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# Exploring the Lives of Gifted Women

## Abstract

Exploring the Lives of Gifted Women is a narrative collection that shares the lived experience of five diverse gifted women. These women were identified as gifted and talented through a formal psychological evaluation. They were served in gifted programming in elementary and secondary school. This qualitative narrative study revealed the lived personal experience of being a gifted female throughout the lifespan for these five diverse gifted women. The internal gifted characteristics and external influences that affect gifted women's relationships, social and emotional health, achievement, and overall wellbeing were analyzed. The results of this study also examined the internal and external influences that affect self-efficacy in gifted women. The collection of narratives allowed prominent themes to emerge, such as perfectionism, Imposter Syndrome, and societal pressures that lead to conformity.

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EXPLORING THE  
LIVES OF GIFTED WOMEN

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A Doctoral Research Project Presented to  
The University of Denver  
Morgridge College of Education

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Education

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By:

Christine A. Winterbrook

April 2017

Advisor: Dr. Norma Hafenstein

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Advisor: Dr. Norma Hafenstein  
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### **Abstract**

Exploring the Lives of Gifted Women is a narrative collection that shares the lived experience of five diverse gifted women. These women were identified as gifted and talented through a formal psychological evaluation. They were served in gifted programming in elementary and secondary school. This qualitative narrative study revealed the lived personal experience of being a gifted female throughout the lifespan for these five diverse gifted women. The internal gifted characteristics and external influences that affect gifted women's relationships, social and emotional health, achievement, and overall wellbeing were analyzed. The results of this study also examined the internal and external influences that affect self-efficacy in gifted women. The collection of narratives allowed prominent themes to emerge, such as perfectionism, Imposter Syndrome, and societal pressures that lead to conformity.

*Keywords: Gifted females, internal barriers, external barriers, self-efficacy, lifespan*

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this study to my beautiful daughter, Abby Noel Winterbrook. She is my heart and soul; she constantly inspires me to strive be the best mother, role model, and woman that I can model for her. She has been my greatest supporter and advocate throughout this process. I could not have completed this study without her encouragement and love. She has been source of strength and encouragement during this process while completing this research study. Abby Noel was identified as “gifted” in fifth grade, but it was not until she was eighteen that I learned of the characteristics of giftedness. The knowledge and understanding of giftedness, gifted characteristics, and overexcitabilities has brought a wealth of knowledge and information on understanding the intensities associated with giftedness as well as the unique characteristics of being a gifted individual. Understanding coping skills to deal with traits of perfectionism and developing a sense of self-awareness of gifted characteristics such as high social justice causes and concerns have been inspirational. I chose to complete a study on gifted women as a tribute to my own gifted young woman. I love you, Abby Noel Winterbrook!

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I would like to acknowledge my community partner, Dr. Joy Navan, who lovingly supported and encouraged my work. She is a tremendous role model, and I aspire to be even a glimpse of the beautiful gifted woman that she is. She is an inspiration to all gifted women. Her wisdom concerning gifted women has been a tremendous reliable and dependable resource during this research project.

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## **Chapter One: Introducing the Investigation**

The narrative stories of gifted women provide insight into the lived gifted experience. These stories uncover the unique challenges of growing up as a gifted female. The purpose of this study was to collect narrative accounts of a diverse group of gifted women. The lives of five gifted women, who came from different walks of life, made this investigation possible. I had the privilege of interviewing five gifted women for this narrative investigation: Kasey, Isabel, Dominique, Elizabeth, and Mary. This study revealed their stories about living the gifted experience from diversely different backgrounds. A purposive sample population that represented various ages, ethnicities, geographic locations, and socio-economic backgrounds was selected for this research study. All the women selected for this research study were identified as gifted and talented through a formal assessment; they also participated in gifted programs. However, their individual walks and experiences were vastly different.

This investigation explored the lives of five women, allowing patterns and themes to emerge, divulging the participants' lifespan from childhood to their present age. I chose to research gifted females because they are an underrepresented population in gifted education, specifically in mathematics and science programs (Bell, 1989; Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013; Clark, 2013; Colangelo & Davis, 2003; Crombie Bouffard-Bouchard, & Schneider, 1992; Gagne, 1993; Neihart, Reis, Robinson, & Moon, 2002; Noble et al., 1999; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Girls are significantly underrepresented in gifted education programs, especially low socio-economic, African-American, and Hispanic populations (Bell, 1989; Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013; Clark, 2013; Colangelo & Davis, 2003; Crombie et al., 1992; Gagne, 1993; Neihart et al., 2002;

Noble, Subotnik, & Arnold, 2002; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). This study is important because it shared the narratives of five diverse gifted women revealing patterns and themes that emerged from the lived gifted experience over the lifespan.

### **Personal Interest as the Researcher**

Education was always important to me, and I knew from a young age that I wanted to pursue higher education. My sixth-grade teacher referred me for a gifted program; however, in 1981 my family did not find a specialized program that catered to advanced academic needs an option that was realistic for our lifestyle. The decision to remain in public school drastically influenced my life. It led to events that caused me to underachieve throughout my young adult life. My pursuit of higher educational dreams did not become a reality until later in my life.

I was thirty-six when I started my bachelor's degree in elementary education and psychology, as a first generation college student. I chose to pursue education because my teachers were influential in my life. I wanted to be a support system for students who did not have a supportive home environment. Once I received my bachelor's degree, I immediately completed a master's degree in curriculum and instruction with an emphasis in gifted education. I was exhilarated to find the combination of education and psychology with focus upon the whole child in gifted education. Upon completion of my master's program, I began working as a gifted education teacher and started the Doctorate of Education in gifted education.

My coursework in gifted education helped me understand the connection of affective needs, high academic ability, and how being a gifted individual makes one feel

different. From an early age, I felt I was “different.” Perfectionism was a persistent problem that I encountered. Daniels & Piechowski (2009) stated, “Perfectionists set high standards for themselves, and they experience great pain if they fail to meet those standards” (p. 146). I also dealt with Imposter Syndrome, which can be defined as, “a collection of feelings of inadequacy that persist despite evident success” (Corkindale, 2008). Another internal characteristic that affected my life was emotional overexcitabilities (OE’s). Daniels & Piechowski (2009) defined emotional OE’s as, “Intense feelings that manifest themselves in extreme, complex, positive, and sometimes negative ways” (p. 51). Learning about the characteristics of giftedness tremendously changed my life and the ability to cope with gifted characteristics. I feel other women who have gifted characteristics will benefit from hearing the stories of other gifted women. Finding the population of students and parents to whom I was able to relate and provide insight and understanding was a critical turning point in my professional career as a teacher.

This study is important to me because of my personal experience with the intensities and overexcitabilities that I experienced growing up as a gifted female. I was an adult before I understood gifted characteristics. It is important not only to research the characteristics of gifted women, but also to share the beauty of each gifted woman’s journey and provide help, support, and insight for gifted girls and gifted women. My hope for this study is that gifted women and readers of the study will recognize self-worth and reflect upon the beauty and uniqueness of their individual stories. It is this researcher’s hope that sharing the lived experience of five gifted women will encourage

other gifted women to identify characteristics and strengths in themselves. Internal and external influences that affect women's self-efficacy are reflected in the narratives to guide and encourage other gifted women.

### **Background of the Problem**

Historically, females were considered an underrepresented population in gifted education (Kerr, 1985; Kramer, 1985; Olshen & Matthews, 1987; Pierson, 2014; Reis & Callahan, 1996; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Currently, specific populations of gifted females are the focus of underrepresentation, especially African-American and Hispanic females, and females from lower socio-economic classes (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013; Ford, 2014; Kerr & McKay, 2014; Neihart et al., 2002; Pierson, 2014; Rothenbusch, Zettler, Voss, Lösch, & Trautwein, 2016). A persistent problem of practice that gifted women face is that "In most professional fields and occupations, men surpass women in both the professional and creative accomplishments" (Neihart et al., 2002, p. 132; Rinn & Bishop, 2015). Another concern is numerous gifted women around the world look back upon their achievements in life with feelings of regret (Neihart et al., 2002, Kerr & McKay, 2014; Rothenbusch, Zettler, Voss, Lösch, & Trautwein, 2016). Nationally, girls are achieving in science, mathematics, and technology (STEM) at lower rates than their male counterparts (Muratori & Smith, 2015; Shanahan, Pedretti, DeCoito, & Baker, 2011; Pusey, Gondree & Peterson, 2016).

Rimm (1999) reported, "As of 1995, more of the doctorates, 60.7 percent, are awarded to men" (p. 322). As of 2010, the number of women receiving doctorates has increased to 51.7% but it is still primarily in traditional women's careers (Rimm, 2014).

Rimm (1999) also found, "Despite the high percentage of women in teaching, women were



less than one percent of school superintendents until 1979 and increased to only seven percent by 1993” (p. 322). This number increased to twenty-four percent as of 2010 but it is still significantly less than the seventy-six percent of men who hold superintendent positions (Rimm, 2014). Despite the fact that almost half of medical students are women, as of 1995, eleven years after finishing medical school, only fifty-nine percent went into teaching as associate or full professors compared to eighty-three percent of males who graduated the same year (Rimm, 1999). In 2010, women make up approximately forty-seven percent of tenured full-time professors at community colleges, thirty-three percent at undergraduate colleges, twenty-four percent at universities that grant doctoral degrees, fifty-seven percent of lecturer and instructor positions, and thirty-six percent of assistant through full professor positions (Rimm, 2014). However, “for all ranks and positions, women earn only eighty-one percent of the amount earned by men” (Rimm, 2014, p. 9). Among major symphony orchestras, an average of twenty percent are women (Rimm, 1999). “A 2011 survey of New York museums found that only four percent of the artists in the contemporary section of The Metropolitan Museum of Art were women” (Rimm, 2014, p. 12).

“There is a serious marriage penalty. Women who have never married earn almost 96% of men’s wages – married women only 77%” (Rimm, 2014, p. 13). Rimm (1999) also found that women are “detoured by family responsibilities and delayed by pregnancy and childbearing” (p. 325). “More than one woman in media, business, art, medicine, and science recognized a glass ceiling in her career field” (Rimm, 1999, p. 325). Rimm (1999) also found, “Working women earned seventy-five cents for every dollar men earn, and this

difference holds for college graduates as well as for women in careers where they outnumber men” (p. 326).

Gifted women are a diverse group that come from different backgrounds and have multipotentiality, or the ability to achieve highly in multiple fields and endeavors, most women of high ability are multipotential (Fellwock-Schaar & Carson, 2014; Kerr & McKay, 2014). Gifted women grow up recognizing they are different; they feel differently, they experience life differently, and they learn differently. Kerr & McKay (2014) stated, “From the time I was very young, I felt different, but I always had some understanding of why” (p. xiii). The possibilities of each woman’s gifts are endless; however, the five primary domains of giftedness are creativity, visual or performing arts, leadership abilities, general academic abilities, and intellectual abilities (NAGC, 2017). “Although eminent people across professions indeed have high general intelligence, they also tend to have particular interests, passion, and motivation to develop their talents in just one, focused area of strength” (Kerr & McKay, 2014, p. 8). Some gifted women demonstrate exceptional talents in musical abilities, others have gifts and talents in academic abilities and still others are gifted in artistic abilities; the areas of potential for exceptional abilities are endless.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Gifted girls have distinct internal and external barriers that cause unique challenges such as deciding in middle school if they want to be known as the “pretty” girl or the “smart” girl (Bell, 1989; Galbraith & Delisle, 2015; Kendrick & Johnson, 2005; Kerr, 1997; Kerr & McKay, 2014; Robbins, 2012). “In today’s American society, however, there is

increasing pressure on girls to be pretty and popular and to have boyfriends as early as possible” (Kerr & McKay, 2014, p. 38). Davis, Rimm, & Siegle (2011) stated that “over compliance, fear of being assertive, and fear of failure” may cause gifted girls to underachieve and “set life goals below their abilities” (p. 428). Women have the unique challenge of choosing to get married and start a family over pursuing higher degrees of education or personal pursuits of passions and interests (Kerr, 1997; Kerr & McKay, 2014, Neihart et al, 2002; Noble et al, 1997; Reis, 2002; Rimm, Rimm-Kaufman, & Rimm, 2014; Stoeger, 2009). These challenges their male counterparts rarely face (Reis, Callahan, & Goldsmith, 1994). Some of these internal and external barriers have been shown to be related to why females are achieving at lower rates than men (Kerr, 1997; Kerr & McKay, 2014, Neihart et al, 2002; Noble et al, 1997; Reis, 2002; Rimm, Rimm-Kaufman, & Rimm, 2014; Stoeger, 2009). Kerr (1985) stated:

Despite countless barriers that have kept many gifted women from rising to their peak, some do not stumble and fall. Why? Why is it that a few gifted women accomplish extraordinary feats? And how does a gifted woman become an eminent woman? (p. 35)

Dr. Kerr interviewed gifted women seeking answers to these questions to derive important principles for guiding gifted girls, and I believe that the stories of other gifted women can continue to shed light upon these and other important questions. In this research study, I present to you the voices that go unheard, but are so valuable. The voices of five diverse gifted women who come from various backgrounds, geographic locations, socio-economic classes, ethnicities, and age ranges.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of conducting a qualitative study on gifted women is to reveal the narratives of gifted women. These narratives share the lived gifted experience and expose what being a gifted female reflects throughout the lifespan. It reveals internal gifted characteristics, external influences, and the influences that impact self-efficacy in gifted women. Discovering common traits that have allowed gifted women to be successful and achieve at optimal levels can provide necessary information for guiding the next generation of gifted girls (Kerr, 1997; Young, Rudman, Buettner, & McLean, 2013). Identifying role models and mentors that gifted girls can relate to helps them with important choices and decisions in the future (Kerr, 1997; Muratori & Smith, 2015). It is beneficial to share the stories of gifted women to allow them to have a *voice* (Kerr, 1997; Stoeger, 2009). It builds their confidence and reveals common traits and characteristics that gifted women possess.

Gifted women's stories can provide important insight into the dynamics that encourage achievement in the population of gifted women. Neihart et al. (2002) stated, "Pre-eminent among the influences on talented females are parents' attitudes and beliefs about their children's academic self-perceptions and achievement" (p. 127). It is important to understand what has encouraged and motivated gifted women to be successful and keep achieving across the lifespan in order to find critical information, techniques, and coping skills to help the next generation succeed and become eminent gifted women (Kerr, 1997; Reis & Callahan, 1996; Neihart et al., 2002, Rimm, Rimm-Kaufmann, & Rimm, 2014; Stoeger, 2009). The underrepresentation of gifted women, in higher levels of educational training and occupational status, might be attributable to

many factors including the opportunities provided to gifted girls to develop their abilities (Crombie et al., 1992; Muratori & Smith, 2015).

Colangelo & Davis (2003) described other issues that are of special concern to gifted girls: self-esteem, at-risk behaviors, inequity in the classroom, decline of aspirations, and the relational expectations that are unique to gifted girls. Understanding how prominent and eminent gifted women have overcome these obstacles can help uncover solutions for the persistent problem of practice of the underrepresentation and underachievement of gifted women (Colangelo & Davis, 2003; Kerr, 1997; Kerr & McKay, 2014; Neihart et al., 2002; Reis & Callahan, 1996; Rimm, Rimm-Kaufmann, & Rimm, 2014; Stoeger, 2009). Gifted women need to have a voice to allow other gifted women and girls to hear their story and relate to their unique, specific, and general challenges of being a gifted female.

### **Research Questions**

The research question that was the driving force of the research project was: What do the narrative stories of gifted women reveal about the lived gifted experience? The sub-questions that supported the research question were: (1) What is the personal experience of being a gifted female in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood? (2) What gifted characteristics influence gifted women's relationships, social and emotional health, achievement, and overall wellbeing? (3) What external influences have contributed to gifted women's relationships, social and emotional health, achievement, and overall wellbeing? (4) What are the internal and external influences that affect self-efficacy in gifted women?

## **Significance of the Study**

A narrative research study collecting the oral histories of gifted women's lived experience is important because females are an underrepresented population in gifted education, especially Hispanic and African American women and women from low socio-economic classes (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013; Ford, 2014; Kerr, 1985; Kerr & McKay, 2014; Kramer 1985; Neihart et al., 2002; Olshen & Matthews, 1987; Reis & Callahan, 1996; Rothenbusch, Zettler, Voss, Lösch, & Trautwein, 2016; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). These shared experiences are capable of providing important insights into understanding the lived gifted experience for women. These stories add to the existing literature on gifted women and reflect the autobiographical accounts of being a gifted woman. Each woman has a unique story of her journey of being a gifted woman. This study provides a voice for five gifted women to share their story of living the gifted experience. This research study may influence the field of gifted education because the common themes and patterns that emerge from the research adds to the existing literature on gifted women.

Kerr & McKay (2014) stated, "The smart woman's goal should be to develop eminence in a field of study that most closely aligns with her creative flow as well as her interests, needs, and values" (p. 49). When women find their calling in life that exhilarates and excites them, they begin to feel a sense of accomplishment and worth, with a feeling of a life well lived and no regrets (Kerr & McKay, 2014; Rimm, Rimm-Kaufman, & Rimm, 2014). "Financial success, status, and even eminence are less

important in our opinion than finding one's true vocation and calling in life" (Kerr & McKay, 2014, p. 49).

The participants are a diverse group of women who represent various geographic locations, ages, socio-economic backgrounds, and ethnicities. The narratives include women who are pursuing dreams (i.e., finishing higher-level education, raising gifted children, teaching gifted children, and exploring new opportunities). They have experienced diversity, racism, sexism, underachievement, and various other challenges and adversities. Kasey is twenty-four years old from Beijing, China. She is currently completing her graduate degree at a prominent university in the United States. Isabel is a thirty-seven-year-old Latina who overcame an impoverished, transient lifestyle to become an alternative education advocate for gifted and twice exceptional children. Dominique is a forty-seven-year-old, single, black woman who was raised in Fresno, California and is now a Gifted Education Teacher for middle school students. Elizabeth is a fifty-one-year-old profoundly gifted woman; she is married, has three profoundly gifted children and resides in the Midwest. Mary is sixty-six; she is married and has two children and three grandchildren. She is a superintendent and resides in the Southeast.

The diverse population of gifted women provided insight into the lived experiences of a variety of age ranges, socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicities, and geographical locations. The purpose of the study was to collect the narrative experiences of this group of diverse gifted women. To provide each woman with a voice to share their unique and individual story. "The study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). Using narrative inquiry

provided a window into the reality of lived experiences throughout the lifespan for five diverse gifted women. Narrative inquiry can be subjective in its nature, although, “People telling stories about their life experiences has rapidly gained legitimacy” (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 329).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations of Narrative Research**

This narrative research study on gifted women has certain assumptions and limitations. The effectiveness or cross-applicability of narrative research has been called into question because there is not a single standard set of procedures. A weaknesses of narrative research is that the data is already subjective because it is collected from the perspective of the person who is being interviewed. They are recalling events in their life from that point of time in their life, to a specific researcher for a specific research question. That makes it difficult to quantitatively assess, in an objective manner, since it is a real world measure from an individual’s personal perspective. The data that are being measured are the lived experiences, they are real world measures, and they are means of capturing “complex, multi-layered and nuanced understandings so that others can learn from the lived experiences” (Etherington, 2013, p. 2). In the case of this research, the purpose of the study was to collect narrative stories of gifted women to examine what they reveal about the lived gifted experience. This allows other gifted women to relate to the subjective meanings contained within the stories that are explored through the narrative inquiry process.

One must bear in mind that the narratives shared are “reconstructions of the person’s experiences as remembered and told at a particular point in their lives, to a



particular researcher and for a particular purpose” (Etherington, 2013, p. 4). This ultimately has a bearing on how stories are told, which stories are told, and how the stories are presented and interpreted (Etherington, 2013, p. 4). The narratives collected do not represent life as “lived,” but are representations of those lives interviewed, as told through the interview process (Etherington, 2013, p. 4).

Best & Kahn (2006) stated:

Human nature is much more complex than the sum of its many discrete elements, even if they could be isolated and identified. Because human nature is so complex, it is much more difficult to develop sound theories of human behavior than to predict occurrences in the physical world. (p. 7)

It is noted that there are four problems that Best & Kahn (2006) reported regarding research on human subjects:

1. No two persons are alike in feelings, drives, or emotions. What may be a reasonable prediction for one may be useless for another.
2. No one person is completely consistent from one moment to another. Human behavior is influenced by the interaction of the individual with every changing element in his or her environment, often in a way that is difficult to predict.
3. Human beings are influenced by the research process itself. They are influenced by the attention that is focused on them when under investigation and by the knowledge that their behavior is being observed.
4. The behavioral sciences have been limited by a lack of adequate definition. Accurate operational definitions are essential to the development of a

sophisticated science. Such traits as intelligence, learning, hostility, anxiety, or motivation are not directly observable and are generally referred to as ‘constructs,’ implying that they are constructions of the scientist’s imagination. Constructs cannot be seen, heard, or felt. They can only be inferred by phenomena such as test scores or by observed hostile or aggressive acts, skin responses, pulse rates, or persistence at a task. (p. 7-8)

As evidenced from the above information, behavioral sciences present great challenges in research. This research project is an oral history of the participants’ lived experience as gifted women. The shared stories are from the participants’ perception of past events from this moment in their lifespan. Inductive reasoning of the shared experiences is limited in scientific knowledge, but is a contribution of narrative knowing. The recollections the participants shared were reflections of their lived experience as a gifted woman to that point and time of their life.

### **Chapter Summary**

This study explored patterns and themes in narrative accounts of gifted women. It is this researcher’s hope that this qualitative narrative study, *Exploring the Lives of Gifted Women*, will be impactful because it provided diversely gifted women an opportunity to share their stories of growing up gifted. This provided participants with a voice, which empowered the participants. Empowering gifted women to share their personal narratives allowed them to recognize self-worth and celebrate how they overcame challenges (i.e., sexism, racism, negativity, and unrealistic expectations). This study also explored the

phenomenon of giftedness through narrative accounts of a group of diverse gifted women from various ethnic backgrounds, of various age ranges, in various geographic locations.

## **Chapter Two: The Literature Review**

The reason for conducting a qualitative study on gifted women is to provide a voice for gifted women to tell their unique story. Sharing their stories empowers gifted women to celebrate their victories of overcoming challenges and allows them to reflect upon the accomplishments and achievements they have made in their lives. “Preventing discouragement and retreat and learning more about why hopes fade is the reason that much of the research about gifted girls and women continues” (Neihart et al., 2002, p. 126). Discovering common traits that have allowed gifted women to be successful and achieve at optimal levels provides necessary information for guiding the next generation of gifted girls. Identifying role models and mentors that gifted girls can relate to helps guide them with important choices and decisions in the future. It is also beneficial to share the stories of gifted women to allow them to have a “voice.” It shares the common traits and characteristics that gifted women have in common.

### **Search Descriptions**

This literature review is an exhaustive collection of relevant research materials that affect gifted women. Neihart et al. (2002) stated:

Not all gifted females experience the same issues, but almost all face a combination of the following: dilemmas about abilities and talents, personal decisions about family, ambivalence of parents and teachers toward developing high levels of competence, decisions about duty and caring (meeting the needs of others before one’s own), as well as other personal, religious, and social issues.  
(p. 126)

This literature review examines research and other relevant literature that exists regarding gifted females. The literature review establishes the need to conduct narrative studies with gifted women. Upon review of the literature, it is lacking in narrative accounts of gifted women's experiences throughout the lifespan. The narrative stories of diverse populations of gifted women describing how they faced making choices and decisions about college and career, coping with internal and external barriers, and ultimately making decisions about marriage and family need to be shared. This study gives a voice to women and allows them to share their triumphs, challenges, regrets, and celebrations. It reveals if the current literature is an accurate portrayal of the lived gifted experience and will add to the existing literature on gifted females.

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

As a qualitative inquirer, I used “different terms for theories such as patterns, theoretical lens, or naturalistic generalizations to describe the broader explanations used or developed” in the study (Creswell, 2009, p. 43). Theory was used for a broad explanation of behaviors and attitudes. “Themes in this context provided a ready-made series of hypotheses to be tested from the literature” (Creswell, 2009, p. 62). Using a theoretical framework or perspective had an overall orienting lens or transformative perspective that shaped the type of research questions asked. Theory guided the researcher as to what issues were important to examine and the people who needed to be studied. For this study, a diverse population of gifted women were chosen to be examined to share their stories. Theory also indicated how the researcher positioned herself in the qualitative study and how the final accounts needed to be written.

### **Narrative knowing.**

Narrative knowing is a theoretical model developed by Bruner (1986) that is used in narrative inquiry (Etherington, 2013). Bruner (1986) defined the concept of the narrative mode of thought or narrative knowing. “Narrative knowing is created and constructed through stories of lived experiences and the meanings those lived experiences create” (Etherington, 2013, p. 5). Narrative knowing “helps make sense of the ambiguity and complexity of human lives” (Etherington, 2013, p. 5). “The *Paradigmatic Mode of Thought* ...draws on reasoned analysis, logical proof and empirical observation – used to explain cause and effect; to predict and control reality, and to create unambiguous objective truth that can be proven or disproven” (Etherington, 2013, p. 5).

