

# To Thine Own Self Be True: A New Model of Female Talent Development

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## ABSTRACT

This article describes an innovative model of female talent development based upon the life experiences of gifted women from a wide variety of backgrounds and talent domains. The model was synthesized from original studies contributed by more than 20 scholars, psychologists, and educators, known collectively as *Remarkable Women: Perspectives on Female Talent Development* (Arnold, Noble, & Subotnik, 1996). Key issues addressed by this model are the personal, professional, and cultural challenges common to gifted females as well as strategies for coping with them, spheres of influence and achievement to which gifted women aspire, and ways to help gifted women and girls identify and actualize their talents and gifts.

There is a poignant scene in *Hamlet* in which Laertes prepares to leave home for a course of university study. His father, Polonius, embraces him and offers him sage suggestions about how to succeed, the most important of which is be true to himself. Unfortunately, Polonius' advice to his daughter, Ophelia, is just the reverse. For her, success lies not in being true to herself, but in following the will of her father, particularly in her choice of a life partner. As all students of *Hamlet* know, this advice ultimately proves lethal for Ophelia, who loses her mind and her life in rapid succession.

Given the constraints operating on women's choices, Ophelia's life might have taken the same course even if Polonius had given her the same counsel he gave to Laertes. For Ophelia, marriage and motherhood or religious life were the sole channels through which she could focus her talents and energies. Fortunately, the past several decades have witnessed unprecedented changes and opportunities in the lives of women and girls. More than ever before, women are working outside the home, moving into domains traditionally reserved for men, and vigorously pursuing careers and inter-

ests (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 1998). Mirroring this social revolution has been the vastly increased attention being paid to the unique developmental patterns of women and girls, their life experiences, and the nature of their participation in personal and public spheres of activity. Despite this explosion of scholarship about women and girls, insufficient research has focused on the development of female talent, especially in specific domains such as science, education, athletics, and the arts. The same can be said of the psychological, sociological, and cultural factors that enhance or inhibit the expression of female ability.

## PUTTING THE RESEARCH TO USE

Talent development is a complex, interactive process that demands effort and awareness on the part of gifted females. From an early age, they must actively seek clarity about their affective needs, values, personality traits, psychological issues, and spiritual goals. Equally important is awareness about the challenges of particular talent domains, the level of achievement to which one aspires, and the sacrifices that such achievement might require.

The need for family, community, and institutional support cannot be overstated, yet this support must not be limited to praise. Gifted girls do not become gifted women by avoiding adversity. We serve them best by alerting them to realistic obstacles, expanding their coping strategies, and encouraging their efforts through significant challenges. Special guidance programs, opportunities for educational acceleration, and formal and informal mentoring make a real difference in gifted females' lives. In addition, the number of women in male-dominated professions and at the top levels of all fields must increase, and occupational structures must be modified to accommodate women's significant family roles.

Society looks to exceptional individuals to lead its institutions, transform aesthetic expression, solve significant problems, and produce ideas that profoundly change our conceptions and material lives. Until recently, however, the majority of renowned individuals have been men, and it is from their lives that much of our knowledge about talent development has been derived (e.g., Goertzel and Goertzel, 1962; Gardner, 1993). The long-standing tradition of excluding women from public life meant that women's experiences were largely overlooked in studies and theories of talent development. Thus, the process of turning potential talent into actual achievement has been generally explicated for men but not for women.

Despite the recent entry of large numbers of women into the public sphere, they remain relatively rare in the elite levels of the arts, sciences, letters, the worlds of finance and politics, and the ranks of the eminent. The term "glass ceiling" has entered the language to describe the invisible, inexorable obstacles women have faced in reaching the top echelons in their fields (Morrison, White, & Van Velsor, 1992). Chief executive officers, ground-breaking scientists, symphony orchestra conductors, and political leaders are nearly always male, for reasons that have more to do with custom and institutionalized sexism than with female preference or ability. As a result, our society does not reap the advantages that could accrue from the full utilization of all its human resources. Just as important, many women are not able to experience the joys and rewards associated with expressing their talents to the highest degree. These present realities engender questions about the fate of women with great potential, insight, and skill, and what can be done to increase the presence of women in all sectors and at all levels of public life.

