid-twentieth century, it had become clear to Sigmund Freud that the emotional and mental health and wellness of a patient was in direct correlation to the “parent-child relationship during the patient's early years;” this awareness and understanding inspired a “family movement in psychiatry” and involved a family-as-a-single-unit approach to therapy (Kerr, 2013, p. 227; 228). For those who would later utilize this treatment approach, a prevalent recognition regarding the necessary and vital role families played in treating the individual patient had to be present. Murray Bowen, a psychiatrist working with schizophrenic patients, began incorporating such treatment options in the early 1950s; his work (predominately with nuclear families) would later involve the *whole* family, and a “family group therapy” would later emerge from his collaborative project (1954-59) with the National Institute of Mental Health (Kerr, 2013, p. 230-231). The project became the building block to a family systems theory (1963, 1966).

The ideas behind the theory promote a more desirable lifestyle “based on thinking rather than feelings,” and thinking “based on fact” is given more weight (Gilbert, 2013, p.

1). Gilbert explains that this approach considers, without blame, “the emotional process going on among people, while never losing sight of the facts” (p. 2). This awareness includes an appreciation for the family as a unit and an understanding that all within the family are naturally affected and influenced emotionally by the other. The eight concepts guiding Bowen’s family system theory (1978) include (a) nuclear family emotional process, (b) triangles, (c) emotional cutoff, (d) differentiation of self, (e) family projection process, (f) multigenerational transmission process, (g) sibling position, and (h) societal emotional process (Kerr, 2000). These concepts highlighted and discussed below provide a clearer understanding of family dynamics and how best to assist one in the healing process.

Nuclear Family Emotional Process

Bowen (1978) recognized the potential problems that could occur within a family unit during existing “heightened and prolonged family tension” as seen in couples and parent-child relations (Kerr, 2000, Nuclear Family; Brown, 1999). Thus, rather than considering the individual as a separate emotional entity, Bowen’s theory (1978) holds the family as a single “emotional unit” (Gilbert, 2013, p. 5). The basic idea is that, within the family unit, whatever emotion (e.g., stress, anxiety) “affects one, affects all,” and, since “anxiety is addictive” it can increase with either positive (e.g., graduation, birth) or negative (e.g., job loss, natural disaster) triggers (p. 6; 9). When this happens, since the whole is seemingly greater than its parts, one or more individuals will sacrifice the self by fusing (or coming) together as seen in modified beliefs, choices, or opinions, for example, in order to keep the peace. Fusion, in short, occurs when discomfort results from the emotional reaction of another family member. It occurs when one feels

responsible for the emotions of another or when one feels injury, offense, or outrage over divergent thinking (Brown, 1999). The unfused, remaining parts of self is what makes one, as Gilbert (2013) explains, individual.

Fusion can cause more serious symptoms (e.g., anger, depression) to manifest. The naturally-resulting reactions (or postures) are “evidence of relationship fusions” and, if used often, can “become problematic” (Gilbert, 2013, p. 11). The postures that anxiety can exacerbate include (1) triangling, where emotions will shift from one party to another; (2) conflict, where strife, ranging in intensity, will occur between parties; (3) distance, where distancing oneself either temporarily or permanently is thought (although erroneously) to resolve the conflict; and (4) overfunctioning/underfunctioning reciprocity (or dysfunctional spouse), where one party becomes the more dominant of the two (p. 11-17).

Triangles

Discomfort sparks change and, when this happens, triangling occurs where a “third party” enters a fused “dyad” to ease tension (Brown, 1999, p. 95). For instance, an emotional shift occurs when one spouse’s anxiety is either partly or completely relieved because it is absorbed by another family member who then feels the emotional burden before it is again absorbed by a third party. Oftentimes, this third party is a child who “will develop a symptom” from the emotional transfer; this symptom, as Gilbert (2013) explains, will then “draw more anxiety from the parents” (p. 48) and the cycle seemingly continues. Triangles will exist regardless of the number of family members, and the system is actually more secure because it gives the tension an opportunity to shift from an inside position to an outside position whereas, in a dyad, tension has no where to go but

back and forth between the two forces (Kerr, 2000). The Bowen Center for the Study of the Family claims that triangulation strengthens connections because, in essence, individuals will choose a desirable over an undesirable in order to “assure their emotional attachments” (Kerr, 2000, Triangles, para. 2). Thus, when anxiety is minimal, to avoid the risk that one might tire of the other and form closer ties elsewhere, Bowen recognized that the two individuals within the inside position will strive to solidify their sense of togetherness, but, in more stressful times, the individual in the outside position may be more at an advantage (Gilbert, 2013). Gilbert explains that “there is no such thing as ‘detriangling;’” however, when one can, during moments of high intensity, situate self in an “‘outside’ position” in order to consider things from a more detached, point of view, all parties involved will benefit from the effort (p. 52).

Emotional Cutoff

Emotional cutoff involves the extreme way in which individuals react to and handle the discomfort of fusion; it is a way to detach from conflict (Brown, 1999; Gilbert, 2013; Kerr, 2000). The posture can be seen as, literally, distancing oneself from another or from the group, or it can be seen, more figuratively, as distancing oneself emotionally from another or from the group (Brown, 1999; Gilbert, 2013; Kerr, 2000). Either way, even if the separation causes out-of-sight problems to temporarily be out-of-mind, the separation does not necessarily resolve the problem, and it can, in fact, create additional problems. Brown (1999) explains that “[t]riangling provides a detour” since it is, in essence, a cry for help where one can seek support from another (p. 97).

Differentiation of Self

Although it is not possible to attain complete differentiation, Bowen found the intention to do so worthwhile (Brown, 1999; Gilbert, 2013). The absence of differentiation, otherwise known as fusion, is when one goes against his or her choice, preference, or whim in order to appease the group and keep the peace (Brown, 1999). Moreover, since individuals naturally gravitate toward a community or family unit in times of anxiety, for example, anxiety will then be distributed among the group. Thus, Gilbert (2013) asserts that “togetherness is more of a problem than a solution” since fusion will then exacerbate the anxiety and cause undesired consequences as seen in negative manifestations in impulsive reactions or postures (p. 21). These postures hinder one from being mindfully present so that differentiation can occur, and the emotional reactions deplete one’s power and makes it more difficult to handle stress (Brown, 1999).

On the opposite spectrum, differentiation is seen when one “function[s] autonomously by making self directed choices, while remaining emotionally connected” to the family unit (Brown, 1999, p. 95; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Successful differentiation enables one to display more independence. It would seem, however, that there are several contributing “factors” influencing one’s ability to differentiate, including (1) stress, (2) individualized reactions to stress, and (3) contact with extended family (Brown, 1999, p. 95). Regardless, attempting to separate from “one’s emotional systems” is, according to Gilbert (2013), essential for optimal growth and development (p. 28). Moreover, it is here that relationships seem to improve and thrive.

Family Projection Process

This concept focuses on the symptoms occurring in children after the parent projects his or her own problems, anxieties, and sensitivities onto them (Brown, 1999). The Bowen Center for the Study of the Family describes the three-step process as involving (1) a child focus sparked from a “fear that something is wrong,” (2) a belief that child behavior “confirm[s] fear,” and (3) “the parent treats the child as if something is really wrong” (Kerr, 2000, Family Projection Process). Ironically, the more energy a parent devotes to the perceived symptoms of the child, the more a child comes to depend on the parent for that specialized attention and affirmation. The process affects various children differently – even those who share the same set of parents. Gilbert (2013) explains that parental reactions from one child to the next varies, for “some children ‘draw’ more focus” and this focus may include either positive or negative variables (p. 68). However, the intensity of transferred anxiety (and thus fusion) is dependent upon the parent focus and whether the “child is on the receiving end of a worried, over-positive focus (or around a parent so anxious as to be neglectful)” (p. 69). Fortunately, higher levels of differentiation become possible once parents are introduced to the concept and a sense of awareness and a clearer understanding of the contributing factors and how their role has intensified the situation results. When this happens, oftentimes, steps can be taken to instill positive change (Gilbert, 2013).

Multigenerational Transmission Process

The multigenerational transmission process explains how “patterns, themes and positions (roles)” are transferred multi-generationally (Brown, 1999, p. 97; Gilbert, 2013; Kerr, 2000). Bowen was able to highlight patterns of unwanted or destructive behavior

carried down generationally in order to help treat the symptoms. Gilbert (2013) explains that “levels of differentiation in different siblings can give rise to whole branches of families that are ascending, or descending on the scale,” and therapeutic communications with family members can help heal the disconnect as well as help individuals take the positive steps necessary to break the cycle and relieve symptomatic or destructive behavior (p. 76-77; Kerr, 2000).

Sibling Position

Walter Toman’s ideas regarding birth order in *Family Constellation: Theory and Practice of a Psychological Game* (1961) was an important consideration for Bowen, who recognized that sibling position affected family dynamics. Toman recognized that one’s birth order, one’s parents, and one’s gender among siblings were each determining factors influential to one’s “personality and relationships” (Gilbert, 2013, p. 85-86). The eleven identified positions include (1) “oldest brother of brothers,” (2) “youngest brother of brothers,” (3) “oldest brother of sisters,” (4) “youngest brother of sisters,” (5) a “male only child,” (6) “oldest sister of sisters,” (7) “youngest sister of sisters,” (8) “oldest sister of brothers,” (9) “youngest sister of brothers,” (10) a “female only child,” and (11) “twins” (p. 87). A middle child is believed to gravitate to and embrace either, depending upon one’s age, an oldest position or a youngest position. Bowen considered how these sibling positions related to one’s parental role, as well. Additionally, in marriages, certain combinations will create, to varying degrees, “rank or sex conflict” (or lack thereof), and the sibling position combinations will create relationship patterns (or postures) that illustrate an eldest child “overfunctioning” and a youngest child “underfunctioning” (p. 95). Bowen hoped his work would create awareness so that one might be cognizant of

“the limitations of their own sibling position and role” in order to improve self and family relations (Brown, 1999, p. 97).

Societal Emotional Process

Bowen (1978) added this final concept when he recognized that triangles can extend beyond the family unit to include external “agencies, institutions and friendship systems” and when he noted that society will become “more or less anxious, orderly and organized” depending upon the state of societal affairs (Gilbert, 2013, p. 101; 102; Kerr, 2000). Gilbert (2013) elucidates Bowen’s reasoning and asserts that during historically anxious times (e.g., war, economic instability, moral compass shifts, rapid and overwhelming technological advancements), heightened anxiety can create and exacerbate additional complexities. Thus, the pulse of the nation affects whether or not society regresses. The evolution of the American family, for instance, can affect this process, and this process can also affect the family by putting more strain on relationships and making parenting more challenging (Gilbert, 2013).

Recently, some have criticized Bowen’s theory (1978), claiming imperfections and gender bias (Knudson-Martin, 1994). In her article, “The Female Voice,” Knudson-Martin asserts that:

Bowen’s family systems theory provides a valuable framework within which to integrate the female experience because it places individual development in the context of a biologically rooted interdependence and conceptualizes the human family as an emotional unit or field influencing the functioning of each person. Cutting one’s self off from significant others is viewed as symptomatic. However, the theory’s explanation of differentiation does not fully capture the reciprocal nature of individuality and togetherness and therefore does not completely include the female experience. (p. 37)

Knudson-Martin’s issue is that the theory model devised by Bowen (1978) excludes the “connection and emotional expressiveness” that is such a large part of the female

narrative (1994, p. 45). Despite this assessed flaw, it is important to acknowledge that, before the father and siblings were included into the whole family equation approach, Bowen's earliest work embraced mothers as the vital instrument in counseling sessions (Kerr, 2013). Gilbert (2013) clarifies that although the theory is fact-based, "feelings are given a great deal of attention" since the family is seen as an "emotional unit" (p. 1). Consequently, emotional expression may be observed and allowed in counseling sessions. Additionally, Brown (1999) notes that the theory attempts to recognize anxiety and its stress-inducing factors in order to "defuse" it before it escalates (p. 95). Thus, a necessary step in reaching such a goal is to create "awareness of how the emotional system functions" as well as to support differentiation so that one reflects on ways to improve one's self rather than ways to improve the other (Brown, 1999, p. 95).

Bowen's (1978) eight concepts make it clear that anxiety plays an active role in differentiation and personal fulfillment. The theory makes it clear, however, that when one can understand the theory and recognize the pattern in order to differentiate, positive change can occur. Accordingly, the family systems theory is a worthwhile framework for this particular study as it aims to discover the lived experience of a mother to a G/T child, and parenting such a child can, in fact, produce anxiety and overexcitabilities (in various levels of intensity), metamorphosing in a number of disguises for both the mother, child, and family unit as a whole.

The Purpose of the Current Study

The lived experiences of G/T children differ from those of their non-G/T peers. Plausibly, it may be assumed that the lived experiences for parents raising G/T children will also differ from those parents raising non-G/T children. The purpose of the current

study, therefore, is to gather data for understanding the uniquely defining experiences and perceptions of mothers currently raising G/T children. Additionally, information pertaining to parenting self-efficacy will also be valuable for more thoughtful consideration regarding these personal narratives. It is hoped that the current study will simultaneously offer valuable insights for the field of gifted and talented education as well as support family relations and development within this population.

Conclusion

Now that the nation is more cognizant of the inner workings and needs of children, there is hope that the inequalities and differences among them will be more readily recognized so that all may be properly accommodated. Parents of G/T children, in particular, may now take full advantage of developing research that better defines the G/T child and identifies his or her social and emotional needs. This information might provide support for parents who may struggle in their parenting role to such a child.

It remains clear that there are complex and challenging intellectual, social, and emotional issues that parents of G/T students might endure, and many are not confident in their parental abilities. The arduous stress and anxiety that may accompany the G/T label can quickly become burdensome, and, without guidance and support, the parenting decisions made may be misunderstood or judged harshly. Therefore, to help promote and maintain confidence and a positive self-efficacy for these parents so that their intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships might improve and become more satisfying for all involved, it is important that their voices be heard and their experiences considered.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

In this chapter, the methods used for the current study are outlined. All aspects of the research – including the research design, research questions, identification of case study participants, data collection procedures, methodological assumptions, limitations, instrumentation, trustworthiness, and the data analysis plan – will be reviewed.

Research Design

This research study was qualitative in design. Qualitative research methods may be utilized when a researcher intends to explore an issue and discover its elements in order to later give it voice by illustrating its intimate parts in story form. It is an approach based on empirical resources, such as thoughtful and introspective communications and observations, that allude to and highlight meaningful lived experiences (Creswell, 1998). Qualitative approaches may be time-consuming and laborious for researchers who must broadly plan an inquiry approach. Moreover, gathering information from an extensive array of sources that might involve unexpected issues and evolve in unpredicted ways may also be challenging. The results, however, are worthwhile as personal truths are revealed in thoughts, feelings, and perceptions that emerge during personal, shared communications between the researcher and the participants.

According to Creswell (1998), the five qualitative study types include: (a) biographical life history, (b) phenomenology, (c) grounded theory, (d) ethnography, and (e) case study. For the purposes of this study, the researcher chose a case study design where the mode of communication was parent interviews so that a more intimate look at the participants' personal narratives could be considered both individually and collectively. While participants shared their accounts, they were granted an opportunity

to interpret their own experiences. Participants were mothers only; future research is planned in order to better understand the lived experience of fathers, as well. However, Bowen (1978) saw the mother as the vital instrument in therapeutic counseling sessions and initially included only her in parent-child sessions because of the influential and impactful role she had on the mental and emotional health and well-being of her son or daughter. Consequently, the researcher chose to narrow the focus by following in Bowen's initial steps as seen in his concept development by using the mother only. Furthermore, like Bowen who only later involved the father and siblings in the whole family equation approach, the researcher too plans future research that will involve the father (Kerr, 2013).

One interview, the primary source of data, for each of the eight participants was conducted in order to delve deeper into lived experiences and take a more analytical look at emotional complexities of these mothers. Since Bowen's theory (1978) indicates that anxiety, for instance, is groundwork for solidified fusion and since the researcher understands that heightened parental sensitivities may be present when raising G/T children, the researcher hoped to identify and provide a foundation for applying Bowen's family system theory to the G/T field where one might better understand how triangulation is possible both within the family unit and externally within society so that differentiation might be reached and self-efficacy enhanced. Consequently, one interview was adequate for this particular study. This approach enabled the researcher to attend simultaneously to both the thoughts and feelings that mothers may have toward parenting a G/T child as well as the perceptions these mothers may have toward societal opinions, expectations, and acceptance of both the mothers themselves and their G/T child. It also

allowed the researcher to consider the dynamic, complicated relationships that mothers have with their children and others within the home, as well as those figures outside of the home, either within an extended family or society (e.g., friendships, school mothers, acquaintances). As was hoped, there were recognized similarities and patterns revealed in the shared narratives regarding the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of participants within their parenting role as mothers to G/T children.

The researcher provided opportunities for mothers to share personal thoughts, feelings, and perceptions in a nonthreatening environment during a one-on-one dialogue. Data came directly from demographic surveys completed by the participants, analytic memos including observations of nonverbal reactions (e.g., discomfort), informant-researcher communications transcribed post-interview, and artifacts provided by the informant. In some instances, during the analysis phase of the study, the researcher did have to reach out and ask follow-up questions for clarity, but the questions were not feeling-based questions; they were more about demographics (e.g., ages of non-G/T peers, student awards and recognition) or requests for artifacts.

The interview discussions revealed the nuanced, layered and complex lived experiences of the mothers raising a G/T child. It was believed that limitations could occur if the mother chose to end the session early or if there was resistance and withheld information from the mother or if the mothers could not articulate her thoughts, feelings, and perspectives adequately; however, all mothers participated openly throughout all of the interviews. There were some who were more articulate than others and there were some who were better able to recall experiences and identify and explain personal thoughts and feelings regarding those experiences, but all had stories and all were

willingly to share. From the shared narratives, the researcher noted that some of the participants might have had fewer experiences with a G/T child if the child was only recently identified, for instance, or if the mother was surrounded by like-minded and supportive peers and neighbors.

Research Questions

This study was designed to answer the following questions:

Research Question One: What are the lived experiences and social, emotional, and educational concerns and challenges of mothers raising G/T children?

Research Question Two: What perceptions might these mothers have regarding society's opinion and understanding of their G/T child as well as the mothers themselves in their parenting role to such a child?

Research Question Three: What are the coping mechanisms used in significant socially, emotionally, and educationally challenging situations?

Study Participants

Research participants were eight Caucasian/Non-Hispanic mothers currently living in the southern parts of Louisiana who have at least one classified G/T child between the ages of five and seventeen enrolled (or eligible for enrollment) in either public or private gifted and/or talented education classes. The National Association for Gifted Children (2010) defines the G/T child as one who can

Demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains. Domains include any structured area of activity with its own symbol system (e.g., mathematics, music, language) and/or set of sensorimotor skills (e.g., painting, dance, sports).

Parental participation was open-enrollment, and the participants were introduced to the study in a number of ways which include (a) personal invitations (via call, text, email, social media outlet inbox message) by the researcher, a 22-year veteran teacher with 17 years experience teaching gifted secondary students and a mother to both a classified G/T son as well as a classified talented son and (b) oral or written communications and invitations from others involved or knowledgeable about the study and who knew the researcher personally and professionally. Many participants were willing and enthusiastically agreed to participate. The lack of participant racial diversity may parallel the underrepresentation of minority students in the nationwide G/T population.

Results from completed demographic surveys indicated that there was variation in ages amongst the participants. One of the mothers was in the 31 to 35-year age range, two were in the 36 to 40-year age range, and five were in the 41 or above age range. The number of underage children currently living in the home also varied amongst the participants as did the number of classified G/T children. Two had one G/T child currently living at home; three had two children currently living at home but where only one was classified G/T; one had three classified G/T children living at home; two had four where, of these two, one mother had two of the four classified G/T and the other had only one classified G/T living at home. Table 3.1 presents the ages of both the informant and her G/T child(ren) as well as the number of non-G/T siblings residing in the home. Two of the women were classified G/T themselves, and two of the biological fathers were said to have been classified G/T. Two of the women claim to have siblings or

siblings-in-law with a classified G/T child(ren). Lastly, half of the participants claim to have close friends who also have classified G/T children.

Table 3.1. Demographic Information Characterizing Participants and Children

| Case # | Mother (age) | G/T child (age; age of identification) | G/T child (age; age of identification) | G/T child (age; age of identification) | # of Non G/T siblings (age(s)) |
|--------|------------------|--|--|--|--------------------------------|
| 1 | Beth (41+) | Blake (11; 7) | | | 0 |
| 2 | Sarah (36) | Colin (10; 4) | Frank (8; 4) | | 2 (5; 3) |
| 3 | Rochelle (31-35) | Joe (6; 4) | | | 1 (4 mo) |
| 4 | Gina (41+) | Samuel (9; 7) | | | 1 (16 mo) |
| 5 | Jamie (41+) | Ann (17; 8) | Seth (15; 11) | Amy (10; 5) | 0 |
| 6 | April (36-40) | Chris (7; 7) | | | 1 (7) |
| 7 | Claire (41+) | Thomas (15; 6) | | | 0 |
| 8 | Adele (41+) | London (14; 8) | | | 3 (15, 10, 10) |

Although not planned or expected, all were married; however, the socioeconomic status varied amongst the participants. The United States Census Bureau reports that the

median household income (2010-2014) for Louisiana residents was \$44,991 (Quick Facts). For the study participants, however, one mother was in the \$40,000 to \$65,000 annual household income range, one was in the \$65,5000 to \$85,000 annual household income range, one was in the \$85,500 to \$100,000 annual household income range, none were in the \$100,500 to \$125,000 annual household income range, and five were in the \$125,000 or above annual household income range. Comparing the differentiation of participant annual household income to that of the state's median household income, the researcher found probable parallels in minority underrepresentation.

Two of the women were from extremely rural communities; of these women, one admitted that her son was the only G/T child on the elementary campus. The other women were all from suburban/urban areas. Two of these six mothers had children enrolled in private schools. Both schools were elite in their communities and tuition (plus registration fees) for one was almost \$1,000 per child with a small discount for the second child. This mother was paying close to \$2,000 per year for her two children to attend. The other mother was paying well over \$25,000 (including tuition and registration fees) for her four children's private school education. Of the eleven G/T children between the participants, five are elementary age and, except for one who is being homeschooled this year, are enrolled in at least one G/T enrichment class. One of the five is also enrolled in a G/T Talented Visual Arts class. Three children are in middle school. Of the three, one has selected Pre-Advanced Placement (AP) classes this year over the offered G/T classes; however, his mother regrets this decision and is considering G/T placement for the following academic year. The final three are in enrolled in high school G/T-AP courses, and two of the three are also enrolled in a G/T Talented Visual Arts class.

Data Collection Procedures

Once permission was granted for the study from the dissertation committee, approval from the Louisiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was the necessary first step in the data collection procedure for conducting the research study. To acquire this approval, the researcher provided an application that included (a) the application form, (b) a brief description of the study, (c) the Informed Consent, (d) a Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training, and (e) a signed IRB Security of Data Agreement. The IRB granted permission on August 30, 2016, and once this permission was granted, the researcher immediately sought out potential participants.