Regarding what we gain from narrative knowing Etherington (2013) stated it is:

- Memorable, interesting knowledge that brings together layers of understanding about a person, their culture, and how they have created change.
- We hear struggles to make sense of the past and create meaning as they tell and/or show what happened to them.
- Shape of a story and helps organize information about how people interpret events; the values, beliefs, and experiences that guide those interpretations, and their hopes, intentions, and plans for the future.
- We find complex patterns, descriptions of identity construction and reconstruction, and evidence of social discourses that impact a person’s knowledge creation from specific cultural standpoints.

- Knowledge gained in this way is situated, transient, partial and provisional; characterized by multiple voices, perspectives, truths, and meanings. (p. 6)

## **Review of Research**

The terms gifted, gifted and talented, or giftedness do not have one universal definition (NAGC, 2017). “From the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until the 1960’s, there was one dominant paradigm of giftedness: giftedness equals high IQ” (Kerr & McKay, 2014, p. 1). E. Paul Torrance introduced the theory of creativity in the 1960’s and the possibility “that something else contributed to extraordinary achievement besides rapid learning and efficient problem solving” (Kerr & McKay, 2014, p. 4). In 1972, the U.S. Commissioner of Education, Sydney P. Marland, Jr. (1972) presented *The Marland Report* before congress. He stated:

Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons or who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contributions to self and society.

In the late 1980’s a group of parents, educators, and psychologists met in Columbus, Ohio to re-define giftedness (Gifted Development Center, 2017). The Columbus Group (1991) redefined giftedness as:

Asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively

different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counseling in order for them to develop optimally.

The NAGC (2017) currently defines giftedness as:

Gifted individuals are those who 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).

The five domains of giftedness reported by the NAGC are intellectual, creative, artistic, leadership, and academic (NAGC, 2017).

Freeman (2010) reported the difference in gifted and non-gifted is “they are normal people – but with one big difference – their extraordinary abilities” (p. 5). Neihart et al. (2002) stated, “Not all gifted females experience the same issues” (p. 126).

Throughout the literature, common themes emerged regarding traits and characteristics of gifted females; however, not all gifted females face the same issues or exhibit the same traits (Neihart et al., 2002). This chapter reports common gifted characteristics and common traits found throughout the literature on gifted women. The domains of giftedness and the definitions of giftedness reveal how vastly different gifted characteristics and traits can manifest.



Two specific characteristics found among gifted populations are intellectual and emotional (Navan, 2008). Navan (2008) described intellectual characteristics of giftedness. She stated, “The intellectually gifted child is driven to understand and thrives when involved in finding original solutions to complex problems” (Navan, 2008, p. 8). A second characteristic Navan (2008) observed was emotional aspects of giftedness, which include sensitivities. She stated, “The most apparent characteristic of emotionally gifted children is their passion” (Navan, 2008, p. 9). “Gifted children, and gifted girls in particular, are highly empathetic when siblings or friends are sad or hurt, and even very young gifted children worry about global problems like hunger, war, terrorism, or weather disasters” (Navan, 2008, p. 9).

### **Lifespan Development Stages**

#### **Early childhood.**

Clark (2013) stated, “Female infants from birth are more sensitive to sounds, particularly their mother’s voice” (p. 243). She also noted that girls can “sing in tune at an earlier age than males” (Clark, 2013, p. 243). They are also more proficient at “fine motor performance than are males and develop the sense of touch more rapidly” (Clark, 2013, p. 243). “Females seem to be at an advantage compared to males in verbal functioning and in a wide range of abilities that require organizing data in sequence due to more efficiency than males in the development of their left hemisphere” (Clark, 2013, p. 243).

“Research shows that gifted girls start scoring ahead of boys; they talk and read earlier, in preschool, they score higher on IQ tests, and they are ready for a more formal

education earlier than boys” (Gurian, 2008, p. 1). “Females speak sooner, generally possess larger vocabularies, and rarely demonstrate speech defects” (Clark, 2013, p. 243). “By preschool years, from ages three to six, another major event happens in the lives of smart girls – they begin to read” (Kerr & McKay, 2014, p. 105). Kerr & McKay (2014) stated, “Smart girls are more likely to read early (between three and five) rather than at the average age (between 5 and 7)” (p. 105). “Academically gifted girls are usually precocious readers and most of the gifted eminent adult women were precocious readers whose talent was nourished at an early age” (Kerr, Vuyk, & Rea, 2012, p. 648). “Preschool [gifted] girls like to seek reading opportunities, to match letters to sounds, to sound out words, and to spontaneously pick up reading without instruction” (Kerr & McKay, 2014, p. 105).

Gifted girls need opportunities for early access to formal education (Clark, 2013; Gurian, 2013; Kerr et al., 2012; Pierson, 2014). Kerr et al. (2012) advocated for early entrance to school through the means of early admission to kindergarten or skipping kindergarten and starting first grade early to meet the needs of young gifted girls. Unfortunately, many gifted programs do not begin until the third grade, which places gifted females at a disadvantage since their outstanding abilities are shown to peak in early childhood (Clark, 2013; Gurian, 2008; Gurian, 2013; Kerr et al., 2012; Pierson, 2014). It is important for gifted girls to have opportunities for developmental advancement during the preschool years to capitalize on providing for young gifted girls’ needs (Clark, 2013; Gurian, 2008; Gurian, 2013; Kerr et al., 2012; Navan, 2008; Pierson,

2014). Terman found that “girls had an edge in academics over boys at every age level from two and one half years old to fourteen years old” (Gurian, 2008, p. 1).

Gifted girls demonstrate asynchronous development in early childhood (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013; Galbraith & Delisle, 2015; Kerr & McKay, 2014; Shavinina, 2009). “Asynchrony is the term used when a child’s development in one area is a different level than other areas” (Kerr & McKay, 2014, p. 104). Asynchronous refers to an imbalance between intellectual, emotional, and physical development (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013; Galbraith & Delisle, 2015; Kerr & McKay, 2014; Shavinina, 2009). Intellectual development and physical development are different for smart girls than for other girls; in addition, emotional development may not be synchronous with verbal ability (Kerr & McKay, 2014, p. 104). The vast knowledge and wisdom of gifted girls can far exceed her age level, which causes significant frustration for the young gifted girl (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013; Galbraith & Delisle, 2015; Kerr & McKay, 2014; Shavinina, 2009). Sometimes this can lead to outbursts or meltdowns and it is an effect of overstimulation, overload, or being overwhelmed (Kerr & McKay, 2014).

Young gifted girls have an advanced understanding of relationships and friendships that generally exceed age level development (Clark, 2013; Kerr & McKay, 2014; Navan, 2008; Rimm, Rimm-Kaufman, & Rimm, 2014). Gross (2002) found in a study with seven hundred children that gifted children need friends who develop higher levels of understanding in friendships. Kerr & McKay (2014) stated, “Even moderately gifted girls matured more rapidly than other girls in their friendship needs and sought the company of other gifted children or older children” (p. 113). Young gifted girls seek out

friends who have the same interests as them, such as reading, but many girls do not start reading until they are five to seven (Galbraith & Delisle, 2015; Kerr & McKay, 2014; Navan, 2008; Shavinina, 2009). “Forced to learn, play, and socialize with children exactly the same age, the smart girl will often be the odd girl out, because neither she nor they understand why she is so different” (Kerr & McKay, 2014, p. 113).

Young gifted girls have broad interests and curiosities (Galbraith & Delisle, 2015; Kerr & McKay, 2014; Rimm, Rimm-Kaufman, & Rimm, 2014). These broad interests and curiosities need resources such as books and media to allow them to pursue their interests (Kerr & McKay, 2014). During this time, the young gifted girls’ desire to learn can be insatiable (Kerr & McKay, 2014; Probst, 2007). Young gifted girls have a thirst for knowledge and a curiosity about the world they live in (Kerr & McKay, 2014; Navan, 2008; Probst, 2007).

### **Middle childhood.**

During middle childhood, Kerr et al., (2012) reported that gifted girls’ self-esteem is high. They will work “industriously and achieve in projects that interest them” (Kerr et al., 2012, p. 648). This is the time to engage gifted girls so they do not become bored with school (Crombie et al., 1992). Crombie et al. (1992) stated:

Gifted programs started in elementary school found to enroll as many girls as boys yet adolescent gifted girls are less likely to accept an enrollment offer for a special accelerated program than are adolescent boys, perhaps because giftedness may be more problematic for gifted girls than boys. (p. 213)

Nurturing talent at this age could potentially prevent underachievement through pre-adolescence and adolescence (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013; Galbraith & Delisle, 2015; Kerr & McKay, 2014; Navan, 2008; Rimm, Rimm-Kaufman, & Rimm, 2014). During middle-childhood, gifted girls are more susceptible to media messages (Kerr et al., 2012). This is a crucial stage where they will start making decisions to go towards intellectual pursuits or popularity pursuits (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013; Czeschlik & Rost, 1994; Galbraith & Delisle, 2015; Kerr, 1985). Czeschlik & Rost (1994) reported that “Gifted girls were the least popular (‘rejected’) and gifted boys received the highest percentage of nominations in popularity questions” which indicated that the “female (adolescent) gifted might represent a risk group in terms of socio-emotional and affective functioning” (p. 4). This is the time to engage gifted girls in personal interests and pursuits (Kerr & McKay, 2014, Navan, 2008, Rimm, Rimm-Kaufman, & Rimm, 2014; Rinn & Bishop, 2015).

### **Pre-adolescence.**

Once girls reach middle school there is a shift in achievement (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013; Clark, 2013; Galbraith & Delisle, 2015; Kerr & McKay, 2014). In secondary school, boys outnumber gifted girls; during the middle school years, the balance is reversed and boys begin to outscore girls on achievement tests and grade point averages (Gurian, 2008; Gurian, 2013). Many believe that the decline in achievement is linked to a message that is sent by parents, teachers, and peers that says, “It is not acceptable for girls to stand out for academic prowess, it’s more acceptable for girls to be like their peers” (Gurian, 2008, p. 1). It has been reported that by secondary school, gifted

girls can lose their passion for learning and their confidence to speak out and demonstrate their abilities (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013; Kerr et al., 2012, Kerr & McKay, 2014; Neihart et al., 2002; Shavinina, 2009). “Eighth grade gifted girls report more negative self-regard and self-confidence in behavior, intellectual and school status, and popularity, than non-gifted girls in the same grade level” (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013; Klein, 1996; Kline & Short, 1991). By middle school, gifted girls begin to underachieve and could potentially underachieve through the remainder of their lifespan. Olshen & Matthews (1987) named this term “disappearing giftedness.” Buescher and Higham (1990) reported:

Perfectionism, competitiveness, unrealistic appraisal of their gifts, rejection from peers, confusion due to mixed messages about their talents, and parental and social pressures to achieve, as well as unchallenging school programs or increased expectations are problems that young gifted girls between eleven and fifteen frequently report. (p. 1)

### **Adolescence.**

“Adolescents are often overwhelmed by the physical and emotional changes occurring during this period of growth, sometimes to the detriment of academic challenges” (Clark, 2013, p. 81). During high school, gifted girls still show great achievement; however, Kerr et al. (2012) reported that those accomplishments do not necessarily transfer to the workforce during their adult years. Clark (2013) provided goals that need to become a priority for gifted adolescent girls to continue achieving:

1. Achieve independence.

2. Discover one's own identity as a person.
3. Establish personal and social values and philosophy.
4. Develop self-guidance, self-motivation, and self-esteem.
5. Become aware of the needs of others and of how they can contribute to meeting those needs.
6. Explore and accept sexuality.
7. Acknowledge intellectual power.
8. Acquire life maintenance, career, and self-actualization skills.
9. Develop meaningful interpersonal relationships.
10. Explore reality structures by use of personal experiences. (p. 81)

Research also shows that gifted adolescent girls need to “learn how to identify equitable relationships and how to plan for dual-career lifestyles” (Kerr et al., 2012, p. 650).

“Smart girls need to plan early for their future, and they need help defining their identity and purpose in life, as well as finding a career title that seems intriguing” (Kerr & McKay, 2014, p. 151). Enhancing the positive attributes and strengths that a gifted adolescent girl possesses can help build resiliency, creativity, hope, and encouragement (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013; Kerr, 1997). “Society sends adolescent girls mixed messages” (Clark, 2013). Therefore, keeping adolescent gifted females engaged in learning and developing a strong sense of self and identity can develop positive attributes, which will aid in preparation for college and career readiness (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013; Galbraith & Delisle, 2015; Kerr, 1985).

Historically, gifted adolescent girls began to lose their authentic voice and begin to conform to societal expectations (Kerr, 1985; Kerr, 1997). However, Kerr & McKay (2014) reported that in the twenty-first century gifted adolescent girls have kept their authentic voices more so than in prior generations. They also reported that millennial adolescent gifted girls are more confident in their opinions and values and are not as withholding as in prior generations (Kerr & McKay, 2014). Admittedly, there is still work to be done to help adolescent gifted girls fulfill their potential but, according to Kerr & McKay (2014); advancements have been made in self-esteem for gifted adolescent girls. Current research on self-esteem shows that all teens experience a drop in self-esteem, although girls experience a greater decline in body image and social self-esteem than their male counterparts (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013; Kerr & McKay, 2014). “Intelligence is a protective factor that guards most gifted girls from many of the worst actions and allows them to avoid the riskiest situations” (Kerr & McKay, 2014, p. 142).

### **Young adult.**

“Women are graduating from college at higher rates than are males” (Clark, 2013, p. 247). Although not all gifted women choose to go to college, the clear majority do attend college (Kerr & McKay, 2014). More than ninety-nine percent of Rimm et al.’s (2014) women attended college, although some did not complete their degrees. It is important to note however that many young gifted adults are choosing to take a gap year before attending college (Kerr & McKay, 2014). Whether a gifted woman attends college or not, an individual’s giftedness does not “disappear” (Rinn & Bishop, 2015).



“Regarding career choice, girls and boys had equal likelihood of majoring in the sciences; yet girls selected careers in socially oriented fields and humanities more frequently than boys” (Kerr et al., 2012, p. 650). One study found “when comparing girls with boys, the girls chose colleges that were less selective and careers that paid less” (Kerr et al., 2012, p. 650). Shavinina (2009) believed, “Dismantling gender and racial stereotypes benefits both females and males by allowing them to pursue their talents without the risk of violating powerful social norms” (p. 123). Potentially, “eliminating this threat may encourage females to pursue math and science in grades 1–12 and to select college majors built on those skills, e.g., engineering, chemistry, and even physics” (Shavinina, 2009, p. 123).

For gifted girls who never felt the intellectual challenge in elementary and secondary school, their hope is that academic challenge will be found in college (Kerr, 1997). Many times, gifted girls do not learn to study in elementary and secondary school because learning comes easily; however, for many gifted girls the academic challenge in college presents a new problem of learning how to study (Kerr, 1997). If a gifted girl is not academically challenged until college and has not developed strong study skills the challenge can be hard to handle (Kerr & McKay, 2014). Imposter Syndrome or fear of success may begin to take over (Kerr 1997). Kerr (1997) provided a vignette of a young gifted college woman:

The gifted young woman enters college with a puzzling combination of characteristics. She has higher high school grades than gifted young men, but she is probably less prepared; her coursework, particularly in math, science, and

social studies, has probably been less rigorous than his. Her career goal is likely to be higher than that of an average woman, as high in status as that of a gifted man. She has high educational aspirations, expecting to do post-graduate work. Nevertheless, her self-esteem, declining since early adolescence, is at the lowest point ever. She has lost confidence in her opinions and tends not to disagree with others because she wants to maintain friendly relations. She is not likely to assert herself in class and is not likely to stand up well to criticism. (p. 132)

College can be a time of great challenge in regards to peer pressure, conformity, and a challenge of femininity or culture of romance (Kerr & McKay, 2014). Finding female role models and mentors in college can be beneficial to gifted college girls (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013; Clark, 2013; Kerr, 1997; Navan, 2008; Rimm, Rimm-Kaufman, & Rimm, 2014). “The recognition of giftedness, identification with one’s chosen field, leadership and maturity, and the presence of mentors all foster the achievement of gifted women in college” (Kerr, 1997, p. 135).

### **Adulthood.**

Adulthood is a time for varied experiences of gifted women, while some choose to pursue their dreams and goals of graduate school, others choose internships or to work in their chosen field, still others choose to marry and start a family (Clark, 2013; Kerr & McKay, 2014; Rimm, Rimm-Kaufman, & Rimm, 2014). There are many choices for gifted women: Do they stay single and pursue their higher education dreams and career pursuits? Do they marry and try to have dual-career households that require a supportive and negotiable spouse? Do they stay home and homeschool their children and play a

supportive role to their spouse? Do they remain single, adopt children, and become a single working mom? (Kerr & McKay, 2014; Rimm, Rimm-Kaufman, & Rimm, 2014). “Although women have made progress towards equality in some areas, the change has been very slow” (Clark, 2013).

Research indicated that gifted women are waiting to marry, they seldom marry in graduate school, and most are waiting for their thirties to marry and forties to have children (Kerr & McKay, 2014). This generation of women are under the pressure to “have it all” at higher rates than any other generation and the millennial generation will have the greatest pressure that women have ever seen (Kerr & McKay, 2014). Kerr & McKay (2014) identify the “Opting Out,” “Pushed Out,” “Mommy Wars,” and the “Lucky Ones.” The gifted women who are “Opting Out” are identified as, “the women who decide to quit the workplace because of inflexible working conditions rather than the attraction of staying home” (Kerr & McKay, 2014, p. 207). Kerr & McKay (2014) also referenced the “Pushed Out” whom are identified as gifted women who feel they are pushed out of their position, (e.g., a surgeon who is passed up for a promotion, due to medical leave for a pregnancy). Although laws protect their jobs, they do not protect smart women’s promotability (Kerr & McKay, 2014). “Many women are still denied high-status occupations, or receive lower pay for an equal work, and are passed over in promotions” (Shavinina, 2009, p. 878). The Mommy Wars are on both sides: those who choose to stay home are judged for staying home and those who work are judged for working (Kerr & McKay, 2014). Finally, there are the Lucky Ones that Kerr & McKay (2014) identified. The Lucky Ones are:

Able to make continual progress in careers that allowed maximum flexibility and autonomy; who married partners who truly did half of the domestic work and believed in the smart women's calling in life, and who found a network of support for childrearing in family, friends, and excellent preschool and schooling. (Kerr & McKay, 2014, p. 210)

Kerr & McKay (2014) term the forties the “Midlife Crisis and the Journey into the Self” (p. 211). They stated, “There comes a point in a smart woman's life when she wonders, ‘Is this all there is?’” (Kerr & McKay, 2014, p. 211). Kerr & McKay (2014) believe this is the time that women begin thinking about what they always dreamed of being or what they imagined themselves being before “life happened.” Kerr & McKay (2014) predicted during this time a spiritual awakening happens within the woman. “Smart women seem to need continuous growth, and often that growth comes as a spiritual or philosophical transformation in midlife” (Kerr & McKay, 2014, p. 214). Finally, the fifties and sixties emerge in a gifted woman's life and in today's generation, Kerr & McKay (2014) believe this is when “many smart women seem to be just getting started” (p. 217). They believed that meaning making is occurring in this timeframe and “despite all manner of setbacks and struggles, these women had used their adaptability to transform their lives and create a new narrative” (Kerr & McKay, 2014, p. 217).

### **Sixty-five and beyond.**

Gifted women who are sixty-five and above can relax knowing that “Intelligence is indeed linked to good health and life satisfaction in old age” (Kerr & McKay, 2014, p. 217). Positive emotions, adaption to new circumstances, and regulation of emotions are

listed as some of the attributes gifted women who transitioned into the “elderly” years reported (Kerr & McKay, 2014). Although, at sixty-five, even seventy-five years old, many gifted women are not slowing down or skipping a beat (Kerr & McKay, 2014). Many gifted women in the later years are still starting new careers (Valiant & Valiant, 1990). Valiant & Valiant (1990) re-interviewed forty of Terman’s women sixty-six years after his original study. The average age of the women was seventy-seven years old. Valiant & Valiant (1990) discovered:

The late-life flowering of these women was reassuring, and we suspect that retention of the capacity for play may be a critical ingredient for successful aging. Perhaps, only adults who have not forgotten how to play are those likely to put something in the world that was not there before. (p. 616)

## **Themes from the Literature**

### **Relationships.**

Understanding the common characteristics and traits of gifted women throughout the lifespan is essential to understanding gifted women. Another aspect that is important in a gifted woman’s life is relationships. Rimm, Rimm-Kaufman, & Rimm (1999) stated, “Our research has documented the importance of parents, relatives, husbands, partners, and friends” (p. 341). A review of the literature that exists on gifted women and the impact relationships have in their life is analyzed in the next section. Four influential relationships in a gifted girl’s life are parental, teacher, peer, and self (Rimm, Rimm-Kaufman & Rimm, 1999). Rinn & Bishop (2015) stated, “While there is no single path to

eminence in adulthood, interpersonal relationships can influence one's personal and professional development" (p. 224).

### *Parental.*

Childhood family experiences and parental attitudes have a strong impact on gifted females (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013; Clark, 2013; Galbraith & Delisle, 2015; Neihart et al., 2002; Rimm, Rimm-Kaufman, & Rimm, 2014; Rinn & Bishop, 2015). "Pre-eminent among the influences on talented females are parents' attitudes and beliefs about their children's academic self-perceptions and achievements which often supersede children's self-perceptions about their own performance" (Neihart et al., 2002, p. 127). Parental opinion matters so greatly that "memories of negative parental comments haunt gifted and talented women decades after they leave home" (Reis, 2002b, p. 2). Parents also have influence over gifted females' math self-concept in adolescence (Dickens & Cornell, 1993). Dickens & Cornell (1993) found "consistently significant correlations between parental expectations and student math self-concept" (p. 67). Callahan & Cunningham (1994) reported, "The influence of parents on their children's development of self-perception is well-documented" (p. 2).

Research suggests that parental relationships are extremely influential for gifted girls (Reis, 1995b). Research has shown that parents who "send negative messages about how girls should act, how polite they should be, how they should dress, and how often they should speak out" can reinforce gifted girls to understate their abilities (Neihart et al., 2002, p. 130). Popova (1997) reported that there are less varied toys in girls' rooms than in boys' rooms. Parents who provide environments that allow gender-neutral access

to toys, games, clothing, and decorations provide girls with a confidence that they can be anyone they want to be and do anything they want to do (Kerr & McKay, 2014). It is especially important in regards to science, math, and technology (Popova, 1997).

“Parents need to encourage girls towards excellent performance, but also encourage them to accept challenges and think creatively” (Davis et al., 2011, p. 428). One-way parents can be good role models for gifted girls is by successfully managing careers and family effectively (Kerr & McKay, 2014). This helps teach girls to form their own identities, which can ultimately lead to overall achievement and satisfaction throughout the lifespan (Kerr & McKay, 2014). It is important to note, “parents’ beliefs regarding the abilities of their children do prove to be more significant for the child’s self-perception than does his or her own success” (Popova, 1997, p. 68). Goertzel (2004) reminded parents to “encourage and help your children develop their strengths instead of trying to make them well rounded. Being really good at one thing is more important than shoring up weak points” (p. 15).

### ***Teacher.***

Gifted girls are immediately presented with education-oriented role models in the form of primary teachers (Davis et al., 2011). “Successful women often idolized their teachers early and were thus inspired to learn in school” (Davis et al., 2011, p. 427). Siegle & Reis (1998) found, “Teachers consistently rated females higher than males on effort and the quality of their work” (p. 39). Fox (1976) found a connection between teacher support and achievement when she identified that with proper intervention, and encouragement from teachers and parents, especially fathers, girls can take higher-level

courses and succeed in math and science. Fox (1976) investigated twenty-six seventh grade-gifted girls. The girls were placed in accelerated mathematics classes with a female teacher and female assistants who served as role models and mentors. Through these significant efforts of special intervention, the discrepancy in higher-level math courses was not seen (Fox, 1976). Girls could keep pace with the boys and achieve at high levels (Fox, 1976). Fox (1976) found that “course taking behavior of gifted girls was modified by early intervention; the experimental girls kept pace with the boys” (p. ii). Fox (1976) determined three factors that were influential in influencing higher-level mathematics courses by gifted girls: 1.) Career interests and aspirations. 2.) Encouragement from significant others, particularly fathers and teachers. 3.) Early entrance into accelerated or gifted programs that encourage girls to take courses (i.e., advanced placement, calculus, and physics).