In order to answer these questions, we issued in 1994 a challenge to ourselves and more than 20 scholars, psychologists, and educational professionals. We asked them to contribute original insights about gifted women from a wide variety of backgrounds and talent domains. We wanted to feature and synthesize work on how women coped with and overcame personal, professional, and cultural obstacles; the nature of female talent development; and how we could use what we learned to help more women identify and develop their gifts and abilities. This article describes the model of female talent development we derived from our synthesis of those studies, known collectively as *Remarkable Women: Perspectives on Female Talent Development* (Arnold, Noble, & Subotnik, 1996), which we continue to refine.

## An Overview of the Model

In our model (see Figure 1), female talent development is a complex and interactive system of relationships among sev-

eral critical variables. Individual and demographic traits affect women's interaction with opportunities and talent domains and their expression of talent in private and public spheres of influence. Like human development theory in general, theories about talent development look increasingly at the social context of individuals' characteristics and life paths (Bronfenbrenner, 1993; Feldman, Csikszentmihalyi, & Gardner, 1994). Our conception is unique among such models in that it addresses context by focusing on women's relative distance from the mainstream or core of their societies' power centers. We understand the mainstream to be the cluster of traditions, values, and practices that constitute what has been termed the "dominant culture" within a given society. Thus, rural, East Indian women denied literacy or economic independence who succeed in earning an advanced education or working productively outside the home, or rural American women who resist the pull of conservative sex-role stereotyping and low achievement expectations to pursue graduate degrees and professional careers are pioneers. In our model, these women could be labeled gifted because of the uniqueness of their achievement. White upper-middle class women are underrepresented in the elite professions. For these women, significant contributions to their field or the transformation of ideas on the global or interdisciplinary level also constitute a measure of giftedness. Definitions of giftedness as unusual or remarkable attainment, therefore, depend on the degree of women's initial economic and cultural marginalization.

The middle components of the model are catalysts and filters through which personal and demographic characteristics become adult gifted behavior. Opportunities—actual, perceived, and acted upon—interact with the specific nature of a talent domain to affect the realization of high potential. These catalysts and filters are featured in other models of talent development.

The final outcome component of our model departs markedly from other talent development theories. Varied spheres of influence constitute legitimate expressions of women's giftedness. These include: (1) self- and community actualization; (2) leadership in organizations, institutions, communities, and professions; and (3) eminence. Most conceptions of adult giftedness view eminence or transformational creativity as the ultimate fulfillment of potential (e.g., Feldman, Csikszentmihalyi, & Gardner, 1994). In our view, given women's continuing association with the personal realm, a single outcome measure of gifted behavior is not sufficiently comprehensive.

Self-actualization is a concept originally coined by Abraham Maslow (1954) to describe people who are intrinsically motivated, self-aware, altruistic, fully engaged in the