The majority of participants were personally invited by the researcher either orally (e.g., phone conversations; face-to-face discussions) or in writing (e.g., text, email, Facebook in-box message). The others were introduced to the study through snowball sampling methods where external sources were asked to recommend participants. Once an interest was expressed via phone, text, email, or Facebook inbox, potential participants were sent an email with further explanation of the study; the email included an informed consent which emphasizes that their participation was strictly voluntarily. There were at least twenty interested parties willing to schedule interviews and participate in the study; however, the researcher used only the eight who could schedule within the month of September. None of the participants knew each other and there was no opportunity for any of them to meet. Moreover, although none of the participants were given cash compensation, all were given a token of appreciation at the start of the interview which consisted of a Bath and Body Works soap and lotion gift set that valued at no more than fifteen dollars.

The interviews were conducted in a number of locations at the recommendation and choice selection of the participant. Two were conducted within the home of the participant; two were conducted in the classroom (as two participants were teachers themselves); two were in coffee and/or ice cream parlors; one was conducted in the university office of the researcher and another in the university office of the participant. Data came directly from these one-on-one interviews where the researcher informed parents of the nature of the study as well as had participants fill out a Louisiana State University informed consent form. The interviews offered a more intimate understanding of the participant; her situational environment as both parent and provider; her network of support and peer relationships; her G/T child as well as his or her habits and behaviors; her G/T child's sibling relationships (if any) as well as his or her relationships with others outside of the home; her G/T child's educational environment and district opportunities; her conflicts, struggles, and concerns relating to societal expectations and demands of both she and her G/T child; her stress management; and the family dynamic within the family unit. It also provided an opportunity for her to share her emotional complexities, struggles, and conflict if she so chose. The scheduled venue and time of day for the interviews were set up to accommodate the participant and convenient meeting times for the parent were scheduled in advance.

Before the interview officially began, participants were asked to fill out a demographic sheet in order to direct the participants' attention to the subject and the formality of the methodological approach. This provided time also allowed both the informant and the researcher a chance to familiarize themselves with each other as well as the space, a nonthreatening and conducive environment for such a one-on-one

dialogue to occur. Once complete and submitted, the researcher used the back of the demographic sheet for analytic memos where observations and thoughts were documented. Observations included displayed emotions (e.g., teary eyes) or anxiety and discomfort as seen in a lack of eye contact, fidgeting, and checking the time. Thoughts that the researcher may include in her analytic memos could relate to, for example, the child's level of giftedness or highlighted comments that the researcher wants to address.

The interview participants were provided an opportunity to share their personal narrative during the interview, and the communications revealed the nuanced, layered and complex lived experiences of the mothers raising a G/T child(ren). The researcher asked the following open-ended questions:

Interview Question One: Tell me about your son's/daughter's strongest gift/talent and what sets him/her apart from his/her peers.

Interview Question Two: Tell me what pleases and excites you the most (even if you can't voice it to others) regarding these gifts/talents and his/her future possibilities.

Interview Question Three: Tell me about a really bad day for your G/T child where he/she was misunderstood by others.

Interview Question Four: Tell me about an experience where your G/T child was treated unfairly or where there was discomfort or resistance (e.g., jealousy, frustration) from others (e.g., classmates, teachers, coaches).

Interview Question Five: What might your biggest concern be (for both you and your child) resulting from such experiences?

Interview Question Six: How do you provide educational resources, intellectual assistance, and logical direction for your G/T child? Are you satisfied with your choices?

Interview Question Seven: Tell me what makes advocating for your G/T child and his/her rights and educational opportunities difficult.

Interview Question Eight: How do you provide emotional support for your G/T child?

Interview Question Nine: What is it like to be with other mothers who don't have G/T children? What might you wish was different?

Interview Question Ten: What might others who have never raised a G/T child think of parents of G/T children and their parenting role? In general, do you think these opinions are correct and justified? Please elaborate.

Interview Question Eleven: What challenges in raising a G/T child might others who have never raised such a child not understand? How might their image of you as a mother to a G/T child be erroneous?

Interview Question Twelve: Tell me about a time you withheld information about your G/T child – even when other mothers were sharing positive news or stories regarding their own child and his/her accomplishments. Why might this have happened?

Interview Question Thirteen: Having had time to reflect upon your experiences in raising a G/T child, tell me about any enlightening thoughts or new discoveries regarding these experiences? Has your opinion/attitude shifted in any way?

Interview Question Fourteen: Describe a/another time when the comments (or lack of comments) and actions by another adult (possibly a mother to a non-G/T child) caused tension and discomfort for you personally.

Interview Question Fifteen: Tell me about additional ways in which you might have adapted/adjusted your communications with others regarding your G/T child.

Interview Question Sixteen: If you knew that these feelings/experiences were common among mothers raising G/T children, how might your experiences – or reactions to them – change?

The questions asked during the interview process were created in an attempt to discover basic information concerning each participant and her family as well as to guide and assist the mother to be mindfully aware of thoughts and feelings resulting from lived experiences in raising a G/T child. The researcher was especially sensitive to the wide-range of emotional intensities that the sharing of such information might generate within the participant, and it was understood that the amount and intensity of information shared as well as the description and explanation for the lived experience would vary among the participants.

For the benefit of understanding the questions more thoroughly, participants were provided a copy of the sixteen questions at the start of the interview; however, for credibility and trustworthiness, all forms were retrieved and kept by the researcher. The interviews evolved organically despite the formality and semi-structured interview protocol. In addition to these set questions, the researcher may have had to rephrase the question(s) and/or elaborate for participant understanding. Further, additional questions emerged, helping the researcher better clarify and understand message content or pull supplementary information from the participant. These more emergent activities aided the researcher in gaining a deeper understanding of the informant narratives and their perspectives in raising a G/T child. Although individual responses and examples differed among participants, it was assumed that there would be common threads among the population. No additional interviews were needed; however, the researcher did contact a

few of the participants afterwards for clarification or added information and artifacts after the interview. During and immediately after the interviews, the researcher wrote analytic memos which included day, time, and location of interview as well as any relevant or inspired thoughts regarding the study analysis.

All oral communication with parent participants was audio recorded and transcribed after the interview by the researcher. Participant information was de-identified, and the voice recordings were deleted once the transcriptions were complete. Transcriptions were then forwarded to interview participant for member checking and participant approval. Some participants were also asked for documentation (e.g., photographs of artwork, test scores) for credibility.

Field Procedures

The researcher was open and honest with participants; there was no deception in the explanation of the nature and purpose of the study. Moreover, the researcher was to be considered by parent participants as an advocate for the G/T child and his or her family as well as a supportive, empathetic listener who attempts to understand the emotional complexities in raising a G/T child. Although the researcher may have responded accordingly and provided information to parent volunteers during interviews when asked, the researcher's role was not one of authority, and she was not to teach, befriend, problem solve, or counsel since the primary function was to elicit and expand upon numerous and descriptive lived experiences as well as an awareness of varied emotions resulting from these experiences. However, the researcher may have suggested reading materials or encouraged online or library research in order to aid the mother in understanding her situation and any feelings that may result from those experiences.

Thus, the purpose for sharing sources and information was to aid in parental enlightenment and enhance self-efficacy.

Researcher bias was avoided in order to increase trustworthiness and rigor. For instance, when collecting data, the researcher avoided leading questions during the interview as well as by utilizing analytic memos. Throughout the process, debriefings occurred with the co-principal investigator (PI) that helped protect the researcher from bias. In these debriefings, the co-PI “ask[ed] hard questions about methods, meaning, and interpretations” as well as allowed “opportunity for catharsis by sympathetically listening to the researcher’s feelings” (Creswell, 1998, p. 202). It was important that the researcher recognize in these discussions her “position and any biases or assumptions that impact the inquiry” (p. 202). Triangulation also occurred where artifacts and other sources of data were collected by the researcher in order to add evidence to parallel narratives and verify the trustworthiness of the participant. While analyzing and interpreting the data, the researcher also avoided bias by avoiding critique or evaluation of the shared narratives.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

The integrity of qualitative case studies has been judged in the past. Noble and Smith (2015) suggest that the vague, ambiguous rigor causes some to question the reliability and validity of the instrumentation, collection, and data analysis. Consequently, trustworthiness is contingent on credible data collected by an able, ethical, and unbiased researcher who understands that “multiple realities” may exist amongst the participants (p. 34). Thus, the researcher established trustworthiness and credibility in a number of ways before, during, and after the interview. Initially, the researcher gained the trust of

the participants through prolonged engagement (while they filled out a demographic sheet) by authenticating the project with a thorough description of the interview process and reminding them that the audio recording would accurately represent and document their lived experiences. Additionally, the researcher explained to the participant that the transcription would be completed by the researcher herself, and the participant was assured that all identifying information would be changed in the process and the recording completely destroyed immediately after the transcription was complete. The researcher also informed the mother that she would receive the attached transcription in an email for approval. The participant was aware that throughout the process any questions would respectfully be recognized, valued, and answered accordingly. Through the research-informant communications before, during, and after the interview as well as through the process itself, the participant should have sensed the integrity of the study and the researcher herself. Moreover, these conversations allowed the researcher to identify “what [was] salient to the study, relevant to the purpose of the study, and of interest for focus” (Creswell, 1998, p. 201).

The researcher also established trust and credibility by keeping analytic memos during and after the interviews, by meticulously transcribing the audio-recorded interviews, and by providing participants with a copy of the interview transcriptions (via email) for approval; participants had the option to edit and provide commentary. Triangulation also occurred where artifacts and other sources of data were collected by the researcher. The meticulously gathered demographics, notes, artifacts, and interview recordings as well as the accurate and informant-approved transcriptions and completely

destroyed recordings also established trustworthiness and added credibility to the researcher and the study.

Additionally, trustworthiness is seen in debriefings between the investigator and the co-principal investigator (PI) as the researcher consulted the co-PI in order to avoid falling prey to impartiality. These discussions helped the researcher – both a teacher to G/T students as well as a mother to a G/T child – recognize personal perspectives about the data and consider instead a more favorable approach that highlighted the data through a theoretical lens. In order to ensure that the application of the theoretical framework was consistent and applied across cases, the co-PI for the study (major professor) and the researcher held case conferences via email and telephone to discuss findings, consider how themes were being coded, and how the analysis was framed as situated within the context of family systems theory.

Ethical Issues:

Of utmost importance within the field of qualitative research is “seeking consent, avoiding the conundrum of deception, maintaining confidentiality, and protecting the anonymity of individuals” (Creswell, 1998, p. 19-20). Thus, the researcher fulfilled such ethical duties by first obtaining informed consents and then by maintaining participant trust and avoiding deceit through the accurate retelling of shared information. Moreover, the researcher also upheld confidentiality by masking all distinguishing characteristics that may have identified a participant and her G/T child by providing pseudonyms for all named individuals, locations, and venues from study communications. Voice recordings were destroyed immediately after transcribed communications. Moreover, analytic memos (as both hard copies and on an electronically-saved, password-protected thumb

drive) will be filed and stored safely in the home office of the researcher, and original identifying information will be immediately changed during the process.

Data Analysis

Analysis of data continued post-interview during the transcription process and afterwards when the transcripts were repetitively reviewed. Creswell (1998) suggests there are several spiral loops that one engages in through the analysis process, including collection and then management of data; reading and annotating the data; describing, classifying, and interpreting the data; and finally representing and visualizing the data (Figure 8.1, p. 143). After collection, in order to manage the data, each interview transcript was saved as a separate file. Demographics and analytic memos were also studied on numerous occasions when the researcher was attempting to gather a more complete picture of the population and better understand the specifics of each participant's environment and family structure. The information also allowed the researcher to consider the mother's reaction to questions posed by the study. Additionally, artifacts were used as corroborative data to support the classification of giftedness and/or talent; they were also used as evidence to support what the participant shared in her interview. Transcripts were entirely read multiple times in order to get a sense of tone within the narrative and better understand the mother's position within her demographic parental role and community.

Consequently, in the general reading and annotating analysis phase, the researcher first did a broad information review where typed annotations were made in the margins of each interview transcript, and identified key words, ideas, and phrases within the transcript were highlighted and noted. Once the researcher recognized commonalities

within the narratives, key words and ideas were sorted; emergent codes (Stuckey, 2015) were identified.

In the describing, classifying, and interpreting analysis phase, the researcher began to shape the narrative through “descriptive detail, classification, [and] interpretation” (Creswell, 1998, p. 144). Classifying the data enabled the researcher to identify common themes and subthemes that were easily recognized across cases in order to then classify and interpret codes found within each theme. To do this, each theme was highlighted in a different color and the data representing each pattern code was underlined in a different way (e.g., single underline, double underline, dashed underline). The researcher also created a table to present each code and corresponding theme. This enabled the researcher to better interpret the data. The initial summaries were then elaborated and expanded upon in a within-case analysis to represent the coded themes. The within-case analysis also enabled the researcher to recognize differences in the data depending upon location and school demographics. Cross case analysis comparisons were made where the researcher considered both the commonalities and differences as seen in the lived experience of each participant. Variations within life circumstances (e.g., rural/urban, private/public) were considered, as well. Using the theoretical framework, assertions were made.

The researcher attempted to identify commonalities amongst the study participants by using “*categorical aggregation*” where “the researcher seeks a collection of instances from the data, hoping that issue-relevant meanings will emerge” (italics and boldface in original, Creswell, 1998, p. 153-154; Stake, 1995). Additionally, “*direct interpretation*” was also utilized when the researcher considered “a single instance” in

order to derive significant interpretation (italics and boldface in original, p. 154; Stake, 1995). Finally, "*patterns*" were considered and "*naturalistic generalizations*" were made (italics and boldface in original, Creswell, 1998; Stake, 1995). More specifically, the analysis attempted to identify challenges and emotional complexities as described by parent participants and sort these into functioning coded categories thematically that allowed the researcher to generalize common experiences and stressors within their narrative and consider this was reflected in the concepts as found in Bowen's (1978) family system theory. In particular, the researcher used a categorical aggregation analysis where "a collection of instances" were found in order to see emerging "issue-relevant meanings" (Creswell, 1998, p. 153-154). Patterns were then discovered across case studies, and naturalistic generalizations followed from the data analysis. In order to ensure that the application of the theoretical framework was consistent and applied across cases, the co-PI for the study (major professor) and the researcher held case conferences to discuss findings, consider how themes were being coded and how the analysis was framed as situated within the context of family systems theory.

Methodological Assumptions

The objectives of the study were to (a) provide opportunities for mothers to reflect on and share personal experiences in both raising a G/T child and dealing with societal relations that are either directly or indirectly related to her role as mother to a G/T child, and (b) increase awareness of emotional complexities resulting from these lived experiences. During the one-on-one dialogues, it was assumed that mothers would openly share personal thoughts, feelings, and perceptions concerning their lived experiences in raising a G/T child. As the case study design allows, it was assumed that these women

would take the opportunity to interpret their own experiences while sharing their accounts. Also relating to the case study design, it was assumed that the researcher would be able to consider the personal narratives of each participant both individually and collectively with the intent to share these experiences without adding the philosophical aspect of a phenomenological research method. It is hoped that in future the parent participants will continue to be highly verbal in their thoughts and feelings and feel less isolated after initially sharing lived experiences that may have been unknown or suppressed before participating in the study.

Limitations

In this study, limitations were present. All parent participants were, for instance, white, middle class women. Moreover, although some were more articulate than others in expressing their stories as well as the thoughts and emotions that accommodated them and although some had been parenting a G/T child longer than others and thus had more experiences to draw from, all parents seemed to willingly and thoroughly divulge, deliver, and develop their narrative so that an accurate portrait was presented.

Chapter Summary

The qualitative, case study design methods successfully administered for the current study were identified in this chapter. The research design, research questions, and research participants have been presented as well as the procedures, methodological assumptions, limitations, and instrumentation to collect, analyze, and add credibility and trust to the data. The results of the study will be presented in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS OF DATA AND FINDINGS

Summary of the Study

The researcher considered the lived experiences of eight mothers currently living in the southern parts of Louisiana and raising at least one tested and classified G/T child between the ages of five and seventeen enrolled (or with the option to reenroll) in either public or private gifted and/or talented education classes. The purpose of the study was to add vital information to the field of G/T education by revealing the emotional experiences and unique challenges that some parents raising G/T children might encounter. Since the lived experiences of G/T children differ significantly from those of their non-G/T peers, the researcher considered it plausible that the lived experiences for parents raising G/T children would also differ from those parents raising non-G/T children. Thus, the researcher purposefully gathered data through interviews and observations that allowed participants to explain their experiences. It was hoped that these shared experiences would lead to both an enhanced understanding of the various factors influencing self-efficacy and family dynamics as well as provide an awareness of the uniquely defining experiences and perceptions of mothers currently raising G/T children. Additionally, the researcher wished to examine the commonalities amongst the parent participants that might explain stressors and individual thought patterns caused by raising a G/T child and dealing with perceived societal expectations and opinions. The researcher also hoped to consider how interpersonal relations affected parents' choices as well as the distinct internal and external reactions initiated by the words (or lack of words), thoughts, and actions of others. The research questions, participants' demographic information, and findings are all presented in this chapter.

Research Questions

For the purpose of this study, the researcher sought the answers to three questions:

Research Question One: What are the lived experiences and social, emotional, and educational concerns and challenges of mothers raising G/T children?

Research Question Two: What perceptions might these mothers have regarding society's opinion and understanding of their G/T child as well as them in their parenting role to such a child?

Research Question Three: What are the coping mechanisms used in significant socially, emotionally, and educationally challenging situations?

Data Analysis Procedures

Analysis of data continued post-interview during the transcription process and afterwards when the transcripts were repetitively reviewed. Demographics and analytic memos were also studied on numerous occasions when the researcher was attempting to gather a more complete picture of the population and better understand the specifics of each participant's environment and family structure. The information also allowed the researcher to consider the mother's reaction to questions posed by the study.

Additionally, artifacts were used as corroborative data to support the classification of giftedness and/or talent; they were also used as evidence to support what the participant shared in her interview. Transcripts were entirely read multiple times in order to get a sense of tone within the narrative and better understand the mother's position within her demographic parental role and community. Consequently, in the general analysis, the researcher first did a broad information review where typed annotations were made in the margins of each interview transcript, and identified themes and narratives representing

such themes were pulled for inclusion within the report. A within-case analysis would later follow initial descriptions of summarized narratives where the researcher provided a “detailed description of the case and its setting,” for the researcher concluded that were differences in the data depending upon location and school demographics (Creswell, 1998, p. 153). Cross case analysis comparisons were made where the researcher considered both the commonalities and differences as seen in the lived experience of each participant. Variations within life circumstances (e.g., rural/urban, private/public) were considered, as well. Using the theoretical framework, assertions were made.

After the initial overview and generalized summary, the researcher identified themes easily recognized across cases in order to then classify and interpret codes found within each theme. To do this, each theme was highlighted in a different color and the data representing each pattern code was underlined in a different way (e.g., single underline, double underline, dashed underline). The researcher also created a table to present each code and corresponding theme. The initial summaries were then elaborated and expanded upon in the within-case analysis to represent the coded themes.

The researcher attempted to identify commonalities amongst the study participants. More specifically, the analysis attempted to identify challenges and emotional complexities as described by parent participants and sort these into functioning coded categories thematically that allowed the researcher to generalize common experiences and stressors within their narrative and consider this was reflected in the concepts as found in Bowen’s (1978) family system theory. In particular, the researcher used a categorical aggregation analysis where “a collection of instances” were found in order to see emerging “issue-relevant meanings” (Creswell, 1998, p. 153-154). Patterns

were then discovered across case studies, and naturalistic generalizations followed from the data analysis. In order to ensure that the application of the theoretical framework was consistent and applied across cases, the co-PI for the study (major professor) and the researcher held case conferences to discuss findings, consider how themes were being coded and how the analysis was framed as situated within the context of family systems theory.

Within Case Analysis Findings

The researcher was able to familiarize herself with the lived experiences of the participants by using a within-case analysis. This method allowed the researcher to discover similarities and differences as well as patterns and themes among the participants. Table 4.1 presents the case codes and themes found across the study. Although not all codes were seen in all cases, all themes were readily recognized within all eight narratives.

Case #1

Beth is an elementary school teacher from a rural community who has a son currently in middle school. The community in which she lives does not seem to understand or support the G/T child as seen in the statistically low number of identified G/T students (especially minority) and lack of teacher recommendation. Beth's son was enrolled in a G/T enrichment program in elementary school where he was bussed to another campus once a week. Beth relayed that even though his experience while in the program was a positive one, Blake still asked to drop the G/T program once he entered middle school because of an understood stigma toward the G/T learner and the classes

offered to such students. When analyzing the interview transcription, several themes and subthemes emerged from the established coding of data (as shown in Table 4.2).

Table 4.1. Case Codes, Subthemes, and Themes

| Codes | Subthemes | Themes |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Child's Gifts and Talents Child's Accomplishments Child's Future Opportunities | Appreciation | Emotional Responses |
| Bragging Downplayed or Withheld Information Societal Interactions | Discomfort | |
| Frustration with Child, Spouse, or Sibling Relations Frustration with Educators or District Advocating for Educational Rights and Opportunities Interpersonal Relations Parenting Challenges Parenting Self-Efficacy Guilt and Remorse | Anxiety and Frustration | |
| Peer Stigma Masked Intelligence Work Ethic and Educational Experience Social Interactions Emotional Needs Negative Self Talk | Concern for Child | Parent Protective Factors |
| Asynchronous Development Child's Personality Child's Ability Child's Lifestyle | Misunderstanding of Child | |
| Mother's Decisions Mother's Challenges Parental Role Influence on Child's IQ and Academic Strengths | Misunderstanding of Mother | Misunderstanding of Mother |

Appreciation. Although Beth typically does not share such information with others, she revealed to the researcher an appreciation for Blake's gifts and talents,

accomplishments, and future opportunities. In fact, Beth considered Blake’s gifts and talents “*above and beyond everybody else*” and often wished she could tell others, “*My child’s brilliant!*” However, doing this would seemingly not be in Beth’s character since she admitted to being cautious about what she shares about Blake with others – even with her other adult children who can be jealous of Blake for his accomplishments.

Table 4.2. Codes, Subthemes, and Themes for Case #1

| Codes | Subthemes | Themes |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Child’s Gifts and Talents Child’s Accomplishments Child’s Future Opportunities | Appreciation | Emotional Responses |
| Fear of Bragging Downplayed or Withheld Information Societal Interactions | Discomfort | |
| Frustration with Child, Spouse, or Sibling Relations Frustration with Educators or District Parenting Challenges Parenting Self-Efficacy Guilt and Remorse | Anxiety and Frustration | |
| Social Interactions Masked Intelligence Work Ethic and Educational Experience Peer Stigma Emotional Needs | Concern for Child | Parent Protective Factors |
| Child’s Personality and Ability Asynchronous Development Child’s Lifestyle | Misunderstanding of Child | |
| Mother’s Challenges Parental Role | Misunderstanding of Mother | Misunderstanding of Mother |

Discomfort. It was apparent, therefore, that Beth has been cognizant of the reactions of others when she shared information about her son. This discomfort, as

recognized in a fear of bragging, one identified code, has caused Beth to withhold information, a second code, in the past. One time, however, Beth did something out of character. Rather than withhold information as she normally does, Beth shared a positive experience when her son won Student of the Year:

I don't *brag* on him... I really don't *talk*. [However,] I can think of a time with Student-of-the-Year when [other students were] nominated and [their parents] were on Facebook going, 'I'm so proud of my child.' And I'm thinking, *You should be very, very proud of your child*, [but] I didn't put *anything* up there about Blake... and then when he got [Student of the Year], I did put something up – and it was *very* hard for me to do because I didn't want to feel like I was *bragging* about him or making other parents feel *bad* or making the other ones around him envious of him. (italics to highlight participant emphasis in speech)

Beth recognized the discomfort this caused within her; however, the researcher noted that Beth's fear extended beyond herself; in Beth's reflection, she expressed concern for the way her son would possibly be treated by others as a result of this action.