Unfortunately, research shows that teachers are more likely and more able to identify gifted boys than gifted girls (Kramer, 1985; Rothenbusch, S., Zettler, I., Voss, T., Lösch, T., & Trautwein, U., 2016; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). “Teachers are less accurate in nominating girls than boys who are likely to do well on the quantitative subtest of the SAT” (Reis, 2002b, p. 3). Teachers are also less likely to like smart girls as well as they like other students (Cooley, Chauvin, & Karnes, 1984). “Male and female teachers find smart boys more competent than smart girls in critical and logical thinking skills and in creative problem solving” (Reis, 2002b, p. 2). It is also reported that “Male teachers viewed female students in a more traditional manner than did female teachers; however, perceiving bright girls to be more emotional, more high strung, more gullible, less



imaginative, less curious, less inventive, less individualistic, and less impulsive than males” (Neihart et al., 2002, p. 128). Neihart et al. concluded, “Teachers expect less from females than from males, especially with regard to achievement in mathematics and science” (p. 128). Crombie et al. (1992) found, “based upon data on overall enrollment, referral, and referral outcomes from five school boards offering gifted programs, that a greater number of boys than girls were enrolled in gifted programs” (p. 213).

*Peer.*

Many gifted girls will “camouflage” or deny their gifts and talents to fit into a social group (Gurian, 2008). Adolescent girls are often faced with choosing between competing goals of popularity or academic achievement (Gurian, 2008). “Since gifted girls are usually more socially adept than gifted boys, they pick up social cues and know how to fit in” (Gurian, 2008, p. 2). Gurian (2008) reported that in a study with over six hundred children, “girls typically adapt to the ability level of their age-mates” (p. 2). The study also showed that gifted girls in third through ninth grade choose not to leave their friends to join advanced classes (Gurian, 2008). During middle school, gifted girls learn that high achievement may cause them to lose the acceptance of their peer group (Gurian, 2008). In a study conducted by Luftig & Nichols (1991) the results showed that gifted boys are found to be the most popular among their peer group and gifted girls the least popular.

The girls were perceived as generally moody or sad and girls with high grade point averages in middle school were found to be more depressed, have more

psychosomatic problems, and to have lower self-esteem than boys with equivalent grade point averages. (Gurian, 2008, p. 2)

### ***Self.***

“The self may be defined as a complex and dynamic system of beliefs that individuals hold to be true about themselves” (Clark, 2013, p. 107). Clark (2013) stated, “It is our own construction, the result of the interactions we have with others” (p. 107). Kerr & McKay (2014) discuss how girls lose their authentic voice as they go through puberty. “Adolescent girls stand at the crossroads; only a few continue with confidence in their opinions and values” (Kerr & McKay, 2014, p. 141). An extreme drop in self-esteem can occur during eleven and seventeen (Kerr & McKay, 2014). “The beliefs we have about ourselves literally determine our actions and our perceptions of the world and other people” (Clark, 2013, p. 107). The values and interests acquired during adolescence and young adulthood will be instrumental in developing a gifted woman’s identity (Kerr & McKay, 2014). “If she identifies as a fashionista, a romantic, a rescuer, or a socialite, she will lose the opportunity to walk away from the crowd and become her unique self” (Kerr & McKay, 2014, p. 174). Navan (2008) stated, “Their *Self* – their perception of who they are – contrasted drastically with the lock-step behaviors that are the norm in classrooms where teachers feel pressured to produce test results” (p. 11).

### **Societal pressure.**

There are three specific areas of societal pressures that will be illuminated from the literature: family, school, and peer (Neihart et al., 2002). Reis (1987) discussed the areas that can cause gifted females to manifest symptoms related to conformity of

societal or cultural beliefs, discrimination and/or stereotypes (i.e., sexism or racism, or underachievement). Noble (1987) stated, “Many studies suggest that, unlike gifted males and females not identified as gifted, almost all gifted women have found it necessary at some time in their lives to hide their abilities in order to survive socially” (p. 371).

### ***Conformity.***

Families, teachers, and peer groups from childhood through adulthood often reject females who deviate from cultural norms by appearing too bright, accomplished or successful, and many gifted women are taught at a very early age that competence and achievement will be accompanied by loneliness and ostracism (Noble, 1989). Callahan & Cunningham (1994) “found that middle school gifted females avoided displays of outstanding intellectual ability and searched for better ways to conform to the norm of the peer group” (p. 4). Research has shown that being identified as gifted, bright, or talented can create social problems for females due to a fear of social isolation due to their success (Bell, 1989; Buescher & Higham, 1990; Buescher, Olszewski & Higham, 1987; Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013; Eccles, Midgley, & Adler, 1984; Kerr, et al., 1988; Kramer, 1991; Neihart, et al., 2002; Reis, 1987, 1995a, 1995b; Reis et al., 1994). Neihart et al. (2002) stated, “Gifted adolescents may deliberately understate their abilities in order to avoid being seen as physically unattractive or lacking in social competence” (p. 130). When gifted girls perceive being smart is negatively received by their peers they may decide to downplay their intellectual abilities or “play dumb” in order to be received by their peers (Neihart et al., 2002).

### *Stereotypes.*

#### *Sexism.*

The doctrine of the natural inferiority of women has been thoroughly ingrained in human consciousness and has impacted law, education, religion, philosophy, and literature worldwide (Silverman, 1995). Sexism is a stereotype that gifted women face and it can influence internal and external factors and place obstacles in the way of gifted females realizing their potential (Noble, 1987). Noble (1987) stated, “The role of sexism in obscuring the recognition and expression of giftedness in women is irrefutable” (p. 368). One role of sexism that gifted girls’ battle is a bias among parents, teachers, and peers that they are not as bright as gifted boys (Noble, 1987). Girls may internalize lowered expectations that society places on them very early in life (Noble, 1987). According to Neihart et al. (2002), teachers have been known to reinforce this stereotype by believing that boys have more innate abilities and girls must work harder. Popova (1997) stated, “One of the most important functions of sexism and of sex-role stereotypes is to justify and defend actual, existing inequality between the sexes” (p. 65-66). Sexism is seen as stereotypical behaviors that parents, teachers, peers, and society expect women to operate around (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013). “Stereotypical feminine behaviors often conflict with the personal attributes that gifted females need to succeed” (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013, p. 349).

One such stereotype is that girls should not be assertive or bossy, yet for leadership abilities these may be qualities that are admired (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013). Hillary Clinton was the 2016 Democratic Presidential Nominee, there is no

evidence that she was or was not identified as gifted and talented; however, she served as a role model for gifted and talented females throughout the United States. During the presidential campaign, she was criticized for yelling. One quote said, “Hillary having a big night in the primaries. So she is shouting angrily in her victory speech. Supporters loving it. What is she mad at?” (Time, 2016). Another quote stated, “Hillary shouting her speech. She has the floor; a more conversational tone might be better for connecting with folks at home” (Time, 2016). Many times, girls are told to be nice or behaved. “According to the stereotype, girls are not supposed to be too independent” (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013, p. 349). Assertiveness or being strong is not a quality that is encouraged in girls by teachers and parents (Gurian, 2008). Clark (2013) said, “From the beginning, girls are taught to be passive, accepting, and nurturing” (p. 248).

#### *Racism.*

Another form of discrimination that affects diverse gifted girls is racism (Ford, 1994). African-American and Hispanic girls are among some of the most underrepresented populations in gifted education programs, especially those who also have a low socio-economic status (Stambaugh & Ford, 2015). Pollock (2008) defined racism as, “any act that, even unwittingly, tolerates, accepts, or reinforces racially unequal opportunities for children to learn and thrive; allows racial inequalities in opportunity as if they are normal and acceptable; or treats people of color as less worthy or less complex than ‘white’ people” (xvii). Ford (1994) stated, “Black youth in general face numerous barriers to academic achievement and success in life primarily due to disproportionate rates of poverty, unemployment, and underemployment” (p. 1). Black

gifted girls are “at risk for underachievement, school failure, and otherwise not reaching their potential in school” (Ford, 1994, p. 1). “Research demonstrates not only the many reasons Black students tend to not attain their academic potential, but also why gifted Black youth are at greater risk for increased negative peer pressure and isolation once identified and placed into gifted programs” (Ford, 1994, p. 1).

Kerr & McKay (2014) stated, “Like all demographic designations, Hispanic-American is socially, not biologically, based; it is neither a race nor a distinct ethnicity” (p. 247). Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Guatemalan, Nicaraguan, Dominican Republican, or even Pacific Islander are considered Hispanic or Latina (Kerr & McKay, 2014). “The prejudice that non-English speaking Hispanics encounter is strong, and most Hispanic children are eager to learn to avoid the humiliation they encounter in many communities” (Kerr & McKay, 2014, p. 249). Kerr & McKay (2014) stated:

One form of prejudice against Hispanics that has emerged is the attempt by legislators in several states to shut down any form of bilingual education programs, to force all children into English-only classrooms and schools and even to forbid the teaching of multicultural courses that include information about Mexican culture. (p. 249)

*Multiculturalism.*

Multiculturalism is a concern about a student’s culture or the vital role that culture plays in a person’s life. Levy & Plucker (2008) presented a *Multicultural Competence Model for Counseling Gifted and Talented Students*. The model has three specific areas of importance:

1. Counselor awareness of one's attitudes, assumptions, and biases about gifted and talented children;
2. Understanding the characteristics of, and issues faced by gifted and talented children, and
3. Developing appropriate interventions and strategies for counseling gifted and talented children. (Levy & Plucker, 2008, p. 3)

In addition to counselors, teachers and parents need to be aware of the benefits of the *Multicultural Competence Model for Counseling Gifted and Talented Students*. Levy and Plucker (2003) suggested that “because of differential abilities and expectations associated with those abilities, gifted children constitute a unique subculture that necessitates understanding and application of specialized skills by helping professionals, including school counselors” (p. 229).

Teachers, parents, and counselors who have cultural consciousness can support diverse gifted populations of children and students understanding of the student's culture. Developing an environment free bias is the first step of creating an environment that supports multiculturalism (Levy & Plucker, 2008). See the table below for the *Competence Model for Counseling Culturally Diverse Gifted and Talented Children* (Levy & Plucker, 2008, p. 7).

This table demonstrates the three competencies: awareness, knowledge, and counseling skills. Parents, teachers, and counselors of gifted students need to be aware of biases, stereotypes, attitudes, and beliefs about culturally diverse students (Levy & Plucker, 2008). They need to be aware of their own attitudes towards culturally diverse students

and how that can lead to racism. They need to be sensitive to cultural knowledge that are vital to the child’s culture of origin. This can be beneficial in overcoming the stereotypes discussed such as racism, which can lead to conformity. When a child does not feel supported and appreciated for her cultural differences it can lead to underachievement.

Table 1

*Competence Model for Counseling Culturally Diverse Gifted and Talented Children (MCC-GT)*

<b>Competency One: Awareness</b>	<b>Competency Two: Knowledge</b>	<b>Competency Three: Counseling Skills</b>
1. General awareness of biases, stereotypes, attitudes, and beliefs about culturally diverse children. <sup>1</sup>	1. Possess clear and explicit knowledge of general characteristics of counseling and therapy with children. <sup>a,b</sup>	1. Counseling and Therapy skills a. general counseling skills <sup>a,b</sup> b. applications to gifted children
2. Awareness of attitudes toward and about diverse gifted and talented clients.	2. Possess specific knowledge about the nature and development of therapeutic issues with gifted children.	2. Consulting Skills a. resource to other professionals b. resource to parents
3. Awareness of similarities and differences counselors share with gifted and talented clients a. Issues related to counselors identified as gifted b. Issues related to non-gifted identified counselors	3. Possess specific knowledge and information about socio-, cultural, and educational issues of that may affect gifted children.	3. Advocacy Skills a. Educational programming b. Resource allocation
4. Sensitive to, and acknowledgement of, circumstances that may necessitate a referral of a gifted client to another counselor; or circumstances in need of supervision and consultation.		

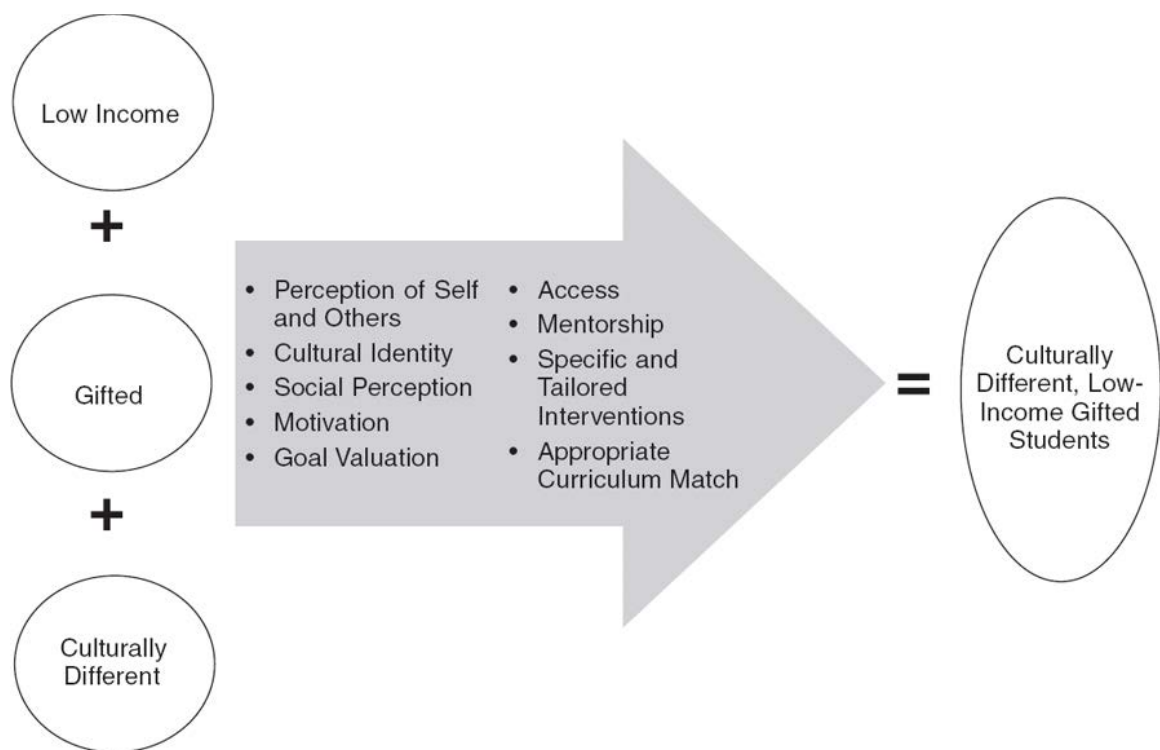
Note. This model is explicitly designed as an extension of Sue and colleagues' model of Multicultural Counseling Competence (Sue, D. W., 2001; Sue, D. W., Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). <sup>1</sup>For a detailed description of multicultural competencies with children please see Liu & Clay (2002). <sup>a</sup>For a detailed description of counseling competence with children see Kaczmarek & Wagner, (1994)

### *Multicultural considerations.*

Culturally and linguistically diverse gifted populations sometimes manifest gifted characteristics differently (Lewis, Rivera, & Roby, 2012). “Students who are not verbal because they are in a silent period of language acquisition may manifest gifted behaviors through other means of communication” (Lewis et al., 2012, p. 15). Lewis et al. (2015) also described, “The key to identifying gifted behaviors in linguistically diverse students is to understand the perspective of the student in a language-neutral context” (p. 15). “Gifted students of poverty and from different cultures, particularly Black students, prefer to learn in a more hands-on way, prefer concrete methods of learning, are creative



storytellers, are more likely to show leadership qualities or question authority” (Stambaugh & Ford, 2015, p. 194). In regards to gifted, first-generation Hispanic students, Staumbaugh & Ford (2015) stated they can have “a strong desire to understand and speak the second language, demonstrate cultural sensitivity, want to share their culture, have pride in both their native language and English, and are fluent in both nonverbal and oral expression” (p. 195). “Because of these specific characteristics, gifted students in general and gifted students who are double minorities (i.e., gifted and of a different race/ethnicity or low-income status) do not fit into the traditional societal or school mold academically or socially” (Stambaugh & Ford, 2015, p. 195). The table below from Stambaugh & Ford (2015) showed how culturally diverse or low socio-economic students’ perceptions are effected by factors such as race/ethnicity, income level, and ability.



### ***Underachievement.***

There is a “glaring discrepancy between young girls’ success in school and their ‘accomplishments after they have grown up’” (Popova, 1997, p. 65). Women continue to earn less and have fewer creative contributions than their male counterparts (Neihart et al., 2002). “Girls underachievement often comes later in life or in adulthood when they fear becoming involved in enterprises where they cannot be assured of success” (Davis et al., 2011, p. 428). The National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) reported, “Half of gifted students do not perform to their tested abilities” (Colangelo & Davis, 2003, p. 424). Reducing underachievement in middle school, high school, and higher education for females may produce greater growth, accomplishments, and advancements for women. Neihart et al. (2002) stated, “Researchers must translate insights about causes and correlates of underachievement into models and strategies that educators use to develop more effective prevention and intervention programs” (p. 87). One challenge presented to researchers is to conduct further research on “developing multiple approaches to both preventing and reversing underachievement” (Reis & McCoach, 2000, p. 166). Regarding preventing and reversing underachievement in gifted females, Reis & McCoach (2000) propagated that eminent females consistently develop strong self-efficacy skills, resiliency, persistence, and determination. Reis (2003) discussed how internal barriers: self-esteem, efficacy, locus of control, and fear of success can all contribute to underachievement and that research is currently being considered on how these factors relate to gifted women’s underachievement. Randall (1997) provided a comprehensive overview of research and literature on gifted girls and the conflicts they

face within culture, family, school, and friendships. “One study of gifted women across eight decades reported that their challenges and concerns were consistent across the decades. Gifted girls may be the most ignored population in our schools. Let’s change that!” (Randall, 1997, p. 48)

### **Social and emotional.**

Gifted women experience specific social and emotional issues that non-gifted populations do not normally encounter (Neihart et al., 2002). “Personal and social and emotional issues occur across women’s lifespans” (Neihart et al., 2002, p. 126). Some of the social and emotional issues that gifted women face are asynchronous development, super sensitivities, overexcitabilities, divergent thinking, perceptiveness, entelechy, social awkwardness, OCD, anxiety, and existential depression (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013; Gurian, 2008; Kerr & McKay, 2014; Navan, 2008; Neihart et al., 2002). According to Gurian (2008), “characteristics such as perfectionism, hopelessness, and discouragement rise with age” (p. 1). Gurian (2008) stated, “The changes result from conflicts between the psychological needs of gifted females and society’s gender-role expectations” (p.1). The work that Hollingsworth (1926) and Terman (1935) did with exceptionally gifted children also indicates the higher the intellectual abilities the more detached from others or feeling different and separate was evident (Silverman, 1990). Children who are highly, exceptionally, or profoundly gifted may experience certain social and emotional issues with greater intensity (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009). When analyzing life’s paths retrospectively of outstanding women, Popova (1997) reported that

outstanding women “reported feeling that they were different and separate, and detached from others – a feeling that was already present in their childhood” (p. 71).

*Dabrowski’s theory of positive disintegration & overexcitabilities.*

Kazimierz Dabrowski developed a theory of positive disintegration that has also been described as a theory of personality development, moral development, and emotional development (Bailey, 2010). His theory grew out of his childhood experiences during World War I and his experiences as a Polish psychologist during and after World War II. He describes having seen both the examples of the “lowest possible inhumane behavior as well as acts of the highest human character” (Bailey, 2010, p. 1). After this period, “Dabrowski set out to create a theory to account for this wide range of human behavior and development” (Bailey, 2010, p. 1). “He, along with others in the field of gifted education, believe that gifted individuals experience the world from a different perspective, with qualitative differences including intensities, sensitivities, idealism, perceptiveness, overexcitabilities, asynchrony, complexity, introversion, perfectionism, and moral concerns” (Bailey, 2010, p.1).

Within his theory are the five developmental levels: Level One: Primary Integration, Level Two: Unilevel Disintegration, Level Three: Multilevel Disintegration, Level Four: Directed Multilevel Disintegration, and Level Five: Secondary Integration. Level one deals with the primary influences of heredity, impulses, and self and is marked by selfishness and egocentrism. Level two deals with submitting to the ideals of a social group or peer pressure and is often referred to as “keeping up with the Jones” and is marked by social factors and peer pressure of keeping up appearances. The third level

deals with individuals beginning to realize “a sense of the ideal of moral concerns, and the existence of conflicting values within oneself” (Bailey, 2010, p. 2). It is marked by “an individual’s inner contrast between ‘what is’ and ‘what ought to be’ it begins the process of positive maladjustment” (Bailey, 2010, p. 2). Level four deals with the recognition of self-actualization and a strong sense of responsibility for others which is marked by a motivator of growth, “spurring the individual to work towards agreement between their actions and their ideals” (Bailey, 2010, p. 2). Finally, level five, which has been debated if it is achievable, deals with a complete harmony and peace with oneself and humankind; all “lower forms of motivation have been destroyed and are replaced by higher forms of empathy, autonomy, and authenticity” (Bailey, 2010, p. 2).

The theory proposes that individuals who manifest given forms of overexcitabilities, especially “one who manifests several forms of overexcitability, sees reality in a different, stronger, and more multisided manner” (Lind, 2001, p. 9). “The concept of overexcitabilities provides an explanation for why certain individuals react strongly to stimuli in their environment” (Navan, 2008, p. 10). The five overexcitabilities are emotional, sensory, intellectual, psychomotor, and imaginal. “The reactions are both physical, involving the central nervous system, and psychological” (Navan, 2008, p. 10). The occurrences of overexcitabilities affects the quality of the person’s experiences and contributes to the ability to move up on the five development levels or show positive disintegration. The occurrence of an overexcitability affects the quality of the person’s experience and the intensity is understood as a qualitatively distinct characteristic (Bailey, 2010). “Overexcitabilities contribute significantly to one’s drive, experience,

power to envision possibility, and the intensity and complexity of feeling involved in creative expression” (Bailey, 2010, p. 2). These overexcitabilities represent the “kind of endowment that feeds, nourishes, enriches, empowers, and amplifies talent” (Piechowski & Colangelo, 1984; Bailey, 2010). “Gifted children have all or some of the five forms of overexcitability. Often, the more highly gifted the child is, the greater his or her intensity will be” (Navan, 2008, p. 11).

*Emotional overexcitabilities.*

Emotional overexcitabilities (OE’s) deal with the experience of intense levels of emotions. It manifests as a strong or intense emotional response to a form of stimuli. It can manifest through attachments to individuals, living things, or locations (Bailey, 2010). “Dabrowski believed that emotional overexcitability is core and that the other overexcitabilities emerge from the individual’s emotional center” (Navan, 2008, p. 11). An example of emotional OE is a child crying uncontrollably when a teacher reads a story about an animal being hurt or killed. Another example is an adolescent girl choosing vegetarianism after realizing that live animals are dying for her food. It can also be manifested in shyness or timidity where a gifted girl is afraid to speak up in a classroom or group setting and it is hard for her to make eye contact with teachers or peers. Other manifestations of emotional OE’s are enthusiasm, a strong effective memory, concern with death, fears, depression, anxiety, feelings of loneliness, need for security, concern for others, and difficulty with adjusting to new environments (Bailey, 2010). Gifted females with emotional OE’s may feel misunderstood because parents, teachers, and peers may not know how to respond or understand their deep sense of

personal and social justice, their deep need for attachment, and their intense emotional outbursts and reactions. Navan (2008) stated:

With their heightened sensitivity, relationships are crucial to those with emotional overexcitability, but for the same reason, false, shallow friendships are meaningless to them, and they may have just one or two lifelong friends” (p. 11).

*Sensory overexcitabilities.*

Sensory OE’s manifest as a heightened ability to feel or sense sensory and aesthetic pleasure and experiences. Sensory OE’s may appear as an increased need to touch and feel. Navan (2008) said:

Parents often report to me that their children need soft fabrics or struggle against wearing socks because the seams bother them, and parents often must remove the tags from clothing because they irritate the child. (p. 13)

Sensual overexcitabilities also manifest as a delight in beautiful objects or experiences. Navan (2008) stated, “Sensual overexcitability is also the trait that moves them [gifted children] to dissolve in tears over a brilliant pianist” (p. 14). Sensual OE’s can also manifest as an ability to experience a taste that differentiates between the highest and lowest quality of foods or an ability to see and experience colors such as different hues of blues that others would not notice (Bailey, 2010). An increased sensitivity to noise, lights, clutter, smells, or other stimuli are also signs of sensory OE’s (Bailey, 2010).

*Intellectual overexcitabilities.*

An intellectual OE can manifest as an activity of the mind such as a tendency to ask probing questions (Bailey, 2010). A high curiosity of how something works or a

strong desire to know how to solve a problem (Bailey, 2010). Other ways an intellectual OE can manifest is through keen observation, strong analytical abilities, avidity for knowledge, a capacity for intense concentration, theoretical thinking, and a reverence for logic (Bailey, 2010). Children who manifest Intellectual OE's need mental challenges. "Provide the child with the opportunity to learn and play strategy games and puzzles like chess and tangrams, riddles, and brain stretchers" (Navan, 2008, p. 14).