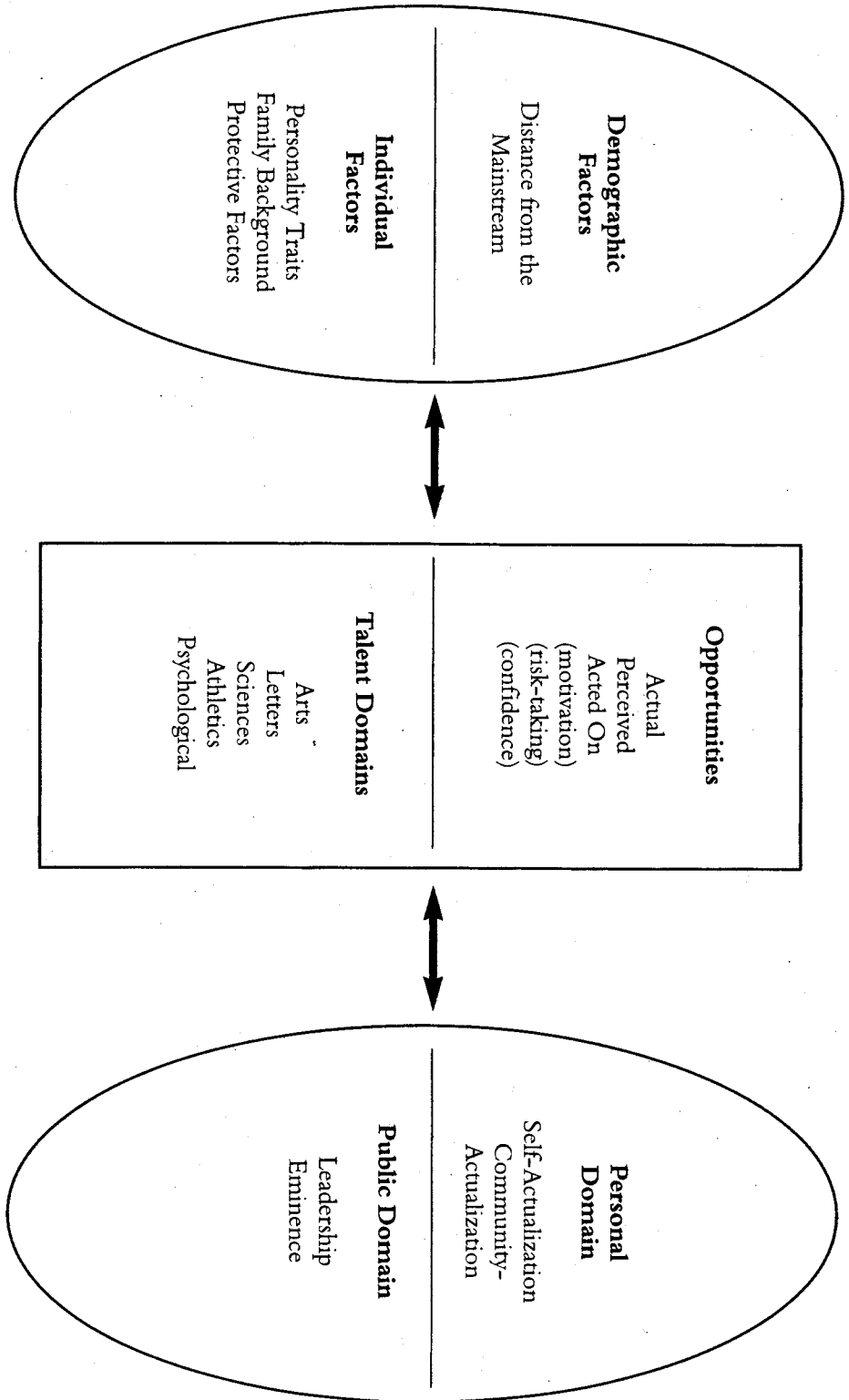


Figure 1. A New Model of Female Talent Development

process of living, and who actively create meaning in their lives. Our model views self-actualization as an intrapersonal achievement that might express itself through such creative products as exceptional parenting or unusual transcendence of traumatic circumstances. Community actualization has to do with transforming particular, local conditions, usually for a group of which one is a member. Entering achievement arenas in which an organization, institution, community, or profession is affected constitutes a wider sphere of influence—leadership. Eminence, the traditional gauge of adult giftedness, is the transformation of a profession or field through unique creative contributions (Feldman, Csikszentmihalyi, & Gardner, 1994). As the model indicates, however, both aiming for and achieving eminence are functions of the distance a woman must travel from the margins and the mediating factors of opportunity and talent domains. Therefore, the combination of degree of social marginalization and sphere of influence become crucial variables in our model of female talent development. With this overview in mind, we turn now to a more in-depth analysis of its components.