Concern for child. Beth further disclosed that she is intensely sensitive to the way others not only “[look] at him to fail” but seem “to rejoice” and even “delight in Blake's failures.” This may have partly influenced Beth's decision to grant Blake's wish: to drop out of the G/T program once he entered middle school because of an understood stigma toward the G/T learner and the classes offered to such students. By staying in the program, Blake would be separating himself from his friends, the norm, and what the community deems important.

Misunderstanding of child. Part of this sensitivity and resulting frustration is in knowing how misunderstood her son is to both his same-age peers and adults. Beth said that “a lot of people don't understand” and “think [Blake has] it so easy.” In fact, just within the first month of school, Blake was gravely misunderstood by both an assistant principal and teacher. Beth's concern for the general misunderstandings of a G/T child as

well as the general misgivings toward the G/T label and the subsequent treatments that follow were evident as she shared these experiences. An awareness that continued misunderstandings, misgivings, and mistreatments could exacerbate a desire within Blake to mask his intelligence (as coded in the Concern for Child subtheme) in order to fit in with his non-G/T and even those lower-level G/T peers caused Beth to admit this fear to herself and the researcher. In fact, Beth claimed to already see problematic signs of this occurring when Blake spent time with a G/T peer – who she confessed may not be “*as gifted*” – and when he “*br[ought] his intellect down to be on that child’s level.*” Understandably, this concerned Beth who explained that she does not want her son “*to be ashamed of [his intelligence]*” or to do poorly academically in order to “*hide*” it.

Beth realized that misunderstandings will inevitably and naturally occur, and the researcher noted the support she provides for Blake on an emotional level when such experiences result; however, Beth wondered if the recent exclusion her son experienced is bothering him more than he admits. She was clearly bothered when Blake was the only one not “*invited to birthday parties,*” and recognized how hurtful those experiences were to her son. To help soothe his sadness, Beth will remind Blake who his real friends are and encourage him to look toward his bright future. Beth seemed confident that this approach was helpful in comforting Blake during these times; however, she did credit the interviews questions for making her ponder Blake’s emotional needs (as coded in Concern for Child subtheme) and whether it was possibility that he “*has more emotional needs than what [she] thought he had.*”

Anxiety and frustration. Other doubts regarding her self-efficacy seemed to present themselves when Beth showed a lack of confidence in her ability to challenge

Blake. Although she supports his academic journey and growth, Beth admitted that it was much easier when he was in elementary school and she, as an elementary teacher, could supply him with stimulating material. Now that he is in middle school, however, she admits that she does not “*know how to*” support him in that way. Another area where Beth’s self-efficacy may be affected is in misunderstanding Blake’s asynchronous development (as coded in the Misunderstanding of Child subtheme). It seemed that Beth was often frustrated when Blake was forgetful or when Blake did something she considered unwise or senseless. She shared an example of a conversation she had with Blake when he was seemingly coerced to do something she found irritatingly reckless. At the time, she relayed a similar message to Blake regarding his choice.

How could you sign a piece of paper in the office saying that you said that when you didn’t say that? How could you let someone intimidate you? You’re almost 12-years-old. You’re gifted; you’re smart; you’re supposed to think like *I think!* How could you do that? (italics to highlight participant emphasis in speech)

After reflecting upon this experience, she admitted to feeling guilt as a recognition of being “*really hard on him*” set in.

Misunderstanding of mother. Having a community of mothers with similar experiences might positively affect Beth and help spark a deeper awareness, strengthen her self-efficacy, and lessen her feelings of guilt and frustration. Beth admitted that she would “*definitely feel more support*” knowing that other mothers to G/T children were experiencing “*the same thing*” and that it was “*not something weird in [her] character.*” She sensed society may not have a clear understanding of how difficult it is to parent a G/T child; in fact, Beth claimed that “*in some ways, it’s a little bit of a harder [of a] job because you expect things more.*” She shared challenges that she wished others would consider.

Some people do not understand that he always has to be stimulated. He always has to be kind of challenged. He always has to be thinking. You have to always be on your toes; you always have to know the answers because he's going to tell you you're wrong.

Despite these feelings, Beth continues to withhold information (as coded in Discomfort subtheme) about both her son and his accomplishments as well as the difficult challenges experienced and anxieties felt in her role as mother to such a child.

Case #1 Assertions

The data gathered from Beth's narrative enhanced the researcher's understanding of several concepts as seen in Bowen's family system theory (1978). Since external and internal misunderstanding can spark anxiety and since, according to Bowen's theory, anxiety will affect all within the family unit, it becomes clear that the G/T child's heightened sensitivities will parallel the mother's heightened anxiety. Moreover, since Dabrowski's theory (1964, 1966) suggests that the higher one's IQ, the more heightened the sensitivity, it can be assumed that the higher the IQ of the child, the more exacerbated the mother's heightened anxieties may be.

Nuclear family emotional process. Beth shared a number of stories which highlights Blake's anxiety amongst peers in an academic setting. For example, knowing the stigma attached to the G/T classes in the rural community in which they live, Blake requested to exit the G/T program. Since then, Beth claims that others still "*rejoice*" in his failures. Her willingness to grant his request – despite her misgivings – represents fusion. Moreover, knowing that her child is misunderstood and is treated differently (e.g., party exclusions) creates added anxiety within the family unit, and causes, for Beth, additional concern that Blake may mask his intelligence in order to fit in. Even though Beth questioned whether Blake was masking his emotional well-being, Beth seemed to

sense that Blake was experiencing problematic tension nevertheless and seemed to innately felt his pain when excluded from parties – despite her efforts to elevate his mood. Beth initially thought that Blake was coping well in such situations; however, the conversations gave Beth pause (and possible discomfort and anxiety) as she considered whether Blake may be more bothered by these events than what she originally thought.

Triangles. The discomfort felt by Beth can be seen in a couple of triangulations. First, it was apparent, when Beth shared stories involving the relations Blake has with his older siblings, that despite the ages and living outside the home, Beth’s other children may already feel the fused relationship between Beth and Blake. Additionally, Beth admitted that she withholds information occasionally because of discomfort. By doing this, Beth is putting the external *other* in the outside (and unwanted) position and gravitating inward to her fused relationship with Blake.

Emotional cutoff. Blake requesting to exit the G/T program in order to relieve anticipated future discomfort is an example of emotional cutoff as well as Beth removing her thoughts and narratives from conversations where she withholds information. Emotional cutoff may also be seen in Beth’s justification as to why she feels like she can no longer adequately stimulate and challenge Blake now that he is no longer in elementary school, her specialized area.

Family projection process. The researcher was not able to identify the effects of Beth’s projected anxiety onto Blake as it was out of the scope of this study. However, it might be concluded, based on Bowen’s Family System Theory (1978), that Beth’s anxiety – both absorbed from Blake and from her own from internal and external sources

– has created added anxiety within Blake which, in turn, continues the cycle. If the G/T label is looked at as an “ailment” causing mental and emotional well-being complications, it can create an intense child focus that can exacerbate the problem. Moreover, it can spark added concern in the parent when G/T traits and behaviors confirm this “ailment” and influence parent to treat child in a special way. Research asserts that the more a child comes to depend on this specialized attention and affirmation, the more fused the relations between parent and child.

Multigenerational transmission process. The researcher did not consider the multigenerational transmission process in this study; however, the research does plan to consider this in future studies.

Sibling position. Blake is the youngest child to Beth and the only child leaving at home. The researcher noted a child focus and may exacerbate anxieties experienced by both Beth and her G/T son.

Differentiation of self. The researcher did not note differentiation of self; however, future studies will consider how parents to G/T child can detach from fused relationships and anxiety.

Societal emotional process. The researcher noted societal emotional process in several areas within Beth’s lived experience. Facebook, for instance, has caused Beth some anxiety and discomfort and, as a result, Beth found it difficult to affirm Blake’s Student-of-the-Year win to others. Additionally, Beth admitted that she felt discomfort when she perceived that Blake was treated wrongfully or misunderstood by others, and the rural community in which she lives has created a community that stigmatizes G/T learners and made it difficult for them to feel a part of the whole.

Case #2

Sarah is a stay-at-home mother of four children in a suburban area about twenty minutes from a major urban downtown area. She is currently homeschooling Colin, age ten, as a result of expressed ongoing issues with the school system not reaching his academic needs as well as personal desires resulting from strained interpersonal peer relations. Her second son, age eight, is enrolled in a self-contained, all-day gifted class with 12 other G/T students. The two youngest children (ages five and three) have not been tested or identified as of yet. Both Sarah and her sons are fortunate to be in a community that provides much opportunity (when compared to rural and even some urban areas) for the G/T learner, but Sarah showed signs of this awareness and displayed gratitude. She credited the district's G/T coordinator who mentors and educates parents. When Sarah is discouraged with the system or wants to advocate for her children's G/T rights and opportunities, she admitted to taking full advantage of this resource and has established a personal relationship with this coordinator-now-friend. They apparently speak often and Sarah has seemingly come to depend upon her for sound advice in decision-making, advocacy, and understanding her G/T sons. When analyzing the interview transcription, several themes and subthemes emerged from the established coding of data (as shown in Table 4.3).

Appreciation. Sarah “love[s] that school will not be an obstacle for [her G/T sons].” In fact, she seemingly does not want to take their educational opportunities lightly or for granted, for she explained that these opportunities are actually “*an asset*” for both boys because she knows “*it’s somewhere where they can feel affirmed*” and possibly find their self-worth.

Table 4.3. Codes, Subthemes, and Themes for Case #2

| Codes | Subthemes | Themes |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Child's Gifts and Talents Child's Accomplishments Child's Future Opportunities | Appreciation | Emotional Responses |
| Fear of Bragging Downplayed or Withheld Information Societal Interactions | Discomfort | |
| Frustration with Child, Spouse, or Sibling Relations Frustration with Educators or District Advocating for Educational Rights and Opportunities Interpersonal Relations Parenting Challenges Parenting Self-Efficacy Guilt and Remorse | Anxiety and Frustration | |
| Social Interactions Masked Intelligence Work Ethic and Educational Experience Emotional Needs Negative Self Talk | Concern for Child | Parent Protective Factors |
| Child's Personality and Ability | Misunderstanding of Child | |
| Mother's Decisions Mother's Challenges Parental Role Influence on Child's IQ and Academic Strengths | Misunderstanding of Mother | Misunderstanding of Mother |

Anxiety and frustration. Although Sarah expressed appreciation for what some teachers have done to help her highly G/T sons in the past, she expressed frustration with other educators who she felt were undereducated in understanding the G/T learner, untrained in recognizing how to support the G/T learner, or unwilling to be flexible in

their professional approach in dealing the G/T learner. Sarah shared one experience when Colin's first grade teacher insisted that he slow his learning (and excitement for learning) down in order to grasp "*the nuts-and-bolts of school – which he could have figured out in, you know, two days but we spent a whole year sort of battling.*" This experience in particular was so frustrating for Sarah that she elected to homeschool Colin for the remainder of that academic term. Despite her frustration with this teacher and others like her, however, her bigger complaint was with administrative decisions denying G/T opportunities, and this is partly why Sarah has opted once again to remove Colin from traditional public school and allow him to remotely attend an online school from home. In this nontraditional approach to learning, Sarah reported that Colin excels; she said that he completed Algebra I during the summer and is now enrolled in Geometry and loves being able to move through academics at his own pace.

Concern for child. Possibly, as Sarah suggested, Colin may feel more at ease in this type of academic setting because he struggles with peer relations. She elaborated on his expressed frustration and said that he has, on more than one occasion, said that his interests, to his same-age peers, are "*stupid and they just hate it.*" In her reflection, Sarah admitted that Colin was misunderstood by his peers (Misunderstanding of Child, a separate subtheme), for she thought they found him to be "*a little stand-offish*" and to not "*know how to have fun.*" Additionally, she thought that Colin, as a perfectionist, "*stand[s] out in a group of middle school boys*" and the discomfort this has caused him is another reason why he prefers to learn from home. Sarah shared an experience where Colin was selected as Student-of-the-Year and was the recipient to the most awards on Awards Day. She was mindful of what the experience did to Colin on an intellectual and

emotional level, and she appeared sad as she described watching him walk to the stage to receive his awards.

There was, you know, sort of polite applause and then right after him came the girl who won Most Congenial or whatever and the whole place – the whole student body – there was loud cheering. So I think that was a disconnect to him like, ‘My school *says* they value academics, but what they really value is popularity,’ so for him, I guess, that would be some jealousy with, you know, ‘I’m excelling but I’m not getting these kind of accolades because my [gifts and talents] just doesn’t fit socially. It’s just not acceptable or exciting to people.’ (italics to highlight participant emphasis in speech)

Consequently, Sarah’s account suggests that learning remotely from home has provided stress relief for both she and her son since it has removed him from a “*demotivating [and] demoralizing*” setting where disappointments such as these are more likely to unfold. Sarah seemed pleased that Colin is thriving in this remote learning environment where he can progress at his own pace and not be subjected to uncomfortable social scenes. Providing this opportunity is seemingly one of the many ways in which Sarah supports her son emotionally and academically.

Frank, according to Sarah’s account, is quite the opposite, for he tends to make friends easily and “*thrives in social situations.*” Additionally, she explained that he is “*most creative*” and enjoys expressing himself artistically. Although different from his brother, Sarah described Frank’s brilliance and conveyed a sense of relief in articulating how she “*love[s] that school will not be an obstacle for [either of] them.*” Frank’s academic journey, however, has not been an easy one because, according to Sarah, he not only compares himself to Colin (coded as Frustration with Sibling Relations in the Anxiety and Frustration subtheme) but he also struggles with memorization-type activities. Sarah expressed concern that his negative self-talk makes things more challenging for Frank when he allows himself to feel that “*he’s not good*” enough and

that he “*doesn't belong*” in his G/T program; she seemed fearful that this negative banter might eventually affect his work ethic. Sarah said that during these moments when the boys doubt their ability, she reminds them that struggle is part of life and that most students struggle “*with everything*.” This reminder is another way Sarah emotionally and intellectually supports her sons. Sarah also shared that the family receives additional support through participation in both church and sporting activities where she seems to value the subtle messages “*letting [Colin and Frank] know it's not only academics*” and the lessons learned that help the boys find balance. Although Sarah expressed an understanding that such activities help develop the “*whole person*,” she still expressed a sense of regret that she has not done a better job “*trying to nurture*” interpersonal relationships which she seems to know will help build confidence and therapeutically relieve stress and anxiety. Stimulated by this desire, Sarah said she plans to make this a priority.

Misunderstanding of mother. During her reflection, Sarah recognized the importance of having positive interpersonal relations to support her, as well. She admitted that there were few people who understood her challenges, and she admitted that she often felt misunderstood in her role as a parent to G/T children. More specifically, Sarah seemed to think that people typically think that “*if your kids are really bright... you must be drilling them nonstop*.” She remembered that, when Colin was reading at age two, she felt discomfort and anxiety (a separate subtheme) when “[p]eople looked at me like I was an animal” and “*a Nazi... a horrible mom*.” Beyond feeling judged, she seemed to quickly learn from such experiences that many do not understand the difficulties in raising a G/T child.

I think a lot people who have not raised a child like this don't realize how much energy it really requires and that if you don't support them, emotionally, they're going to start to unravel.... Their kids are *crying* about homework. They get [that, but m]y kid's crying because he doesn't have enough homework. They don't understand how that's possible, but they're connected – the emotional and the academic. So, I think, there's a gap there where people don't really understand that sometimes having the gifted child is very similar to having a struggling child. It's just on the other side of the spectrum, and you don't get any sympathy. You know, people are like, 'Oh, poor you! Your kid's brilliant,' you know, but, I think, emotionally, it brings all sorts of challenges. You know, to have that and it's not as socially acceptable to push for... *I want my kid in AP* or whatever. It's *totally* socially acceptable to say, *My kid can't read and he needs help.* (italics to highlight participant emphasis in speech)

Sarah was able to articulate misconceptions many may have regarding G/T children and their parents, and she seemed to wish that more people understand how difficult it is “*keeping up with them [and] keeping them challenged*” as well as understand the challenge in “*trying to push them in uncomfortable situations.*” Sarah shared that she often feels misunderstood and that, instead of “*wearing [her]self out,*” people feel that she should “*just take the easy street.*” Because of this mentality, Sarah admitted that she is now leery of sharing her experiences (coded as Withheld Information in Discomfort subtheme) with most. She already feels, for example, that she is “*losing some respect*” with her sister who does not understand her decision to alter her “*whole life*” in order to accommodate Colin's academic needs. Accordingly, when Sarah finally found a mother to another highly G/T child, she said their conversations felt “*so freeing*” because she was finally able to share openly.

Discomfort. Sarah admitted that “*it's hard to communicate*” when speaking of her sons and their accomplishments to others. She expressed feelings of guilt (as coded in the Anxiety and Frustration subtheme) because she, like Beth, does not want to brag. She explained that she does catch herself “*try[ing] to downplay*” the gifts and talents of her

sons when communicating with others, but she also seemed to recognize the vital role she plays in “*his understanding of his giftedness;*” she admitted, therefore, that she will be more aware of withholding information and downplaying accomplishments in the future because she does not want to give the wrong impression if either one of her sons overhears such communications. Overall, Sarah seemed confident in her parenting role; however, she admitted that her “*insecurities are liabilities*” and that she has “*car[ed] too much about what other people think,*” and this has caused her to “*underperform as their advocate.*” Sarah’s awareness could help her take more aggressive steps in advocating for her sons and implementing positive change which, in turn, could prevent future anxiety, relieve stress, and enhance her self-efficacy as a parent to two G/T children.

Case #2 Assertions

The data gathered from Sarah’s narrative further enhanced the researcher’s understanding of Bowen’s family system theory (1978).

Nuclear family emotional process. Sarah’s stories highlighted her anxiety and concern for her children and their social interactions and learning opportunities and environments as well as her discomfort with those who offer no understanding or support toward the G/T child. These emotional complexities have seemingly caused Sarah to further fuse herself with her sons and those advocates for the G/T child.

Triangles. The discomfort and anxieties felt by Sarah can be seen in a couple of triangulations. First, it was apparent, that there were triangles that extended outside of the family unit between Sarah, her son(s), and those not in understanding or support of either of them. Another triangle included Sarah, her mentor, and those undereducated administrators and teachers who were also unsupportive of her sons. Within the extended

family, there was mention of a sister who did not show understanding and empathy with Sarah or her parenting choices. When this happened or when society, in general, seemed unsupportive, Sarah would seemingly gravitate inward to her fused relationship with her sons and withdraw both physically from the environment or withdraw mentally and emotionally from the conversation by cutting herself off from either the group or the topic at hand.

Emotional cutoff. By Sarah granting permission for Colin to learn from home in order to relieve discomfort as well as to avoid the accompanied heightened sensitivities displayed with interpersonal interactions, Sarah has allowed Colin to emotionally cut himself off from conflict, and, although it does temporarily seem to fix the problem, Bowen's theory suggests that the problem will still be lurking in the recesses of his mind. Additionally, Sarah had emotionally cut herself off from discomfort and anxiety-producing situations by either fusing with her mentor and allowing her to suggest and encourage choice decisions and actions or by withdrawing either emotionally or vocally with others.

Family projection process. The researcher was not able to identify the effects of Sarah's projected anxiety onto her sons. However, she did mention that she needed to be more socially aware when either Colin or Frank were present and listening in on conversations. She indicated that she seemingly understood the damage not crediting them or offering the well-deserved praise and recognition could cause. Thus, it may be assumed, based on Bowen's family system theory (1978), that Sarah's indirect or hidden anxiety might still be projected and be absorbed by her sons. Moreover, similar to Beth, if

the G/T label is looked at in this family unit as something special that must be handled with care, it can create an intense child focus that can exacerbate the problem.

Sibling position. Colin is followed by Frank, and, although both are classified G/T, Sarah indicated that Frank, at times, lacks self-esteem because he follows a brother who is brilliant and skilled in so many areas. Sarah also said that Frank thrives in creative outlets and has no difficulty in social settings and peer interactions; resulting from this information, the researcher questioned whether this highlighted a child focus between Sarah and Colin and wondered whether that allowed Frank to have and display more differentiation of self as a result.

Differentiation of self. The researcher felt that Frank showed that most differentiation of self amongst Sarah and her two sons.

Societal emotional process. The researcher noted several societal elements affecting Sarah. First, the overwhelming discomfort with administrative decisions that seemed to slight her G/T sons caused Sarah to cling to her G/T mentor as a life line. It seemed that their conversations, although outside of the family unit, helped to ease Sarah's discomfort initially by justifying Sarah's emotional complexities and educating her on the G/T rights and administrative responsibilities as well as by providing Sarah with the proper verbiage to advocate for her sons. Although some of Sarah's discomfort had seemingly been eased by the mentor prompting and encouragement that Sarah enroll her son in online school this year and learn from comforts of home, the researcher noted that Sarah may have only temporarily relieved the discomfort, for when Colin returns to his brick and mortar classes, he may have even more of a struggle. Since Colin struggles socially with his peers, his isolation of self may be problematic as it sets him apart and

fuses him with adults (namely his mother), and these adults may not be able to help him tackle his heightened sensitivities with classmates. Likewise, when Sarah feels anxiety with those outside her family unit who seem to misunderstand both she and her G/T children, Sarah's choice to cut herself off emotionally and sometimes even physically may actually strengthen the conflict because nothing ever gets resolved.

Case #3

Rochelle, also mother to a newborn, is both the mother and first-grade teacher to Joe. Thus, as an educator, she may have access to information some parents may not be privy to and a more thorough understanding of scored data because of her educational background, experience, and expertise. When analyzing the interview transcription, several themes and subthemes emerged from the established coding of data (as shown in Table 4.4).

Anxiety and frustration. Coming from an incredibly rural community where her son is the only G/T student on his elementary school campus, Rochelle seemed to feel extreme anxiety when sharing test results that place Joe on a tenth-grade reading level. Rochelle said that when she received the results, she immediately “*went home in tears*” and with “*a knot in [her] stomach.*” Her anxiety seemed to stem from questioning her ability as his mother in “*helping him reach his potential.*” Joe apparently began reading at age two and his ability and interest in “*the solar system,*” science, and “*trigonometry,*” among other things, certainly set him apart from his peers. There was appreciation (a separate subtheme) noted by the researcher regarding Joe's gifts and talents; however, Rochelle explained that although she would like to say she was “*overwhelmed with joy,*” she admitted that the joy was overshadowed by other emotions such as fear and anxiety.

One of her biggest fears, she recognized, was that she might not be able to “*protect him*” when he transitioned away from elementary school.