*Psychomotor overexcitabilities.*

Psychomotor OE's can manifest with symptoms that mimic ADD/ADHD. Many times, doctors and psychologist misidentify psychomotor OE's for ADHD. Psychomotor is a "surplus of energy due to enhanced excitability of the neuromuscular system" (Bailey, 2010, p. 5). It can manifest through excessive physical energy, rapid speech, compulsive talking, nervous habits, impulsive actions and behaviors, marked competitiveness, workaholic, restlessness, and constant fidgeting (Bailey, 2010).

*Imaginational overexcitabilities.*

Imaginational OE is the capacity to visualize events; some call it the Walt Disney Effect "Imaginational overexcitabilities reveal themselves in children who remember their dreams vividly and are prone to nightmares that are experienced with events, colors, and sounds so vibrant that the child may have a difficult time recognizing they are not real" (Navan, 2008, p. 13). It manifests as associations of images and impressions, inventiveness, intuitive or heightened consciousness, use of imagery and metaphor in verbal expressions, vivid and animated visualization, dreams, nightmares, blending of truth and fiction, and an intense preoccupation with living in a world of fantasy (Bailey,



2010). Navan (2008) stated, “Those who love reading may think of their favorite characters as close friends and talk about them as if they are actual people that inhabit their everyday world” (p. 13).

### **Conflicts and barriers.**

Gifted women often believe they can accomplish all their dreams and then encounter both subtle messages and the reality of decisions later in life, according to Reis (2002a). Popova (1997) stated, “Many gifted young women design their life’s plans on the basis of expressed expectations and uncritically accepted hidden messages of the environment, never considering their own abilities, interests, desires, and qualities of personality” (p. 71). Reis (2002a) also stated that, “Some talented women begin to believe that being ambitious and developing their own talents may be considered selfish” (p. 1). Many times, gifted women face the unique challenge of deciding between marriage and career after high school or college, which for men is generally not a choice they have to make; it is expected that they will work and have families (Randall, 1997). Women have to face the reality sometimes that getting married or starting a family can mean putting their dreams, passions, pursuits, and career aspirations on hold (Randall, 1997). This is only one form of a conflict or barrier that gifted women face. Other internal and external barriers are perfectionism, Imposter Syndrome, Cinderella Complex, Superwoman Syndrome, Housewife’s Syndrome, multipotentiality, and Horner Effect or Fear of Success.

### *Internal barriers.*

Internal barriers begin to arise when “females hide their intelligence or begin to doubt they have advanced abilities” (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013, p. 351). Neihart et al. (2002) stated, “Talented females have to deal with a number of personality factors, personal priorities, and decisions that have emerged as the reasons why many of them either cannot or do not realize their potential in academic areas and their professions” (p. 128). “Not all gifted females experience any or all of these barriers, but research studies identify a combination of internal and external factors as potential inhibitors to talent development in this population” (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013, p. 348).

### *Perfectionism.*

Some argue that there is healthy and unhealthy perfectionism while others believe all perfectionism is unhealthy (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009). Regardless, perfectionism is a very real internal barrier for many gifted women (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009). Rimm (2007) stated, “While the pressures of perfectionism may lead to high achievement motivation, it may also lead to underachievement. In important ways, perfectionism is very different from the motivation for excellence” (p. 247). “Perfectionism can cause talented women to set unreasonable goals and to spend their lives trying to achieve perfection in work, home, body, children, wardrobe, and other areas” (Neihart et al., 2002; Siegle & Shuler, 2000). Many times, gifted girls can construe parental expectations negatively and believe that they have to be perfect in everything that they do (Neihart et al., 2002). Unhealthy expectations of parents can lead to perfectionism, which affects many gifted girls (Neihart et al., 2002). Unhealthy female perfectionism can result from

fears about making errors because of standards placed on them (Siegle & Shuler, 2000). In Schuler's (1997) work with gifted girls, "they viewed their parents' perfectionism negatively and perceived parental expectations as demands to be perfect in everything they did" (Neihart et al., 2002, p. 131). Too high of expectations set by parents can have serious negative effects upon gifted girls (Siegle & Shuler, 2000). Since girls many times work to please others, these false expectations or too high expectations that they place upon themselves or those of their parents can cause unhealthy perfectionism (Siegle & Shuler, 2000). "Concern over mistakes, perceived parental expectations, and perceived parental criticisms are salient factors for the gifted unhealthy/dysfunctional female perfectionists" (Siegle & Shuler, 2000).

*Loss of belief in abilities.*

"Self-confidence of gifted girls steadily decreased from elementary grades through high school" (Neihart et al., 2002, p. 129). Gurian (2008) reported a "gradual loss of self-esteem in girls as they progress through school. The slide for gifted girls starts between grades three and eight and by adolescence many gifted girls suffer a marked lack of self-confidence" (p. 1). Reis (2002a) reported, "Female students who had done well in high school lost their confidence in their ability after a few years of college." (p. 3). The loss of self-confidence can be due in part to lowered expectations (Reis, 2002a). When gifted girls are young, they tend to believe that they can accomplish anything but as they progress through secondary and post-secondary school, they tend to have a loss in belief about their abilities and their self-confidence declines (Kerr & McKay, 2014).

*Fear of success/Horner effect.*

In 1972, Horner first discovered the “Horner Effect” which was later named the “Fear of Success Syndrome.” “The phenomenon occurs because the typical woman is afraid to win against a man in competition, for to win against a man was actually to lose” (Kerr, 1997, p. 163). “Fear of success may cause some females to believe that they will be rejected by their peers or that they will appear undesirable to the opposite sex if they are too competent or successful” (Reis, 2002a, p. 3). “Many capable young women change their plans to accommodate a less ambitious, more traditionally feminine role” (Reis, 2002a, p. 3). “Over compliance, or the fear of being assertive, and fear of failure may cause “good little girls” to set their life goals below their abilities” (Davis et al., 2011, p. 428). “Women characteristically underachieve when competing against men; despite exceptional ability. Women would perform decidedly below their skills and, curiously, would usually be unable to explain why” (Kerr, 1997, p. 163).

The Horner Effect or Fear of Success Syndrome can cause lifelong achievement problems for gifted women because gifted girls are “astute, they become sensitive to the conflicts for women in competitive situations much earlier than average girls do” (Kerr, 1997, p. 163). Girls who suffer from the Fear of Success Syndrome will hold back their efforts and abilities, which places them in an underachieving pattern (Kerr, 1997). “Even when a gifted woman understands how irrational or impractical it is to underachieve; she may continue to do so if she believes success will result in a failure of intimacy” (Kerr, 1997, p. 164). Certain cultural expectations can place gifted girls at a higher risk for developing the Horner Effect or Fear of Success Syndrome (Kerr, 1997).

*Imposter syndrome.*

Clance & Imes (1978) defined the condition known as imposter phenomenon in 1978. They stated, “The term imposter phenomenon is used to designate an internal experience of intellectual phonies, which appears to be particularly prevalent and intense among a select sample of high achieving women” (Clance & Imes, 1978, p. 1). In 1978, Clance & Imes believed certain early family dynamics and introjection of common sex-role stereotyping appeared to contribute to the development of imposter syndrome. “Despite outstanding academic and professional accomplishments, women who experience the imposter phenomenon persists in believing that they are really not bright and have fooled anyone who thinks otherwise” (Clance & Imes, 1978, p. 1). Many times, regardless of the accomplishments, women who suffer from Imposter Syndrome believe it was just luck that caused the accomplishment not their abilities (Clance & Imes, 1978). “These women often experience a terror of failure. They think if they make a mistake or fail at something they will feel foolish and humiliated” (Clance & O’Toole, 1987, p. 1). Reis (2002a) described Imposter Syndrome as a “Low sense of self-esteem occurring when females attribute their successes to factors other than their own efforts and see their outward image of a bright successful achiever as being undeserved or accidental” (p. 4). Gifted females who suffer from the Imposter Syndrome may attribute success to being in the right place at the right time, help from others, or accidental (Clance & O’Toole, 1987). Dweck (1986) found that although girls may identify themselves to be smart and capable, they interpret any failure quite adversely and believe it is due to a lack of ability. The women who suffer from Imposter Syndrome walk around feeling like they are an

“Imposter” and that people are going to find out that they are not as smart as people think they are (Dweck, 1986).

*Multipotentiality.*

Multipotentiality, like other internal barriers, can be both a positive and negative characteristic in the lives of gifted women (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013). “Women who have multipotentiality usually have an eagerness to learn or an endless thirst for knowledge” (Neihart et al., 2002, p. 130). They also have “uniformly high scores across ability and achievement tests” (Neihart et al., 2002, p. 130). Many times, multipotentiality, or the ability to perform multiple talents and abilities at high levels, is considered a positive attribute; however, for some gifted women multipotentiality can be extremely frustrating. Multipotentiality is a positive attribute because it provides various educational and vocational opportunities; however, it can quickly turn into a negative attribute when gifted women cannot “find their niche, make it on their own, or choose a vocational path” (Fredrickson, 1986; Kerr, 1991; Marshall, 1981; Neihart et al., 2002). Fredrickson (1986) stated, “Gifted and talented individuals need more information and assistance with career planning than do other persons because of the many more options and alternatives they can realistically consider” (p. 64). “Too often, gifted and talented young people are expected to succeed on their own, or because of their multipotentiality, they are expected to adapt to whatever happens to them” (Fredrickson, 1986, p. 64).

*Housewife’s syndrome.*

There are some women who choose to be a housewife and others have it thrust upon them as an expectation of a spouse, parents, or parents of a spouse (Popova, 1997).

Although some women do feel satisfaction in the role of a homemaker, according to Popova (1997) “working women, on the whole, enjoy greater satisfaction, including their self-assessment and sense of their own compensation” (p. 67). “The American experience has shown that years devoted solely to family concerns deprive women of a sense of independence and competence; as a rule, it can lead to the loss of a sense of self and can result in alcoholism, mental and sexual disorders, and suicide” (Popova, 1997, p. 67). Many times, even in the gifted community, choosing to be a homemaker is frowned upon. Reis (2003) stated:

There is no clear path for any of us, as our lives and creativity are both more connected with our love for our family and our friends and are more diffused than the lives and creativity of our male counterparts. Because relationships are central to the lives of most gifted and talented women, they often run at parallel levels of importance to their work. (p. 155)

*Cinderella complex.*

The Cinderella Complex was coined by Colette Dowling (1981) to describe a combination of fear of success and the desire to be cared for which is categorized as a personal and psychological dependency. “The Cinderella Complex is a network of largely repressed attitudes and fears that detain women in a kind of half-light, retreating from the full use of their minds and creativity” (Kerr, 1997, p. 164). It was named after Cinderella because “like Cinderella, these women are still waiting for something external to transform their lives” (Kerr, 1997, p. 164). Belief is that women who develop the Cinderella Complex were over helped as children so these women are crippled by a

subsequent sense of dependence on others (Kerr, 1997). This causes women to judge men based upon their competence to take care of them completely; they base their self-worth on the man they choose to marry (Kerr, 1997). “Only crisis could shock these women out of submerging themselves in marriage and family” (Kerr, 1997, p. 165). Families whom place pressure upon their daughter to marry early and marry for materialistic gain, who do not support career choices and options, and who do not encourage independence and achievement place their daughter at risk for developing a Cinderella Complex (Kerr, 1997).

*Superwoman syndrome.*

Now more than ever women feel pressured to “have it all” (Kerr & McKay, 2014). Popova (1997) discussed a syndrome that gifted women sometimes face, the Superwoman Syndrome. Superwoman Syndrome occurs when women striving to realize their full potential, by working outside the home and having a family, find their potential interwoven with a feeling of guilt toward her family and super efforts to work things so that the family does not “suffer” from her career (Popova, 1997). This entails working a full-time job, being the soccer mom, and taking care of the home without getting other members of the household to help her (Popova, 1997). The “superwoman” believes she can do it all and quickly has burnout (Popova, 1997). Callahan & Cunningham (1994) stated that the superwoman syndrome began with the feminist movement when women’s careers increased and there was a tendency that woman should be able to do it all.

They [women] come to believe that they should fulfill multiple roles – the good student, the family support, the athlete, participant in extra-curricular activities,



class officer- although they are not taught how to balance and manage multiple roles. (Callahan & Cunningham, 1994, p. 3)

***External barriers.***

Gifted females also face external barriers (i.e., pressure from parents, teachers, spouses, or peers). These external pressures can affect choices and decisions about marriage, family, and careers. They can also influence choices about duty, nurture, and caring. Many times, gifted women feel pressured to put off their personal ambitions, hopes, and dreams to support the ambitions, hopes, and dreams of their parents, spouse, or children. Bizzari (1997) conducted an intergenerational study of three gifted women and the obstacles and challenges they confronted. She found:

There are several major obstacles and challenges confronting women of high potential that surfaced in the course of this research. Included are issues related to responsibility, decision making and unplanned lives, disenfranchisement, wants, needs, quality of life, and internal understanding of themselves. (Bizarri, 1997, p. 113)

Bizzari's (1997) research found obstacles and challenges confronting gifted women; the first obstacle is "the need to place on hold personal wants and needs in favor of providing for the needs of family, children and others" (p. 116). This can ultimately influence a woman's choice and decision about marriage, starting a family, or choices about duty and nurturing.

*Choices and decisions about marriage.*

When it comes to choices and decisions about marriage, gifted women who choose spouses who support their interest in passions and pursuits outside the home have a higher achievement of goals and are overall more satisfied and fulfilled in their personal and professional lives (Rimm, Rimm-Kaufman, & Rimm, 2014). A study conducted by Hansen & Hall (1997) studied one hundred sixty-seven highly able women who were the alumnae of Martha Cook dormitory at the University of Michigan and who participated in the Maslow (1954) study. Of those women, those who married a “very supportive” partner was able to achieve high goals of accomplishment. Whereas those who were in non-supportive marriages had a low achievement of goals. This study suggested that “women who perceive their husbands as supportive believed they had high potential for achievement” (Hansen & Hall, 1997, p. 169). Rimm et al. (2014) found, “Almost all married women who described their careers as fully successful credited their husbands for support, respect and leaning in to parenting if they had children” (p. 14).

*Choices and decisions about careers.*

When it comes to careers and choices and decision about careers Rimm & Rimm-Kaufman (2001) reported, “Challenge, contribution, and creativity were the three words most frequently used to describe why [our] successful women chose their careers” (p. 17). Literature reports that gifted women need to focus on interests and passions when choosing a career (Kerr & McKay, 2014). Greene (2003) stated, “Gifted and talented girls typically demonstrate stronger academic and career interests than non-gifted females which causes gifted and talented females to experience more negative effects from

conflicts between their career aspirations and society's expectations for women" (p. 67). Due to multipotentiality gifted girls usually can enter multiple career fields; however, Neihart et al. (2002) shared that boys are more likely than girls (46% to 27%) to state a specific job or career they would be doing after graduating from college. This can be caused by the concern of marriage and family versus work. As discussed earlier, gifted women can feel guilty for choosing a career over starting a family. Sometimes gifted women feel their husband or soon-to-be husband's career is more important than their own (Randall, 1997). Randall (1997) stated, "Women's careers have a lower status attached to them, even though the amount of schooling required for the career may be equal" (p. 43). Many times, gifted women will choose to allow their husband to get started first because they believe, or are convinced, that his career is more important for providing for the family (Randall, 1997).

*Decisions about duty, caring, and nurturing.*

"Women not only define themselves in a context of human relationships, but also judge themselves in terms of their ability to care for others" (Reis, 2002a, p. 1). The talented women that Reis (2002a) studied, "understood that if they placed an emphasis on developing their own talents, those they loved would be affected in some way" (p. 2). Women feel responsible for placing their family, spouse, and children first and their needs and wants come last. (Reis, 2002a). It is more important to make sure the house is clean, the family has dinner, homework is finished, Halloween costumes are ready, and there is happiness and peace within the other family members. Today's woman is also concerned about the nurturing of aging parents and ensuring that their needs are met.

There are also responsibilities with the local PTO, church, and other volunteer organizations. It leaves little time for women to care for themselves and when they do, oftentimes, they feel guilty. There is talent development for women “in nurturing children, building strong primary relationships and making a home – particularly for women worldwide whose pasts are marked by dysfunction, lack of health services, and other obstacles” (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013, p. 344). For some women, if this is a life that they choose, they can find great satisfaction in being a traditional homemaker. (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013).

#### *Competition.*

There are different forms of competition: academic, performing or visual arts, athletic, or career goals and ambitions. “Girls need to learn to cope with competition and to understand that they can continue to contribute even when they are not the best in their class or interest area” (Davis et al., 2011, p. 428). Research has indicated that girls will avoid competition “to preserve relationships, even if that means that they do not take the opportunity to use their skills” (Neihart et al., 2002, p. 277). “Gifted girls often perceive achievement and affiliation as opposite issues because gifted girls believe competition means that someone wins and someone loses” (Neihart et al., 2002, p. 129). Rimm & Rimm-Kaufman (2001) found that girls grow through healthy competition. They stated, “Many of the successful women from our study listed ‘winning in competition’ as an important positive experience for them” (Rimm & Rimm-Kaufman, 2001, p. 7). Successful women do not always win and learning to cope with personal and professional losses is an important lesson for gifted women.

### **Characteristics of self-efficacy.**

Kitano & Perkins (1996) conducted a study to investigate gifted women around the world. They selected sixteen high academically achieving women from fifteen countries outside of the United States to investigate the factors affecting lifespan achievement. Questionnaires and focus groups were the primary means for data collection (Kitano & Perkins, 1996). The specific questions focused upon the women's perceptions of factors that "encouraged or discouraged their achievement over time and strategies they used to cope with obstacles" (Kitano & Perkins, 1996, p. 1). The results indicated that gifted women, "from highly diverse countries, share personal characteristics of determination, love of learning, willingness to take risks, and an indomitable will to achieve their goals" (Kitano & Perkins, 1996, p.1). Factors that participants identified that hindered their progress included economic limitations and cultural barriers for women (Kitano & Perkins, 1996). The research discerned eight positive coping strategies from the research. The coping strategies are determination, taking positive action, social support, confronting the problem, ignoring the problem by focusing on specific tasks, accommodating or adapting to the problem, thinking it through, and hardening yourself by letting yourself be angry and then moving on (Kitano & Perkins, 1996). The characteristics that gifted women share are "determination, love of learning, willingness to take risks, and an indomitable will to achieve their goals" (Kitano & Perkins, 1996, p.1).

Research suggested characteristics of high achieving women that allow them to overcome cultural and gender discrimination include "cognitive and emotional flexibility,

willingness to take risks and aim high, tolerance for making mistakes, persistence in the face of adversity, and the ability to resist the tendency to internalize limiting messages from the outside” (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013, p. 345). Callahan & Hertberg-Davis (2013) shared two commonalities among eminent gifted women “work they loved and meaningful relationships with partners, friends, lovers, or family members who supported their work” (p. 354). Navan (1998) found in her study of gifted women, “Young gifted females find self through authenticity and their authenticity through connection with others” (p. 172).

*Characteristics of feminine talent development.*

Returning to the question of why some gifted women achieve at high levels and others do not we now look at characteristics of feminine talent development. Callahan & Hertberg-Davis (2013) proposed the following definition of talent development in women:

Feminine talent development occurs when women with high intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership ability or potential achieve at high levels in an area they choose, [and] make contributions that they consider meaningful to society; these contributions are enhanced when these women develop personally satisfying relationships and pursue what they believe to be significant and consequential work, resulting in the betterment of some aspect of society or their personal work. (p. 344)

Leroux (1998) found in a study of forty gifted women that working hard, believing in cooperation, stretching themselves to invent their own styles and capitalizing on opportunities as they arose, women could build their dreams.

As they overcame the many obstacles of their daily lives, they learned the range of their strength. As they accepted and built greater capabilities, they discovered resilience and personal power. In discovering power, they recognized they were flexible, creative women with a growing, healthy self-esteem. (Leroux, 1998, p. 12)

Noble et al. (1999) stated, “Gifted girls do not become gifted women by avoiding adversity” (p. 140).

*Resilience.*

Resiliency is a common factor that is found among women of eminence. Reis (2002a) characterized “talented female artists, scientists, authors, politicians, activists, and scholars by determination, insight, independence, initiative, humor, creativity, and resilience” (p. 2). Resilience is a character trait that can be acquired and several factors have been identified that contribute to resiliency. “Strong family and relationship ties, friendships with other women and men, love of work, and a passion to continue doing what you love were all attributes of the resilient gifted females studied” (Reis, 2002a, p. 2). Ford (1994) described characteristics of resilient black youth. “Resilient black youth share many of the characteristics of resilient youth in general, particularly autonomy, competence, independence, and self-sufficiency (Ford, 1994, p. 3). Profiles of resilient black youth also showed that what is stressful to one individual or culture is not

necessarily stressful to all peoples and cultures (Ford, 1994). Ford (1994) found that a “C” on a test can be devastating to one student but not to another so “resiliency is relevant both individually and culturally” (p. 3). Other common characteristics of resiliency is an “internal locus of control, a positive sense of self, and feelings of empowerment” (Ford, 1994, p. 3).

*Periods of aloneness.*

Research of gifted females has found that periods of aloneness were common for gifted women. Whether chosen, or forced upon them, a period of alone time provides young women with a time for reflection and an appreciation for individual work (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013).

*Mentors.*

Leroux (1994) stated, “Mentor relationships is another key factor. Someone who takes an abiding and intense interest in a person as well as her talent can provide significant encouragement for a young student as well as for the potential career woman” (p. 167). Research showed that a common trait among eminent women was mentors, specifically mentors who achieved at the highest level in their professions (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013). Hook (2000) found gifted women identified teachers as mentors more frequently than any other group identified such as mother, family friend, peers, historical figures, celebrities, or fictional characters. Hook’s (2000) study concluded, “Providing mentors and role models is one important method of assistance to gifted girls. Mentors can offer themselves as examples and guides for both what to do and how to do it. Without them, gifted young women may find themselves living unfulfilled lives both



personally and professionally” (p. 124). “Mentors inspired and believed in the women they guided and often made a positive difference without even realizing the impact they had” (Rimm et al., 1999, p. 297).

### **Notable researchers of gifted women.**

#### ***Barbara Kerr.***

Barbara Kerr began her research on gifted women in 1985 (Kerr, 1985). Her research began as “an attempt to understand why one small group of gifted girls did not fulfill the promise of their childhood” (Kerr, 1985, p. i). It began with a small group of gifted girls who were identified as gifted shortly after the launch of Sputnik in 1957 (Kerr, 1985, p. i). Kerr’s work became a research project, a counseling program, and a series of books (Kerr & McKay, 2014).

Over the past forty years, Barbara Kerr, Ph.D., has established herself as the definitive authority on the unique characteristics and development of smart girls and the particular challenges and dilemmas they confront as they seek to build meaningful and satisfying lives” (Kerr & McKay, 2014, p. i).

#### ***Sally Reis.***

Sally Reis conducted research on gifted females in 1987 and reported her findings in a journal article in *Gifted Child Quarterly*, *We Can’t Change What We Don’t Recognize: Understanding the Special Needs of Gifted Females*. In this article, Reis (1987) discussed important issues affecting gifted women, (i.e., underachievement, creative productivity in math and science, cultural stereotyping, sex roles, perfection complex, and imposter syndrome).

Few questions can be raised about whether or not the underachievement of bright women exists; the fact remains that in almost all professional fields and occupations, men overwhelmingly surpass women in both the professional accomplishments they achieve and the financial benefits they reap. (Reis, 1987, p. 83)

Since then, she has written numerous journal articles and books on gifted women, specifically about social and emotional issues and internal barriers that affect gifted women. Her research on gifted women has influenced the literature that exists on gifted women.

***Sylvia Rimm.***

The feminist movement has opened doors for women to achieve equality in many new leadership positions. The women who enter through those doors and rise to new career heights, often combining their careers with parenting, are, in effect, explorers and adventurers. (Rimm, 1999, p. 1)

Sylvia Rimm's research with gifted women has provided insight into how girls became successful women. She interviewed one thousand girls in her first book, *See Jane Win*.

The main findings of her research in *See Jane Win* were:

1. The American dream and feminist dream are alive and well.
2. About 70 percent of the women believed that both their parents had high expectations for them.

3. Although most of the successful women in the study were highly intelligent according to various measures, many described themselves as above average or even average in intellectual abilities.
4. In choosing words to describe themselves as they were growing up, the women of the study chose 'smart,' 'hard-worker,' and 'independent' most often.
5. Many successful women described themselves as 'sensitive,' 'kind,' 'shy,' 'emotional,' 'perfectionistic,' and 'self-critical.'
6. Most of the successful women in our study, 79 percent, were educated in public schools; 16 percent attended parochial schools, and 5 percent went to independent schools.
7. The best academic subjects of these women as early as elementary school may have at least partially predicted many of their career directions.
8. Middle-school math decline is real for many women, even for some successful women.
9. A quarter of the women skipped subjects and 15 percent skipped grades during elementary and secondary school.
10. The successful women in our group talked and read early.
11. Many of our successful women listed 'winning in competition' as an important positive experience for them.
12. The second most frequently chosen positive experience for women at all developmental levels and in all career groups was travel.