## Foundations

*Demographic factors.* That the context of a woman's life deeply affects her talent development is an underlying premise of this model. More subtle factors emerge beyond obvious issues of nationality, race, gender, and class. Where she comes from not only affects a woman's opportunities, but, as importantly, her perceptions of possibilities for achievement (Astin & Leland, 1991). Access to education, civil and legal rights, and professional achievement have increased exponentially since Leta Stetter Hollingworth set out to prove that females were as variable in intelligence as males (Hollingworth, 1914). From circumscribed roles and stereotypes as intellectual inferiors confined to domestic tasks, women have moved in great numbers into virtually every sphere of public achievement: intellectual, artistic, political, and athletic. Gains are not universal, however, and women are still newcomers to top career ranks in prestigious fields.

To succeed in arenas that have been denied to them historically, women must become fluent in both traditionally private (female, communal, domestic) and public (male, agentic, career) spheres (Nieva & Gutek, 1981). All women move between public and private spheres or cultures, and all, to varying degrees, are "outsiders within" (Lorde, 1984). Many women are distanced from centers of power and socially valued achievement by more than gender. Ethnic minority women, working class and rural women, lesbians,

and women with disabilities are multiply marginalized by obstacles such as racism, homophobia, and other stereotyping beliefs and behaviors as well as sexism (Collins, 1986). Beyond the external constraints of "outsider" status lies the damage from internalized gender inferiority.

Women as a group are new to many high-powered professions and achievement spheres. Nieva and Gutek (1981) and Rodenstein, Pflieger, and Colangelo (1977), among others, have discussed the conflict between social stereotypes of the ideal woman and the ideal career achiever. As noted earlier, the centers of power and achievement have been largely defined by middle class, male, white, urban, heterosexual, and Western traditions, values, practices, and assumptions. For non-white, non-privileged women, therefore, multicultural issues are more complex than for middle class white women. Giroux and McLaren (1994) and Giroux (1992) have written of the invaluable contributions that can be made by "border crossers" such as non-white or economically disadvantaged women as they gain access to mainstream organizations and institutions, introducing perspectives not otherwise heard. Yet, dual allegiance exacts a price. When talented women adopt new value structures and ways of being and knowing, they are likely to feel distanced from their culture and family. Women who adopt new cultural practices will not fully belong at home or in their new milieu. Each woman, therefore, comes to the achievement arena with a constellation of background experiences related to class, race, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, and disability. These traits interact with her personality, family background, early experiences, and psychology. From this beginning, gifted women must channel their aspirations into opportunities within specific talent domains and take advantage of those opportunities when they arise.

For many gifted women from both marginalized and mainstream positions, service to their family or cultural group can be a powerful motivator for fulfilling their potential. Major issues of identity and belonging persist, however. *Where am I most at home? How can I address competing cultural values? How much do I wish to sacrifice or mask myself to succeed in mainstream achievement circles?* The more a woman finds herself a token, the more she faces such questions.

*Individual factors.* Giftedness is a dynamic psychological process that can pose particular dilemmas, especially as women move from childhood to adolescence and adulthood (Arnold, 1995; Kerr, 1995; Noble, 1987, 1994, 1996). For example, gifted women tend to be more androgynous in behavior and attitudes and to rebel against narrowly prescribed gender roles. Despite the relaxation of gender roles in the past several decades, stereotypical expectations continue to influence female behavior, aspirations, and self-perceptions. When

women defy these stereotypes, they risk being perceived—or perceiving themselves—as deviant (Angrist & Almquist, 1993; Holland & Eisenhart, 1990; Kerr, 1995; Noble, 1994). Many gifted women report painful experiences of being criticized for being “too verbal,” “too sensitive,” “too intense,” “too introverted,” and “too driven” (Noble, 1994), a situation that leads to embarrassment, shame, and a tendency to hide their abilities from themselves and from others.