Table 4.4. Codes, Subthemes, and Themes for Case #3

| Codes | Subthemes | Themes |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Child’s Gifts and Talents Child’s Accomplishments Child’s Future Opportunities | Appreciation | Emotional Responses |
| Fear of Bragging Downplayed or Withheld Information Societal Interactions | Discomfort | |
| Frustration with Child, Spouse, or Sibling Relations Frustration with Educators or District Interpersonal Relations Parenting Challenges Parenting Self-Efficacy Guilt and Remorse | Anxiety and Frustration | |
| Social Interactions Work Ethic and Educational Experience Emotional Needs | Concern for Child | Parent Protective Factors |
| Child’s Personality and Ability Asynchronous Development | Misunderstanding of Child | |
| Mother’s Challenges Influence on Child’s IQ and Academic Strengths | Misunderstanding of Mother | Misunderstanding of Mother |

Misunderstanding of child. Rochelle shared multiple stories highlighting times she had to act as Joe’s advocate, and she admitted to seeing first-hand how both teachers and peers have misunderstood Joe both academically and socially. She conveyed an understanding that his impulsiveness, immaturity, and hyperactivity have hindered him from finding favor with both, and it “*hurts [her] heart,*” she exclaimed, to witness these struggles in academic and social settings (coded as Social Interactions and Emotional

Needs in the Concern for Child subtheme). This seemingly has “*sparked*” an interest in Rochelle who reads a great deal about the G/T child even though she feels that she “[*does*]n’t know what’s out there” and “[*does*]n’t know where to look.” The knowledge (e.g., asynchronous development) that she has gleaned has helped her better understand the mental and emotional needs of her son and strengthened her desire to advocate for his educational rights. Despite this knowledge and educational background, Rochelle seems to struggle with a sense of inadequacy in her parenting role and “*question[s] every choice*” she has made (coded as Parenting Self-Efficacy in Anxiety and Frustration subtheme), admitting that these anxieties and self-doubt keep her “*up at night.*”

Part of her struggle may be in her recognition that Joe is misunderstood by many. In fact, Rochelle admitted that she herself does not even “*understand him.*” Therefore, she shared her challenges in “*teach[ing] him how to fit in to a normal setting*” as well as identify and cope with his emotions. Having an infant at home seems to create additional overwhelm for Rochelle who admitted that, on some days, her primary goal is to just “*get through [the] day and keep [her] kids alive.*”

Misunderstanding of mother. In addition to these challenges, however, Rochelle noted that she, too, is often misunderstood. She feels that others may find her job “*easy because he’s smart*” when, in reality, there are days when she feels the emotional strain of having a son who may not “*need for [her] to... teach him.*” Consequently, expressed a sense of longing, as a mother, to “*feel needed.*” Additionally, she mentioned that others may not understand “*the intensity*” of parenting a child who displays such constant “*emotional highs and lows,*” and Rochelle admitted that there are days when she has to “*handle him with oven mitts on.*” Rochelle clearly felt the need to delicately handle his

emotions; however, Rochelle explained that if she and others continue to “*treat him differently*” there may be concern that one day he may *think “he is different.”*

Discomfort. Rochelle expressed strong opinion that she will never “*be satisfied*” with her choices and claimed that she has difficulty discussing this with others. Even though her family, for instance, is “*in such awe*” of Joe, she finds that she withholds sharing stories and relaying information regarding his gifts, talents, and accomplishments for fear of bragging or for fear of making “*other people feel inadequate.*” Rochelle shared that she would never, for example, “*talk about how [Joe] just read Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer simultaneously*” because she finds that people who brag do so because “*they need to bring [their child] up.*” Consequently, Rochelle admitted to downplaying Joe’s accomplishments by not sharing positive news and stories about him with others. She noticed that when she does share, she will, oftentimes, point out the negative in either her son or, most often, in her own inadequacies as a person or in the challenges and difficulties she faces as a parent to such a child – a child she sometimes wished “*wasn’t gifted.*”

The discomfort that Rochelle seemingly experiences in social settings where others seemingly judge and misunderstand both she and her son as well as the additional distress and even embarrassment that she sometimes feels as a parent to such a hyperactive and oversensitive child who has had “*complete meltdown[s]*” in public places has made Rochelle adapt her interpersonal communications by becoming more reclusive. Although she articulated some concern that she was “*keeping [Joe] from social*” opportunities to possibly form friendships, she seemed to find that they are both better off isolating themselves. Subsequently, Rochelle admitted to finding some solace in social

media outlets like Facebook where she can “*gravitate*” towards communities with mothers who are also raising G/T children; these online communications seem to have pacified some desire to connect with others who are also experiencing similar narratives. Rochelle conveyed that her military training “*to never show weakness*” may also be a contributing factor for why she prefers to keep her thoughts and feelings to herself and spend the large majority of her time with her husband and son rather than go outside her immediate family unit. She openly admitted, however, that she is going to therapy, and this environment seems to provide some relief as she is able to articulate her thoughts, fears, and anxieties.

Case #3 Assertions

Elements of Bowen's theory (1978) were also identified from the data gathered from Rochelle's narrative.

Nuclear family emotional process. The researcher noted that it is possible, since Rochelle seemed to understand the common struggles of a G/T child as well as the misunderstandings that often result from those uneducated or undereducated individuals who may not understand the personalities and needs of such children, that Rochelle and Joe's fused relationship is further solidified by her desire to do further research that would logically support and emotionally justify her circumstances and need to advocate for her son. Her studies also allow a gateway for a strengthened child focus – which for many mothers may enhance self-efficacy although not differentiation.

Triangles. The researcher questioned whether Rochelle's discomfort and anxieties – especially when Joe outwardly experienced a panic attack or reacted in some impulsive, immature, and hyperactive way – was pushing her to subconsciously fuse with

Joe so that he would not be experiencing the outside and unwanted position created when his actions set him apart from his peers and was negatively viewed by his teachers.

Rochelle's position as a teacher at his school allowed Rochelle immediate access in order to merge into such a situation as Joe's advocate so that Joe is not singled out, and this may be reason why Rochelle fears a time when Joe will not be physically on the same campus. Additionally, this fear as well as the desire to "*feel needed*" may highlight the comfort Rochelle feels in her parenting role and why she adamantly seeks wisdom through literature regarding the G/T child as well as through social media groups for parents raising G/T children.

The researcher also questioned the possibility of Rochelle's subconscious desire to fuse with others interpersonally outside the home. Evidence that Rochelle will downplay Joe's accomplishments or insist on the negative aspects of parenting and her own inadequacies as a parent to such a child, for instance, may be Rochelle's way of fusing with others in society to avoid discomfort.

Emotional cutoff. There was evidence that Rochelle, at times, emotionally cuts herself off from the group due to discomfort or embarrassment seemingly felt in social settings. She admitted that she has largely removed from social settings and prefers to spend that time with just her husband and children. The researcher noted, however, that this isolation seems selective since Rochelle does not seem to remove herself from communications with those who understand the G/T child. Additionally, the fact that she and her husband are both military may highlight an additional fused relationship; Rochelle may sense that others cannot understand or relate to her harrowing experiences, so she will, therefore, emotionally cut herself off from those uncomfortable social

environments where she feels so segregated from the other. For these reasons, Rochelle's attitude seems to have shifted toward focusing more on healing relationships with like-minded individuals who better understand her special situation.

Family projection process. An analysis of the interview data collected from Rochelle did not highlight projection or its effects. The researcher contributed this largely to the fact that Joe is only in first grade.

Sibling position. Since Joe's sibling was only four months old at the time of the interview, the researcher understood that there was no data to consider sibling position at the time.

Differentiation of self. The researcher noted that there was no data representing differentiation at the time of the interview.

Societal emotional process. As noted above, the researcher noted several societal elements affecting Rochelle. In fact, the rural community in which she lives may be large reason why there were so many elements of this within her narrative. It was noted that since Joe is the only G/T student in his school, he is certainly segregated from his peers as is his mother in her community; both are recognized as different and outside the norm, and it is assumed that both feel the affects of this. Rochelle's narrative underlined the distinct differences between urban and rural settings for the emotional health of a G/T child and his or her family. The importance of surrounding oneself with like-minded individuals and supportive groups is seemingly vital for the success of all involved.

Case #4

Gina is a mother to a recently adopted toddler and a fourth-grade G/T learner who has been enrolled in a Spanish-Immersion program since Pre-K. When analyzing the

interview transcription, several themes and subthemes emerged from the established coding of data (as shown in Table 4.5).

Table 4.5. Codes, Subthemes, and Themes for Case #4

| Codes | Subthemes | Themes |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Child's Gifts and Talents Child's Accomplishments Child's Future Opportunities | Appreciation | Emotional Responses |
| Fear of Bragging Downplayed or Withheld Information Societal Interactions | Discomfort | |
| Frustration with Educators or District Parenting Challenges Parenting Self-Efficacy | Anxiety and Frustration | |
| Work Ethic and Educational Experience Emotional Needs | Concern for Child | Parent Protective Factors |
| Child's Personality and Ability Asynchronous Development Child's Lifestyle | Misunderstanding of Child | |
| Mother's Challenges Parental Role | Misunderstanding of Mother | Misunderstanding of Mother |

Appreciation. She seemed excited to announce that he was bilingual at age seven, and this is partly what excites her the most about Samuel's academic journey and future possibilities. She appeared pleased with the "*exposure he's had at such a young age to different things,*" and explained that, because he was an only-child for so long and because she "*wanted to keep him well-rounded,*" she supported a number of extra-curricula activities in music, art, and sport-related fields. She conveyed that she was able to feed his intellectual interests, as well, and reported that the family just recently traveled

to Spain where Samuel was able to sharpen his language skills while speaking with the natives.

Both Gina and her husband were identified G/T themselves, and Gina graduated from a magnet school where she was surrounded by like-minded G/T peers. Accordingly, Gina seemed to compare herself a great deal to Samuel during the interview since her own personal narrative as a G/T learner in a special school seems to help her better understand her son and his experiences. Gina explained, however, that Samuel will have more and better opportunities to grow and develop optimally than what she and her husband had, and this is partly because he is being raised by two equally bright but very different personalities with varied interests and parenting styles but who are both avidly involved in his school and supportive of his educational endeavors.

Misunderstanding of child. In her report, however, Gina admitted that, academically, she “*expect[ed] a lot from him because he’s always acted and seemed so smart and so mature for his age.*” Gina admitted that she prefers a more hands-off approach to helping with homework and that she pushes autonomy. Nevertheless, she is still an actively engaged parent at his school and often visits with his teachers. Just recently, however, Gina realized how hard the teachers were on Samuel.

I saw last year for the first time... his teachers were *very* hard on him and his teacher... would say, ‘Your son is in La-La-Land today.’ And they told me that often, and I think in class he was not challenged enough, and he would space out and basically I would look at them and say, ‘Was he being disrespectful?... Is he causing a disruption?... Well, he can be in La-La-Land because he makes As.’ So I think definitely frustration from the teachers; they saw (in their mind) he was spaced out and not paying attention, but what was actually happening was that he was really not being challenged and he already knew the information and that’s what was going on. (italics to highlight participant emphasis in speech)

This seems to be one way in which Gina advocates for her son even though she does not think, when asked, that she “*advocate[s] so much about his education.*” She is concerned, however, about his future complacency; she explained that “*it’s okay for him to be in La-La-Land,*” but she admitted that it was important that Samuel know that “*life is going to get tough*” and that he will need to “*stay focused*” and understand that he “*just can’t be in La-La-Land forever and all the time.*”

Concern for child. Gina emotionally supports her son in a number of ways; for instance, she wants him to especially understand that “*it’s okay to fail.*” However, she was surprised to find that “*it never occurred to [her] to think about how emotionally unique he is*” as a G/T child. Gina explained that, to her, Samuel “*still likes to do the same things his friends like to do,*” and she does not “*think he feels he sticks out yet.*” Gina admitted, however, that she would like to ponder his emotional needs more and consider how (or if) he differs from his peers. She recognized that her family may be in a unique and special situation because of the combined educational opportunities she, her husband, and now her son have all been able to experience. Additionally, although not every student at Samuel’s school has been identified G/T, Gina admitted that they all have to be “*pretty bright*” to be enrolled in the school and keep up with the assignments while immersed in a second language. Further, Gina communicated that she and the other mothers had recognized and discussed on many occasions the coincidence that the school population had “*a lot of only children and a lot of older parents*” who were “*thirtyish or so when [they] had kids – or forty.*” This could be why Gina feels as if she had interpersonal support from her community; she admitted that she and the other mothers are “*kind of all in the same boat*” since their children are similar in intelligence,

background, and educational experience. The researcher attributed this environment as a large reason why Gina may have differed so greatly from the three prior case interviews and this may contribute to reasons why there seemed to be a lack of anxiety expressed within the interview dialogue.

Discomfort. Outside of this school environment, Gina admitted to having difficulty discussing Samuel's academic accomplishments to others. She said "*it's hard to talk about because you don't want to feel like... your kid is this Golden Child,*" so she finds that she will "*either try to downplay it,*" "*gloss over the topic,*" or "*just [not] talk about it.*" She conveyed that it was difficult "*to talk about him being gifted... because he is smart and he knows that stuff already.*" Furthermore, she elaborated that she found she "*almost ha[s] to dumb him down a little bit;*" at times, she even found herself "*almost apologizing for him [being so] smart.*" Sarah seemed surprised with the realization that she did this at all when communicating with some people and admitted that she would like to consider her actions more closely in the future.

Fortunately, however, Gina does not experience this often, and she agreed that since both she and her husband are G/T and since she has always been in large G/T communities and since she has gravitated toward G/T minds, she has seemingly not been exposed to many people who are *not* G/T or highly intelligent and who may not misunderstand both her son and herself in her parenting role. Gina seemingly has a great many friends raising G/T children, and she explained that "*we do kind of talk about that kind of stuff very easily;*" however, for those not raising G/T children, Gina can see how a parent to a G/T child could be misunderstood.

Misunderstanding of mother. When asked what others may think parenting a G/T child is like, Gina thought that they may think “*it’s easy because they kind of just know everything*” when, in reality, Gina founds that the “*added pressure*” of doing “*extra-curricula things with him and challenging him*” is actually “*very exhausting.*”

Case #4 Assertions

Analyzing Gina’s narrative further enhanced the researcher’s understanding of Gina’s perspective.

Nuclear family emotional process. Because Gina has chosen to be active in an urban community that offers several G/T possibilities and opportunities and because she is surrounded by like-minded parents who are also raising incredibly bright children (even if not classified G/T), the researcher did not document much anxiety within her narrative. Thus, the researcher found polarity between the narratives of Rochelle and Gina. Moreover, because Gina mentioned several times that her husband, who is also G/T, is an active participant in parenting Samuel, the researcher noted that the family seems to be a tight unit where little anxiety was stated or displayed by the participant’s nonverbal language.

Triangles. There were triangles noticed by the researcher but more externally and not within the home. The researcher felt that more dialogue was needed to approach this topic within the family structure.

Emotional cutoff. The researcher noted emotional cutoff within Gina’s narrative when she felt discomfort when admitted to downplaying or withholding information about Samuel and his gifts, talents, and accomplishments. In fact, she admitted that she

feels she has to “*dumb him down*” and often feels the urge to apologize for his G/T traits and abilities.

Family projection process. There seemed to be some discomfort when Gina shared how hard she was on Samuel academically, and the researcher noted that there was possibly some parent-to-child projection of anxiety. Asynchronous development may not be fully understood since Gina expects autonomy because Samuel “*seem[s] so smart and so mature for his age;*” Gina admitted that she never considered “*how emotionally unique*” Samuel was as a G/T child, and this may be because, on the surface, she does not see him as different from his peers in his varied interests.

Sibling position. Although Samuel has a new sister, the researcher noted that she is still too young to accurately address the sibling position concept found within Bowen’s family system theory (1978).

Societal emotional process. The researcher noted that there seemed to be discomfort felt by Gina when Samuel was treated unfairly or misunderstood by his teachers, and on several occasions Gina has felt the need to advocate for her son. This emotional disturbance may create anxieties pertaining to Samuel’s future academic journey and whether or not he will be able to adjust to challenge, for Gina’s concern about his future complacency indicated that Samuel understand that life is not easy and that he must ready himself for difficulties ahead.

Case #5

Jamie is the mother to three G/T children: two in high school and one in middle school. When analyzing the interview transcription, several themes and subthemes emerged from the established coding of data (as shown in Table 4.6).

Table 4.6. Codes, Subthemes, and Themes for Case #5

| Codes | Subthemes | Themes |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Child's Gifts and Talents Child's Accomplishments Child's Future Opportunities | Appreciation | Emotional Responses |
| Fear of Bragging Downplayed or Withheld Information Societal Interactions | Discomfort | |
| Frustration with Educators or District Advocating for Educational Rights and Opportunities Parenting Challenges Parenting Self-Efficacy | Anxiety and Frustration | |
| Social Interactions Work Ethic and Educational Experience Emotional Needs Negative Self Talk | Concern for Child | Parent Protective Factors |
| Child's Personality and Ability Child's Lifestyle | Misunderstanding of Child | |
| Mother's Challenges Parental Role | Misunderstanding of Mother | Misunderstanding of Mother |

Concern for child. Her oldest, Ann, is a senior and seems to be, based on participant's communications, an academic overachiever and perfectionist. She was selected as Student-of-the-Year for her school in fifth grade and she was selected again in eighth grade at both the school and district level. Despite the well-deserved awards and recognition, Jamie explained that Ann *"puts a lot of pressure on herself, and she lets things get to her."* Jamie shared that she is worried that Ann, as an adult, will have unrealistic expectations and erroneously think *"she's going to be able to control everything."* During her freshman year, Ann experienced a great tragedy when *"a*

friend of hers committed suicide” and it “*affected her tremendously.*” Apparently, Ann was so rattled by the experience and empathetic to others’ pain that she took on the role of counselor to her friends, and her friends found that they “*like[d] to tell her their problems.*” However, Jamie conveyed that Ann, seemingly, was negatively affected by this.

They think she’s a counselor, but she’s not at *all* and she gets very withdrawn and kinda takes on their pain, so she’s had a lot of trouble dealing with that, and now she’s kinda doing the opposite where people think she’s mad because she’s wanting to shut that out. She knows she cannot handle hearing about problems and drama constantly. (italics to highlight participant emphasis in speech)

Hearing and internalizing the problems of so many, according to Jamie’s shared narrative, sparked a change in the way Ann communicates with her peers, for, even though she “*want[s] to listen*” to them, she realizes that, for her own self-preservation, she needs to reserve her emotional energies. Jamie understood that this “*has been a huge struggle for [her daughter]*” because Ann wants to do “*the right thing.*” Ann has evidently come to depend on Jamie for emotional support, for Jamie admitted they communicate quite often.

Jamie explained that even though her son “*still wants to do well and be proud*” of his work and accomplishments, he has taken a more back-seat approach to academics. She admitted that “*he’s not going to work as hard [as Ann], and maybe he doesn’t have to because he still makes the grades.*” Seth, who was not tested and identified until eighth grade, is very different from his sister and this may be the reason why “*he’s always felt like he wasn’t as good as [Ann].*” Jamie further elaborated that this may be “*his biggest challenge... his own personal, ‘Am I good enough?’*” And maybe that’s why he’s found other avenues to make himself stand out. These other avenues come in the therapeutic

and creative form of visual arts; Seth is both “*a painter and a sketcher*” (see Figures 4.1 & 4.2). Although Jamie admitted that she worries “*about him the least because he has learned to find himself*” through art, Seth has not always had an easy time academically or personally. Jamie conveyed:

He had developed all these relationships with *other* kids in elementary school and then when he was identified gifted in middle school and high school, he didn’t have that bond with his class, so he had a little bit of trouble fitting in, and he still wanted to be friends with the ones *not* in gifted, and he still kind of struggles with that because his best friends are not in the gifted program with him. (italics to highlight participant emphasis in speech)

Jamie also shared that Seth has had to “*[learn] to do his own thing and become his own person,*” but she seemed pleased with what he has done with his life thus far (as seen in the Appreciation subtheme).

Jamie’s seventh-grade daughter, Amy, is “*so different from the others,*” that parenting, for Jamie, “*hasn’t gotten easier.*” Jamie shared that Amy has social issues that separates her from both same-age peers and adults. At age nine, Amy “*developed a tic disorder*” that resulted in some “*serious anxiety problems.*” Apparently, Amy was shy even as a child; however, when “*kids [started] mocking her and making fun of her*” as a result of this tic, Amy started experiencing grief. The cause of Amy’s grief, however, is not solely from her peers. Jamie shared that the biggest blow came from adults, namely teachers; she explained:

The kids picking on her has been rough, but the worse thing was when her friend told her that the friend’s teacher (who wasn’t my child’s teacher) across the hall said that ‘Oh, she’s just doing that for attention.’ And those words got back to my child. That ‘Nobody believes me. I really can’t control [the tic], but nobody believes me...’

Evidently, teachers were not the only skeptics who had trouble believing the seriousness of the disorder. The doctor himself initially spent months telling Jamie that all Amy

needed was counseling for anxiety when what Amy needed most was an out-of-town specialist who could identify the problem and provide treatment options. Since finding someone in the medical field who could do this, Jamie reported that Amy is getting the medical help she needs as well as seeing a counselor. Although both of these treatment options have been helpful, most of Amy's emotional relief comes, according to Jamie's commentary, in the form of pet therapy. Amy still "*has a long way to go [in] dealing with her trust with adults,*" however, Jamie seemed to think the counseling sessions may help and the pet therapy has, according to Jamie's accounts, significantly benefitted Amy. Regardless, concern for Amy's self-esteem as well as her social interactions with others has seemingly dominated a large part of Jamie's time and attention.

Misunderstanding of child. Although Amy's social issues and heightened sensitivities seemed to be the most extreme of the children, all have seemingly been misunderstood by others. For instance, in elementary school especially, same-age peers misunderstood the nature and purpose of their G/T enrichment class. Jamie asserted that these same-age peers thought that their participation meant "*extra field trips and just fun stuff*" which included "*get[ting] out of class.*" Jamie explained that she doubted these students realized the G/T participants still had to "*make up the work they miss[ed] in class without the content.*" Both Ann and Amy, according to Jamie's account, struggled with feeling "*bad*" because of this misunderstanding. Furthermore, Jamie shared that additional misunderstanding occurred with adults. For example, that a fourth-grade teacher unrealistically expected the girls, when they were students in her class, to have content knowledge and be prepared for tests even when they did not receive instruction. Jamie expressed her frustration with this teacher who did not consider or care that the



Figure 4.1. Spray Paint on Canvas



Figure 4.2. Drawn Stencils and Spray Paint on Foam Board

girls were in a G/T enrichment class and were “*really lost*” because of insensitive teacher expectations. Despite discomfort, Jamie felt the need to advocate for both girls, and, on a number of occasions, went to the school to address the situation and let the teacher (and others) know that she was “*causing some unnecessary stress.*” Jamie admitted that advocating for her children has not been easy. She claimed:

I personally feel like I’m just being a *pain*. Like I’m just being *that* mom who complains about stuff, and I’m *not* that mom. I’m the one that says, ‘Y’all just shut up and let the teachers do their job.’ And let your children learn from things. That’s how I’ve always been. (italics to highlight participant emphasis in speech)

Despite these feelings, Jamie knows that she must address Amy’s needs with educators so that Amy can have a positive school experience.