13. The negative experience most frequently mentioned by the women in the study was 'isolation from peers.'
14. Tobacco, alcohol, and drugs were used minimally by our successful women.
15. Although there are some women in every career group who had been rebellious adolescents, most of the women got along well with their parents most of the time.
16. Our study showed that all careers had women of all birth orders.
17. Although 83 percent of our successful women had mothers who were full-time homemakers when the women were preschoolers, many had careers or returned to school after their children's preschool years.
18. Successful women learned resilience.
19. The three most common reasons the women of our study chose for recommending their careers to others were that the career was 'challenging,' 'makes a contribution,' and is 'creative.'
20. Your daughters may wish to have families and careers. (Rimm, 1999, p. 6-17)

Rimm (1999) followed up her research on gifted women with *How Jane Won* and *Jane Wins Again*.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter two reviewed an exhaustive collection of relevant research materials that affect gifted women. Beginning with the conceptual framework and theory of narrative knowing, which is a theoretical model developed by Bruner (1986), that is used in narrative inquiry. "What we gain from narrative knowing is memorable, interesting

knowledge that brings together layers of understanding about a person, their culture, and how they have created change” (Etherington, 2013, p. 6). Utilizing narrative knowing, to share the stories of gifted women, allows “complex patterns, descriptions of identity construction and reconstruction, and evidence of social discourses that impact a person’s knowledge creation from specific cultural standpoints” to illuminate (Etherington, 2013, p. 6).

The lifespan literature on gifted women from early childhood through sixty-five and beyond was reviewed allowing common traits of gifted females to be highlighted. Common gifted characteristics were reviewed including parental, teacher, and peer relationships. Societal pressures can emerge from relationships including conformity, stereotypes and discrimination (i.e., sexism, racism). Multiculturalism and multicultural considerations were reviewed since this study included a diverse group of gifted women. Societal pressures can also influence underachievement in gifted women (Popova, 1997). Dabrowski’s *Theory of Positive Disintegration* and overexcitabilities (OE’s) are social and emotional factors that gifted women experience (Piechowski & Colangelo, 1984).

Conflicts and barriers can be both internal and external (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013). Some of the internal barriers are perfectionism, loss of belief in abilities and self-confidence, fear of success or the Horner Effect, Imposter Syndrome, Multipotentiality, Housewife’s Syndrome, Cinderella Complex, and Superwoman Syndrome. External barriers identified are choices and decision about marriage, careers, and duty, caring, and nurturing as well as competition.

Characteristics of self-efficacy were explored and the characteristics and definition of feminine talent development. Resiliency, periods of aloneness, and mentors are common factors that are found among women of eminence (Reis, 2002a). The pioneers and leaders in the research of gifted women were recognized and identified as their research permeated throughout the chapter. In conclusion, this literature review examines research and other relevant literature from broader fields of study that can provide a contextual framework. The literature review establishes the need to conduct narrative studies with gifted women. It is important to remember the words reflected by Neihart et al. (2002) as the methodology is revealed in chapter three:

Not all gifted females experience the same issues, but almost all face a combination of the following: dilemmas about abilities and talents, personal decisions about family, ambivalence of parents and teachers toward developing high levels of competence, decisions about duty and caring (meeting the needs of others before one's own), as well as other personal, religious, and social issues.

(p. 126)

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

*Exploring the Lives of Gifted Women* is a qualitative narrative study. “The study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world” (Connelly & Cladinin, 1990, p. 2). “Narrative is inherently multidisciplinary, and is an extension of the interpretive approaches in social sciences. Narrative lends itself to a qualitative enquiry in order to capture the rich data within stories” (Mitchell & Egudo, 2003, p. 2). “One theory in educational research holds that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives” (Connelly & Cladinin, 1990, p. 2). Narrative can be both the phenomenon being studied and the methodology of the study (Creswell, 2013). “As a method, narrative begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals” (Creswell, 2013, p. 70). As a qualitative design, narrative is “understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected” (Creswell, 2013, p. 70). “Writers have provided ways for analyzing and understanding the stories lived and told” (Creswell, 2013, p. 70).

Bruner (1986) developed the theory of narrative knowing, “created and constructed through stories of lived experiences, and the meanings created. Narrative knowing helps make sense of the ambiguity and complexity of human lives” (Etherington, 2013, p. 5). “Narrative knowing is memorable, interesting knowledge that brings together layers of understandings about a person, their culture, and how they have created change” (Etherington, 2013, p. 6). Narrative knowing has “subjective meanings and a sense of self and identity are negotiated as the stories unfold, bearing in mind that

stories are reconstructions of the person's experiences, remembered and told at a particular point in their lives, to a particular researcher/audience and for a particular purpose" (Etherington, 2013, p. 2). "This all has a bearing on how the stories are told, which stories are told and how they are presented/interpreted. They do not represent 'life as lived' but our re-presentations of those lives as told to us" (Etherington, 2013, p. 4). It is also part of the "shape of a story and helps organize information about how people interpret events; the values, beliefs, and experiences that guide those interpretations; and their hopes, intentions, and plans for the future" (Etherington, 2013, p. 6). By using narrative knowing for the research study, it revealed complex patterns of the lived experience as a gifted female. It provided descriptions of identity construction and reconstruction of the lived gifted experience. Finally, the knowledge that was gained in this way was "situated, transient, partial and provisional; characterized by multiple voices, perspectives, truths, and meanings" (Etherington, 2013, p. 6). The participants' views of their lived experiences and interpretation of their story is relied upon throughout the research process. Through creating broad and general interview questions participants constructed meaning of their lived experience as a gifted female.

A qualitative study was chosen for this research project because it focused upon sharing the narrative accounts of five gifted women's lifespans. Narrative inquiry is the best way to share the lived gifted experience of these five gifted women. Etherington, (2013) stated that:

Narrative inquiry requires high levels of ethical and critical engagement. It is dependent upon mutual and sincere collaborative efforts between the participant



and researcher. The storyteller, or interviewee must have full voice, but both voices need to be heard. It also requires reflective engagement throughout the research process and a tolerance of ambiguity. The researcher needs to value the use of signs, symbols, and metaphors of the participant and use multiple data sources for analysis of data. (p. 15)

### **Research Design**

“Narrative inquiry is a means by which we systematically gather, analyze, and represent people’s stories as told by them, which challenges traditional and modernist views of truth, reality, knowledge and personhood” (Etherington, 2013, p. 3). “Narrative researchers collect stories from individuals about individuals’ lived and told experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 71). “These stories may emerge from a story told to the researcher, a story that is co-constructed between the researcher and the participant, and a story intended as a performance to convey some message or point” (Creswell, 2013, p. 71). This research project followed an oral history pattern, which “consists of gathering personal reflections of events and their causes and effects from one individual” (Creswell, 2013, p. 73). The data collected were the stories gifted women shared of their lived experience of a being gifted woman. “Narrative stories tell of individual experiences, and they may shed light on the identities of individuals and how they see themselves” (Creswell, 2013, p. 71). According to Yang (2011) “to raise the question of the nature of narrative is to invite reflection on the nature of humanity itself” (p. 200). Narrative research is known as “real world measures that are appropriate when real life problems are investigated” (Lieblich, Tubal-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998, p. 5).

Narrative research was the best method for the research study because it allowed the participant's stories to be showcased and shared based upon their knowledge of living the gifted experience. Through embracing the stories of the lived gifted experience and exploring the lessons learned through the narrative accounts of gifted women's lives patterns and themes emerge. In this study, a narrative of five individual stories of the lived experience, each told separately, created a collection of narratives of the lived gifted experience of females. It did not compare the individual lives but celebrated the uniqueness of each life while emphasizing the similarities and the differences of the participants.

“There are different forms of narrative analysis – some focus on ‘content’ of stories; others on ‘meaning’ (maybe both). Depends on philosophical position” (Etherington, 2013, p. 7). “Stories can be viewed as a window into a knowable reality and analyzed using concepts derived from theory, such as thematic analysis, or concepts derived from the data, such as analysis of narratives” (Etherington, 2013, p. 7). “Or stories can be viewed as socially situated knowledge constructions in their own right that values messiness, differences, depth and texture of experienced life – narrative analysis” (Etherington, 2013, p. 7). Analysis of this doctoral research project focused on both content and meaning. The narratives of the five participants were observed as a window into a knowable reality and were analyzed using concepts derived from narrative knowing (Etherington, 2013). “A thematic analysis in which the researcher identifies the themes ‘told’ by a participant” (Creswell, 2013, p. 72). The stories were analyzed as “socially situated knowledge constructions in their own right that values messiness, differences, depth, and texture of experiences such as a life-narrative analysis” (Etherington, 2013, p. 7). “Analysis or

meaning making, occurred throughout the research process rather than being a separate activity carried out after data collection” (Etherington, 2013, p. 8). The emphasis was a co-construction of meaning between the researcher and the participants (Etherington, 2013). “The stories are re-presented in ways that preserve their integrity and convey a sense of the ‘irreducible humanity’ of the person” (Etheridge, 2013, p. 9). “The social reality of the narrator conveys a sense of the participant’s experience in its depth, messiness, richness, and texture” (Etherington, 2013, p. 9).

### **Research Questions**

“The intent of qualitative research questions is to narrow the purpose [statement] to several questions that will be addressed in the study” (Creswell, 2017, p. 138).

“Drafting the central question takes considerable work because of its breadth” (Creswell, 2013, p. 139). “Qualitative research questions are open-ended, evolving, and nondirectional” (Creswell, 2013, p. 138). The research question restates the “purpose of the study in more specific terms and typically starts with a word such as what or how rather than why in order to explore a central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 138). To make construction of meaning of the lived gifted experience the research question and sub-questions were developed in ways that the depth, messiness, richness, and texture of the participant’s stories would be collected. “The research questions are few in number (five to seven) and posed in various forms” (Creswell, 2013, p. 138).

For the purpose of this qualitative narrative research study, the research question and sub-questions were developed to focus on the specific themes that would highlight the lived gifted experience of females. The themes of focus were lifespan, internal

characteristics, external influences, and self-efficacy. The central question needed to be encoded with the language of narrative (Creswell, 2013). The sub-questions need to further refine the central question and can be a means of subdividing the central question (Creswell, 2013).

The research question developed for the doctoral research project is: What do the narrative stories of gifted women reveal about the lived gifted experience? The sub-questions are: (1) What is the personal experience of being a gifted female in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood? (2) What gifted characteristics influence gifted women's relationships, social and emotional health, achievement, and overall wellbeing? (3) What external influences have contributed to gifted women's relationships, social and emotional health, achievement, and overall wellbeing? (4) What are the internal and external influences that impact self-efficacy in gifted women?

The working definition of self-efficacy that is being used for the purpose of the study is Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy:

Self-efficacy reflects confidence in the ability to exert control over one's own motivation, behavior, and social environment. These cognitive self-evaluations influence all manner of human experience, including the goals for which people strive, the amount of energy expended toward goal achievement, and likelihood of attaining particular levels of behavioral performance. Unlike traditional psychological constructs, self-efficacy beliefs are hypothesized to vary depending on the domain of functioning and circumstances surrounding the occurrence of behavior. (American Psychological Association, 2017)

The research question and sub-questions were developed to be open ended and began with the word “what” (Creswell, 2013). This allowed the research question and sub-questions to influence the core questions asked during the data collection through the interview questions (Creswell, 2013). The interview questions were open ended and invited gifted women to share their stories of the lived gifted experience. Hubbard & Power (2003) stated, “The job of the interviewer is to launch the speaker and then sit back and wait for surprises” (p. 61). The goal of the research question and sub-questions was to allow the audience to hear the participant’s voice in the narrative accounts instead of the researcher’s voice.

### **Data Collection**

“A typical reaction to thinking about qualitative data collection is to focus on the actual types of data and the procedures for collecting them” (Creswell, 2013, p. 145). Data collection; however, involves much more including developing the setting, gaining permissions, identifying the participants, developing the means for recording the data collected, and storing the collected data (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) encouraged researchers to visualize the phase of data collection as a “circle” of interrelated activities. During this process of interrelated activities, the first phase was identifying the participants. “In a narrative study, one needs to find one or more individuals to study, individuals who are accessible, willing to provide information, and distinctive for their accomplishments and ordinariness or who shed light on a specific phenomenon or issue being explored” (Creswell, 2013, p. 147). For the purpose of this study, it was vital to identify women for the study who were identified as gifted through a formal evaluation

and served in gifted programming in elementary and/or secondary school. It was also imperative to find a diverse population of women who had various ages, ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds, and came from various geographic regions.

### **Participants.**

“An important step in the [narrative] process is to find people to study and to gain access to and establish rapport with participants so that they will provide good data” (Creswell, 2013, p. 147). A selective sample was chosen for the narrative research project, more specifically a purposive sample. “A purposeful sample that will intentionally sample a group of people that can best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination” (Creswell, 2013, p. 147). The community partner recommended participants and they were sent recruitment letters through email. Participants were selected because they were identified as “gifted” through a formal measure and participated in a gifted program during elementary, middle, or high school. A diverse population was selected to have various geographic regions, ethnic backgrounds, and ages represented. For this study, it was important that a diverse group of gifted women were represented to hear the stories from various perspectives of gifted women from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, diverse ages, different ethnicities, and a wide range of geographic locations. “A hallmark of all good qualitative research is the report of multiple perspectives that range over the entire spectrum of perspectives” (Creswell, 2013, p. 151). The five women chosen to participate in the project had vastly different stories to tell about growing up gifted and are at various stages of their lives.

They represent a diverse population of gifted women and each have a unique story to share from a unique perspective.

Name	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Geographic Location	Socio- Economic Class (Growing up)	Marital Status	Children/ Grand Children	Educational Level
Kasey	24	Asian	Urban/ China	Middle Class	S	0	Graduate Student
Isabel	37	Latina	Transient/ United States	Poverty	M	0	Bachelor's Degree with some Post- Secondary Work
Dominique	47	Black	Suburban/ Western United States	Middle Class	S	0	Graduate Degree
Elizabeth	51	White	Suburban/ Midwestern United States	Upper Middle Class	M	3	Graduate Degree
Mary	66	White	Rural/ Southern United States	Lower Middle Class	M	2 3	Graduate Degree (Ed.S. & Ed.D.)

Kasey is a single, twenty-four-year-old graduate student from Beijing, China. She was identified and placed in gifted programming in middle school. Isabel is a thirty-seven-year old, married, Latina who grew up in a transient, impoverished household who is an alternative education advocate for gifted and twice exceptional students. Dominique is a single, black, forty-seven-year old woman who is a teacher of middle school gifted students who was born in Fresno, California and was identified and served in gifted

programming beginning in elementary school. Elizabeth is a married, white, upper middle class, profoundly gifted woman who was born and still lives in the Midwest. She is a mother of three profoundly gifted children. Mary is a white, sixty-six-year-old married woman with three grandchildren who is a superintendent for a city school district in the southern United States. She was born on a one-hundred-fifty-acre cattle farm and was raised in a rural area.

Once the women were identified as potential participants, contact was made with each participant through email. A recruitment letter (Appendix B) was sent to the potential participants. “For a narrative study, inquirers gain information from individuals by obtaining their permission to participate in the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 153). Once the potential participant indicated they were interested in participating in the study then the participant was provided with an Informed Consent (Appendix C) to sign with a description of the research project and interview guide (Appendix D). They were “assured of anonymity and told by the researcher about the purpose of the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 154). Once the Informed Consent was received back, contact was made with the participant to set up a time and place to interview that was a convenient time and place for the interviewee.

### **Setting.**

Kasey was introduced to me because of her affiliation with a prominent university where she was attending graduate school. She was purposefully selected to represent the Asian perspective and the young adult perspective of being a gifted woman. She chose to be interviewed at her residence after numerous failed attempts to meet at a university



library occurred. We met for her interview in late October of 2016. She lived in a townhome near her university campus with four other foreign exchange graduate students from China. We sat in her dining room; I brought coffee and donuts for her and her roommates. It was early in the morning, around eight o'clock, and all her roommates were sleeping. Her interview lasted for approximately one-hour-fifty-nine minutes. It was easy to establish and build a rapport with Kasey. The audio of the interview was recorded on my cell phone. The interview guide was used to keep the conversation flowing however; the interview was conversational in nature. She was provided the interview guide with the informed consent so she would be familiar with the questions I asked during the interview.

Isabel was selected to participate to represent the Latina perspective, as well as the thirty-something perspective. She also represented the transitional and impoverished perspectives. Isabel's interview occurred in March of 2017 with the use of technology. We met through SKYPE and her interview was transcribed recording the audio transmission on my cell phone. She was sent the interview guide with the informed consent and was familiar with the questions that would be asked of her prior to the interview. It was surprisingly easy to establish a rapport over the internet. We found common elements and themes within our backgrounds that forged a connection (e.g., being gifted girls raised in poverty) which allowed us to establish rapport easily. Isabel's interview lasted one-hour-twelve-minutes.

Dominique was purposefully selected to provide the black perspective and the forty-something perspective. Her interview occurred in late October of 2016 while driving in a

car. She requested that I interview her on the way to a state conference for gifted; she and I were the passengers. She was too busy to meet at any other time and she knew that she would have about two hours to commit to the interview during the car ride. The interview was audio recorded on my cell phone, and it was easy to establish a rapport and build trust with Dominique.

Elizabeth was purposely selected to represent the fifty-something and profoundly gifted perspective. She was also the only mother who still had children living at home. Her interview occurred at a hotel in mid-November of 2016. I traveled to her hometown to interview her. The interview lasted approximately two hours and it was easy to establish a rapport. We used the interview guide, but the majority of her interview she spoke of her children and their profoundly gifted needs because her role as a mother is the prominent role in her life.

Mary represented the sixty-five and beyond perspective. She also represented the rural, married, and grandmother perspective. Mary's interview occurred in November of 2016 in her office where she is the superintendent of schools. Her interview lasted about two hours in length and was audio recorded on my cell phone. It was easy to establish a rapport with Mary.

### **Interview procedures.**

The interview procedures followed a narrative inquiry protocol. The Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) seven stages of conducting qualitative inquiry was utilized (Creswell, 2013). Participants were provided with a recruitment letter asking if they would like to participate in the research project. Once a response was received, a purposive sample

population of five women was identified. Each chosen participant was given an Informed Consent (Appendix C) to sign which included an interview guide (Appendix D). The research was transparent to the participants and the Informed Consent stated the purpose of the study and asked participants' permission to interview, as well as record, the interview process. Once informed consent was received, one-on-one interviews was scheduled with the participant at a location and time of their choosing.

A pilot interview was conducted to allow refinement of the interview questions. The first interview questions were specific to the research question and sub-questions which were confusing to the participant in the pilot study. Once the questions were refined it allowed an easier flow of dialect. The refinement process also allowed the researcher to decide to only record audio and not video.

Once the refinement process occurred, the interview protocol allowed the interviews to stay focused on the topic but remain conversational in nature. During the interview, the participants were asked about their life growing up as a gifted female. The interviews began with collecting vital information (i.e., age, ethnicity, and socio-economic status growing up). They were asked about where they were born, parents, siblings, and extended family. Their recollections of toddler and preschool years were solicited. They were asked about their personal experience of being a gifted female in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, which focused upon lifespan. The interview guide asked where the participant grew up, attended elementary school, middle school, high school, and college. It also asked when and where they received gifted services and when they were identified as gifted. It asked about where they have lived and worked in adulthood

including career, marriage, and children. The other questions asked were what they believe their greatest accomplishment has been, what they would change if given the opportunity, and what are their hopes and dreams for the future. Then they were asked if they had any last thoughts or comments, any suggestions or words of advice for other gifted girls and women, and if they identify with being a gifted woman.

Broad and general questions were used so the participants could make meaning of their experience of growing up as a gifted woman. Open-ended questions were utilized to allow them to share their experiences of being a gifted woman in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood to answer the research question: What do the narrative stories of gifted women reveal about the lived gifted experience? As well as the sub-questions focused upon lifespan, internal gifted characteristics, external influences, and self-efficacy.

### **Data Analysis**

“The data collected in a narrative study needs to be analyzed for the story they [participants] have to tell, a chronology of unfolding events, and turning points or epiphanies” (Creswell, 2013, p. 189). The Three-Dimensional Space Approach Clanadinin & Connelly (2002) developed is a broader, more holistic sketch “to understand people that examines their personal experiences as well as their interactions with other people” (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 339). This narrative approach incorporates “common elements of narrative analysis: collecting stories of personal experiences in the form of interviews, retelling the stories based on narrative elements, rewriting the stories into chronological sequence, and incorporating the setting or place of the participants’ experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 189). Based on the interactions that

occur in a place or context, these elements of experience conceptualize “a primary means for analyzing data gathered and transcribed in a research study” (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 339). The three aspects of the Three-Dimensional Space Approach are:

1. Interaction involves both the personal and social. The researcher analyzes a transcript or text for the personal experiences of the storyteller as well as for the interaction of the individual with other people. These other people may have different intentions, purposes, and points of view on the topic of the story.
2. Continuity or temporality is central to narrative research. The researcher analyzes the transcript or text for information about past experiences of the storyteller. In addition, it is analyzed for present experiences illustrated in actions of an event or actions to occur in the future. In this way, the analyst considers the past, present, and future.
3. Situation or place needs also to be analyzed in a transcript or text. Narrative researchers look for specific situations in the storyteller’s landscape. This involves the physical places or the sequence of the storyteller’s places.  
(Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 339)

In addition to the three-dimensional approach, “the complex analysis process as reading and rereading through the field texts (transcripts), considering interaction, continuity or temporality, and situation through personal practical knowledge and the professional knowledge landscape of the individual” (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 342). Personal practical knowledge is described as “personally individualized and

pointing inward, in terms of aesthetic, moral, and affective elements and language that are constructed as part of the experience” (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 342).

Professional knowledge refers to “outward and existential conditions in the environment, in terms of other individuals’ actions, reactions, intentions, purposes, and assumptions” (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 342).

### **Transcription of interviews.**

Once the interviews were complete, the recorded interviews were transcribed and placed into a narrative; a sequential date order that shares the narrative from beginning to current day, told in the voice of the participant, using the Three-Dimensional Space Approach. The recorded data was placed into a transcription software for transcription. The researcher listened to the audio recording of the interview and compared it to the document the transcription software generated to ensure the software transcribed the interview accurately. Kasey’s interview did not have many words that transcribed accurately, less than ten percent. The other interviews had about fifty to sixty percent of the interview transcribed accurately. It took approximately twenty-five hours each for Dominique, Isabel, Elizabeth, and Mary’s transcription to be finalized and over seventy hours for Kasey’s transcription to be finalized. The audio recordings were reviewed and compared to the transcription repeatedly to ensure accuracy of the transcription.

Once accuracy of the transcriptions were finalized, the transcriptions were then placed into narratives, which were chronologically ordered. “Moving away from the actual transcript, the researcher asks ‘what it means’ and what its ‘social significance’ is. Furthermore, themes, tensions, and patterns were also identified” (Ollerenshaw &

Creswell, 2002, p. 342). The researcher then began the re-storying process, or retelling, and collaborating and negotiating “information with participants and returning again and again to the field data” (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 342). “Finally, the researcher writes interim texts to find a narrative text that promotes an account of participants’ lived experiences” (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 342). “The researcher organizes larger patterns and meaning from the narrative segments and categories. Finally, the individual’s biography is reconstructed, and the researcher identifies factors that have shaped the life” (Creswell, 2013, p. 192).

### **Validity & reliability.**

“‘Validation’ in qualitative research is an attempt to assess the ‘accuracy’ of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants” (Creswell, 2013, p. 249). Creswell (2013) uses the term validation to “emphasize a process rather than verification or historical words such as trustworthiness or authenticity” (p. 250). Member checking is one validation strategy that, “solicits participants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). It is the most critical technique for establishing credibility, according to Creswell (2013, p. 252). This process involves taking the analysis, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants. “Participants should play a major role in directing as well as acting” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). Once the transcription was complete, the data was sent to the participant to verify authenticity of the transcription process to ensure their voice is heard throughout the story and not the voice of the researcher. The researcher then worked with the participant to make any

changes or edits until they were satisfied with the outcome. The story was then included in the doctoral research project.

### **Protection of Participants**

To minimize potential risk, I employed the following precautions:

- All participants were assured that their participation is in no way an obligation of our relationship, and that at any time, they could refuse to answer any question or simply terminate their consent to be interviewed.
- All participants signed a detailed form specifying their consent to be interviewed and audio-taped/video-taped for this research and for me to publish their results for the purpose of this doctoral research project (Appendix C).
- Participants were assured that their audiotapes will not be archived, only used for the purpose of my research and then destroyed.

### **Chapter Summary**

“Narrative is a way of characterizing the phenomena of human experience and its study” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). The methodology used in this qualitative study, *Exploring the Lives of Gifted Women*, utilized the “study of narrative” or “the study of the ways humans experience the world” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). Narrative was both the phenomenon and method. “Narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2).