Despite the widespread belief that “the cream will always rise to the top,” there are many constraints that divert or prevent the most talented individuals from fully expressing their gifts. When giftedness is defined exclusively by a standardized IQ or achievement test score, by participation in a special program in elementary or secondary school, or by admission to an elite university, highly capable adults who were not identified as such may fail to recognize their potential for achievement. Testing bias may deflect the true ability possessed by some highly capable women; accelerated programs may be inaccessible or unavailable; and higher education may be a remote or unattainable possibility. Adverse funding climates, geographical limitations, religious ideology, racism, child-rearing responsibilities, gender discrimination, economic expectations, political systems, and homophobia are other obstacles to talent realization.

In order to develop their talents in the face of these obstacles, women must cultivate a number of protective factors known collectively as “resilience.” Resilience is the ability to respond to stress with competence (Garmezy & Tellegen, 1984). Numerous studies cite qualities such as intelligence, emotional flexibility, independence, sensitivity, curiosity, and the willingness to reach out for love and support as central components of the resilient personality (Anthony & Cohler, 1987; Garmezy & Tellegen; Dugan & Coles, 1989). Other protective factors include introspection, altruism, self-awareness, a sense of humor, optimism in the face of adversity, and a willingness to rely upon one’s own inner resources (Flach, 1988). Higgins (1994) and Flach (1988) reported that resilient people believed they had the ability to exercise some measure of control no matter how dire the circumstances in which they found themselves. Because they were committed to living as fully as possible, they developed their talents and abilities, acquired a high degree of personal discipline, and were willing to fight to preserve their own souls.

Resilience does not demand that individuals be superhuman or saints, but rather that they be committed to their own psychological health. As Murphy (1987) said of the resilient members of her research cohort, they “*wanted* to be resilient and actively mobilized and responded to anything and everything that would contribute to recovery” (p. 104–105, emphasis in original). These individuals took time

to recuperate from trauma and setbacks and strove for a coherent philosophy of life that helped them maintain emotional vitality. They learned to turn to themselves for comfort and safety, and to trust their own thoughts and beliefs rather than accept unquestioningly the ideas of those around them.

To be resilient, gifted women must cultivate these strengths as well as others. They must understand what giftedness—in general and theirs in particular—entails (Kerr, 1995; Noble, 1987, 1989). They must cultivate a strong sense of self and a solid working knowledge of their values and needs. They must resist internalizing the profusion of messages about female inferiority and learn to recognize and externalize sexism and discrimination in whatever forms they appear (Noble, 1994). From an early age, they must expect to encounter some resistance both within and outside themselves and develop strategies for overcoming it. A high level of innate ability is insufficient to withstand cultural pressures that have forced untold numbers of women to discount or deny their gifts. What is essential is a mindset that allows for and anticipates failure and mistakes (Sternberg, 1993); persists in the face of adverse individual, familial, or societal circumstances; recognizes the undermining power of stereotypes; and transforms adversity into creative productivity (Kerr, 1995; Noble, 1994; Ochse, 1990; Simonton, 1994).

Although adversity is an important ingredient in developing resilience, it is insufficient as a motivator for talent development. Just as an individual must want to be resilient, so must a gifted woman want to achieve, that is, to translate her potential into creative performance or production and to use her motivation, imagination, persistence, and resolve to accomplish that goal. Women must also understand that each domain has its particular gatekeepers and critics and decide for themselves whether they are psychologically suited to engage in interactions with those individuals and their values.

## Filters

*Opportunities.* Opportunities have both psychological and sociological aspects. The availability of actual opportunities for schooling, exposure to talent domains, mentors, and resources, depend on women’s distance from the mainstream. Women must be able to perceive that they can indeed attain a goal. Finally, women must actively pursue opportunities. It is here that a woman’s motivation, risk-taking, self-confidence, and desire to contribute come into play. Juggling family and career can constrain achievement in many fields, and gifted females must be encouraged to think about their goals and to recognize that they may need to grapple with difficult life decisions should they choose to pursue certain opportunities or levels of achievement.