I felt like my daughter really *does* have some special needs. She didn’t talk to her third grade teacher *one* time the whole year. Not one word. She’ll answer stuff, but she’s got some special needs, but she’s not a special needs *child*. And I feel like *those* are the kids that really get just pushed to the side because they’re not handicapped... so starting from third grade, that’s when I started to feel like *I’m going to be that mom because I have to go and speak on behalf of my child so she can get what she needs*. And then in fourth grade when she wasn’t being treated fairly... I felt like it was all about *me*. I felt like the teachers were all talking about me [behind my back]. (italics to highlight participant emphasis in speech)

Jamie seemed to know her daughters’ work ethic and their desire to do well academically. However, she also claimed to understand “*the anxiety and the work that [her daughters] put on themselves.*” She said that both girls put a tremendous amount of pressure on themselves by “*internalizing their failure,*” as well as the expectations others may have for them (as seen in Concern for Child subtheme). This mental and emotional internalization seemed to cause concern for Jamie who explained that the girls continue to feel as “*if [they] don’t make this mark then [they’re] not good enough.*”

Misunderstanding of mother. Jamie admitted that other parents who have never raised a G/T child may not understand the intensity of such emotions and the “*over*

stimulation” that can sometimes be overwhelming for both Ann and Amy. She also admitted that, as a parent, *“dealing with [these] emotions”* on a daily basis can be challenging, and she has to insist to her girls that their *“worth isn’t about just [their] brain or [their] beauty or [their] grades.”* Jamie communicated that she teaches religion from home and that she has been able to use that material as a platform to *“talk a lot about social interactions with people and morals and how to deal with our own personal feelings that way.”* Jamie shared that the discomfort caused by *“jealousy from other kids”* has *“made [Ann and Amy] withdraw a little bit”* and not talk *“about themselves or their intellect because they don’t want to be different. They don’t want people to think that they think they’re above them.”* Understandably, these misunderstandings and jealous feelings from peers have been problematic, but Jamie is relieved to know that, her children are *“blessed to be surrounded by good children that are intelligent.”*

It seemed that Jamie recognized the difference community makes in one’s experience, and she agreed that being in a community where there are so many G/T children has been positive for both she and her family. In fact, Jamie asserted that Ann surrounds herself with only like-minded peers. In fact, she admitted that *“all her friends are gifted.”* Jamie stressed these four friends are the only peers that Ann chooses to spend her time with when she stated that Ann is *“down to four friends, and they’re all gifted.”*

Jamie may be able to appreciate this because both she and her husband both come from incredibly small, rural communities that do not support the G/T learner, and, although neither Jamie nor her husband were identified G/T themselves, both were extremely bright. It is quite possible that being in a more suburban community with a larger G/T population has been beneficial for Jamie – who admitted that she does not feel

tension, resistance, or discomfort with the other mothers – because statistically she is not alone and there are more people who understand her parenting role and lived experience.

Discomfort. She admitted, however, that even though she does not feel tension, resistance, or discomfort she is “*cautious about how much [she] mention[s]*” to family members especially because she does not want to “*feel like [she’s] bragging.*” In fact, Jamie said that she has withheld sharing “*ACT scores*” with both family and friends, and she also admitted that she still has not shared with *close* family members that “[*Ann has*] *already gotten a full-paid scholarship.*” Understanding this seemed to cause concern for Jamie who indicated that withholding such positive news causes Ann to suffer “*because she doesn’t get the praise that she deserves.*” Jamie said that she does share information about “*my kids’ social issues, so we’re not always talking about the good part of gifted but the social part that I’ve had to deal with,*” but she feels that when she does this, she is confiding in others and does not see it as overcompensating.

Case #5 Assertions

The data gathered from Jamie’s narrative was profoundly affective in the researcher’s understanding of Bowen’s family system theory (1978).

Nuclear family emotional process. Jamie's narrative enhanced the researcher's understanding of how the nuclear family emotional process can be affected by tragedy and loss. Ann’s emotional dependency on her family – especially her mother – after the loss of her friend is an example of the ease in which families fuse together in their emotional support of one another. Furthermore, since Ann easily takes on the pain of her struggling friends, she seemed to find refuge within her family system. Additionally, Amy’s physical health has taken an obvious toll on her mental health, and she too has

become dependent upon the support and love of her family unit. To emotionally support her children, Jamie uses home schooled religion classes to help her teach valuable lessons regarding social skills and jealousy issues and coping mechanisms, for instance. By doing this, the family system seems to be more emotionally fused and dependent upon one another.

Triangles. There were many triangles seen within Jamie's narrative, most of which were extended to others outside of the home (e.g., teachers, doctors, extended family), but the researcher noted an interesting triangle with Amy and her pets who therapeutically help her cope with her trust issues, heightened sensitivities, and discomforts. The tic disorder that had caused such stress, anxiety, and grief for Amy and separated her from both peers and adults compelled her to fuse emotionally with her pets. Although it may be argued that focusing solely on her pet relationships allows Amy to emotionally cut herself off from others, it would seem that when faced with stressful situations and circumstances, Amy fuses more closely with her pets, and this provides emotional relief and safety net to Amy in her time of need. Jamie also seemed to find relief from Amy's use of pet therapy since it seemed to lessen her immediate concern and anxiety for Amy. Consequently, this comforting emotional outlet (although she is also in counseling) available to her has had positive affects on the family unit and especially on Amy's self-esteem.

Emotional cutoff. Since Jamie explained that Seth takes a more back-seat approach to academics, the researcher considered the possibility of Seth cutting himself off emotionally because it may be less of an emotional risk if he avoids competing with Ann. Although Bowen (1978) indicated that such unconscious actions does not address or

fix the problem, Seth has found an emotionally satisfying outlet in his art – something he uniquely shows true talent for and does not have to share with his sisters. Since Seth has apparently questioned his worth and value when comparing his gifts and talents against his sister's, it may be possible that Seth immersing himself in his artistic gifts and talents may be his way of emotionally cutting himself off from any comparisons one may have regarding he and his sisters.

Additionally, Ann's decision to cut the emotional ties to her friends and their drama after subjecting herself to their needs and giving of herself as their desired "counselor" left Ann emotionally depleted and disturbed. Once realizing that she could not emotionally handle the stress and added anxiety, Ann's decision to remove herself from those situations is a clear example of how one emotionally cut oneself off from disturbing circumstances. It seemed that such stressful circumstances led Ann to more completely fuse with her mother and place the turmoil experienced by peers in the external and unwanted position.

Finally, although Jamie seemed to gravitate to like-minded individuals who were also raising G/T children, she did admit to cautiously treading conversations with family members that might highlight Ann's accomplishments. The fear of bragging caused Jamie in the past to hesitate or completely withhold sharing information with family such as the full-paid scholarship that Ann was recently offered. Even though Jamie expressed concern that Ann deserved the praise and recognition, the researcher sensed that the overwhelming discomfort that these social situations presented made Jamie oftentimes opt to emotionally cut herself off from the discomfort as felt with certain family members.

Family projection process. Jamie expressed anxious concern about both of her daughters, but the researcher was not able to gauge whether this anxiety was projected on to Ann or Amy. However, according to Bowen's theory (1978), one might assume that this is the expected case.

Sibling position. Since all three children are classified G/T, there was limited sibling rift seen within the family unit, and all seem to peacefully get along; however, the researcher did note that Seth seemed to be thrust in the external and unwanted position, at times, because his sisters required so much child focus from their parents. As a result, he has found his own way by fusing with artistic outlets.

Differentiation of self. Because of his independence, the researcher felt that Seth showed that most differentiation of self amongst his sisters and mother. Moreover, he seemed to have an easier time adapting to and befriending both G/T and non-G/T peers, and Jamie seemed to attribute this partly to his delayed G/T classification. Regardless, Seth has "*learned to do his own thing and become his own person,*" and this is the most developed differentiation as noted by the researcher.

Societal emotional process. There were numerous societal factors affecting Jamie's family. For Ann, the pressures she felt when internalizing other people's anxieties, for instance, would end up being too much for her to handle and in order for her to preserve her self and her emotional energies as well as differentiate from the emotionally-draining negativity, she learned that she needed to focus her attention elsewhere. Ann has gained responsive support from Jamie and she has apparently taken advantage of home and learned to treat it as a safe haven from the chaos that can occur when counseling her friends during their trying times.

Additionally, the skeptical teachers and students as well as the doctor who all had to be convinced that Amy had problematic systems of a disorder caused unnecessary anxiety for Jamie and forced her to advocate for her daughter despite the unease of doing so. Despite fearing she might be considered a “*pain*” or would be viewed as “*that mom*,” Jamie forced herself to speak her mind and this may have caused added stress and anxiety because the alternative might have been continued misunderstandings and unfair treatment of Amy.

Although there was some societal discomfort with extended family when discussing her children and their accomplishments, Jamie seemed to recognize the affect community has on one’s levels of anxiety. Jamie’s children are all in contact with many G/T peers and Ann, in particular, has chosen to surround herself with only like-minded, G/T peers. Because Jamie and her husband both come from small, rural communities that arguably do not support the G/T learner, the researcher noted that Jamie may be more cognizant than other parents raising G/T children regarding the positive affects that being in a more suburban community with a larger G/T population and a community of like-minded peers have on the family unit, and this may be reason why Jamie admitted to not feeling much tension, resistance, or discomfort with other mothers within her community.

Case #6

April is a mother to identical seven-year-old twin boys, Chris and Sam. At the time of the interview, Sam had not passed the G/T test but was due for another round of testing after Christmas, and April conveyed a sense of hopefulness that he too would be identified even though she admitted the two brothers were very different in personality, skill set, and interest. Chris, on the other hand, was identified eight months prior to the

interview. When analyzing the interview transcription, several themes and subthemes emerged from the established coding of data (as shown in Table 4.7).

Table 4.7. Codes, Subthemes, and Themes for Case #6

| Codes | Subthemes | Themes |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Child’s Gifts and Talents Child’s Accomplishments Child’s Future Opportunities | Appreciation | Emotional Responses |
| Fear of Bragging Downplayed or Withheld Information Societal Interactions | Discomfort | |
| Frustration with Child, Spouse, or Sibling Relations Frustration with Educators or District Advocating for Educational Rights and Opportunities Interpersonal Relations Parenting Challenges Parenting Self-Efficacy | Anxiety and Frustration | |
| Social Interactions Work Ethic and Educational Experience Emotional Needs | Concern for Child | Parent Protective Factors |
| Child’s Personality and Ability | Misunderstanding of Child | |
| Mother’s Challenges Parental Role Influence on Child’s IQ and Academic Strengths | Misunderstanding of Mother | Misunderstanding of Mother |

Anxiety and frustration. Since Chris was only recently identified as G/T, the researcher noted that April is still new to the program and placement process, and this might explain why she seemed stunned when voicing that the principal, initially, did not want to accommodate Chris with a conflicting schedule. April understood that “*it is a privilege to be in the gifted enrichment class,*” but she also understood that children

placed in such a program still “*need all the other stuff that normal... I don’t want to say normal because he’s normal too... [but] that all other kids need,*” as well. It was seemingly incredulous to April that both she and the teacher found an easy fix that would accommodate Chris, but the principal firmly did not want to make the exception. April did advocate for her son, and the schedule was fixed, but April was thrust into a new situation that seemed to rattle her.

The private school in which April’s sons are enrolled is an elite school settled in an urban community supporting the G/T learner, and this seems to ease some of April’s anxiety. The student population is overwhelmingly from affluent families who have been extremely successful in both academics and career (e.g., doctors, lawyers; businessmen); thus, the academic standards and student accomplishments reflect the stern academic expectations that the parental community has and demand of the school. Historically, the school has had a large percentage of G/T learners on its campus privately tested and identified by a licensed clinical psychologist. Therefore, the advanced student body, the school “*environment where his type of thinking is endorsed,*” and the curriculum offered creates an academic learning environment that April said Chris “*thrives*” in and her commentary conveyed a sense of excitement for his future.

Concern for child. April expressed concern, however, that Chris is “*a rule follower*” and can have trouble, at times, with flexibility. She compared him to his more artistic and creative twin, Sam, and communicated how she has seen these differences translate in sports:

He’s just such a rule follower... that’s why Sam – the as-of-now-not-gifted – he’s more athletic naturally. Like he just – he swings things right – because it’s not a step-1-step-2-step-3... He just *does* it and he figures it out. And he can do it a different way and it’ll still be okay. Whereas Chris, my gifted child, it’s a step

process, you know – which can be good, you know, if you’re shooting basketballs – if you’re shooting free throws, he’s more accurate than Sam, you know, because he’s going to step-1-step-2... that’s why he’s probably going to be great at *golf* because golf is step-by-step. There’s only one right way to get the ball and you’re striving to hit it *that* way. Whereas playing a team sport... you don’t *know* what’s coming at you; it’s not a step-by-step process; you just have to go with the flow. And my gifted child can not go with the flow very much. He needs a rule book; he needs written instructions, and he will follow it to a T! (italics to highlight participant emphasis in speech)

April tries to instill flexibility in Chris through a number of extra-curricula activities that seem to strengthen the development of the whole child, as well. For instance, in addition to academics and his G/T enrichment class, Chris also participates in individual sports (i.e., golf and tennis), team sports (i.e., basketball and baseball), piano, chess, and Boys Scouts. Moreover, April and her husband travel a great deal with the boys “*to show them that... the world is not as big as you think it is and possibilities are endless.*” These are some of the ways in which April wishes her own parents (or another adult) would have supported and encouraged her to try new things and step out of her comfort zone. As a once-identified G/T learner, April sees much of herself in Chris and compared herself to him on several occasions; this comparison seemed to help her not only better understand both his needs and her desired parental style for such a child but it also seemed to aid her in explaining Chris’s actions and reactions to certain experiences. At one point in the interview, she shared what kind of parental support both she and her husband received from their own parents growing up:

We felt like our parents really didn’t... we didn’t really get a *lot* of guidance... [my husband’s] parents were like, “If you don’t get a scholarship, you’re not going to college, so if you want to go to college, you better get a scholarship.” That was the extent. And mine, I think my parents were intimidated by me and maybe my level of giftedness. They didn’t know what to *do* with me, and coming from a small town with giftedness and parents that don’t really know what to do with you, you don’t really get much. (italics to highlight participant emphasis in speech)

April seemed to recognize the difference a school, a community, and a support system of like-minded individuals can make in the lived experience of a G/T learner, and this understanding may be why April seems to value her sons' school and the community of like-minded parents and students in which she has been able to interact with on account of the school and its environment. Accepting an elected board member position and taking such an active role in the school may explain why April did not seem to initially recognize tension or discomfort between she and the teachers or between she and the other mothers. She shared that she does not feel as if she is "*treated any differently*" among the group of mothers, and she reasoned that this lack of jealousy and discomfort may be on account of having a school environment where, "*whether or not you're gifted, it seems most of the kids thrive.*" Despite this, however, April was cognizant of her role as a board member and hoped that others would not think she was trying to take advantage of her seemingly powerful position.

I am *very* serious about advocating for my child and I won't apologize for that, but I hope that they don't feel like I'm doing that because I'm a board member. That's not what this is about. This is about my child, and... a part of it is board membership that I'm trying to delineate, you know. But as far as him, what makes it difficult... you don't want to be *that* parent. I don't want to be *that* parent. (italics to highlight participant emphasis in speech)

Misunderstanding of child. Having a supportive community does not mean that Chris is not misunderstood, and April explained that others often misunderstand him when Chris "*becomes very serious when people don't want him to be serious.*" This seemed to bother April in such a way that she feels compelled to explain what is happening to others for clarity.

If he's concentrating on something or if you say something and he doesn't understand what you're saying... he's analyzing what you're saying, and so they're like, 'Oh, you're not in a very good mood today' or something like that.

And he's like, 'No, that's not at all...' and so I find myself sometimes apologizing for him. I'm [mentally] like, 'Oh, no. He's just, you know, overthinking.'

April realized, however, that Chris can be "*wound up a little tight*," but she is seemingly grateful for people like her husband who can joke with Chris because she thinks "*that settles him down a little bit*" and helps him to know that "*it's okay*" to not be serious all the time. April thought this (and "*having a twin who is very outgoing*") may actually be why Chris is so well-liked among her peers which helps him do well academically.

Discomfort. Even though Chris has only recently been identified G/T, April confessed that she is already withholding information for fear of bragging.

I didn't tell anyone about [the G/T identification] even though I know they would have told me. And maybe that's because I knew he was going to make it. And I think they knew he was [going to be identified], but... I feel like you can't brag... deep down I feel like people probably don't want to hear it. You know like, 'Oh you have a gifted child so you're set.' That's pretty much what I feel... like if you have a gifted child, you're set, so don't worry about him. Whether he makes As or Bs or even Cs... he's gifted, so it doesn't matter. So I feel like, in general... people probably don't want to hear about successes... he's gifted; that's success enough.

April seemed surprised to realize just how much information she withholds regarding Chris and his accomplishments. In fact, when Chris was identified G/T and other children were not, April felt discomfort hearing the other mothers share their disbelief; April admitted that she "*didn't know what to say*" even when, she confessed, it may be obvious why Chris passed and it also may be obvious why the others did not pass. Regardless, however, April realized that the interview allowed her time to reflect on her actions and consider why she "*was so cautious*" in sharing positive news and stories about Chris. Even though she recognized that "*haters are gonna hate*," she seemed frustrated with the fairness of it all:

It's not *fair* that I can't talk about my kid just because he's gifted, but you can talk about your average kid because it's not gifted. Like how does that make any sense? But... you don't want to make enemies either. You just want to be humble about it. (italics to highlight participant emphasis in speech)

Although she was not sure whether or not it was on account of being a parent to a G/T child, April also admitted to exacerbating stories in order "*to normalize*" with other mothers:

You never bring up the positives, but if they say something about their kid doing something – not super negative but on the negative spectrum – and you're like, 'Oh, yea, girl, Chris does that all the time!' It's almost like you try to agree – if it's even *slightly* true – you try to agree to make them feel like you're there to... You know, you try to normalize with them. Even though it may not – not that you're lying about it – but it's really not that big of a deal. (italics to highlight participant emphasis in speech)

April may be starting to recognize her own struggles and challenges in raising a G/T learner. She seemed to understand, for example, a parental responsibility "*to foster his thinking*" and "*encourage*" cognitive development – even when she said she does not always understand his way of thinking or "*know how to [foster] that.*" She admitted, however, that she wants to better understand, according to her account, "*where his brain is and stimulate it to the best of my ability.*" She also admitted that, although she "*want[s] him to be him,*" she struggles (coded as Parenting Self-Efficacy in the Anxiety and Frustration subtheme) with knowing how to do that "*if it's not going to be that socially acceptable.*" Despite the supportive community that April feels she has, April may sense that some may not understand her unique and challenging lived experience in raising a G/T child (Misunderstanding of Mother subtheme).

Case #6 Assertions

April's narrative offered a unique perspective to Bowen's family system theory (1978) since she has a set of twins where only one is classified as G/T; the researcher felt that the data was valuable to better understanding how families with G/T children cope.

Nuclear family emotional process. The researcher found it interesting how the private school setting was almost a like a nuclear family in and of itself with many fused relationships and April's family was no exception to this. The fact that she is a board member for the school may have added additional complexity to the situation.

Regardless, the researcher noted that April was still new to the G/T world.

Another area of interest to the researcher was the emotional connection this family established through travel, for it seemed that April and her husband provided a great deal of emotional support to their children through this unique opportunity that, in a sense, cuts them off from the external other and gives them an opportunity to fuse in a positive way while using it as a gateway for positive communications between parent and child.

Triangles. The discomfort April already feels when Chris is misunderstood has caused her to fuse with Chris as seen in the excuses she uses to explain his actions or lack of actions when, according to April, he becomes "*serious*" in unexpected ways. April admitted that when this occurs, she finds that she often feels a need to apologize for him and explain what he is really doing – overthinking. This is partly why April appreciates her husband who can add humor to a tense situation, although the researcher did note that since April and Chris are so much alike, April's husband may feel like he is in the external and unwanted position within the triangle.

Emotional cutoff. April seemed surprised to find that she was already withholding information about Chris for fear of bragging, and she also seemed to understand the societal unfairness involving mothers of G/T children who can not share positive news and stories regarding their G/T child. Moreover, April also admitted to exacerbating stories in order “*to normalize*” with other mothers. Each of these may be examples of emotional cutoff to avoid discomfort.

Family projection process. The researcher was not able to identify the effects of April’s projected anxiety onto her sons.

Sibling position. Chris is a twin, but since they are only in first grade, it was difficult to establish sibling position as seen in Bowen’s family system theory (1978) at this time. The researcher did note, however, that April seemed to compare the two often and seemed to comment on how Sam compliments his brother. Consequently, Chris may have been positively affected socially by Sam’s more creative and socially acceptable norms.

Differentiation of self. The researcher found no data within this narrative to support differentiation. However, she may be starting to differentiate herself from other mothers. April considered the unique difficulties and challenges in raising a G/T child when she mentioned her understanding of fostered thinking and encouragement for cognitive development – even when she herself does not seem to understand.

Societal emotional process. The elite private school in which April’s sons are enrolled is settled in an urban community already in support of the G/T learner; however, it would seem that the academic standards and student accomplishments reflecting the expectations for student success also eases some of April’s anxiety. However, the

experience with the principal where April had to advocate for Chris so that the school would accommodate his schedule seemed to rattle her, and the researcher noted that this may have been the first of many chances April gets to advocate for her newly identified G/T son and his educational rights and opportunities. Additionally, as an elected board member, April shared some discomfort in the way others may view her intentions and how she takes advantage of her position. However, the researcher noted the possibility that it may be *because* of her elected position that April does not seem to recognize tension or discomfort from either the teachers or the other mothers. April attributed it to the school environment, however, where there were so many G/T and bright students who thrive. Finally, the researcher did note parental anxieties instigated by societal expectations when April shared that she “*want[s] him to be him,*” but worries that it may not “*be that socially acceptable.*”

Case #7

Claire is mother to 15-year-old Thomas, a highly gifted and multitalented sophomore. When analyzing the interview transcription, several themes and subthemes emerged from the established coding of data (as shown in Table 4.8).

Appreciation. Among his many interests, Thomas is classified as artistically talented and is enrolled in the Visual Arts Talented program. He is also talented musically, and Claire seemed excited to report that he is “*showing some talent for [theatre],*” as well. She explained that his participation in the theatre program represents character development since his “*social skills and self-expression has always been kind of hard for him.*” In addition to these more artistic and creative realms, Thomas, now bilingual, was enrolled in a French Immersion program. Currently, he is taking G/T and

G/T Advanced Placement classes at an urban public high school. Academically, Thomas has a positive “*attitude about learning*” and “*understands the importance of it,*” according to Claire. She added, though, that “*he doesn’t like to have his time wasted*” and seems to get frustrated if given work that is not challenging or “*smells like busy work to him.*” This is why Claire and her family value the G/T program because it has offered Thomas the challenge he so desperately desires in an environment where he has been able to thrive.

Table 4.8. Codes, Subthemes, and Themes for Case #7

| Codes | Subthemes | Themes |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Child’s Gifts and Talents Child’s Accomplishments Child’s Future Opportunities | Appreciation | Emotional Responses |
| Fear of Bragging Downplayed or Withheld Information Societal Interactions | Discomfort | |
| Frustration with Child, Spouse, or Sibling Relations Frustration with Educators or District Advocating for Educational Rights and Opportunities Parenting Challenges Parenting Self-Efficacy Guilt and Remorse | Anxiety and Frustration | |
| Social Interactions Work Ethic and Educational Experience Emotional Needs Negative Self Talk | Concern for Child | Parent Protective Factors |
| Child’s Personality and Ability Asynchronous Development Child’s Lifestyle | Misunderstanding of Child | |
| Mother’s Challenges Influence on Child’s IQ and Academic Strengths | Misunderstanding of Mother | Misunderstanding of Mother |

Concern for child. Claire conveyed that Thomas has not always had an easy time academically, and he was misunderstood by both peers and teachers for some time (Misunderstanding of Child subtheme). In elementary school, for instance, he “*struggled to make friends*” and, to this day, Claire explained that he still “*struggles with anxiety and depression.*” Claire admitted that it was difficult for her to hear him say, “*I don’t feel like my classmates really understand me. My classmates tell me that I’m weird.*” Fortunately, once Thomas entered the middle school academic program for G/T learners, Claire indicated that his mood and attitude seemed to shift in a more positive direction. Apparently, Thomas needed a challenging environment that afforded him opportunities to grow with like-minded peers, and this stimulating academic experience has since continued into high school.