To preserve this distinction, we use the reasonably well-established device of calling the phenomenon ‘story’ and the inquiry ‘narrative.’ Thus, we say that people by



nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2).

Bruner's (1986) theory of narrative knowing provides, "memorable, interesting knowledge that brings together layers of understandings about a person, their culture, and how they have created change" (Etherington, 2013, p. 6). Narrative knowing has "subjective meanings and a sense of self and identity are negotiated as the stories unfold, bearing in mind that stories are reconstructions of the person's experiences, remembered and told at a particular point in their lives, to a particular researcher/audience and for a particular purpose" (Etherington, 2013, p. 2). "This all has a bearing on how the stories are told, which stories are told and how they are presented/interpreted. They do not represent 'life as lived' but our re-presentations of those lives as told to us" (Etherington, 2013, p. 4). It is also part of the "shape of a story and helps organize information about how people interpret events; the values, beliefs, and experiences that guide those interpretations; and their hopes, intentions, and plans for the future" (Etherington, 2013, p. 6). By using narrative knowing for the research study, it revealed complex patterns of the lived experience as a gifted female. It provided descriptions of identity construction and reconstruction of the lived gifted experience. Finally, the knowledge that was gained in this way was "situated, transient, partial and provisional; characterized by multiple voices, perspectives, truths, and meanings" (Etherington, 2013, p. 6).

"Narrative inquiry is a means by which we systematically gather, analyze, and represent people's stories as told by them, which challenges traditional and modernist views

of truth, reality, knowledge and personhood” (Etherington, 2013, p. 3). “Narrative researchers collect stories from individuals about individuals’ lived and told experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 71). “These stories may emerge from a story told to the researcher, a story that is co-constructed between the researcher and the participant, and a story intended as a performance to convey some message or point” (Creswell, 2013, p. 71). This research project followed an oral history pattern, which “consists of gathering personal reflections of events and their causes and effects from one individual” (Creswell, 2013, p. 73).

For the purpose of this qualitative narrative research study, the research question and sub-questions were developed to focus on the specific themes that would highlight the lived gifted experience of females. The themes of focus were lifespan, internal characteristics, external influences, and self-efficacy. The central question needed to be encoded with the language of narrative (Creswell, 2013). The sub-questions need to further refine the central question and can be a means of subdividing the central question (Creswell, 2013). The research question developed for the doctoral research project is: What do the narrative stories of gifted women reveal about the lived gifted experience? The sub-questions are: (1) What is the personal experience of being a gifted female in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood? (2) What gifted characteristics influence gifted women’s relationships, social and emotional health, achievement, and overall wellbeing? (3) What external influences have contributed to gifted women’s relationships, social and emotional health, achievement, and overall wellbeing? (4) What are the internal and external influences that impact self-efficacy in gifted women?

Data collection involved developing the setting, gaining permissions, identifying the participants, developing the means for recording the data collected, and storing the collected data. During this process of interrelated activities, the first phase was identifying the participants. “In a narrative study, one needs to find one or more individuals to study, individuals who are accessible, willing to provide information, and distinctive for their accomplishments and ordinariness or who shed light on a specific phenomenon or issue being explored” (Creswell, 2013, p. 147). For this study, it was vital to identify women for the study who were identified as gifted through a formal evaluation and served in gifted programming in elementary and/or secondary school. It was also imperative to find a diverse population of women who had various ages, ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds, and came from various geographic regions.

The participants of this study were a purposeful sample population that represented various ages, ethnicities, geographic locations, and socio-economic classes. Kasey is a twenty-four-year-old graduate student from Beijing, China. Isabel is a thirty-something Latina who was raised in a transitional and impoverished household. Dominique is a black woman in her forties who is single. Elizabeth is a profoundly gifted mother of three profoundly gifted children in her fifties. Mary is a sixty-six-year-old superintendent of schools who was raised in a rural, southern community.

The interview procedures followed a narrative inquiry protocol. The Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) seven stages of conducting qualitative inquiry was utilized (Creswell, 2013). Participants were provided with a recruitment letter asking if they would like to participate in the research project. Once a response was received, a purposive sample

population of five women was identified. Each chosen participant was given an Informed Consent (Appendix C) to sign which included an interview guide (Appendix D). The research was transparent to the participants and the Informed Consent stated the purpose of the study and asked participants' permission to interview, as well as record, the interview process. Once informed consent was received, one-on-one interviews was scheduled with the participant at a location and time of their choosing.

“The data collected in a narrative study needs to be analyzed for the story they [participants] have to tell, a chronology of unfolding events, and turning points or epiphanies” (Creswell, 2013, p. 189). The Three-Dimensional Space Approach Clanadinin & Connelly (2002) developed is a broader, more holistic sketch “to understand people that examines their personal experiences as well as their interactions with other people” (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 339). This narrative approach incorporates “common elements of narrative analysis: collecting stories of personal experiences in the form of interviews, retelling the stories based on narrative elements, rewriting the stories into chronological sequence, and incorporating the setting or place of the participants' experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 189).

The interviews were transcribed and once accuracy of the transcriptions were finalized, the transcriptions were then placed into narratives, which were chronologically ordered. “Moving away from the actual transcript, the researcher asks ‘what it means’ and what its ‘social significance’ is. Furthermore, themes, tensions, and patterns were also identified” (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 342). The researcher then began the re-storying process, or retelling, and collaborating and negotiating information with

participants and returning again and again to the field data (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 342). “Finally, the researcher writes interim texts to find a narrative text that promotes an account of participants’ lived experiences” (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 342). “The researcher organizes larger patterns and meaning from the narrative segments and categories. Finally, the individual’s biography is reconstructed, and the researcher identifies factors that have shaped the life” (Creswell, 2013, p. 192).

Participants played a vital role in validity and reliability of the narrative and themes that emerged from the narratives.

## **Chapter Four: Research Findings**

### **Exploring the Lives of Gifted Women**

The purpose of this qualitative narrative research study is to share the lived experiences of five gifted women. The research project celebrates their unique, timeless, and unparalleled narratives. Freeman (2010) stated, “The essential message...of gifted and talented children compared with the non-gifted is that they are normal people – but with one big difference – their extraordinary abilities” (p. 5). My hope for this research project is to glean an understanding of the lived gifted experience for women from diverse backgrounds: age, ethnicity, social class, and geographic location. One commonality that all the women possess is advocacy; they are all involved in advocacy work for gifted children. One participant is a superintendent of a thriving kindergarten through sixth grade diverse city school district. Another is involved in school counseling and hopes to take the information she has learned about gifted children to communist China. One is a thriving mediator who advocates for the rights of her gifted children. Another is an alternative school advocate for gifted and twice exceptional students. Finally, one has been a teacher of gifted children in a top ranked school district for over fifteen years. All of these women are using their giftedness to reach the next generation of gifted children. They are all advocates for giftedness and support the initiatives of various gifted advocacy groups.

#### **Kasey’s Narrative**

Kasey’s story begins in Beijing, China in 1992 where she was born as the only child to middle class parents. Her parents lived with her paternal grandparents, which is

traditional in Chinese culture. Kasey spent a significant amount of time with her grandparents; she acknowledges her grandmother as her greatest supporter and caregiver. She did not see her parents often. Her father was a salesperson and traveled extensively and her mother was an accountant who was pursuing a degree in higher education. They were very busy parents and Kasey feels it was very hard for her grandmother because she was the primary caregiver for Kasey. Kasey shared with me that her mother has always claimed that she was a good, loving mother for Kasey, but Kasey felt neglected by her mother. She experienced a sad and lonely childhood. She does not feel like her parents understand the depth of the sadness and loneliness she felt during her childhood.

She attended nursery school starting at age two, but she hated the school and would cry regularly. Her grandfather was a high school math teacher and he had a former student who worked in the kindergarten. His former student volunteered to take care of Kasey in her kindergarten classroom. Kasey left nursery school and went to kindergarten at age two. She spent four years in kindergarten with her grandfather's former student. Since she started attending school at a younger age than her peers did, her parents were concerned that she was the youngest and smallest student in the kindergarten classroom. Kasey said that her peers bullied her regularly. She feels she was bullied because she was not athletic. In preschool and kindergarten, there was a great emphasis on athleticism but that changed when she started elementary school. In elementary school achievement in academics, especially math and science, was highly regarded. However, she said that the bullying continued throughout her educational experience.

In communist China, the schools are referred to as factories. Her grandfather, mother, and father belonged to one factory, Factory B. Her grandmother belonged to another factory, Factory A. Because her father, mother, and grandfather had attended Factory B and only her Grandmother attended Factory A the government said that she had to attend Factory B. Factory B was known as an inferior school to Factory A. She resided in the residential area for Factory A and the children in her community attended Factory A so she had to walk far, about thirty minutes, to get to Factory B and did not have classmates or friends that lived in her immediate community.

Her grandmother would walk her to school, return home, return to school to pick Kasey up for lunch, walk back home for lunch, return Kasey back to school after lunch, return home, come back to school to pick Kasey up, and then return home. Kasey felt very bad for her grandmother to be burdened with providing care for her. She attended elementary school in Factory B from first through sixth grade. She regularly cried after school. She did not like elementary school; she continued being bullied, did not have friends, and felt very alone. She said that she cried almost daily. She would tell her grandmother that nobody played with her, nobody liked her, and that she felt sad. Her grandmother would always tell her that if she could focus on her academic work others would respect her. Respect is highly regarded in Chinese culture.

In school, she said that she experienced some stereotypes of gender bias. There were certain rules and expectations that girls were to follow; she was to be a good girl and follow directions. High academic achievement is what her parents and grandparents expected from her. Kasey was expected to excel in school. There was a ranking system



and she was expected to perform in the top of her class. When she expressed that she did not have friends and was unhappy she was told that was not the priority of her education. She was told if she could be better in academics than her peers everything would be okay.

Right before middle school, in the fifth grade, Kasey enjoyed school the most. She was highly motivated and dedicated herself to her studies. Admittedly, it was the time in her life that she applied herself to her highest potential. She loved her teachers and recalls that they were her only friends at school. She loved literature and began to study and work hard. She knew that high achievement would allow entrance into a top ranked middle school. She applied herself and worked diligently; she developed a strong interest and passion in literature. Her hard work paid off and she gained acceptance into two very good gifted programs: one was a literature program and the other was a mathematics program.

Kasey placed in the top ten percent of the literature program. She knew that she would have higher achievement in the literature program but she was among the lowest ranked in the mathematics program. The math program is highly sought after in Beijing and to be accepted was quite an honor; however, math was not her strength and passion area. Her parents insisted that she go to the mathematics program instead of the literature program. They believed she would have greater opportunities in college and career with mathematics. Kasey was devastated. She desperately wanted to go into the literature program; she had more in common with the peers in the literature program. There were one hundred twenty students in the mathematics program and she did not have any friends in the program. She felt like she did not have a choice, she had to obey her

parents' wishes, and for a twelve-year-old girl it was a very desperate and very sad experience. She did not know how to self-advocate for her needs.

She continued feeling very alone. In middle school, she decided she wanted to come to the United States. A Princeton University student came to her middle school to speak about her experience at Princeton. Kasey was fascinated hearing about the educational opportunities at Princeton. It was an escape for her to dream of a better place. Middle school was very challenging for Kasey; she felt a discrepancy between her classmates' quality of life and her own quality of life. Although she grew up in Beijing, she felt where she lived was more rural than that of her classmates. Her classmates grew up wearing Nikes, watching Disney Channel movies, listening to poetry and literature. She did not and it made her feel inferior. Her classmates grew up middle class but she grew up with working class peers. She always felt like an outcast; she did not feel like she fit in and she hated the emphasis on math and science in her coursework.

High school was also very intense. Kasey endured a significant emphasis on STEM programming yet her heart was in love with literature. She was depressed and cried a lot. She quit studying and found herself swept away in a fantasy world of romance novels. She lacked confidence in her abilities and she felt like her parents did not understand her or care about her wants and needs. She lived based upon her parents' expectations of her and she was not able to live the life that she so desperately wanted.

She made a few friends in high school, mostly male friends. She got along better with males than females because she felt girls were too complicated: however, she had one female friend who was her best friend. Kasey believed that girls in China focused on

achievement to prove they were as smart as boys were. She never felt pressured to seek popularity over intelligence. Culturally, it is not highly sought to be pretty or popular; instead, intelligence, especially in math and science, is highly regarded in China. Girls who focused on their appearance were not well liked or respected by their peers. It never crossed her mind to “dumb it down” to fit in.

In her junior year of high school, Kasey stated she burned out. There were four hundred students in her program and she ranked at three hundred. Her standing could have kicked her out of the program. She was failing chemistry and physics because she quit doing her homework and procrastinated. She was in rebellion because she hated school. She was spending much of her time reading romantic novels. She retreated to a period of aloneness and was very depressed.

Kasey decided to change her track from the STEM program to the Literature and Arts Program her junior year of high school. She knew that she could not get a good placement in college if she was failing. She asked her teacher if he thought it was a good idea to change tracks. He told her yes because she was sensitive and emotional, less rational and logical. That made her very angry because at that time she felt being sensitive and emotional was a weakness. This conversation motivated her to fight to stay in the science program to prove him wrong. She wanted to prove to him that she was logical and rational; however, she found that she was too far past remediating her failure into success in the STEM track. She was in the top thirty percent in the literature and art track. She remembers being angry all the time because she felt like a failure. Her parents did not support her changing from the STEM track to the Art track but she took the

initiative to change classes regardless of how her parents felt. It was her first big decision for herself and it was painfully difficult.

She wanted to prove to her parents and peers that she could achieve. She wanted to go to one of the two best universities in China, but she did not make it. She had one large high stakes test to gain entrance into college and she had severe test anxiety, which caused her not to place well. Her parents wanted her to pursue finance in college but she wanted to pursue sociology. If she would have gone into sociology, she could have gone to a university in Hong Kong which was her first choice. However, it was her parents' choice that prevailed; instead, she attended a different university for a degree in finance.

She lived on campus, but went home every weekend. She had five roommates and they lived in a small room, they were all finance majors. Her problems persisted with her peers and she did not feel like her peers understood her. She learned how to be a friend but she never really felt like anyone understood her and really knew who she was. Being a local Beijing resident, she had privileges her roommates did not have and she felt they resented her because of her privilege being a local resident.

Kasey liked economics but she did not like mathematics. She was required to take a philosophy class and found that she enjoyed philosophy. She loved her philosophy professor. She began to explore other subjects and found subjects that she enjoyed. She loved learning about Chinese culture and history. She chose to do a double major in philosophy and economics.

Kasey began to date in her second year of college and dated for three years in college. They were best friends in high school and he was her sole support system. He

experienced severe depression and was suicidal. She thinks it was because there was a tremendous amount of pressure to succeed in his university. He attended the highest ranked university in China. The pressure placed on academic excellence was very intense. She thinks he felt pressure to focus on Kasey instead of his academics. She says he felt she was too emotional. He did not want to spend time investing into his relationship with Kasey. Instead he wanted to focus on his academics. Therefore, she felt it was best to break up with him.

After the break up, she needed something to focus on and began working with the British Counsel. Kasey had started working with Junior Achievement and the British Counsel in high school. While working with the British Counsel she began to learn about social enterprise. She was fascinated with anthropology and began making connections and meeting people involved in anthropology. She did national research and fieldwork in an elementary school for the anthropology professor. At twenty-four, she graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Economics and Philosophy then she started graduate level anthropology classes and enjoyed learning about education. While she was studying anthropology and education, she discovered anthropology was her passion. Anthropology and education is what she wanted to focus on for a career. Her parents were angry with her for leaving finance and did not understand her decision. Kasey chose to leave the China and she planned to never look back. She took a gap year after her graduation because she did not feel like she had the qualifications to be accepted at a university in the United States. She worked with children and did internships during her gap year.

After her gap year, Kasey was accepted into a graduate program and came to the United States for her graduate degree to focus on school counseling. She planned on staying in the United States for at least ten years to escape from her parents. Sadly, her experience in her program of study at the American university was not a positive experience. Kasey experienced much hardship in America. She did not want to elaborate and share her negative experiences during her time in the United States. Instead of staying in the United States, she will return to Beijing. It is hard for her to be a counselor and speak English in the United States. When counseling, she has to focus on the words she wants to use, which is challenging, so she feels she could do counseling better in China, speaking in her native Chinese language. She also felt significant stress and anxiety with the intense evaluation processes used for counselors in the United States.

The two years she lived in America, she felt oppressed; she has felt that she has not been able to advocate for herself. She recognizes now that she has special privileges in China since she is a citizen from Beijing. She did not elaborate on what those special privileges involve; only that she feels she has more advantages and connections in Beijing. She has battled depression since she has been in the United States.

Kasey shared that mentoring is not common in the Chinese education system. She pursued mentoring in anthropology but was responsible to seek out mentoring opportunities for herself since it is not common in China. Kasey values the role of mentoring that she has received in her American education. Mentoring is one area that she highly praises from her American education. She hopes to influence mentoring programs when she returns to Beijing.

Her hopes and dreams are to be a good mom; she feels the tragedy of her life is due in part to a mom who did not spend time with her and was not supportive and loving. Although her parents expected her to have a high-powered career, Kasey's dream has always been to be a loving and supportive mother. Being in the United States, she has learned that wanting to be a mom and having children should not be her only identity. She realizes that is only a part of her; she has significantly more to offer the world than only being a mother.

Getting married has proven to be challenging for Kasey. She struggles to find a boyfriend. One male Chinese acquaintance recently told her that she could not find a boyfriend because she is too much of a feminist. He told her that if she goes on to receive a Ph.D. she would never find a husband. He told her that boys like gentle, behaved girls; boys do not like girls like her. He also told her that she is too vocal and she has too many opinions. These comments only fed into the intense fears that she carries that she will not find someone who loves her.

Kasey wants to return home to Beijing after graduation and be a school counselor. She dreams of influencing the transformation of the Chinese system of education. She hopes to focus on the social and emotional needs of students. She is not sure how her skills and training will fit into the Chinese system of education but she wants to work for a public school system and rent an apartment for herself. She wants to live in her hometown because she has connections and privileges in her hometown. Kasey is confident that she will be successful in her career and she plans to pursue a Ph.D.

## **Isabel's Narrative**

Isabel's story begins on a Marine Corps base in southern California. She was born to a young Puerto Rican father who was a Marine in his early twenties and a nineteen-year-old, stay-at-home white mother. Isabel said her family was very poor. She had one younger sister and a younger half-brother. Isabel did not know her extended family very well and indicated her immediate family was very isolated.

In hindsight, Isabel can see clearly recognize both of her parents were gifted in wildly different ways, although they were never officially identified as gifted. Her mother was much more creative and visual spatial; her father was much more linear sequential. The family dynamics were extremely dysfunctional; to say that her parents did not get along well would be an understatement. They divorced when she was very young. She does not know if the failure of their marriage was because of the differences between them but she imagines it played a part. Her father has been in and out of her life, since she was young; she lived with her mother growing up and they were a transient family moving over thirty times.

Once Isabel's parents divorced, since her mother was white and she had very little contact with her father, she never really learned about her Puerto Rican heritage. She met her grandparents a few times and they shared some things about her heritage with her but she always had an overwhelming feeling that she did not belong anywhere; being only half, she never felt whole.

One of Isabel's earliest memories of preschool was her preschool teacher was replaced and the replacement had told the class that she left because she had got married.



Isabel stated, “Oh, is she pregnant?” She remembered the replacement teacher being very offended and saying, “No, you get married before you get pregnant” and Isabel saying, “Not my mom!” She feels that she remembers that memory from preschool because at that moment she had the epiphany, “There is something going on socially that I just do not understand.”

Isabel said that she was always very mature, she did not relate well to her peers, especially in preschool and elementary school. She is not sure if the maturity was due to her giftedness, the home lifestyle, or a combination of both. A former classmate of hers, from elementary school, met her for dinner recently. He shared with her that a classmate of theirs remembered her and made the comment that Isabel was “born a woman, she was impossible to play with.” That comment made her feel strange and she realized it was an intense thing to say; however, it summarizes how she was always mature and intense.

Another event she recalled was having Star Wars punch out masks in an activity book in school. When other children wanted to play with them, she would try to explain the dynamic between the characters, provide the back-story of Star Wars, and was just very controlling in how they could play with the masks.

Isabel self-taught herself to read at the end of preschool. She recalled that if she ran into something she did not know while reading she would ask someone what it meant. They would explain it to her one time, for example, what sound ‘ch’ made, then she would remember for future reading. She only needed one repetition for mastery of content. She does not feel like she learned very much in kindergarten and spent most of her time in school very bored. She feels like she learned more social ques than content.

Living in poverty in a dysfunctional family environment she never learned important social cues. Due to her home life and her giftedness she feels that she was always too weird and intense for a lot of people.

Isabel felt she was always “too much into the teacher’s business” and that “teachers were always just kind of put off by her” due to her maturity. She could relate better to the teacher than her peers, but it seemed highly inappropriate to the teacher. She said the teachers did not say anything to her specifically but she intuitively had a feeling, like an acute awareness, when people did not like her. Regardless, her teachers recommended her for gifted identification.

Isabel was identified as gifted and remembers being served in gifted programming at a very young age. She attended many different schools, in many different states. She recalled being served in gifted programming in California, Wisconsin, Arizona, and Virginia from first grade through sixth grade. Her sister was never identified but Isabel felt it was because her sister valued being normal. Isabel said for herself, “It was like really clear that ship had sailed. There was nothing normal about us [our family]. She [her sister] fought it and I just kind of went with it.”

Isabel attended a small rural public school in Arizona for fourth through sixth grade. She recalled that fourth grade was probably one of the hardest school years that she ever had because her family was like “totally toxic, like really toxic.” She also did not like her teacher in fourth grade and felt very uncomfortable around him. She did not remember fifth grade; however, she loved sixth grade. She felt sixth grade was awesome because of her teacher and that there were enough students to have a “proper gifted

program.” She had friends and intellectual peers in the classroom since it was clustered for gifted learners. Isabel recalled that her sixth-grade teacher just really understood how to meet the needs of gifted students. “We had different levels of math textbooks up on the shelves and every day we would pick whatever math textbook we wanted and open it up and work out of it. The teacher would say, ‘You know what you need. You know where you are in your learning. This is our math hour so go pick something to work on and learn. If you have a problem, raise your hand, and I will come talk to you.’” She loved the structure of autonomous learning, independent study, and the teacher in the role of a facilitator. His teaching style was ahead of the curve in terms of gifted education and ways to handle gifted students. Isabel remembers that the students were very challenging but he did not take their attitudes personally. She said, “He was really smart, really witty, and if you were trying to get something over on him, he was like right there with you to match your wit.” It was probably her best year in school and formative to who she is as an educator and advocate today; however, she was not prepared for what was to unfold in middle school.

Seventh grade proved to be very challenging in Isabel’s home life. The toxic stress escalated to new heights. Her mother and stepfather were in an on again, off again relationship cycle. Her mother even left her children, alone, with the oldest, Isabel, being in seventh grade. She left to make things work with her husband in another state. Isabel said that very inappropriate things happened during that time. Somehow, she persevered and made it through seventh grade, but in her words, it was horrible.

The ethnicity issue also took front and center for her during this timeframe. She was living in Arizona and most of her classmates who were Hispanic were from Mexico or Ecuador. She felt they made fun of her because she was Latina and could not speak Spanish. She felt she was white passing raised by a white mom, but when her ethnicity would come up at school she felt discriminated against. She recognizes that she did not deal with the prejudice that many people face, but it was nevertheless a challenging situation. Isabel felt pressure from both sides because she was only half white and half Latina. She also felt different on a “molecular level” from the other students, not only due to her ethnicity and dysfunctional, impoverished home environment but also due to her giftedness. She started doing things a seventh grader should not do that were too mature for her. Since preschool, she had a mature concept of things before other girls and this continued through middle and high school. Middle school can be challenging, but with lack of parental guidance and a constant cycle of poverty and abuse, it can be almost impossible.

By eighth grade, Isabel was totally identifying with counterculture and subculture. She was really into Indie music, punk music, and everything that went along with counterculture and subculture. When she started high school, those who were also into counterculture and subculture were her peers and she found a role for herself in that social realm. She did participate in advanced placement classes and still successfully navigated receiving good grades. She attended multiple high schools. Her freshman year she was in Arizona and Northern California. Her sophomore year she was in Las Vegas, then she dropped out of school for a while. Isabel returned her junior year and did half of

her junior year and senior year in Washington. She graduated high school and went to college in Washington. She always knew that going to college was her only way out of the cycle of poverty and abuse. She said, “I knew that was the way to get out.

I was like college is a thing that people do and I want to go do that.”

Isabel went to an interdisciplinary, evaluation-based college that had no grades or prerequisites. It was a lot of responsibility and it was challenging her freshman year. She persevered and became very successful the remainder of her bachelor degree. She always imagined she would do something in humanities like creative writing, she wrote poetry in high school; but she did not like her classmates so she started taking some different classes. She fell into chemistry. Isabel tried one class that combined chemistry, algebra, and biology and found her niche. She graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry.