*Talent Domains.* Women encounter dilemmas or obstacles unique to various domains. Testing bias is one example that impinges negatively upon the recognition of girls' and women's potential in the areas of mathematics reasoning and spatial ability (Diaz, 1996). Homophobia is a major concern for female athletes, not males (Wildenhaus, 1996). The biological clock for women's childbearing poses particular dilemmas for women in male-dominated professions such as research science and medicine (Subotnik & Arnold, 1996). Some women flourish in collaborative settings at odds with the competitive practices in certain male-dominated fields (Gilligan, 1982).

A further consideration in the discussion of domain specific talent development is the amount and status of women's participation in a field. Until the middle of the 19th century, only women of great wealth could engage in science, philosophy, and the arts and letters for their personal intellectual growth and enjoyment (Silverman, 1996). In the last 100 years, pioneering women scientists such as Marie and Irene Curie and Rosalind Yalow, writers such as Virginia Woolf and Charlotte Brontë (Van Tassel-Baska, 1996), and artists like Mary Cassat, Rosa Bonheur, and Georgia O'Keefe gained prominence, paving the way for a wider array of women to express their potential in those arenas. The presence of women might also have widened the kinds of voices and achievements that are considered significant (Keller & Longino, 1996).

Leadership positions within the professions, however, persist along stereotyped gender lines. For example, female policy makers and administrators are most prevalent (although certainly not as a majority) in education (Bell & Chase, 1996; Napier, 1996). In more male-dominated fields, such as physics, computer science, engineering, and business, female leaders remain more rare (National Science Foundation, 1992).

In sum, opportunities within different talent domains vary for women depending upon the historical and societal context of the field in question. Taking advantage of opportunities is also a function of the quality of support available as well as an individual's resilience. The important role of family and mentors appears in nearly all the research collected for *Remarkable Women*. It is through other people that women sense the magnitude of their gifts and possible directions for fulfilling their talents.

## Spheres of Influence

*Personal domain.* Women can make contributions to their present and future environments at many levels. Some channel their creativity into raising children, homemaking, rela-

tionships with loved ones, or getting to know and love themselves well. Becoming a self-actualized individual in the face of institutionalized sexism is an intrapersonal achievement having to do with such qualities as efficacy, resilience, spirituality, and wisdom. The expression of talent through community actualization is a second private sphere of achievement that is unrecognized by standard definitions of achievement. The work of many women in arenas such as church, tribal councils, schools, and neighborhood groups lead to significant achievements on behalf of local communities (Kerr, Arnold, Martinez-Thorne, & Napier, 1996). Such spheres of influence might be particularly accessible and important to women in developing countries and to some American women of color. Obstacles to fulfillment in these areas are particularly powerful for those whose personal backgrounds are filled with dysfunction, poor health, or other forms of adversity. Yet, the variables that serve as obstacles to gifted women's ambitions in family and personal realms are fewer in number than barriers to extraordinary public attainment in powerful positions traditionally occupied by males.

*Public domain.* Opportunities for women to achieve leadership or eminence in professional arenas depend upon the historical and societal context of the field in question or upon widely influential accomplishment. First come pioneers who break into a field by mastering traditional models of excellence. These pioneers pave the way for more women to forge creative identities within a domain's power structure. Women of rare talent and exceptional commitment can then bring their unique perspectives and experiences to bear upon the course of a field or discipline.