Anxiety and frustration. Claire seemed to know early on that Thomas was G/T, but, for two years, she had difficulty getting Pupil Appraisal to test him. This may have been the first time Claire was compelled to advocate for Thomas and his G/T educational rights and opportunities, but her shared narrative proved that she would have to advocate for Thomas again. After consideration, Claire commented on the frustration she felt when advocating for her son:

When you’re trying to advocate for your child with a professional who doesn’t have a background in gifted education, it’s an almost impossible conversation to have. You know, there’s some very, very good teachers out there, but if they *don’t* have that background, they really don’t have any understanding of his needs and the needs of the other kids in the program... It’s like talking two different languages. (italics to highlight participant emphasis in speech)

Now, both Claire and her husband have a G/T certification and background, and Claire seems to have an easier time advocating for Thomas. However, when Thomas was in elementary school, she expressed that a lack of knowledge regarding the needs of a G/T

child as well as a clear understanding of academic opportunities hindered her from finding the confidence and language to properly advocate for her son.

It just felt really frustrating because I *didn't* really know what I was talking about, but I had a *strong* sense that something wasn't right. And it felt awkward to be a parent coming in to a professional space and telling that professional, 'You don't know what you're doing'... I didn't have the language myself... to be a good advocate for him when he was younger. I could go in and say, 'Well, I'm worried that he's not being challenged. I worry about what might happen when he gets older.' And I just got a lot of... 'It'll be fine. He's a genius'... I didn't like that getting brushed off and, 'I don't know why you're worried. Your child makes straight As. I've got kids who are failing and those are the kids whose parents need to be worried and they're *not*,' so I kind of felt like I was getting the brush off a lot of times... I kind of felt like my hands were tied, and it makes me sad for parents who are in that situation who *aren't* where I am now. (italics to highlight participant emphasis in speech)

Claire seemed to have a sense of confidence that she lacked then. However, in addition to her G/T certification and background, Claire also seemed to be in a unique situation since not only is she married to a G/T educator but she is also surrounded by other G/T educators and spends a great deal of time with communications with them concerning the academic needs of and opportunities for G/T learners. Additionally, Thomas is uniquely situated in a largely G/T populated school, so he too is surrounded primarily by G/T peers. Thus, the entire family is enveloped around like-minded people who seem to better understand and support the G/T learner.

Discomfort. Claire admitted, however, that it can still feel "*awkward*" to discuss Thomas and his accomplishments with others. With two friends, in particular, Claire explained why it is uncomfortable for her to discuss Thomas and his positive experiences:

It's awkward because it feels insensitive to be concerned about your gifted child's social interactions and emotional health and future prospects while you're talking to a friend whose child is autistic and nonverbal and, you know, has a hard life ahead of him or with a friend whose child has a physical disability and has to go

to therapy, you know, X number of times a week, so I don't talk about my child in the same way around *those* parents as I would around the parents that I know also have gifted kids... it's not to say that those friends aren't understanding, but I feel like there's a line that I can kind of approach and that I can't go over in the amount of concern that I express or talking about good things that he's done without it sounding braggy. (italics to highlight participant emphasis in speech)

Despite the sensitivity Claire has for her friends, withholding information may give some pause for misunderstanding both the G/T child and the difficulties some parents have in raising such a child.

Misunderstanding of mother. Upon reflection, Claire shared that people who have never raised a G/T child might think that Thomas “*comes home and he does his homework in five minutes and he makes straight As and everything's peachy*” when, in reality, it is more complicated. Claire articulated what made parenting such a child difficult:

No matter how perfect your child is, parenting is hard, but I think... it's hard in different ways, you know... I worry about his self-esteem and... I worry about his social interactions, I worry about, you know, whether he'll allow himself to be in an uncomfortable situation because he's a perfectionist and he doesn't want to try anything new, and I get really excited when he tries something new and I know that sometimes my friends will say, ‘I don't understand why you're flipping out because he did a summer theatre program.’ ‘No, you don't understand; this is *huge!* This is my child who's been standing and hiding in the corner for twelve years-thirteen years of his life. Now, he wants to be on a stage. That's *huge!*’ So just little things like that that I worry about that maybe other people are worrying about but not in exactly the same way. (italics to highlight participant emphasis in speech)

As a parent to such a child, Claire seemed to understand and appreciate her son's unique way of thinking about things; however, that did not lessen her concern regarding his anxiety and depression, for instance, or the concern she has for him when she sees him struggle to complete a task in a timely manner. Additionally, because Thomas seems to “*worr[y] about things that he doesn't need to be worried about,*” further complications

and stress are experienced by both Thomas and Claire. Consequently, such misunderstandings seemed to make Claire feel that parenting such child can be “*a lonel[y] place to be.*” Claire shared a story where her sister-in-law just did not seem to understand that Thomas’s intelligence came naturally:

I remember her saying something like, ‘Oh, yea, I remember when my first was born, I had all day long to sit and teach her the alphabet too, but, you know, the second one comes along and you don’t have as much time.’ And I kind of felt like she was saying, ‘Well, yea! You’ve got nothing else going on right now except for you and him. Of course, you can just teach him all day long. That’s why my first one is smart but my second one not quite so much because I just didn’t have the time for it’ And I just kind of remember thinking, *Am I supposed to be offended right now by that?* (italics to highlight participant emphasis in speech)

Claire seemed to feel that there is a general “*misperception that gifted kids are gifted because their parents must have pushed them and shame on them because...childhood is for play.*” Moreover, she also seemed to wish that more people would recognize their special needs (as seen in Misunderstanding of Child subtheme). Claire has apparently tried to communicate these concerns with her mother in hopes that addressing the problem and educating her might alleviate the misunderstandings Claire feels her mother has regarding Thomas. Claire reported that on numerous occasions she explained to her mother:

Please don’t keep telling my child what a genius he is. That’s not helpful for him; that’s dangerous for him. Please don’t keep going on and on and on about how smart he is. Please don’t treat him like a trained circus monkey and ask him to recite the alphabet backwards for your friend or your neighbor. Please don’t ask him to talk about the map of a city that he has imprinted in his brain when your friends are over.

Despite these requests, Claire said that her mother “*still wants to make a big deal about how smart he is*” and this, according to Claire, exacerbates the problem.

Case #7 Assertions

Claire's narrative solidified more of the researcher's understanding of concepts seen in Bowens' theory (1978).

Nuclear family emotional process. Thomas, a scholar who appreciates learning and takes it seriously within the learning environment, seemed perfectly fused with his certified G/T parents who also appropriate learning opportunities and, like their son, might not tolerate those who want to be silly or those who take learning opportunities for granted.

Triangles. As a family of three, the researcher found it easy to see the family unit as a triangle. The researcher further noted that Claire clearly understood and sympathized with Thomas's "*highly sensory*" needs because she herself had had similar experiences while growing up. This situation contributed to the researcher considering Claire and Thomas fused in the internal positions while Claire's husband took the external position. This seemed to be the case since he (before his G/T training and certification) lacked an understanding and tolerance for such heightened sensitivities and would lose patience when, for example, Thomas was ultrasensitive to his socks and shoelaces. Once Claire's husband gained a deeper understanding and appreciation for the G/T child, things seemed to positively shift within their family and they were able to utilize their knowledge to better advocate for their son.

Claire seemed to understand that Thomas has had a difficult time emotionally because he has been misunderstood by both peers and adults. However, whereas, in an academic setting, Thomas may have felt in the external and unwanted position and his peers and teachers or the curriculum in the internal position, things seemed to shift once

he entered the G/T program and found his place. Before then he may have found comfort in his fused mother-son relationship where he was understood by a mother willing to be his advocate – despite the discomforts, anxieties, and frustrations. This puts Thomas and Claire, again, in an internal position whereas the external other – those who judge or misunderstand – are pushed in to the external and unwanted position.

Emotional cutoff. Although it may have been unintentional and unplanned or work-related and inspired rather than family-related and inspired that propelled Claire to seek a G/T certification, the researcher found that this may represent the duality of emotional cutoff because, since Claire educated herself and learned the language and content for conversations to promote advocacy, she was able to address the internal discomforts and problematic circumstances to better meet her family's needs. Now, rather than getting “*brushed off*,” Claire can directly approach the issue – rather than feel “*like [her] hands [are] tied*” – and deal with it from a confident and assured position. Claire expressed a concern that other mothers may not be in this position and seemed to understand the disadvantages and potential hazards this lack of understanding could cause. Claire, who understands how parenting a G/T child can be “*a lonel[y] place*,” seemed to sympathize with these mothers.

Family projection process. Although the researcher did not identify anxiety projected on to Thomas, she did question whether a serious appreciation for education and learning was projected on to Thomas since both his parents are educators themselves and work with G/T learners. Additionally, by placing Thomas, like Claire and her husband, in a learning environment surrounded by like-minded, G/T learners and educators certified to work with G/T learners, this projection may be exacerbated.

Consequently, if this is the case, the researcher can better explain why community matters and the more opportunities offered and G/T learners available to surround oneself with, the better one's chances of emotional and mental health and functionality.

Sibling position. Thomas is an only child.

Differentiation of self. The researcher felt that the knowledge gleaned from Claire enrolling in the G/T certification program allowed some differentiation of self.

Societal emotional process. Claire was able to articulate several uncomfortable societal circumstances that seemed to enhance anxiety within her. For instance, she admitted to feeling awkward when sharing positive news to some of the other mothers, especially those who were parenting children with special needs. Claire indicated that, to her, it was “*insensitive to be concern[ed] about your gifted child’s social interactions and emotional health and future prospects*” when the mother on the receiving end is struggling with a child who is “*autistic and nonverbal,*” for instance. Like the other mothers, Claire did not want to come across as “*braggy*” or insensitive.

This discomfort and social anxiety may be partly why Claire now chooses to surround herself with like-minded people who seem to better understand and support the G/T learner. Unlike her sister-in-law who indicated that Thomas, an only child, was advanced simply because Claire worked individually with him or the generalized public who, as Claire commented, may feel that the G/T child is stripped from a childhood because of pushy parents, Claire seemed to understand that she could discuss her personal circumstances as a parent to a G/T child more easily with other mothers also raising G/T children or with certified G/T teachers trained to understand. Consequently, she seemed to have learned that it may be easier to simply cut herself off from those uncomfortable

interpersonal communications and withhold information rather than put herself in another anxiety-producing conversation. Although it seemed that people (e.g., Claire's mother) who do not understand that Thomas is not a "*trained circus monkey*" are frustrating to Claire and cause additional stress and anxiety, Claire also seemed to wish that more people understood the challenges she faced as a mother to such a highly intelligent child. If society would dispel the myths and understand that not "*everything's peachy*" for a G/T learner and his or her family, Claire may feel more ease. For her, Claire has to "*worry about [Thomas's] self-esteem,*" his "*social interactions,*" and his "*anxiety and depression.*" Thus, although Claire admitted that all "*parenting is hard,*" she shared that the challenges for those raising G/T children are different and she seemed to wish that the general public would better understand that.

Case #8

Adele is mother to four children, but only one has been identified as G/T. London, a fourteen-year-old eighth-grader at a private school, is not only gifted academically, but he also seems to be gifted athletically and loves playing basketball, baseball, football, and soccer as well as participating in track and running cross-country. When analyzing the interview transcription, several themes and subthemes emerged from the established coding of data (as shown in Table 4.9).

Appreciation. Adele seemed to think that London, who "*likes competitiveness,*" is at his "*best when he's engaged in different sports*" and his self-motivation, discipline, and "*ability to multi-task*" has apparently enhanced his capacity to juggle academics and athletics. Adele seemed to love that her son was "*an achiever*" and was excited about his present and future opportunities in both academics and sports-related areas.

Concern for child. Adele felt that London is “*well-liked*” among his peers; however, because he “*think[s] faster than them,*” he can get “*aggravated easily*” if they misunderstand him or something he said. This intolerance, Adele admitted, could also be

Table 4.9. Codes, Subthemes, and Themes for Case #8

| Codes | Subthemes | Themes |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Child’s Gifts and Talents Child’s Accomplishments Child’s Future Opportunities | Appreciation | Emotional Responses |
| Fear of Bragging Downplayed or Withheld Information Societal Interactions | Discomfort | |
| Frustration with Child, Spouse, or Sibling Relations Frustration with Educators or District Parenting Challenges Parenting Self-Efficacy Guilt and Remorse | Anxiety and Frustration | |
| Social Interactions (present and future) Masked Intelligence Work Ethic and Education Experiences Emotional Needs | Concern for Child | Parent Protective Factors |
| Child’s Personality and Ability | Misunderstanding of Child | |
| Mother’s Decisions | Misunderstanding of Mother | Misunderstanding of Mother |

directed at teachers when they have said or done something that London thinks is “*stupid.*” However, London’s frustration and resulting anger seemed especially problematic at home. Consequently, Adele explained that when London’s twin brothers, for instance, lack understanding or when she herself is “*not as quick as him,*” London

will react with anger, and Adele seemed sensitive to how this intolerance would impact his future wife and children. Adele clearly wanted London “*to soften up*” even though she, who was “*kind of like him*” growing up, could sympathize with him and his frustration.

Anxiety and frustration. What seemed to concern Adele the most and cause her great discomfort was when London “*butt[ed] heads*” with his father – a man Adele claimed was “*the total opposite from [she and London].*” Adele shared that, when London is being disciplined by his father, she will attempt to explain to her husband that he “*can’t do that with this kind of kid,*” but her husband does not seem to understand (as seen in Misunderstanding of Child subtheme) that the problem will continue to escalate if he refuses to wait until a later time, when things calm down, “*to talk to him about it and hold him accountable.*” The researcher noted Adele’s gratitude that she can understand her son and speak on his behalf when necessary, but she shared what she has found to be the best thing for deescalating situations.

I think the best thing I’ve learned with him is to just kind of leave him alone [and]... give him his space... because... if he’s disrespectful (because he’s aggravated or anxious or whatever), or if I start seeing him getting anxiety or like overwhelmed, I will just take a step back.

Adele admitted that London is her “*most difficult child*” and “*makes it hard*” on the family at times.

Misunderstanding of mother. Upon reflection, Adele thought that there was a possibility that people who have never raised a G/T child may not understand the parental difficulties in understanding “*their little idiosyncrasies; their anxiousness; their aggravation; their... impatience.*” Additionally, Adele shared that, as a parent a G/T child, she worries (as seen in Anxiety and Frustration subtheme) sometimes that London

may be doing too much juggling academics and sports. She said that she will often ask herself, “*Am I letting him do too much? Is this putting too much of a strain on him?*” For the most part, however, Adele seems pleased with her son and his accomplishments.

Discomfort. However, she admitted that she does, at times, withhold information and positive feelings because she does not want to “*be braggy.*” Adele said that she has witnessed people sharing such stories on Facebook and it makes her “*want to vomit because my kids all make straight As.*” She remembered her negative self-talk and discomfort when she did share positive information and how that made her feel afterwards, and she indicated that she would regret saying it and worry that it might have sounded “*braggy.*” Adele seemed surprised when she considered how she “*kept quiet when [she] was excited about something and made a conscious effort to maybe withhold [her] emotions,*” but she recognized that she downplayed positive news and stories often with her husband’s family, especially. Adele admitted that her in-laws “*get offended,*” but because she “*didn’t want to make a big deal about it,*” she did not inform them of events, for instance, where London was getting recognized or awarded.

Adele did not seem to think this was problematic within her interpersonal relations with friends and “*[did]n’t think people judge[d her].*” However, she admitted to normalizing conversations with friends by sharing “*stories to make him more on the other kid’s level*” so that the other mother(s) would not “*feel bad.*” Overall, however, Adele did not seem especially bothered with negative reactions or judgments from others even though she did admit to being cognizant of withholding information so that she did not come across as bragging or so that she did not make the other person feel bad.

Case #8 Assertions

Data collected from Adele's narrative allowed the researcher to further consider Bowen's family system theory (1978).

Nuclear family emotional process. The researcher noted high anxieties displayed within this nuclear family, and Adele admitted that London was her "*most difficult child*" who often made things challenging for the family as a whole. For instance, Adele was open about the induced stress that occurs when London and his father "*butt heads.*" It seemed obvious to the researcher that, of the three individuals, London had fused more with his mother. She seemed to better understand him and tolerate his emotional reactions and words. Moreover, Adele admitted that her husband was "*the total opposite from us,*" and this may add to why mother and son have so easily bonded emotionally. When Adele attempts to ease stressful situations, the researcher noted that it may exacerbate the situation if Adele's husband feels threatened as being in the outside and unwanted position. The possible defensiveness felt by London's father may be reason why he struggles to walk away from an uncomfortable situation where he may want justification for his feelings which he does not seem to receive from Adele.

Triangles. The biggest triangle within the family unit, as mentioned, seemed to be between parents and son; however, there were additional triangles seen involving, of course, siblings (refer to Sibling Position section). Outside of the family unit, there seemed to be additional triangles although not as pronounced. For instance, the researcher noted a triangle involving Adele, London, and London's teacher(s) who misunderstand him. The stress caused by such a triangle may be reason why London chooses at times to cut himself off emotionally (refer to Emotional Cutoff section). Although he is well-

liked, London's peers may be so different from him (e.g., quick witted) that a triangle may be seen there.

Emotional cutoff. London's intolerance for stupidity or slow wit may be what inspires him to emotionally cut himself off from the object of his frustration. Adele admitted that London "*knows when to hold 'em, knows when to fold 'em, [and] knows when to walk away,*" and this may be his escape. Additionally, the researcher noted that Adele may be emotionally cutting herself off from friends when she attempts to normalize conversations by sharing "*stories to make [London] more on the other kid's level*" so that the other mother(s) would not "*feel bad.*"

Family projection process. Adele seemed to worry that London may be juggling too much between academics and sports, and the researcher noted that this anxiety may eventually be projected onto London himself who may, for instance, chose to drop activities for fear of placing undue worry and anxiety on to his mother. Also, because Adele, oftentimes, does not extend invitations to the extended family, the researcher noted that this too may silently project emotions on to her children.

Sibling position. Of the eight participants, Adele's family unit presented the most data to better understand the concept of sibling position found within Bowen's family system theory (1978). It seemed that placement and personalities played a key role since London falls right in the middle of an older sister who is a perfectionist, overachiever, and the recipient of many accolades and awards and twin younger brothers. London seemed to react impulsively with anger in the past when his brothers lacked an understanding or skill set.

Differentiation of self. The researcher considered whether London was bringing about differentiation through his participation in sports. If he thinks that G/T learners are stigmatized as “*nerd[s]*” in his learning environment, it is possible that, to avoid heightened sensitivities such as discomfort or anxiety, he will present a different image of what London thinks is expected so that he can be seen in a new and more favorable light with his peers. Thus, the researcher questioned whether this awareness makes London redefine the typical image of a G/T learner so that he is not fused with that stereotypical learner image and so that heightened sensitivities and feelings of discomfort can be avoided and emotionally cut off from the self. Adele seemed to be aware of a G/T stigma, as well, but indicated that London’s friends were not “*jealous of him;*” however, she also admitted that “*he doesn’t make himself stand out*” either because “*he doesn’t want to be classified as a nerd.*” Parallel to her son, the researcher considered whether Adele was enthusiastically encouraging his participation in sports in favor of creating a more accepted image amongst his peers and community, especially since she seemed to empathize with her son so much. The researcher considered if this was a way for her to avoid personal stress and anxiety, as well.

Societal emotional process. There were anxieties noted by the researcher instigated by societal pressures. For instance, like the other mothers, Adele admitted that she often withholds information in order to not appear “*braggy,*” for there have been times – after sharing positive stories – when she regretted her words. Upon reflection, Adele seemed surprised that she made such “*a conscious effort*” to do this; however, she admitted that with her sister-in-laws who are not raising a G/T child, Adele may not feel as if she has another option.

Overarching Themes

There were three overarching themes identified within this study: (1) *Emotional Responses*, (2) *Parent Protective Factors*, and (3) *Misunderstanding of Mother*. Each one had at least one subtheme and several codes.

Emotional Responses

Appreciation, Discomfort, Anxiety and Frustration were easily recognized in all eight cases.

Appreciation. Participants were willing and readily able to (1) identify gifts and talents of their G/T child, (2) share a number of child accomplishments both academically and beyond the realm of academics, and (3) express excitement regarding their child's future possibilities and opportunities. The researcher recognized and appreciated the fact that the participants were sharing information that they may not share under normal circumstances; however, for the purposes of the study and without fear of judgment, participants may have felt compelled to openly share stories otherwise untold.

Discomfort. There was an undercurrent of discomfort for these mothers in social settings where a fear of bragging (unrecognized for the most part) and an unwillingness to either hurt or cause discomfort for the conversation recipient was apparent. In the most extreme case, Gina admitted her discomfort and admitted "*it's almost hard to talk about him being gifted.*" To handle uncomfortable situations, she catches herself at times "*dumb[ing] him down a little bit*" and "*almost apologizing for him [being so] smart.*" Whether or not it was recognized at the time by the participant, these emotional responses directly resulted in either downplayed or withheld information regarding her G/T child's gifts, talents, accomplishments, and potential success. For example, Beth explained that

when her friend's son did not pass the G/T testing, there is an element of "*tension there where you don't want to say*." Since Beth knew she could not say, "*My child's smarter than your child*," she admitted that, to alleviate discomfort, one must "*make excuses*" to help explain why the child did not pass the test. In this case, Beth suggested to her friend that her son may have had "*test anxiety*" or may have had "*an off day*." The researcher noted that these excuses seem to relieve some societal discomfort, even if only temporarily. April had a similar story and admitted to "*tiptoe[ing] around*" uncomfortable situations when friends felt the idea of their own child not passing the G/T test was incredulous. She elaborated on this discomfort:

It's uncomfortable because they're like, 'I just can't believe my son didn't screen in! How did Chris and Sam screen and mine not?' I don't know what to say. When it may be obvious to you and other people... So you just kinda have to make something up like, 'Yea, I'm sure. Just have them retested again....' You're just trying to ta-ta the mom.

Rochelle, like April, wants "*to be very humble*" in conversations with others and she does not want to make the recipient "*feel bad*" but she understands that it is "*a subconscious thing*" and was not recognized until the interview questions sparked an awareness. This was a common sentiment amongst the participants.

Neither April nor Adele seemed to think that their role as mother to a G/T child created problems interpersonally between friends; however, both found themselves surprised at how they have, at times, normalized conversations in order to either downplay the gifts and talents of their sons or make them seem to fit in more with the expected norm. Although, for women, it may be a natural reaction or encouraged trait to soothe, nurture, or uplift others, several mothers recognized a posed problem for the G/T child. Beth explained, for instance, that by trying to help her friend not feel so bad about

her son not passing the G/T test, she actually felt like she was “*putting Blake down when I’m trying to kind of belittle*” the situation.