After graduating, Isabel knew she wanted to travel but did not know how to make that a reality. She checked with her school to see what options were available and they recommended she apply for a Fulbright Scholarship, although, they did not think she was likely to be awarded a Fulbright Scholarship. Isabel went through the process, which was significantly harder than she anticipated, and worked as an industrial chemist while she waited for the response. She was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship and was able to work in Thailand as a chemist at a university. She moved to Thailand with her boyfriend, who later became her first husband. They lived in Thailand for a year and then came back to the United States and she tried a variety of chemistry related jobs. She was a lab manager, food chemist, and an R&D chemist, but she just disliked it so intensely.

Isabel found the people that she was working with to be inauthentic. She says that inauthenticity causes her to “spin out.” She does not know what is real and not real and it causes her severe anxiety. She attributes inauthentic people for her choice to change her focus in college from humanities to chemistry and for her disintegration from chemistry. It is a repeating theme in her life; she becomes full of anxiety when she spends time with inauthentic people. Therefore, when she left chemistry she says it was her largest disintegration. She said, “It just rocked my whole life. I was hospitalized for a little bit. I just did not know what I was going to do. I was so miserable being a chemist but I went to school for this and I paid for it. My ego was wrapped up in being a chemist and it made me feel like a huge failure. However, at the same time being a chemist was killing me. So, I had to get out.”

After she left chemistry, Isabel became a nanny and people who had creative, intense kids that loved math and science absolutely adored her. She was a good nanny and one of her families told her that she should become the chemistry teacher at a little alternative school, so she did. She said it was hand in glove, she immediately connected with how to serve the kids and totally fell right into her life’s work and flow. She was twenty-seven years old when she discovered her call in life. She received her Montessori Credentials for Lower School and became a committed practitioner of nonviolent communication. For a number of years, she led or owned alternative education schools for gifted and twice exceptional children. Then she was asked to write a book about the alternative education schools that she helped develop which was published. After writing the book, she started doing a variety of roles: online teaching, working one-on-one with

students, family coaching, starting her own website and blog, and focusing on neurodivergence, giftedness, and twice exceptionality.

Her first marriage dissolved when she was thirty-one and she married her second husband at thirty-five. She said, “I met my current husband and he is just wonderful. Now I can see all of the reasons why my first marriage did not work.” Her current marriage is one of her greatest accomplishments. Things in Isabel’s life are wonderful now; there is nothing she would change in her current situation if given the opportunity. She is estranged from her father and sadly, her mother passed away due to a drug overdose. She still sees her sister, nieces, and nephews; they are very close. Another one of her greatest accomplishments is overcoming the cycle of abuse and poverty that was in her family. She wants to ensure that her nieces and nephews get what they need in terms of opportunity. Learning emotional self-regulation and just general self-regulation skills not to implode her life every time she feels emotional have been a tremendous accomplishment in Isabel’s life.

Isabel’s advice to other gifted girls and women is to keep going no matter what. She said, “Do not ever let anybody tell you that you cannot accomplish something. If you think it is true then it is, more often than not. There are people who will try to gaslight you about your vision for what is possible and try to say you cannot do this or that, but it is just not true. It has never been true for me any time anyone has ever told me that I cannot do this or that or that I am not going to get this or that, I have always got it. So, you just have to keep going no matter what.”

Isabel's hopes and dreams for the future are to step more fully into her joy and understand that her life is joyful. She wants to learn to embrace the joy in her life. She also wants to continue going bigger, deeper, and stronger into her work with gifted, and twice-exceptional children and into her vision of alternative education.

### **Dominique's Narrative**

Dominique's story begins in California. She was born into a black, middle class family. Her mother and father were married all her life. She has an older stepsister, who was from her mother's previous marriage. She also has a younger brother. She acknowledges that being a middle child had its benefits, for one it helped her learn to advocate on behalf of her needs. She is well acquainted with her large extended family. Her father was one of sixteen children and she knew her paternal grandparents and great-grandparents very well. She also knew her maternal grandparents and recalls being very close to her maternal great-grandmother. Family is a very strong bond in Dominique's life and is a significant thread in the tapestry of her life story. Her mother has been a strong advocate and role model for Dominique. Although Dominique now lives over two-thousand miles away from her mother, they remain very close to this day. Unfortunately, her father passed away a few years ago. She has very happy memories of her family and her childhood.

Growing up as a black female in a predominately-agrarian community in California, many of the local people had a "farming mentality." Although there were no official Jim Crow laws in the state of California, people were expected to live "where they belonged." There were many limitations for people of color and it was more



common that people of color would be working in a field picking crops not working in an office. Dominique's dad rose above the limitations of racism and broke through the glass ceiling as he went from being a janitor to being a manager over many area cells and divisions with a prominent company in California. He established and modeled an example to his children that with perseverance anything is possible, regardless of your ethnicity. Dominique's mother earned her associate's degree and her father completed his high school education. She remembers both of her parents as being highly intelligent. They set high expectations for Dominique and her siblings and instilled a strong work ethic in Dominique. She truly believed she could accomplish anything that she set her mind to.

There are many indicators of a genetic link of giftedness in her family. Dominique recalls many of her family members showing signs of giftedness, for example, she remembers her cousins talking in full sentences at age one and several other family members being able to do things at a very early age such as reading. She recalled how her mother had higher expectations for her and her brother. Her mother noticed that Dominique and her brother would learn easily, with only one or two repetitions where it took their stepsister repeated repetitions to accomplish or learn a new task. She specifically recalled that she always wanted to do things herself. She remembers reading at three. She said that she probably wanted to be able to read at such a young age because she always wanted to do things herself. She remembered how she would keep prodding her mother to tell her what the words were and tell her what they meant so that she could read. She did not want her mother to read to her, she wanted to read to her mother.

Dominique was a precocious little girl. She was highly curious and always wanted to know how things worked. She recalls that her mom had to watch her constantly because she would take apart everything she could get her hands on: mechanical or physical. She shared, “I would always break everything just to know what was inside of it and what made it do what it did. The reason I was so close to my great-grandmother was because my mother needed a break from me, she would make me go stay with her for two weeks every summer.”

Dominique was raised by a confident mother who advocated on behalf of her needs. Elementary school was complicated for Dominique, especially since she was a black female in a primarily white agrarian community. Integration was not common in their neighborhood so Dominique’s parents moved to a different area so their children would have more opportunities. It was predominately-white families with a few Hispanic and Asian families. Dominique’s sister attended the “black” school across town, but when Dominique was old enough to start school, her mother decided she was going to try sending Dominique to the local neighborhood school.

There was conflict because many of the teachers did not believe Dominique belonged there because of the color of her skin. Dominique’s mom knew that Dominique was extremely intelligent, and although Dominique’s teachers did not see her exceptional abilities, her mother knew that her daughter had the potential for high academic achievement. Being a black female proved to be challenging for Dominique all throughout elementary and secondary school. It did not help that she was very strong willed and stubborn. She described herself as obstinate. She started kindergarten at four

knowing how to read, so when her teachers gave her books that did not challenge her, she refused to read. “They refused to promote me because they said I had not demonstrated competency and they were concerned that I probably should not even be in their school, that maybe, I needed a school for special needs children. Therefore, my mom, not knowing very much about education and thinking that she had to follow what the authorities were saying, went ahead and held me back. Therefore, I repeated what I already knew before I got to school, again. At the end of that year, they said the same thing but literally by the grace of God, special education laws were in place and so they could not just put me in a separate school they had to test me. And when they tested me, not only did they find out I was not in need of the special education services on the other end, they found out I was gifted.”

Once she was identified as gifted, she was placed in a first-grade classroom. However, Dominique’s mother felt that the teacher in the first-grade classroom was not really teaching the students, instead they were coming home with elaborate art projects. Dominique’s mother took the art projects to the administration and demanded they change her classroom where she was learning instead of completing art projects. She was moved into another first-grade classroom, where she met one of her lifelong friends, who is Korean and is also a gifted female. This was the first teacher who really paid attention to what Dominique could learn and challenged her. In second grade, Dominique joined the official gifted class. Her school district provided separate classes for gifted students and used the cluster model for gifted students.

This created another difficult experience because many of the other students' parents would say that she did not belong in the gifted class because of the color of her skin, even though she had the highest scores of anybody in the class. Being identified as gifted as a young girl in elementary school did not solve all her problems. Now Dominique faced new problems as she was clustered in a special classroom for other gifted students, predominately-white students. That placement in gifted education remained through high school and there was only one other student of color identified as gifted. The consequence of the cluster model was that she stayed with the same group of gifted students through high school.

In fifth grade, a new school opened and she attended the new school, along with most of her classmates. She remembers being challenged on a higher level at the new school. She would arrive at school early for the Chess Club and be able to work on creative projects such as building a space rocket. They used techniques for teaching that engaged students with higher level thinking strategies. They had deep, intense conversations and teachers really sparked her curiosity. She attributes this time and some of these teachers as influencing the person she is today because of their challenge, methods, and approach to teaching. She does remember; however, that she never had homework in elementary or middle school. She would finish all her assignments quickly. She also remembered that her mother was taking a college Algebra course and she would help her mother. Because she was learning college level algebra at home she was bored in Pre-Algebra. Her Pre-Algebra teacher would get frustrated with her because she did not have to exert effort to learn in class. She said that her obstinacy persisted and she would

regularly challenge and argue with her teachers. Since she was in a separate gifted class, she never felt the pressure to be the pretty girl instead of the smart girl. Due to her placement, being the smart girl is where she felt pressured. Everyone was smart, so being smart was an expectation.

Once Dominique reached high school, she found it to be an exhilarating and interesting experience. She attended a new performing arts magnet school. This suited her well because she was a dancer and enjoyed ballet, jazz, and piano. She participated in many performing arts classes, which she really enjoyed. She was still placed with the same students she was clustered with since second grade, but now she had access to other students. She participated in band, which helped her make some new friends that were outside of the gifted cluster students.

In regards to academics in high school, she still did not have to exert effort to receive straight A's. In some ways, Dominique feels as though she was an underachiever because she did not exert the effort she should have in her academics. The A's just came very easy for her and did not require significant effort on her part. Although she never felt the pressure to "dumb it down" she did have an active social life in high school and she was more concerned about dating and being invited to the right parties than she was concerned about school and her academics.

After graduating from high school with honors, Dominique attended a prominent state university for a degree in social ecology. She had the "cream of the crop" professors and was part of the university's campus wide honors program. That provided her with small class sizes and the opportunity to get personalized mentoring from her professors.

Part of that personalized mentoring was having the opportunity to go to their homes and have special experiences. One experience that she recalled was when the physics professor took them out to observe the stars and rock climbing in the desert at Joshua Tree. She really enjoyed the opportunities and privileges that she had but she also remembers that she was never one just to go along with someone else's philosophy just because they had a title. This caused her to challenge her professors and get into arguments with them sometimes. Her obstinacy and being argumentative continued throughout her academic career. Dominique is a person who speaks her mind and is not easily persuaded by others.

During college, Dominique recalled some incidents with racism. She stated that in that particular area, there was a population of Neo Nazis. There were places that were unsafe for her. She encountered numerous experiences where people driving by in their cars called her names. She also dealt with some racism on the campus, not from people who were attending the campus, but from the ethnic minorities who were working on campus such as the gardeners. She felt they resented the fact that she was a student there. She also encountered racism in the form of the black population telling her that she was an "Oreo" or that she was trying to act white. One example is that she speaks clearly and precisely. Her mother was born with a lisp, which resulted in a speech impediment. Her mother received speech services to correct the speech impediment, so she modeled correct and proper speech to Dominique growing up. Dominique was raised to use proper grammar and speech and to some people they took it as she was trying to "act white." She was told that she was trying to act like "those people." She had been with "those people"

since second grade and many of them were her neighbors. When asked about the times she was accused of trying to “act white” and how it made her feel, her response was that she just decided she was not going to worry about that.

Dominique has always had a wide variety of friends from various backgrounds, ethnicities, and cultures. She loves people, all kinds of people, and was taught by her parents that relationships is what is important, not the color of a person’s skin. In middle school, she tried to be friends with a group of people who looked like her. What she found was that although they looked like her, they did not think like her. She found that it was too discordant to try to be a part of a group of people who look like her but did not think like her. She wanted to be with people who could hold a conversation about things she liked to talk about.

She also remembered in the eighties she was into big hair bands. She loved big hair bands. She recalled that she loved Journey, Def Leppard, and U2. She spent a lot of time listening to those particular bands and that made her different as well. She went to heavy metal and rock concerts in college. She said that she had a full college experience. She joined a sorority and it was not a traditional black sorority. It was just a campus sorority. She said they had campus mixers, which again were sometimes awkward because there were people who were not open to people dating outside their ethnic group. She was mostly around males who were outside of her ethnic group. She came to realize they did not know if it was okay to date her because she was black. It produced many conflicts. Instead of dating, she would just go out with guys who were friends to parties and concerts because being a different ethnicity was an issue she constantly had to deal

with.

After her undergraduate degree, Dominique consulted with her mom about graduate school. Her mom was a very strong influence, mentor, and role model in her life. Dominique recalled, “One of the wonderful things about my mom is that she made me promise when I was going to college that I would read my Bible for fifteen minutes a day. That was the only thing she asked me to do and I did it. It really gave me a foundation of who I was to become as far as a person is concerned. It really helped me to be introspective about who I am, why I am here, and what my purpose is. I realized that what I have been doing my whole life, every chance I had, was teaching people. I was part of the panel and counsel for the sorority and fraternities. I was part of the leadership group from the university. I do not even know how I ended up being on the leadership group at the university. To be honest with you I have never sought out roles like that, I was just all of a sudden put into the positions. I was one of the students my sophomore year who was in charge of the dorm. The resident advisor as a sophomore! Which is really kind of nuts because I was the resident advisor for the sports dorm and we had coed dorms. So, I was the resident authority as a nineteen-year-old for twenty-one year olds.” She realized that she was always a natural leader and decided it was in her DNA to become a teacher.

After her epiphany of wanting to become a teacher, Dominique sought out a graduate program that would train her to become a teacher. She recalls that the prominent university she attended really chose her. She took the GREs and sent her test scores out to numerous universities. She planned to go to the northeast, she never thought about



moving to the south. She never had a desire to live in the south. However, a prominent southern university contacted her and asked her to apply. When she applied for graduate school they offered her a full scholarship and everything was paid for. They even picked her up at the airport when she flew in from the West late at night and took her to her dorm room. They also offered her an internship and to get her degree finished in one and a half years. No one could match or beat their offer.

She refers to her time in the graduate degree program as academic hazing. The level of coursework and interning was so intense. She completed student teaching and her master's degree with licensure in one and a half years. She earned a position at a local middle school and started working. She currently works at the same school and has been employed there for twenty-three years. She is a strong, vibrant, and poised gifted educator. She has consistently worked with middle school students, in an upper-middle class public school, in the southeast portion of the United States, since obtaining licensure as a teacher. She was a classroom teacher for six years, then administration asked her to assume the role of the Gifted Teacher/Differentiation Coach. She has been in the position of Gifted Teacher for sixteen years now. Her district is the number one public school district in her state and is nationally recognized for high achievement scores. Her school has a highly diverse population, but the average income has been compared to Orange County, California. Few cities in the nation compete with the economic growth her county has seen.

Perfectionism was a struggle for Dominique once she started teaching. She had always dealt with symptoms of Imposter Syndrome, wondering if anyone would realize

she was not as smart as they thought she was. Sometimes she questioned why she was chosen for leadership roles because she could not possibly have the best ideas and answers as many people alluded to. Perfectionism was a primary concern when she became a teacher. “I was so tired. I was staying up late at night and creating things. That is when the perfectionism kicked in a little bit. I was really trying to teach the children and I wanted to know that they were learning. I really went above and beyond and exhausted myself to no end, because it had meaning and what I did mattered.” The perfectionism became more manageable when she was able to work with a smaller population of students as the Gifted Teacher. She also felt more confident because she was able to challenge them on a higher level.

When asked what her greatest accomplishment has been she stated having “true impact” with her students. “I honestly feel like having a hand in thousands of lives, as their teacher, has a much greater impact on society than me going and doing one little or small thing. I do believe in doing small things: I volunteer to do cleanups for flood victims; I helped clean up after Hurricane Katrina. I am involved with End Slavery Tennessee. I do believe in doing those types of things, but when I am talking about policy and the future of this nation, I really like having my hands on children that are going all different directions. One former student of mine wants to become a Supreme Court justice someday, and he is on track to get there. Another former student, her mom sent me her graduation notice, she is working with development in order to provide a better life for women in South America and it started with a program that I started her with in middle school. These stories are just now beginning to have impact and growth. One of

my former science students is now an emergency room doctor at a local hospital. I've just been able to see those kinds of things and so I feel like my greatest accomplishments are just the seeds I've sown into these world changers that are going out there and living it."

When asked if given the opportunity to change anything in her life what she would change, Dominique stated, "As far as my story, I don't know that I would change a dramatic amount of events that have occurred or influences that I've had because I don't regret it. Some people feel like they need to have their name up in lights or something. I've been blessed because I've had a student who submitted a teacher recommendation for me and I was one of four teachers in the county that was chosen to be honored. I have received acclamation from things I have done but that is not as important as wanting children to hear me so they can be the best individual that they can be, in every arena of their life. Not just that they can be the person who cures cancer but that they are going to be the person of sound mind to make decisions, vote for people who will make good decisions, and interact with their neighbors in a way that promotes healthy, well balanced lives."

When asked if she identifies with being a gifted woman, her response was "That's a hard question. It is a really hard question. You would think that I would say yes because I was in a gifted program as a kid, I was in a gifted program in undergraduate school, by the way, I graduated from graduate school with highest honors. Yet I still struggle with Impostor Syndrome. I am just an average person. I still cannot be as gifted as some people seem to think. As a forty-seven-year-old single woman, I had a friend ask me, 'Are you looking for someone who is as smart as you are?' I said, 'I just want someone I

can talk to.’ She said, ‘I really don’t think you’re going to find a lot of people, they are just not as smart as you are.’ I am thinking why would you say that? What do you mean by that? This is a good friend I went to college with and so I still struggle with that because I do not see myself as being remarkable. Yes, I am intelligent, but there are a lot of people that are intelligent.”

When asked about any last thoughts or comments, she immediately thought of gifted girls. She said, “Well, I think what is unfortunate, is what I have seen for gifted students. We have a tendency to over identify males. Because I presented like a male, I think that was one of the things that ended up really pushing me into being seen because I was obstinate. I was a problem. I was attention seeking. I feel like there are a lot of gifted girls who are compliant who get overlooked because they are compliant. If you are too assertive, then they look at you like there is something wrong with you. If you are aggressive; then your parents have not parented you correctly or there is some other label they want to give you because you are not acting lady-like. Well, just like I resisted that label that I’m acting white. I also resist the label of not being lady-like. Just like the differences between cultures are minimal versus the differences within a particular culture. So, stop trying to stereotype me and put me in a pigeonhole. Stop trying to put women in a pigeonhole and say that just because these girls are compliant, because we do catch the ones that are noncompliant and who are doing the same types of behaviors that we typically see in boys who are considered bored, but I just want to catch more of those girls who really do need additional challenge. Who are truly sitting there bored but they are sitting there daydreaming and twirling their hair or they are drawing or doodling on

their page and not paying attention to anything that the teacher is saying because they have it already. Therefore, I think that my last thought would be towards really wanting to make sure that we really look at the information about students, look at what the student is doing, and ask what they are capable of in our data team meetings. Do not assume someone does not need anything just because they have not said something. Sometimes the parents do not speak up, the teacher does not speak up, and the child does not speak up, so they just go without being identified because they are not put on our radar. I think it's a travesty because there is such a disparity of women in positions of power or in positions of authority in different fields when there could be.”

### **Elizabeth’s Narrative**

A first child, born to an upper middle class white mother and father in the Midwest in the 1960s, Elizabeth was exceptional in many ways. Identified as profoundly gifted in elementary school she was a challenging child who was fiercely independent. She had two younger brothers who were also identified as profoundly gifted. The family moved to the southern United States when Elizabeth was in first grade and she was officially identified as profoundly gifted by a prominent gifted psychologist, along with both of her brothers. She remained in the Southeast until third grade when her family returned to the Midwest.

Upon their return, her parents divorced. She says that the divorce obliterated her mother. After the divorce, her mother moved frequently, with her and her two brothers. They lived in the northeast for about a year then began to travel and even lived abroad for a while. Elizabeth believes her mom suffered a loss of reality after the divorce,

demonstrated through the frequent moving and living abroad. It is hard for Elizabeth to determine if her mother's instability was a result of gifted intensities due to her mother also being profoundly gifted or other unspecified and undiagnosed reasons. However, she attributes this "loss of reality" as what resulted in her strong self-efficacy skills. Someone had to take care of her, so she took care of herself.

She does not have many memories of early childhood; however, she remembers always being able to read and does not recall a time in her life when she was not able to read. She found elementary school boring, she attended private schools; however, they were still not challenging for her. Although she was identified as profoundly gifted at a young age, the identification did not provide insight into how to appropriately challenge her and meet her educational needs.

She never attended high school instead at sixteen she started college and lived independently. Her father preferred to pay for an apartment for her to live in than to have a disruption in his bachelor lifestyle. So, she lived alone and attended college at sixteen. She did have some friends and they would have parties at her apartment, like a normal college experience, but her social life was anything but normal. Elizabeth recalls connecting with teachers more than with peers. She recalls feeling very much alone. She stated there were many people around but she still felt very much alone because most of her friends were still in high school and could not relate to her problems. While attending college she connected with a group of peers who were at a youth performing arts high school. She recalled there was a weird intersection because they were same age peers but

she was attending college, not high school. There was a marked difference in the level of experience, exposure, and interests.

Elizabeth finished college in three and a half years with a sociology degree. She chose sociology because math courses were not required to obtain the degree. She struggled with perfectionism and knew that she could not get a good grade in math without help, but refused to ask for help. Her identity was wrapped up in her intellectualism at this point and asking for help was almost like cheating in her mind. She strongly identifies sociology as one of her greatest strengths. She knew she could be successful in a sociology degree. Upon graduation from college, at twenty, Elizabeth returned to her hometown and began working with the public health department. She found the position to be very interesting and advanced quickly; however, she always had a desire to seek higher-level education that graduate school could offer.

At twenty-seven, Elizabeth decided to attend graduate school, which is where she met her husband, and at thirty-one, they married. She does recall dealing with Imposter Syndrome during this timeframe, she remembers when she was about to receive her degree at graduation thinking, "They are going to realize that the test that I passed really was not mine and they will come out and say that you need to step out of line."

Although she and her husband had the same degree, at the time it made sense for them to pursue putting her husband's career as a priority because they felt he would have a greater earning potential. In hindsight, Elizabeth wishes that she had fought harder to establish herself with her degree. She did remain active in work and has always been involved in various endeavors but she did not pursue full time employment or establish

herself in a specific field. At times during her marriage, her husband encouraged her to seek a position well below her abilities. This was a little frustrating since they have the same degree. When asked what advice she would have for other gifted women and what her greatest regret is she replied that she wishes she had pursued her own career. By putting her husband's career first, she has placed herself in a position that many women place themselves in, being dependent upon their husband's income. She absolutely has the potential to achieve at the same level as her husband; however, like many women, she felt pressured to decide between career and family.

Elizabeth had her first child in her thirties. Her child was identified as profoundly gifted at a very early age, as was her second child. She had her third profoundly gifted child in her forties. She has three children who are now between elementary and high school ages and all of them are profoundly gifted. Being profoundly gifted has made it challenging to find an educational setting where their needs are met. She has felt the necessity to home school to challenge them at their appropriate levels. Elizabeth recalls not being challenged in her own academic endeavors so providing that challenge and rigor for her own children's education has been extremely important to her. The two oldest attend a local state university for various courses to supplement their learning. She commented that the youngest is the only extravert in the family and that concerns her about how she will balance meeting his profoundly gifted needs and his social needs. He enjoys being in school and loves his friends but she does not feel that he is really being challenged to his full potential in the academic setting he is currently in.

Elizabeth is extremely busy; in addition to being a dutiful wife and mother, she



has various other pursuits and interests in a variety of areas. Due to her multipotentiality, she has the ability to excel and achieve highly in multiple areas. She has just never placed her own personal wants and needs as the priority. She has always been busy taking care of others. She was busy taking care of herself as a child and adolescent, and then caring for her husband and children as an adult; however, she does not regret those choices. Her children are her greatest accomplishment and she stated, "Creating for them, facilitating for them; has been my greatest accomplishment; just making things work for them in such an alternative way, but productive way."