Aspiring to spheres of influence in the public arena requires a different constellation of coping skills, such as organization, articulation, leadership, charisma, and vision. Background variables that may negatively impinge on the pursuit of such a path derive principally from established social and cultural norms and systems of power relations (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bronfenbrenner, 1993). A woman who can overcome these obstacles and take her place at the highest levels of professions and public affairs may subsequently encounter resistance from men and women who are uncomfortable with women in leadership positions. Some men may feel that women do not belong to a tradition passed along through the ages; some women may feel threatened by a rising star exploding from their ranks. Family may fear becoming estranged as their loved ones move into "foreign" arenas, or abandoned in the rush and intoxication of influence and prestige. Maneuvering through these constraining social attitudes to become a leader in a previously male realm is extremely challenging, but this sphere of influence does not

require that women significantly change the domain they have entered.

The widest sphere of influence lies in the creation of ideas or products that change the shape of a domain or a social arena. Both women and men who aspire to this level of eminence encounter resistance from supporters of the status quo (Gardner, 1993; Kuhn, 1962). Women from mainstream backgrounds, however, are more likely to be exposed to childhood opportunities (e.g., extracurricular lessons, travel, and high quality schooling) that would allow them to be competitive with men at the eminence level. One personality variable essential to maintaining persistence through adversity is the supreme self-confidence to create and grasp opportunities that enhance creative productivity. In most societies, this kind of self-confidence is highly valued in males but discouraged as immodest in females.

### Unresolved Questions

Does our model apply to gifted men as well as gifted women? Gifted rural, working class, disabled, and non-white men, for example, face many of the same obstacles. They, too, need opportunities, guides, and resilience to enter and succeed in high-level achievement spheres, such as science, mathematics, and engineering. Three strands of consistent findings, however, appear to differentiate gifted women from their male counterparts.

Devaluing their accomplishments and discounting their potential seem to be particularly problematic for women. The central role of self-esteem in aiming high, taking risks, and confronting stiff challenges makes this gender-related issue a vital factor in talent development. Second, women are automatically minorities or even token members of high-level, male-dominated achievement settings. Third, balancing career and family remains a largely female issue, strongly affecting the professional choices of women more than men (Arnold, 1995; Subotnik & Arnold, 1996). These three persistent gender differences—self-esteem, minority status, and balancing family and career—are all interrelated artifacts of our current social context.

A second unresolved issue concerns the definition of adult giftedness. This is an extremely slippery concept, one that is the subject of debate in the field of gifted education (Subotnik, Arnold, & Noble, 1995). We believe that childhood and adult definitions of giftedness are distinct from one another: Giftedness in children is linked to potential, in adults, to achievement.

Yet, several important questions arise: At what level must one achieve in order to be considered gifted in a domain, and

what are considered acceptable arenas for displaying such gifts? All women try to determine the best way to use their talents. Nurturing a spouse and children is a vocation that many women would choose if they could afford to do so financially. Some women are driven by the challenge of managing satisfying professional and family lives. Yet, other women risk being criticized as selfish or “unfeminine” by taking on a solitary existence focused on the creation of ideas or products.

If each woman were to place herself on this figurative continuum, she would have to choose among an infinite number of possibilities on the scale. How can we designate some women as gifted and some as not? All women cope with adversity, for example. Gifted women overcome these challenges in part through extraordinary motivation, but does exceptional drive constitute a form of giftedness? Is every woman potentially gifted if she overcomes the difficulties she encounters in her quest for fulfillment? Certainly all professionals in any field are not gifted, nor are all terminal degree holders. Yet, women who achieve advanced degrees and training from backgrounds that actively discourage females’ academic or professional pursuits could be considered gifted. This giftedness would refer to their resilience in the face of adversity, not necessarily their exceptional contributions to a field.

Are women who are labeled gifted in elementary or secondary school still gifted if they choose a life that is neither unusual nor publicly remarkable? If they choose to put their energies into motherhood, are they still gifted? How does one measure the quality of parenting when there are no established standards, and society expects success in this realm? Should the gifted label in adulthood be reserved for women who make a demonstrable impact outside their immediate circle of family and friends? If, after several years spent raising children, a formerly gifted girl is elected to Congress or organizes a nature preserve, does she become gifted again?