Regardless of the circumstance, societal interactions (including social media) seemed to cause such discomfort that the participants were often prompted to alter or adjust their communications with others. Sarah attributed some of this to a “*competitive dynamic*” between women in general. She felt that it has become a “*cultural*” problem “*because of the pressure moms put on themselves.*” Sarah explained that “*we’re all under the microscope,*” and because she recognizes this phenomena, she feels that she has been “conditioned” to withhold information concerning her G/T sons “unless it really is required and necessary” in order to avoid such discomfort. Furthermore, since all participants reported – regardless of recipient reception – a fear of bragging, the researcher noted that just sensing the presence of tension, disapproval, and judgment or expecting the presence of such negative societal reactions was powerful enough to cause these women either adjust or completely withhold information. Sarah worried about “balance” and how to “how to talk about it in a way that doesn’t make other people feel intimidated but doesn’t downplay that I’m crazy proud of him.”

Some mothers, in extreme cases, have begun to remove themselves from social settings because of assumed discomfort; others just gravitate to those who are liked-minded or who seem to understand. Location seems to play a role to some extent. Beth and Rochelle, for instance, both reside in rural communities where G/T learners are few and far between. As a result, it is a general belief that not only are these learners unsupported academically (as seen in a lack of challenging opportunity as well as unfounded teacher expectations), but they are also generally misunderstood. Both Gina

and Jamie seemed to recognize the difference community makes in one's experience. The researcher noted that, in contrast to Beth and Rochelle, these women are in large communities that not only support the bright child but, for the G/T learner, also offers varied opportunities for a rather large G/T population. This means that these learners feel like part of a larger group and may not feel as if they stand out in a negative way. Jamie admitted, for example, that Ann's four best friends are all classified G/T, and Gina insisted that the students enrolled in her son's school have to all be "pretty bright" in order to keep up with assignments while immersed in a second language. Consequently, for a mother to a G/T child, this understanding may consciously or unconsciously ease some discomfort and anxiety. For the mother herself, as seen through Gina's communications, a community of parents in similar circumstances with children similar in intelligence, background, and educational experience may help ease some discomfort. Moreover, there might be more opportunity for mothers of G/T learners to converse with other mothers of G/T learners and thus avoid the discomfort of dissimilar communications.

Anxiety and Frustration. Strong anxiety and frustration was seen in all cases. Parenting challenges certainly affected parenting self-efficacy amongst the participants and caused some to experience guilt and remorse. Claire admitted that "*parenting is hard... no matter how perfect your child is;*" however, parenting a G/T child can be "*hard in different ways.*" Beth thought that her job as a parent to a G/T child, in some ways, was actually, "*a little bit of a harder job.*" This may be one reason why Gina finds parenting a G/T child so "*very exhausting.*"

One stressful element to parenting a G/T child expressed by these mothers seemed to be a sense of insecurity in their knowledge and skill. For instance, when Sarah's son was tested "*in the highly gifted range*" at age four, her anxiety propelled her to immediately seek assistance; her plea to professionals was, "*I don't know what I'm doing... so please help me.*" April said that "*it's a challenge to meet [Chris] where [he is]*" because "*I don't think the way he thinks.*" It seemed that Rochelle would agree, and for this reason she does not "*think [she] 'll ever be satisfied with*" her decisions. Shocked and overwhelmed, she went home in tears when she received Joe's unexpectedly high reading scores because "*the responsibility of helping him reach his potential*" was a great deal for her to bear. She elaborated on the challenge of raising a G/T child:

I question *every* choice I make with him, and it keeps me up at night. Not that I don't think I'm not giving him enough, but I don't think I'm not giving him enough. I don't think I understand him enough, and if I don't as his mom, I know he's not understood by others... even though he is my kid, I feel like he *is* so different *from* me that I *can't* understand him, so how can I tell him to calm down when I don't understand how his brain is working? (italics to highlight participant emphasis in speech)

This sense of insecurity in one's ability to help one's child was seen in several of the narratives. Beth explained that she did not feel as if she "*challenge[d]*" her G/T son enough. It seemed that both Beth and Rochelle considered part of their successful parenting to include, as professional elementary educators themselves, continued academic support, assistance, and challenging stimulation. However, both questioned their ability to provide this support, assistance, and stimulation after elementary school, and this seemed to put added stress on both women. Beth admitted that, now that Blake is in middle school, she does not "*know how to*" support her son in that way. Rochelle feared the day Joe would leave her campus and went so far as to express an intense desire

to “*feel needed.*” This desire as well as her sense of inadequacy may have instigated a need to research about the G/T child and his needs, and, for this reason, Rochelle seemed to have a better understanding of asynchronous development as well as Joe’s emotional needs. Additionally, Beth has distantly sought like-minded individuals through social media to have some sense of community support and understanding. The researcher noted that others mothers, like Beth, currently raising G/T children in rural communities may also benefit from having an online community of mothers who are raising G/T children. Such a community may be a positive outlet to share their struggles and doubts in one’s parenting role as mother to such a child. It may also offer resources and information on the needs and characteristics of a G/T child as well as provide information and suggestions concerning academic support from home since that seemed to be so important to both Beth and Rochelle. Finally, these mothers may benefit from shared coping mechanisms and how one handles interpersonal relations and societal interactions within such communities.

Claire’s anxiety lies heavily in worrying about her son’s emotional health; she said that she worries about his “*self-esteem,*” “*social interactions,*” “*anxiety,*” and “*depression*” among other things. She also worries “*whether he’ll allow himself to be in an uncomfortable situation because he’s a perfectionist and he doesn’t want to try anything new.*” She admitted that these might be things parents to non-G/T children also worry about but “*not in exactly the same way.*” Claire was not alone in her sentiments. Sarah too was so intensely concerned with these things that she opted for Colin to enroll in an online school where he could learn from home. The researcher noted, consequently, that the anxieties experienced by both Claire and Sarah may be exacerbated when other

mothers are seemingly not experiencing such emotions similarly and because of this may make, as Claire shared, parenting a G/T child feel like “*a lonel[y] place to be.*”

Advocating for one’s child was important for all mothers; however, it added an element of anxiety and frustration for most. Consequently, some mothers, like Gina and Adele, are so uncomfortable getting involved in a such a way that they just refuse to do it unless it is absolutely necessary. Both Sarah and Claire, however, have advocated for their G/T child, and the researcher noted from their shared narrative the valued difference support from a certified G/T professional can make. It would seem that not only can such a professional inform and educate a parent but they can also strengthen one’s confidence in the decision to advocate which, in turn, affects one’s self-efficacy. Sarah, discouraged with the system on numerous occasions, seemed assured by the encouragement of the district’s G/T supervisor. This caring professional positively influenced Sarah’s choices and approach. Before becoming G/T-certified, Claire still remembers her frustrating discomfort during parent-teacher dialogues – even with excellent teachers – when attempting to advocate for Thomas. Without the proper verbiage or a true understanding of the G/T child, it seemed that Claire felt defeated before the conversation even began. She explained the difference her G/T certification has made in her approach and confidence when advocating for her son:

Most of the teachers that he has that I’m dealing with have the same background, so we’re talking the same language. But when he was younger, it just felt really frustrating because I *didn’t* really know what I was talking about, but I had a *strong* sense that something wasn’t right. And it felt awkward to be a parent coming in to a professional space and telling that professional, ‘You don’t know what you’re doing.’ It’s very uncomfortable. It’s very awkward. And I didn’t have the language myself or the tools myself to be a good advocate for him when he was younger. I could go in and say, ‘Well, I’m worried that he’s not being challenged. I worry about what might happen when he gets older.’ And I just got a lot of, ‘He’s a smart kid. It’ll be fine. He’s a genius. He doesn’t need any help.

He's going to grow up and make a million dollars and he's going to be smarter than everybody. He'll make more money than anybody.' You know, and I didn't like that getting brushed off and, 'I don't know why you're worried. Your child makes straight As. I've got kids who are failing and those are the kids whose parents need to be worried and they're *not*,' so I kind of felt like I was getting the brush off a lot of times. So it's frustrating because *I* knew he needed help he wasn't getting and nobody seemed to understand that, but to come in and say, 'You're a professional. You're educated; as an educator (and I'm not and I'm telling you what to do).' It's, you know... I kind of felt like my hands were tied, and it makes me sad for parents who are in that situation who *aren't* where I am now. (italics to highlight participant emphasis in speech)

Misunderstanding of Mother

It seems the participants felt that society, in general, misunderstood (or may understand) their maternal *Decisions, Challenges, Role, and Influence on their G/T Child's IQ and Academic Strengths*.

Many of the participants felt that their maternal challenges, decisions, and lifestyle role were misunderstood and even judged by a number of individuals (e.g., husband, friend, acquaintance). Sarah, for instance, admitted that her sister, seeing Sarah's stress, did not understand the "*pointless*" effort she was putting into Colin's educational experience. Sarah explained that her sister did not understand why "*I'm changing my whole life because of this pointless thing*" (i.e., enrolling Colin in online school and allowing him to learn from home). It seemed that some questioned the logic of the maternal decision made in the interest of the G/T child.

In addition to questioned and misunderstood logic, the participants thought that it was difficult for others to understand the daily challenges of dealing with the heightened sensitivities of a G/T child. Rochelle feels she has to "*handle [Joe] with over mitts on*" and is often surprised herself over his "*intensity*" and "*emotional highs and lows.*" Jamie agreed that other people may not understand the extreme heightened sensitivities of these

children, and she admitted that it is a “*daily*” issue. Sarah explained her thoughts regarding the exhausting toll this has on her:

I think a lot of people who have not raised a child like this don't realize how much energy it really requires and that if you don't support them, emotionally, they're going to start to unravel. I don't think people get that connection – even though they deal with it in their own kids. You know, specifically, if their kids struggle. They get it. Their kids are crying about homework. They get it. My kid's crying because he doesn't have enough homework. They don't understand how that's possible, but they're connected – the emotional and the academic. So, I think, there's a gap there where people don't really understand that sometimes having the gifted child is very similar to having a struggling child. It's just on the other side of the spectrum, and you don't get any sympathy... emotionally, it brings all sorts of challenges. You know, to have that and it's not as socially acceptable to push for... ‘I want my kid in AP’ or whatever. It's *totally* socially acceptable to say, ‘My kid can't read and he needs help.’ (italics to highlight participant emphasis in speech)

This may partly explain why Gina puts “*added pressure*” on herself “*doing those extra-curricula things with [her G/T son] and challenging him.*” However, it seems that these lifestyle challenges are misunderstood, as well. Rochelle shared her frustration when others think that her job is easy “*because he's smart*” and they assume she does not “*have to help him with homework.*” She also recognized that they do not seem to understand her innate need “*to be able to teach him*” or any of the other struggles that she deals as a mother to a G/T child. These misconceptions are partly why Claire considers parenting a G/T child a “*lonel[y] place to be.*” When others think that she is “*lucky*” to have a child who “*is so smart,*” she wishes they could understand the “*challenges*” that come with that. One such challenge, as Beth explained, is the constant need for stimulation and challenge. She explained that one has “*to always be on [one's] toes.*” Beth is not alone. Sarah agreed that “*keeping them challenged*” is difficult as well as “*trying to teach them hard work... when everything's easy for them*” since “*you're really*

trying to push them in uncomfortable situations” when society is saying, “That’s wrong! Your kids should be comfortable.”

It seemed that some participants have felt misunderstood and judged for many years, especially when their child was mastering skills at incredibly young ages. Sarah shared that when Colin was reading at age two, people would look at her “*like I was an animal like, ‘You must be a Nazi... a horrible mom’.*” She further explained her perception of how others viewed her during this time:

I think they think you’re a tiger mom. Every time. If your kids are really bright, they think you must be drilling them nonstop. So I think they don’t understand that with these kids.... They’re so self-motivated, so driven – (well, my kids are) that it really is a matter of supporting them... that is definitely a misconception.

Claire would agree, for she had a similar experience with her sister-in-law who indicated to her once that Thomas is bright because he is an only child and she had the time to work with him. She explained her perception of society’s view of mothers raising G/T children:

I feel like sometimes I get the sense that some parents think that the parents of gifted kids must be just, you know, ruthlessly pushing their children twenty-four hours a day to learn stuff and *that’s* why their kids are gifted because, you know, ‘Well, you’re drilling him on the multiplication table when he’s three years old.’ Well, actually... he wanted to learn some math, so we showed him some math. He wanted to learn... you know, he just walked in to the room one day knowing how to read. I didn’t really show him how to do that. So I *do* think there’s a misperception that gifted kids are gifted because their parents must have pushed them and shame on them because, you know, childhood is for play and all that stuff. (italics to highlight participant emphasis in speech)

Parent Protective Factors

The researcher identified parent protective factors as seen both in *Misunderstanding of Child* and in *Concern for Child*. They felt, for the most part, that their G/T child was misunderstood in a number of areas including *Asynchronous*

Development, Personality, Ability, and Lifestyle. This misunderstanding caused additional concerns in areas including *Peer Stigma, Masked Intelligence, Work Ethic and Educational Experience, Social Interactions, Emotional Needs, and Negative Self-Talk.*

Sarah and Claire seemed to have similar concerns regarding their son's peer interactions. Even though Thomas is now in high school, the researcher noted that, as an elementary student, he seemed to have interpersonal relationship struggles much like what Colin was experiencing in his own elementary school before Sarah allowed him to enroll in a nontraditional online school from home. It seemed that both boys felt as if their interests (both inside and outside of academics) were not accepted or appreciated by their classmates, and both mothers felt that their sons suffered emotionally from feeling excluded from same-age peer relationships. Claire indicated, however, that Thomas's struggles did naturally improve in middle school once he enrolled in a school where he was surrounded with like-minded, G/T peers who were tolerant of each other's differences and idiosyncrasies. However, he still "*struggles with anxiety and depression,*" and this may have stemmed from those early days when he would come home saying, "*I don't feel like my classmates really understand me. My classmates tell me that I'm weird.*" Since both boys, according to the participants, value learning and take it so seriously, the researcher noted that an academic placement within an environment with positive, influential peers can have to one's academic journey and personal fulfillment boys value learning and seem to take it seriously.

Claire was concerned with misconceptions and myths of the G/T learner. She explained the difficulties and struggles that her G/T son faces and why this concerns her as his mother:

I think probably a lot of people without that experience wouldn't understand that it's really hard sometimes. It's not that he goes to school and he comes home and he does his homework in five minutes and he makes straight As and everything's peachy. It's *hard*. You know, he's got struggles... you know, his brain works in a different way. He's thinking of things in a *very* different way. And, you know, I *wish* it was as easy as he's making As and everything's fine, but, you know, he's anxious and he's depressed and, you know, it takes him five hours to do a ten-minute homework assignment. You know, he worries about things that he doesn't need to be worried about. He doesn't even know how to study but he needs to know how to study. I mean, it's *hard*. (italics to highlight participant emphasis in speech)

As a middle school learner who was classified at the age of seven, Blake has experienced classmates who not only hope for him to fail but who also “*rejoice*” and “*delight*” in these failures when they occur. Rochelle's son, a mere first grader, has not had such experiences as of yet; however, the researcher noted that these problematic issues and social interactions may play a determining factor in whether a G/T learner chooses to continue academic participation in such programs. Additionally, because of the low population of G/T learners in the rural communities in which Beth and Rochelle live, even when there are other classified G/T students, the range of giftedness may be more pronounced and, as a result, jealousies may occur even amongst G/T peers. Blake, for example, has experienced this as well with another classified G/T peer who convinced him to exit the already limited G/T program. Such interactions may cause a G/T learner, feeling as an outsider in a triangular academic world, to downplay or mask one's intelligence in order to fit in to the non-G/T world of learning where no one feels threatened or discomfort and where one is more likely to be included and invited, as in Blake's case, to birthday parties.

Both Chris and London are well-liked amongst their peers. However, April shared that she was already having to speak with Chris about the way he reacts to others,

including his twin brother, when, for example, they are excited to share news or ideas with him. The researcher noted April's concern with the way Chris interacts socially with others his age as well as with concerns regarding the possibility of unwanted reactions worsening and preventing Chris from maintaining healthy relationships. Adele has seemingly been subjected to intense intolerance and aggravation from London for some time when others (e.g., teachers) are not, for example, as quick-witted or when they seem to be doing something London thinks is "*stupid*." Since this often happens at home with his younger brothers, Adele admitted that such intensity makes things difficult for her emotionally; however, her concern is for London's future relationships with his wife and children.

Both Gina and Jamie seemed to have some anxieties regarding how their G/T children might adapt and react to future challenge. Jamie, for instance, relayed some concern that her daughters, who at times can feel overanxious and overwhelmed with academic work and the personal pressure to perform, can internalize what they believe to be failure. This internalized failure seemed to concern Jamie because she wants her children to feel their self-worth. Her concern about future challenge parallels her concern about their self-confidence and esteem and in dealing with such internal pressure and what they may conceive as failure. Gina's concern regarding Samuel's future complacency emphasizes some apprehension that Samuel's level of focus may waver when things become difficult. Her own personal experience in college highlights an awareness that some G/T children who do not face much (or any) challenge in elementary, middle, and high school may struggle both in college and beyond. Therefore,

it seemed important that Gina emphasize to her son that “*life is going to get tough*” and he will need to “*stay focused.*”

Chapter Summary

Both the data collected and the methods used to analyze the data was presented in this chapter. Additionally, a within-case analysis for each participant was conducted by the researcher where codes, subthemes, and themes, resulting from recognized similarities and patterns across the participant narratives, were created. Recognized key themes of *Emotional Responses*, *Parent Protective Factors*, and *Misunderstanding of Mother* were then elaborated upon and considered in reference to participant data. Throughout the chapter, rich and descriptive narratives were created in order to both give illustrate the lived experiences of these mothers and present the study findings.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions of eight mothers currently raising G/T children. It was believed that these narratives might add valuable insight to the field of gifted and talented education by highlighting the various factors influencing self-efficacy and family dynamics as well as by creating an awareness of the emotional experiences and unique challenges some mothers raising G/T children might encounter.

Summary of Findings

Because the lived experiences of mothers raising G/T children may differ significantly from the lived experiences of mothers not raising G/T children, it was important to qualitatively study perspectives that contribute to one's self-efficacy and consider the internal and external factors that influence such narrative perspectives. To accomplish this, interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview procedure where participants shared personal perspectives from the context and point of view of a mother currently raising a G/T child. The study addressed three guiding research questions.

Research Question 1

The first research question was, "What are the lived experiences and social, emotional, and educational concerns and challenges of mothers raising G/T children?" The compelling lived experiences of the eight participants consisted of emotional responses that ranged from positive to negative in scope. It seemed that all mothers were appreciative of their G/T son or daughter's gifts, talents, and opportunities; however, there was discomfort expressed over perceptions of society's misunderstanding of their

child as well as societal interactions and interpersonal communications that negatively impacted the mothers or the children. Moreover, there was expressed concern regarding the social, emotional, and academic needs of one's G/T child, including shared examples of how both the child and participant herself have been misunderstood by others. Finally, several anxiety-producing elements found both internally and externally to the family structure were shared by the participants. All themes highlighted a social and emotional component, and varied educational concerns and challenges were recognized amongst the study participants.

Social Component. Although most mothers did not feel that their lived experience raising a G/T child affected their friendships, all mothers were cognizant of speaking too much about their G/T child. Accordingly, sharing their narrative created a personal awareness that there was a fear of bragging experienced in many social settings that influenced the participants to either downplay or withhold information entirely.

Emotional Component. Participants seemed confident in their parental choices and seemed to have positive self-efficacy overall in their role as mother to a G/T child. However, emotional responses were identified from the narratives of all eight participants, and it seemed that, to varying degrees, the participants did experience some negative emotions including discomfort, concern, and anxiety in their parental role in raising a G/T child.

Educational Concerns and Challenges. There were educational concerns and challenges experienced by all participants to varying degrees. Most of the stated concerns regarding teacher misunderstanding or teacher treatment of the child seemed to be situational and short-term, but those instances did seemingly alert the mother to future

possibilities. For some mothers, these situations and circumstances sparked an interest and desire to research or consult knowledgeable mentors in order to learn more about the G/T child. For those who did this, the newfound knowledge seemed to strengthen their confidence in advocating for their G/T child and enhance positive self-efficacy.

Research Question 2

The second research question was, “What perceptions might these mothers have regarding society’s opinion and understanding of their G/T child as well as them in their parenting role to such a child?” All participants seemed to have some concern about society’s opinion and understanding of their G/T child and many felt there was some misunderstanding regarding one’s parental role, decisions, and lifestyle.

Perception Regarding Society’s Opinion and Understanding of G/T Child. It seems that the perceptions of these participants concerning society’s opinion and understanding of their G/T child varied but parent protective factors resulting from such perceptions were recognized in all cases. Some mothers expressed concern about peer interactions resulting from either from the stereotypical and stigmatized G/T label, or from myths regarding ease of lifestyle, or from misunderstanding the child’s ability and needs. These perceived societal thoughts and opinions seemed to add pressure and stress on the participants and, for many, created a sense of anxiety.

Perception Regarding Society’s Understanding of Mother to G/T Child. It seems that the perceptions of the study participants concerning society’s opinion and understanding of them in their parenting role to such a child varied, as well. In fact, the interview may have been the first time many of these participants considered such societal perceptions. However, once considered, those mothers who seemed to be

reflecting upon such matters for the first time noted that they could, in fact, sense misunderstanding concerning their maternal role to a G/T child as well as their influence to his or her intelligence and ability. Some seemingly felt judged in their personal choices and decisions by family members, acquaintances, and teachers, for example. Some seemed to sense jealousies and conversational discomfort, as well. Furthermore, some participants seemed to understand the possibilities that misunderstandings could occur from others – especially those who have never raised a G/T child – regarding one’s parental role, daily challenges, emotional complexities, and exhaustion, for instance, in raising such a child.

Research Question 3

The study’s final research question was, “What are the coping mechanisms used in significant socially, emotionally, and educationally challenging situations?” Understandably, the researcher noted that there seemed to be a parallel between the G/T child’s heightened sensitivity and the mother’s emotional response as seen in concern, stress, anxiety, and frustration. It seemed the most recognizable coping mechanism was fusing to avoid discomfort and anxiety. Several of the participants attempted to either research literature that highlighted the G/T child or seek mentorship and friendship from others who were knowledgeable themselves either from their own research or from their own lived experience. By reaching out in this way, not only did one seem to gain a better understanding of one’s child but one also may have gained a better understanding of the lived experience, parenting challenges, and varied options available socially, emotionally, and academically. The interaction with either literature or interpersonal relations also seemed to relieve stress, enhance one’s confidence, and create positive self-efficacy. This

evolved, for some, into advocating for one's child, a more aggressive but proactive form of coping.

The researcher noted that staying active in one's community and gravitating to like-minded individuals seemed to help some mothers. Anxiety was seemingly manageable for those who were able to surround themselves with individuals experiencing similar situations and circumstances. Thus, the study findings suggest that location and community make a difference in one's lived experience. For those in rural communities, both the G/T child and parent might feel more emotionally isolated since, statistically, there is a smaller population of classified G/T children, and there are usually fewer academic options available. Consequently, highly G/T learners may especially have a more difficult time adjusting and feeling a sense of belonging. Moreover, misunderstandings may be exacerbated simply because there are fewer G/T learners in the community and, thus, fewer interactions with such learners. For the mother, there would also be fewer mothers in similar situations whom one could communicate with and feel a community of support.

Connections to the Literature Review

Since there is an indication in the literature review that a child is affected by the parent's emotional health and well-being (Renati et al., 2016) as well as by parental choices and actions (Hoghughi & Long, 2004), it is important that these parents find desirable support and information in order to enhance one's self-efficacy and offer guidance in their unique parental role to a G/T child(ren). However, the challenges and uncertainties that come with parenting such children often leave struggling parenting feeling frustrated and confused. For the overstimulated, overwhelmed, and frequently

overworked parent, intense emotional feelings can easily create or enhance feelings of helplessness and damage one's confidence in the ability to parent such a child. Moreover, it could also harm productive decision-making skills and techniques, limit positive options and opportunities, and damage parent and child relations.

The eight narratives highlighted in this study offer a glimpse at the lived experiences and the unique complexities and emotional challenges that raising a GT child brings. The parent participants in this study recognize the special gifts and talents of their child and want to support him or her socially, emotionally, and academically, however, some – left to deal with ambiguous choices, unexplained concerns, and unresolved sensitive issues – are overwhelmed and left feeling anxious in their parental role. The parent participants certainly understood that their G/T child(ren) needed stimulation, yet some seemed to question if the stimulation they provided was adequate. Additionally, some may be experiencing what Delisle (2001) identified as *profoundly gifted guilt* since some felt inadequately equipped in their role as parent and advocate. These concerns and feelings seemed to affect both intrapersonal, stifling positive self-efficacy, and interpersonal relations which may also impact successful family dynamics. In alignment with the literature review findings (Webb & DeVries, 1998), the parent participants from this study seemed to have few, if any, opportunities to discuss their feelings, confusions, and concerns with others, and many feel judged and sense animosities from others. This has caused study participants to withhold information for fear of bragging even though some recognized that by doing this they are not promoting a healthy environment for either themselves or their G/T child(ren).

The researcher noted that child's level of giftedness as well as the community (e.g., number of G/T peers, placement options, peer grouping) may account for the varying views and emotional complexities and frustrations of the mother. For instance, some seemed to feel more *profoundly gifted guilt* (Delisle, 2001); some seemed to feel more stress and anxiety with idea of raising a child with such capability and potential. Some felt compelled to seek available resources (e.g., literature, mentorship) that may help educate and inform them on the characteristics of the G/T child as well as the rights and opportunities of such a child in an academic setting. Doing this seemed to enable some to feel more confident as their child's advocate. However, overall, parent participants seemed to feel discontent with the interpersonal lines of communications and the perceived largely societal misunderstanding of themselves and their G/T child. This may contribute to why most study participants felt that they could not share personal stories with others who may have unfair misconceptions regarding the mother in her parental role and her G/T child. Some certainly felt judged by others who may have thought they were pushing their child to excel. One mother attempted that she hoped her unborn child was not G/T because of the overwhelming, anxiety-producing circumstances experiences in her parental role to her G/T son. In short, many parent participants felt isolated and removed from those who might be able to understand and empathize their experiences.

Beyond the Literature Review

The narratives in this study added to the current literature and provided concrete examples to illustrate findings highlighted in the literature review. However, the researcher found that the findings in this study extended beyond those in the literature

review. Although myths may be recognized regarding the learning, lifestyle, and drive of G/T child, there are additional areas of concern for some parents raising such a child. Beth's narrative, for instance, reminds us that not only are there often jealousies and strained interpersonal peer relations that a G/T child has to deal with, but there are often those who "*rejoice*" and even "*delight in [the child's] failures*" and this can put added stress on the mother who, like Beth, is intensely sensitive to these experiences. Beth's narrative also reminds us that those individuals who have ill will toward the G/T child may even be from the G/T population themselves. Additionally, the literature does not seem to address fully the connection between "*the emotional and the academic*" and how "*sometimes having the gifted child is very similar to having a struggling child.*" Sarah elaborated:

If you don't support them, emotionally, they're going to start to unravel.... Their kids are *crying* about homework. They get [that, but m]y kid's crying because he doesn't have enough homework. They don't understand how that's possible, but they're connected – the emotional and the academic. So, I think, there's a gap there where people don't really understand that sometimes having the gifted child is very similar to having a struggling child.

Moreover, the literature may not fully recognize the need some parents may have "*feel needed*" by their G/T child(ren). Rochelle's narrative illustrated that there are days when she feels the emotional strain of having a son who may not "*need for [her] to... teach him.*" Consequently, this sense of longing may put an additional strain on the mother and negatively impact her self-efficacy. Finally, the understanding that communities matter is an important consideration. The researcher found that the participants who seemed more at ease in their parental role were in areas that either supported the G/T child and his or her family or areas where there were others like them and who could offer support in the way of formal and informal communications. It was clear, for instance, that Rochelle –

who seemed to struggle with high anxiety – may suffer more because her son is the only G/T child in the entire school. Thus, there are few, if any, who would understand her role and unique experiences. On the other hand, for Gina – who was and is married to a G/T learner herself and who both were enrolled in schools with a large G/T population – whose G/T son is enrolled in an immersion school that prides itself on the bright intelligent of its student learners, the researcher noticed less anxiety. Jamie too admitted that she was relieved to know that, her children are “*blessed to be surrounded by good children that are intelligent.*” Consequently, the researcher noted that, in this instance, Jamie’s anxiety was far less noticeable than other participants like Beth who is also from a rural community.

Impact of Theoretical Lens

Bowen's Family System Theory (1978) was the theoretical lens used within this study to observe and analyze the data. Through the shared experience of the participants, the researcher was able to glimpse into eight nuclear family units in order to better understand the emotional process as highlighted in Bowen’s theory. The background, community, and educational opportunity influenced the lived experience of the mother; however, the researcher noted patterns and themes regarding the perceptions and emotional responses amongst the participants.

The researcher recognized how stress and anxiety caused by innumerable factors – from routine daily living to, the most extreme, tragedy and loss – can fuse family members in order to ease discomfort and find relief through support and togetherness. This, however, can create stress, discomfort, and complications for those family members in an awkward outside and unwanted position – like Adele’s husband who “*butt heads*”

with their son and who was “*the total opposite from [Adele and London].*” When complications arise within such a triangle and one feels emotionally threatened, for instance, problematic issues are exacerbated. These triangulations can develop externally from the family unit, as well. Sarah fused with her G/T supervisor, for example, since she was able to offer Sarah refuge and relief from overwhelming options and emotional challenges, confusions, and concerns. When the mother considered her G/T child’s fusion a healthy, healing one, the researcher found that the child’s fusion paralleled the mother’s sense of calm relief and became a basis for helping her cope. For instance, Jamie was better able to cope with her emotional responses knowing that her daughter was getting relief from her own heightened sensitivities through pet therapy. Jamie also seemed to find comfort and relief in knowing that art has been a positive and therapeutic outlet for her son. The researcher also noted, however, that the triangular fusion can take an unexpected turn when the participant wants to avoid discomfort and interpersonally connect in conversation. In order to normalize lived experiences, some mothers chose to downplay accomplishments, highlight exacerbated challenges of parenting a G/T child, or insist on personal inadequacies as a parent to such a child. Emotional cutoff is also a possibility in such a setting, and a fear of bragging has certainly caused these participants to either adjust or withhold the sharing of information entirely. In an extreme case, one participant admitted to completely cutting herself off from society at large, for she prefers to spend that time with just her husband and children since there is seemingly less discomfort.

It was difficult to address the projection process since it was only the mother’s perception and experience documented. However, based on Bowen’s theory (1978), the

anxieties of the mother may be projected on to her G/T child, and the heightened sensitivities of the child may parallel the stress and anxiety of the mother. Therefore, the emotional cycle may continue within the family unit, and if the G/T label is looked at as an “ailment” causing emotional complexities, it can create an intense child focus that can exacerbate the problem.

Society at large (e.g., teachers, other mothers, social media) seemed to cause a great deal of emotional rift within the lives of the study participants. Many of the participants shared stories, for instance, of teachers and administrators who were either not supportive or understanding of the G/T child and the G/T program. Stress, anxiety, and frustration drove some mothers to advocate for their child, but, for some, advocating was out of their comfort zone and thus avoided. Peer interactions also caused heightened emotional stress for some participants and their G/T children. Problems seemed especially prevalent in rural communities where G/T learners may be seen as different and where these learners may themselves feel abnormal. These perceptions and the feelings they endorse seemed to create additional stress and anxiety in the home, and this seemed to exacerbate fusion. The importance of surrounding oneself with like-minded individuals and supportive groups is seemingly vital for the success of all involved, but for some this may not be possible. Awkwardness experienced in uncomfortable societal settings caused some participants to adjust their words and actions in order to both normalize and feel part of the group without feeling insensitive to the recipient(s) of the conversation. Myths and erroneous beliefs about a G/T child’s learning style and lifestyle, for instance, may exacerbate misunderstanding of both the child and his or her

mother, and these misunderstandings seemed to create more pressure and stress for the mother raising a G/T child.

Limitations

Limitations were present in the participant demographics since all eight participants were white, married, and middle class women. Although some participants had more than one G/T child and some participants had been parenting a G/T child longer than others (and, therefore, had more experiences to draw from), all parents seemed to willingly and thoroughly divulge, deliver, and develop their narrative so that an accurate portrait was presented. The study participants, however, were women who opted into the study wanting to share their lived experiences and willing to expose their emotional responses and perceptions concerning society's treatment and understanding of both them and their G/T child. There were some who were more articulate than others, and there were some who were better able to recall experiences and identify and explain personal thoughts and feelings regarding those experiences, but all had valuable information to share. There was no way the researcher could gauge those mothers raising G/T children who did not opt to participate or those mothers who may be raising unidentified G/T children. Moreover, the study did not address fathers or grandparents raising G/T children. The participant population, therefore, is a skewed group and this was a limitation found in this study.

Considerations for Teachers, Counselors, and Administrators

It is important that educators and administrators understand the lived experiences of mothers raising G/T learners since they are, in fact, stakeholders that directly affect student success. One participant, Claire, felt strongly that there was a need for educators

to consider and better understand such information so that they can take, according to Claire, the concerns of mothers raising G/T children seriously. It would seem that understanding the concern and probable anxiety that accompanies it might make a difference for the success and emotional health and well-being of these families. Consequently, teachers and administrators may help build self-efficacy within these mothers. Acknowledging the thoughts and opinions of these mothers may help boost confidence which, in turn, might encourage them to positively advocate for their child so that he or she is properly placed, for instance, in the right academic environment.

Training teachers, counselors, and administrators to better identify and understand the G/T child and his or her needs might also make a positive difference, as well. The study findings indicate that when a mother sees her G/T child stressed with heightened sensitivities from being misunderstood or from being placed in inappropriate and inadequate academic settings, the mother may be more susceptible to emotional responses such as frustration and anxiety. Therefore, teachers, counselors, and administrators might consider a more active role in advocating for these students and creating a safe and worthy learning environment so that these learners may reach their fullest potential. Some participants may have perceived teachers and administrators as either untrained or unsupportive of G/T learners or G/T programs. Additionally, as one narrative illustrated, this lack of support and understanding may also stall the testing and classification process which delays placement and child development. Consequently, these participants may have felt frustrated and concerned with not only educators who misunderstood and had unreasonable expectations of one's child, for example, but who

also did not understand the risks that were involved in not providing challenging content or not providing for social and emotional needs.

Considerations for Society at Large

It is important that society at large first recognize the unfounded myths and false assumptions regarding G/T learners. It is also important to recognize the challenges and complexities of some mothers raising G/T children in order to better understand their experience to avoid misconceptions and false judgments. Even those in the medical field might benefit from recognizing the needs of these mothers to avoid unnecessary wait for treatment or misdiagnosis.

Considerations for Mothers Raising G/T Children

It is important that mothers raising G/T children recognize, first and foremost, that the stress and heightened sensitivities of one's child can create stress and anxiety within oneself. For this reason, one might consider self-directed knowledge and insight either through research or through communications with others knowledgeable in such areas. For example, mothers of newly identified G/T learners might consider seeking support from veteran mothers of older G/T students, for these relations may help them better understand their unique experiences so that they may be more proactive in their approach to parenting such a child. Parent support groups may be another option, and, as one narrative illustrates, even online parent groups can be comforting for those, especially those in rural communities who feel isolated from others who might better understand.

Additionally, one's awareness and understanding of especially sensitive triggers that may exacerbate a G/T child's negative reactions to overwhelming and stressful circumstances and situations may be useful to challenging choices and stressful situations

experienced in one's parental role. Since knowledge seemed to boost confidence and inspire some participants to advocate for their child, which seemingly enhanced a positive self-efficacy, the quest for knowledge may be another vital element to success. In fact, if enhanced knowledge helps to minimize misunderstanding, confusion and doubt, it may also help lessen discomfort, concern, and anxiety.

Suggestions for Future Research

Coincidentally, all eight participants in this study were older Caucasian mothers and married from middle-to-upper class families. Future research could and should investigate the lived experiences of women from more racially and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds as well as mothers raising profoundly G/T children. Dabrowski (1964, 1966) suggests that the higher one's IQ, the more heightened the sensitivity of the child; therefore, it can be assumed that the higher the IQ of the child, the more exacerbated the mother's anxiety may be. Therefore, future research is planned to include mothers raising such profoundly G/T children in order to address those parallel and heightened anxieties and the emotional responses to such lived experiences.

Moreover, since this study focused on the lived experience of mothers only, future studies are planned that will also consider the lived experiences of fathers raising G/T children. Other scholars are also encouraged to seek out and evaluate such paternal populations or other family configurations (e.g., grandparents, guardians, step-parents) to further develop opportunities for shared narratives nationally.

Conclusion

Indeed, parenting is difficult. However, with society's continued evolution, as reflected in family structure diversity, it is wise to be mindful of the unique challenges

and emotional complexities some parents face in their parental role, for these challenges may influence one's parental self-efficacy and may impact family dynamics which, in turn, might impact one's community. For parents of G/T children, it would seem that an intensely unique set of challenging obstacles, complexities, and difficulties may surface and that these unique experiences may spark concern, impact choices, and exacerbate stress and anxiety. Therapeutic outlets that could help ease the stress and tension of parenting such a child may be unknown or out of reach. Consequently, some parents raising G/T children may feel overwhelmed and isolated in their parental role.

The researcher considered the narratives of eight mothers currently raising G/T children. In the societal push to consider the whole child, it is wise to consider, as Bowen (1978) did, the maternal influence on one's development. Accordingly, mothers play a pivotal role that greatly impacts one's social, emotional, and cognitive growth and development. These women offered valuable information in creating an awareness that will benefit both educators and parents to G/T children. It is hoped that study findings can generate interest from stakeholders as well as encourage mothers raising G/T children to continue sharing their unique experiences.

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APPENDIX A. IRB APPROVAL

ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST



TO: Mary Hidalgo
Education

FROM: Dennis Landin
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: August 30, 2016

RE: IRB# E10013

TITLE: Parenting the Gifted and Talented Child: A Qualitative Inquiry of Parenting Perceptions Regarding the Unique Experiences in Raising Children

Institutional Review Board
Dr. Dennis Landin, Chair
130 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
P: 225.578.8692
F: 225.578.5983
irb@lsu.edu | lsu.edu/irb

New Protocol/Modification/Continuation: New Protocol

Review Date: 8/30/2016

Approved **Disapproved**

Approval Date: 8/30/2016 **Approval Expiration Date:** 8/29/2019

Exemption Category/Paragraph: 2b

Signed Consent Waived?: No

Re-review frequency: (three years unless otherwise stated)

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable):

Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal: (if applicable)

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman 

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –
Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:**

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
7. Notification of the IRB of a serious compliance failure.
8. **SPECIAL NOTE: When emailing more than one recipient, make sure you use bcc. Approvals will automatically be closed by the IRB on the expiration date unless the PI requests a continuation.**

**All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at <http://www.lsu.edu/irb>*

APPENDIX B. PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

Please read this informed consent in its entirety prior to agreeing to participate in this study.

Dear Parent,

Thank you for agreeing to sit and visit with me. I am conducting a study that will explore the lived experiences of parents raising gifted and/or talented (G/T) children. It is important that your voice be heard and your uniquely lived experience acknowledged and understood. I am conducting this study for my dissertation research in Curriculum and Instruction within the College of Education at Louisiana State University.

You have been identified as a parent to a G/T child(ren) based, after either private or public testing, on your child's G/T classification as well as his/her enrollment in G/T programs and classes. During the audio-recorded interview(s), you will be asked to share personal information about your thoughts and feelings regarding the experiences in raising a G/T child(ren) and in your communications and relations with others socially, educationally, and emotionally. Please answer all questions as honestly as possible.

Information gathered from the transcribed interview(s) will add to the body of knowledge within the field of gifted education and our psychological understanding of the parent and G/T child relations and dynamics. The interview(s) will be administered face-to-face on a day and time convenient for you between August 25th and September 25th. Additionally, the agreed upon venue must be comfortably suitable for you and your expectations (e.g., home, work, library, coffeehouse). The voice-recorded interview will take no longer than an hour, and second interviews are available on an as-needed basis and at your request. There will be no cash compensation or prizes; however, small tokens of my appreciation will be presented at the time of the interview(s). Agreeing to, orally or in writing (e.g., text, email), and later meeting with me one-on-one to answer a series of interview questions will indicate your consent to participate in the study.

I do not anticipate participating in this interview(s) will contain risk of harm to you or your loved ones. Furthermore, your participation is strictly voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any time without penalty.

All information shared will be kept confidential and will benefit my research only. Pseudonyms will be given and no other identifying information to either you or your family will be specified in the results or in future publication of the results. At your request, I will be happy to share results with you once the study is complete. If you have any other questions, please feel free to contact:

Mary Hidalgo, Principal Investigator
mhidal8@lsu.edu
337-526-9497

Or

Jennifer Curry, PhD, Co-Investigator
jcurry@lsu.edu
225-578-1437

Additionally, if you have any concerns regarding your treatment as a participant in this study, please call or write:

Dennis Landin, PhD
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
irb@lsu.edu
225-578-8692

By **voluntarily** agreeing to meet and share in the interview process, you are verifying that you have read the explanation of the study and agree to participate. Thank you for your interest and involvement.

I, _____, understand the process,
(please print your first and last name)

requirements and expectations involved in this study and agree to participate.

Signature

Date

APPENDIX C. PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Directions: Please answer the following questions by choosing the response that best pertains to you or by answering the prompt. (All responses will remain anonymous).

_____ Age

- a. 20-25
- b. 26-30
- c. 31-35
- d. 36-40
- e. 41 or above

_____ Marital Status

- a. Single
- b. Married
- c. Remarried
- d. Divorced
- e. Cohabiting

_____ Number of Underage Children in Household

- a. 1
- b. 2
- c. 3
- d. 4
- e. 5 or more

_____ Number of Privately or Publicly Tested & Classified G/T Children in Household

- a. 1
- b. 2
- c. 3
- d. 4
- e. 5 or more

_____ Gifted Child 1

- a. Age _____ Gender _____
- b. Age of G/T Identification _____
- c. Strength _____

- d. Weakness _____

- e. School Enrolled? _____
- f. Describe Gifted Services or Classes Enrolled

_____ Gifted Child 2

- a. Age _____ Gender _____
- b. Age of G/T Identification _____
- c. Strength _____

- d. Weakness _____

- e. School Enrolled? _____
- f. Describe Gifted Services or Classes Enrolled

*** If there are additional G/T children, please duplicate # 5 on back on page

Y or N Were you tested and classified G/T?

Y or N Are the children of your closest friends tested and classified G/T?

Y or N Was the biological father of the G/T child tested and classified G/T?

Y or N Are the children of your or biological father's siblings tested and classified G/T?

APPENDIX D. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about your son's/daughter's strongest gift/talent and what sets him/her apart from his/her peers.
2. Tell me what pleases and excites you the most (even if you can't voice it to others) regarding these gifts/talents and his/her future possibilities?
3. Tell me about a really bad day for your G/T child where he/she was misunderstood by others.
4. Tell me about an experience where your G/T child was treated unfairly or where there was discomfort or resistance (e.g., jealousy, frustration) from others (e.g., classmates, teachers, coaches).
5. What might your biggest concern be (for both you and your child) resulting from such experiences?
6. How do you provide educational resources, intellectual assistance, and logical direction for your G/T child? Are you satisfied with your choices?
7. Tell me what makes advocating for your G/T child and his/her rights and educational opportunities difficult.
8. How do you provide emotional support for your G/T child?
9. What is it like to be with other mothers who don't have G/T children? What might you wish was different?
10. What might others who have never raised a G/T child think of parents of G/T children and their parenting role? In general, do you think these opinions are correct and justified? Please elaborate.

11. What challenges in raising a G/T child might others who have never raised such a child not understand? How might their image of you as a mother to a G/T child be erroneous?
12. Tell me about a time you withheld information about your G/T child – even when other mothers were sharing positive news or stories regarding their own child and his/her accomplishments. Why might this have happened?
13. Having had time to reflect upon your experiences in raising a G/T child, tell me about any enlightening thoughts or new discoveries regarding these experiences? Has your opinion/attitude shifted in any way?
14. Describe a/another time when the comments (or lack of comments) and actions by another adult (possibly a mother to a non-G/T child) caused tension and discomfort for you personally.
15. Tell me about additional ways in which you might have adapted/adjusted your communications with others regarding your G/T child.
16. If you knew that these feelings/experiences were common among mothers raising G/T children, how might your experiences – or reactions to them – change?

**APPENDIX E. PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT
FOR 2004 PILOT STUDY**

Dear Parent,

Thank you for your time during my 2004 studies. During our encounters, you were able to share parts of your narrative in raising a gifted and talented child(ren). The knowledge gleaned from your participation has benefitted me in my research and inspired future studies. Currently, I am conducting a qualitative study for my dissertation research in Curriculum and Instruction within the College of Education at Louisiana State University. My inquiry focuses on parent perceptions regarding the unique experiences in raising gifted and talented children. I hope that, like you, additional voices will be heard so that the field of gifted education can be expanded and lived parenting experiences of raising such children can be considered and better understood.

To your knowledge at the time, your voluntary one-on-one interview(s) was voice-recorded and the dialogue contents were later transcribed. All information continues to be kept confidential and benefits my research only. Pseudonyms were given and no other identifying information to either you or your family was specified in the results. I will be happy to share the transcribed interview notes with you upon your request.

In order to update my data for current purposes, I am asking you to again provide permission to include, in my written work, part(s) of your shared experience and thoughts in raising a gifted and talented child as well as in your communications and relations with other socially, educationally, and emotionally.

If you have any other questions, please feel free to contact:

Mary Hidalgo, Principal Investigator
mhidal8@lsu.edu
337-526-9497

Or

Jennifer Curry, PhD, Co-Investigator
jcurry@lsu.edu
225-578-1437

Additionally, if you have any concerns regarding your treatment as a participant in this study, please call or write:

Dennis Landin, PhD
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
irb@lsu.edu
225-578-8692

By *voluntarily* signing this form, you are giving permission for your 2004 interviewed shared experiences to be used as personally-unidentified data in my current study. Thank you for your time and involvement.

I, _____, give
(please print your name legibly)

Mary F. Hidalgo permission to use my interview responses for academic purposes.

(informant signature)

(date)

VITA

Mary Hidalgo, a native of Southwest Louisiana, received her Master's Degree in Administration and Supervision from McNeese State University (MSU) and an Educational Specialist Degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Louisiana State University (LSU). She has spent 21 years in Calcasieu Parish schools as a classroom teacher, primarily to G/T students. She is also a Visiting Lecturer at MSU. She anticipates graduating in May 2016 with a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction. She is optimistic about the possibilities of positive change in the field of gifted education, and she expects this degree to provide a platform to give voice to a typically unheard-from population – parents raising the G/T child.