These are points of contention and confusion for scholars of giftedness. They are also problematic for those who are reluctant to recognize levels of ability among women or to place greater value on some talents or abilities than on others. One of the most challenging problems that remains unresolved is determining a definition of giftedness that is inclusive, yet indicative of a qualitative difference in performance or behavior.

### Implications

The research that forms the basis of our model of talent development brings us closer to viewing the above dilemma

as simply unresolvable, and it reflects the same conundrum evidenced in the historical cycles of selectivity and inclusiveness in gifted education (Tannenbaum, 1983). The answers are closely related to the philosophical orientation of researchers, psychologists, educators, and policy makers who work within a particular social context.

How might educators, counselors, and other supporters of talented females use this model to promote the development of talent among women and girls? To remove the negative effects of minority or token status, a primary intervention goal is to increase the number of women in male-dominated professions and at the top levels of all fields. This major task begins long before adulthood, when girls shape their aspirations and self-image as achievers. Special programs, such as Kerr's (1995) program for at-risk gifted girls at Arizona State University, women's issues seminars and group guidance sessions, opportunities for educational acceleration (Noble & Smyth, 1995), and special secondary school programs, appear to make a real difference. Formal and informal mentoring opportunities and school and community efforts to foster talent development when the family cannot or will not do so are also clearly vital.

Self-knowledge is a vital component of talent development that must be encouraged and promoted throughout a woman's life span. It is an ongoing process, not a solitary insight, and one that begins long before adult status is reached. Self-knowledge demands deep and determined awareness of one's evolving values and needs, personality traits, psychological issues, and existential states. It also requires clarity about one's roots. What are/were the implicit and explicit expectations of one's parents? Extended family? Community? The beliefs, attitudes, traditions, and ideals of parents, extended families, communities, and cultures shape women's ambitions. Thus, a woman must learn to see clearly the psychological and sociocultural parameters of her life, consciously choosing those she will keep, discard, or modify.

In the equally central area of self-esteem, women require environments in which they experience sustained effort, rigorous discipline, risk-taking, and meaningful achievement. The need to increase opportunities for women to explore talent domains and learn of career possibilities is a central implication embedded in this model. In addition to direct encouragement and support, positive self-esteem derives from working hard and doing something well. In this sense, the efforts of counselors, teachers, and family members to foster self-esteem must not be limited to praise. Women do not reach extraordinary achievement levels by avoiding adversity. We serve women best by alerting them to realistic obstacles, expanding their coping strategies, and supporting their efforts

to meet significant challenges. Further, we can help them recognize the unique psychosocial requirements of various achievement domains so that women can decide for themselves whether a "good enough fit" exists between their personalities and particular goals.

Combining family and career is rarely an explicit issue in higher education or professional settings. Those of us who work with gifted individuals must help women consider the trade-offs they can realistically anticipate and support their traditional and nontraditional role choices. With an eye to longer-term solutions, we must also work collectively to modify occupational structures to accommodate women's significant family roles. Finally, those who work with gifted women must bolster their resilience, which requires that psychologists, career counselors, school counselors, and other mental health practitioners understand the characteristics of giftedness and the complex issues they present in women's lives.

As more and more women enter the highest echelons of public achievement, differences related to gender will presumably become less salient. At this point, gender per se might give way to other categories of difference in explaining the outcomes of high potential. Or, conversely, persistent gender-related psychological or epistemological differences might remain, transforming our conceptions and institutional arrangements for achievement.

Whether gifted women exercise their talents to help others, to experience the joys of personal evolution, or to make meaning through self-expression is a choice that only they can make. The spark of their gifts, their personal motivation and tenacity, the support of allies, and their resilience enable exceptionally diverse women across social groups and talent domains to be true to themselves and to their talents, and to reshape the world. ¶

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