Elizabeth has dealt with some extremely difficult, emotional, and intense relationship situations and has always had to rise above as the voice of reason and common sense. She has assumed the role of protector and her primary focus has been on making sure everyone else is taken care of. In both her parental and spousal relationships, she has had very challenging situations to overcome but she has been a rock for her children, which is quite different from what was modeled for her from her own parents. She has focused her abilities and talent on providing her children with a safe, stable, comfortable, and loving environment. We spent most her interview discussing her children. She is a loving mother and in this time of her life, her role as mother, far outweighs any other role she may dream of for her life.

### **Mary's Narrative**

Mary was born in the southern United States, on a cattle farm in 1950. She was the only child of a loving mother and father. When she was born, her parents were advanced in age for a 1950's family. Her mother was thirty-four and her father was forty.

Her parents had married young: her mother seventeen and her father twenty-three, yet they were in their middle adult years when they had their first and only child. Mary had very stable, secure, mature, loving parents who had natural parental instincts. She was raised on the family farm that her father's family had sharecropped when he was young.

She knew her extended family well. Most of her relatives lived in the area. Her paternal grandmother passed away right after her birth, but her paternal grandfather lived nearby until she was about eight years old. Her mother had two siblings who lived in the area and she knew her maternal grandparents into her late teenage years. She had many cousins and they spent a significant amount of time together. Although she did not have brothers or sisters, her cousins were always at her house. She remembers having a close family and has fond memories of them gathering at her childhood home at Christmas. Family is extremely important to Mary, she lives next door to the farm she was raised on and her daughter lives next door to her. Her daughter's family has about five acres next to the family farm. Mary has lived in the same community for sixty-six years and is an active member in the community. She is highly respected and is a change agent for education in the community.

Mary experienced the quintessential southern, rural farm life. She learned to sew, crochet, and cook when she was young. She also helped her father on the farm: drove the tractor, raked and baled hay and milked the cows. Her parents were kind people. In addition to farming, her father also drove a school bus. Her mother was a homemaker. Although her father only had a sixth-grade education and her mother had an eighth grade education, she remembers them as the smartest people she has ever known. She

remembers them as extremely kind and compassionate. She recalled a black family who lived across the field from her home. The family did not have running water and her father would invite them to come to their farm to get water. She remembered that was not how all white people were to black people in the 1950's and 1960's in her community. She feels her parents modeled and demonstrated strong morals and ethics for her in an extremely loving way.

She has many happy memories of her childhood. She was very close to her mother and father. She remembers her parents as being supportive. They were supportive of her dreams and pursuits. They modeled high expectations for her but they did not personally set unrealistic high expectations for her. She never felt external pressure from her parents to succeed, only love and support.

Her home was in the country, it was a rural area, and she recalled that there were only five houses between her house and the city. She was zoned for the county school district but had the option to attend the city school district. Her parents felt she would receive a better education in the city school district. She attended first grade in the elementary school, in the school district, where she is now the director of schools. She can vividly remember a program in the primary school for non-graded classes. A professor from a nearby local prominent university came to do research in her school. He was a psychologist and administered standardized tests used for gifted identification. When she was in fifth grade, she was pulled out once a week to meet with other students in the school district in a gifted program. At the time, she did not realize she was participating in gifted programming or that she had been identified as intellectually

gifted. No one specifically told her what she was being tested for or why she was going to meet with other students. During gifted services she learned to type, read higher-level advanced novels, and perform higher-level creative tasks involving integrated music and art. They would listen to music and draw what was heard. These were innovative teaching practices in the mid to late 1950's.

She does not remember feeling that she was exceptional in any way. One of her most vivid memories about middle school is when she was in seventh grade. Her teacher had a conference with her mother. She told her mother that she did not want Mary to do homework for six weeks because she was doing too much. Mary remembers always doing too much. She was also very self-conscious about the products she produced and would hide her work when the teacher walked by. She was a terrible perfectionist and has always driven herself very hard. She never felt the pressure from her parents or teachers to succeed but placed extreme pressure upon herself.

She discovered that she had a strong musical ability in middle and high school. She played the piano, flute and was in the band. She was first flute in high school and shared that she can play any brass or woodwind instrument. She stated that her musical abilities just came naturally to her. The only genetic link she has discovered for her musical ability is that of her grandfather; he was a country violinist. She can sight-read and designates sight-reading as one of her greatest strengths.

In high school, aside from participating in band, she also was in numerous honor societies. She took higher-level math and science courses. She completed four years of math and science, which was not required in the 1960's, especially for girls. She was one

of four girls who took Physics. She remembers that Physics is where she received her first C in high school. Her perfectionistic tendencies and unrealistic high expectations caused her to feel like she was “going to die” when she received her first C. She also remembered, as an example of the high expectations she had of herself, one summer in high school that she chose to take a sociology class during summer. There was no need for her to take a summer course instead of having a relaxing summer off, but she felt it was necessary. She was always setting very high expectations for herself and driving herself to accomplish and achieve at high levels.

She always related well to her peers, she does not recall any struggle with social awkwardness or acceptance issues with her peers. She met her husband during her sophomore year of high school. He was the head of drummer and she was head of the flutes. She seemed to have an ease in social situations even in high school and college. Mary believes that possibly, being part of a program for gifted students helped her find her likeminded social peers.

After high school, Mary completed a triple major at the local state university: Elementary Education, General Music Education, and Music Performance. She took overload courses each semester and completed the coursework in three and a half years. She had opportunities to go to other more prominent universities but ultimately chose to stay at the local university because her soon to be husband planned on staying and attending the local university. They married soon after college started, when Mary turned nineteen.

Upon graduating from college, she started her career with the city school district she attended for elementary and secondary education and is currently serving as the director of schools. She taught middle school math for six months and then taught music for six months. She left after her first year because she did not feel that she was a good teacher. After she left her position, about a year later, she ran into her former principal and he told her that he was so sad she left. He told her that she was such a good teacher, the best music teacher he had ever seen. She recalled thinking, "I wish you would have told me that." If she had known that he thought she was a good teacher, she would have stayed in her teaching position. She recognizes that she seeks and needs that reassurance and approval from other people, which has been a constant need in her life. Her need for the acceptance and approval of others has improved slightly throughout her lifespan especially once she became the director of schools. She also attributes the improvement in not seeking other's approval to being able to see her own accomplishments.

Mary left teaching for fifteen years and dedicated herself to being a wife and mother. She started a family and had two children: a boy and a girl. During the fifteen years, after she left full time teaching, she tutored private music lessons with over sixty students. She also worked with local marching bands. She completed her master's and Ed.S. degrees in education. She and her husband were the P.T.O. presidents for two schools. She also sewed all her children's clothing! She stated that her husband worked outside the home and when he came home from work in the evenings, she was able to tutor, take classes, and attend meetings. Even while she did not have a full-time career, her expectations were extremely high for what she could and should accomplish.

She returned to teaching when her daughter was entering sixth grade. The principal of her daughter's school told her, "If you want your daughter to have band you are going to have to teach it." After she returned to teaching, she taught three years as a part time music teacher and/or band director, and then went full time. She was the band director/music teacher at various schools in the district for about eight years. She received the Teacher of the Year award for the state and began assuming a leadership role in her school. She organized various functions for the school such as the school retreat, school wide initiatives that included Native American Days and huge school wide art days where forty different artists came to work with students. The superintendent hand selected her to become the Associate Director for Instruction, which was a district wide position. She was also teaching at the local state university, where she and her husband graduated, as well as part time adjunct work teaching at another local university.

Mary is committed to education that incorporates the whole child. Right after she accepted the position as the district's Associate Director for Instruction the district shifted away from a whole child approach and focused attention on test scores. She believed this was not beneficial for children and she was not able to support their initiatives so she left her city schools position to assume a full-time role with the local state university. Somewhere during this timeframe, she also completed her doctorate in education. Her Ed.S was in Administration Supervision so she chose to pursue her Ed.D. in Curriculum and Instruction. She shared that she completed her dissertation on keyboard labs. She researched if computer assisted keyboards really made a difference in students' rhythmic perception and inaudible perception. Although she enjoyed her Ed.D. she feels like she

learned more in her Ed.S. Her Ed.S. is where she feels she learned specific skills that she has really been able to use in her professional career. It taught her how to effectively influence and create change in a community. It also taught her that leaders create leaders and the concept of differing stages of teaching.

For almost six years, she worked at the local state university in the department for educational leadership. The primary courses she taught were school community relations, instructional strategies, and assessment. During that time, she helped start a statewide initiative that was part of the local university and about twenty-one local school districts. She also received a grant for the local university that started a math and science program that was modeled after a thriving program in Texas; it was expected to be replicated in her state. At the same time she received the grant, she received encouragement to apply for the vacant superintendent position for the district she attended as a child and worked for as an adult. She remembers, “In the newspaper, on the same day that it announced I was going to head up the initiative at the university and it also announced that I was going to be superintendent.”

She was elected as superintendent in a unanimous vote. At sixty years of age, she became the superintendent of schools for the city schools and has actively been in that role for the last six years. During her tenure as the superintendent, she said it has been the most difficult position to influence change because there are so many boundaries and barriers, such as the school board, state law, and a philosophy of education that is different from hers. She stated, “I think without those things, then there would not be any issues. However, when you have things that you have no control over, and it is not that I



am a control freak. However, when you have no control over it. Then it makes change, well, it's not a clean change, it's an ugly kind of change, especially not being able to have a holistic change.”

Her intense perfectionistic tendencies make it hard for her to reflect on everything she has accomplished, because all she sees is what she still wants to accomplish. Although she is a superintendent, she still does not identify with being exceptional in any way and does not identify with being a gifted or exceptional woman. She admittedly still hides her work if someone walks by, even though she is now in the highest position obtainable within the local public school system. She has never really felt that anything she does is enough; she always feels it could be better; somehow, she could improve upon whatever she is trying to accomplish. She stated in her interview, "Nothing I do is ever good enough for me. I have a real hard time meeting the expectations of myself." Once she finishes whatever it is that she is working on, then she is always looking for the next thing to focus her attention on. She does not have the same high expectations of other people, that she places upon herself, but she fears that others close to her believe she does have the same high-level expectations. She worries that this can cause people around her to feel like they cannot live up to her expectations. One example that she shared is that she has an ability to multi task on many projects and initiatives at one time. She recognizes that not everyone else is able to do that but she feels that many times her employees think she expects them to be good at multi-tasking, too.

Some of the positive changes she has been able to make is declaring the “whole child” as the emphasis for the school district. She explains that the “whole child” refers to meeting a student’s physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and academic needs. The student community she serves is diverse. Although in the fifties and sixties the area that she lives in was considered a rural area, the growth of this county has far exceeded most counties in the United States. The city in which Mary is the superintendent now has over one hundred thousand people living within its limits. The district serves approximately eight thousand students in twelve schools. It is within thirty minutes of the largest metropolitan city in the state and there is access to numerous universities within thirty or forty-five minutes. It is adjacent to the number one school district in the state with the highest socio-economic population in the southeastern portion of the United States. The district remains a strong eight out of ten ranking on Great Schools.com even though some of the schools are Title One schools and serve a highly diverse population of students. Problems of homelessness, poverty, and English as a second language are prevalent within specific schools in the district. These are only some of the reasons that focusing on the whole child is so important to Mary.

Her high social justice concerns have encouraged her to be an active leader in her community. When asked what her greatest accomplishments have been, she had a long list of accomplishments, but all focused on providing for the needs of others. She has been successful in implementing a mobile health unit, free breakfast in the classroom, free hot lunches, free food backpacks for weekends, and a food bus. The food bus has thirty-three sites that it visits and provides food for residents especially in the summer

months when school is out. She also provides food at schools on snow days for any resident under eighteen years of age. She created a farm initiative to forge a relationship between local schools and local farmers to help students learn about agriculture, farming, and food production.

Educational accomplishments she has been able to make within the district include a focus on gifted education. This school year she hired a third gifted specialist. She is an advocate for gifted education; she has created a Gifted Academy in the district for Gifted Cluster Teachers to obtain employment standards as gifted teachers. Her goal is to have one Gifted Cluster Teacher, in each school, at each grade level. However, she also strongly believes that the general education teacher should have high expectations of all students and teach at a rigorous level while providing supports and scaffolds for all students to reach academic potential and attain at the highest level possible. She has been instrumental to the hiring of instructional coaches: reading and math as well as interventionists and has established a strong Curriculum and Instruction Department which has developed a district wide scope and sequence project. She established district PLCs and created collaborative and cooperative planning at each grade level, in each school. She has connected social workers to each school and they are now involved in collaborative measures within each school. She stated, "I feel good about shifting the culture of the district in this way. It's just that I have not been able to make the complete change that I would like to make." She envisions the district having absolute collaboration and cooperation to focus upon meeting the needs of the whole child. She also recognizes the need for a strengths based approach to education instead of a deficit

model where the focus is on what children can do instead of what children cannot do. She strongly believes if leaders focus on what students can do, instead of what they cannot do, then students will go significantly further and accomplish much more. She successfully started a Leader in Me program at one of the elementary schools. She strongly encourages others to become leaders who make a difference.

When asked if given the opportunity what she would change she immediately thought of what she still wants to accomplish in the future. She hopes to have health clinics within schools in the near future. She stated that mental health is a real issue that needs to be addressed and she would love to have community health clinics in schools with integrated health care so that when families walk into the school, they can get dental, mental, and physical health needs met. Everything they need in one location because they may not have access anywhere else. She stated, “When you ask about what I would change, it would be that kind of philosophy change so that it really is about identifying where people need help and helping them.” She also believes in identifying what an individual’s strengths are and supporting them to build on their strengths, which helps them grow to their highest potential. She stated, “I want children to learn as much academically as they can, but equally as important is the ability to problem solve because I really do believe for the future workforce students will need to be able to problem solve. They will need teamwork and creativity. Those are the skills children need to start learning early.”

She spoke more about career accomplishments than personal accomplishments; however, as a proud mother she did share some information about her children. Her son

was in band in high school; he was a good child who made good grades. He attended the same local state university that she and his father attended. He planned on going into law but then then came to her one day and said, “Should I do something to make me happy or do something to make a lot of money?” She told him, “You better do something that makes you happy.” So, he told her, “I am going to be a preacher.” He went to seminary and then came back home for about five years. He decided while he was home that he wanted to work with people in the inner city. She believes it was due to a project that she started in an inner-city neighborhood where they had a family resource center and a GED program that included childcare. He helped her establish it and he decided that is what he wanted to dedicate his life to. Her son is now a minister and is currently working on his doctorate with hopes of when he finishes he will be able to focus his efforts in an inner-city community.

Mary’s daughter strongly resembles her mother. Mary said that she was an excellent flute player in high school. She recalled that her daughter strongly opposed becoming a teacher however, she would substitute teach for Mary on occasion. She eventually went to school, finished her degree, and became a teacher. She currently works for the same school district as her mother as an instructional coach. She has three children, Mary’s grandchildren, a freshman in college, a junior in high school, and an eighth-grade student. She is a strong willed, influential leader in education, just like her mother. They are close, but both have a strong emphasis on their professional careers.

Mary’s philosophy about parenting is that parents should walk with their children. She values communication and shared that even when her children made mistakes she

never broke the communication relationship she created with them. She remembers they were always honest with each other about what they thought and she said that they still are honest about what they think today. She said, "They tell me exactly what they think and I tell them what I think, and we're ok, you know?" When I asked her if they see each other a lot, she stated, "My son, not as much, I will see him more in the spring." She stated, "When mom was sick, I stayed with her for two and a half years every night and I would go down and stay with her from nine o'clock at night until seven o'clock in the morning." She did not have the ability to leave her mom and go visit her son, so now that her mother has passed she says they [her husband and she] will go visit her son more in the spring. Even though she and her daughter work together and live next door to each other, they do not see each other as often as one would think. They are both very busy. She said her husband is retired and so he will cook supper and have it ready when she gets home from work and her daughter's family will come over for dinner. She feels they are very close and there is a strong bond there. She stated, "If they need me to do something or I need them to do something we know we're going to be there for each other."

When asked if given the opportunity to do anything differently what she would do differently she stated, "There are probably some people I did not thank, I can think of being so impossibly busy that there were probably people that I know I ignored." She finds her regrets to be more in the "personal stuff." She was so tired when she was caring for her mother, some nights she would become easily frustrated when her mother could not sleep. She was working in her role as superintendent and trying to provide care for

her mother and she said that she was just so tired. She knows she may have not been as patient as she could have been. She worries about when her children were young and she worked so hard. It is more her personal life that she has some concerns or possibly regrets that she may do differently if given the opportunity. Overall, she feels good about her life and her life choices.

Her hopes and dreams for the future are to do whatever she is supposed to do. She stated that when she was getting her doctorate she remembers being asked, "What are your goals?" She stated, "I am fine right where I am." She sets goals for the organization, but she does not really set goals for herself. Instead, she believes that opportunities just happen. The right door has always opened at the right time and when it is time to move on she will know it is time to move on and the door will close and another will open. She is able to move on and not look back. She keeps herself focused on the task. She stated that she is generally content with the position of where she is and has always been content with whatever she was doing. However, she always wants to personally do better and accomplish more in any position she holds.

When asked if she had any suggestions or words of advice for gifted girls or other gifted women she said, "Always be yourself, that is my advice to anybody, always be true to yourself. If you're true to yourself you'll do whatever it is you need to do and you'll succeed, if you really stay true to yourself." She also said that when you try to please other people or when you try to be what other people want you to be then you are just pushing yourself. She said that she has pushed herself when she has not wanted to disappoint other people.

When asked about the importance of gifted identification she stated that she believes it depends on a student's support system, how strong they are, if they view the identification as internal or external expectations, and if it is about laying an expectation down for the person identified to perform a certain level. She believes that gifted kids are going to push themselves and that it can be too much sometimes. She reflected on students that she served over the years and how she watched a brilliant flute player who struggled with personal identity, trying to choose a career, and who struggled to choose a major. Then she watched one of her son's friends, who was gifted, who came to live at her house because he struggled to self-regulate and keep regular employment. She has seen gifted children struggle with suicide. Therefore, she thinks that identification depends on the support system the children have and the external expectations that are placed on them by others.

When discussing the role gender has played in her life and if she has felt any gender bias she stated, "I think one of the only times would have been in high school when the four of us girls were in physics." There were three or four different classes of physics and there were only four girls in the class, most girls were taking typing or home economics. It was obvious in the class that the boys caught on to the material faster than the four girls did, but the teacher paired the four girls together and we helped each other to understand, it just took us longer than the boys to understand. She also reflected on being a female superintendent. She knows there is some underlying bias towards women because when she first became a director of schools there were not many female superintendents in her state. Most superintendents only hold the position for about two or



three years, there is a high turnover rate. Now that she has been a superintendent for almost seven years, she feels that she is respected, but when you look around the room there is still a vast majority of men. She still has situations, such as chamber meetings, that she may be the only woman in the room. She feels she has earned the respect and that the vast majority of men will listen to her and take her ideas and suggestions seriously. However, there are times when it has been uncomfortable especially with some of the legislators that she has to work with. She believes if they are in her profession, they know her well, and they are in the city she resides in that she is in good shape. However, if with legislature, or a meeting among legislators that are not in education and not from her city then she will sometimes take the assistant superintendent, who is a man, with her so she will be taken seriously.

In conclusion, Mary stated, “We want the children to succeed academically, but we know that they have to have their physical needs met first. That's where we start.” Mary is a gifted woman. She is a daughter, wife, mother, grandmother, friend, educational advocate, and a superintendent. In her interview, I would say that her career is the most prominent area in her life. However, her role as wife, mother, and grandmother is equally important to her. She seems to balance everything seamlessly. Her heart and soul is focused on her community; whether that community is her personal family, her church family, or her educational family. She is a change maker and is committed to making this world a better place, especially for children.

## Chapter Five: Conclusions, Discussions, and Suggestions for Future Research

*“Story is a mode of knowing that captures in a special fashion the richness and the nuances of meaning in human affairs” (Shkedi, 2005, p. 9).*

*Exploring the Lives of Gifted Women* is a collection of narratives for five diversely gifted women. As a narrative qualitative inquirer, I sought to share the oral histories of this diverse population of gifted women. By utilizing the methodology and framework of narrative knowing, I examined the themes and patterns that emerged from the stories of Kasey, Isabel, Dominique, Elizabeth, and Mary. Neihart et al. (2002) stated:

Not all gifted females experience the same issues, but almost all face a combination of the following: dilemmas about abilities and talents, personal decisions about family, ambivalence of parents and teachers toward developing high levels of competence, decisions about duty and caring (meeting the needs of others before one’s own), as well as other personal, religious, and social issues.  
(p. 126)

In the summary of findings, a comprehensive evaluation of the findings for all five women from this study with an analysis of the main themes and patterns that emerged in the literature is reported. Next, a summary of each of the five women that reports the main themes and patterns that emerged in their narrative is shared. Conclusions derived from the research are analyzed for the research question and sub-questions. Finally, a discussion with the implications of the research and suggestions for future research are

discussed.

The interviews provided the data necessary to analyze the themes and patterns that emerged from the interviews to the existing literature on gifted females. Through the use of narrative inquiry, I had an overall orienting lens to guide me as to what issues related to being a gifted woman were important to examine and the people who needed to be studied. The narrative accounts of Kasey, Isabel, Dominique, Elizabeth, and Mary represent the uniqueness and individuality of each woman and their personal lived experience of being a gifted female. “What is gained from narrative knowing is memorable, interesting knowledge that brings together layers of understanding about a person, their culture, and how they have created change” (Etherington, 2013, p. 6).

Although each of these women were identified through a formal measurement (i.e., psychological evaluation) and were served in gifted programming, their experiences are vastly different. The age ranges were highly diverse, ranging from twenty-four to sixty-six years of age with a broad spectrum of lifespan experiences. The socio-economic status was also highly diverse from impoverished and transient to upper-middle class. The women ranged in ethnicities: African-American, Asian, Latina, and Caucasian. The levels of giftedness also ranged from moderately gifted to profoundly gifted. Three of the women were married, two had children, and one had grandchildren.

The five women graciously and candidly shared their personal lifespan experience of being a gifted woman, providing a rich opportunity for extensive analysis. For me to try to analyze every experience, with the wealth of data the interviews provided, would be impractical and unwise. While each facet, of each story, is full of a wealth of

information to learn about gifted women, it is not possible to compare or contrast each facet to the existing literature on gifted women. It would be impossible and unpractical to try to contain within this doctoral research project and it would overwhelm the important and significant details.

The data collected was the lived experience of the five participants which are real-world measures that are “complex, multi-layered and nuanced” (Etherington, 2013, p. 2). For the purpose of this doctoral research project, the analysis is limited to the aspects that relate to the research question and sub-questions. Four main areas of analysis are reported: summary of findings for each of the developmental phases in the lifespan (e.g., early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence, etc) for each woman, the common themes that emerged in the literature, each individual narrative story including the researcher’s observations, and the research questions and sub-questions. The focus of the developmental phases are to report characteristics the women demonstrated that reflect common traits in the literature for lifespan development of gifted girls. The focus of the literature are the themes and patterns that emerged from the literature and what characteristics the participants demonstrated through the data collected. Regarding the personal narratives of each woman it is the researcher’s observations and analysis of each narrative incorporating major themes and patterns from the literature. Finally, an analysis of the research questions and sub-questions summarizes the findings for the questions.

The summary of findings reflects patterns and themes that emerged from the narratives. This research project analyzed how the narratives reveal and inform the themes and patterns that exist in the literature. They are not evaluative and do not reflect

an analysis of choices or decisions participants made in their lives. They do not and should not reflect an analysis of what should have or could have been done in any situation or circumstance. The main intent is to share the stories of the lived gifted experience. Each narrative is a reflection of their personal lived story at this point and time in their life, told to this researcher, for this particular research project.

### **Summary of Findings**

The data revealed that each participant had a unique story to share; however, there are common threads that are evident when analyzing the data from the research project and comparing it to the existing literature on gifted women. The narratives revealed information about the lived experience of five diversely gifted women throughout their lifespan (i.e., early childhood, middle childhood, pre-adolescence, adolescence, young adult, adulthood, and sixty-five and beyond). The chart below reflects each participant's age, ethnicity, geographic location, socio-economic class in childhood and adolescence, current marital status, the number of children and grandchildren they have, and their highest educational level at the time of the interviews. Analysis of lifespan reflects to the participant's current age (e.g., Kasey is twenty-four, her lifespan analysis will end at young adult/adulthood whereas Mary is sixty-six so reflection will occur through sixty-five and beyond.)

This chart helps to inform the background of each of the women selected in the research study. The purpose of the study was to collect narrative accounts from a wide range of diverse backgrounds. The developmental evaluations are based primarily upon the narrative accounts of the participants.

Name	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Geographic Location	Socio- Economic Class (Growing up)	Marital Status	Children/ Grand Children	Educational Level
Kasey	24	Asian	Urban/ China	Middle Class	S	0	Graduate Student
Isabel	37	Latina	Transient/ United States	Poverty	M	0	Bachelor's Degree with some Post- Secondary Work
Dominique	47	Black	Suburban/ Western United States	Middle Class	S	0	Graduate Degree
Elizabeth	51	White	Suburban/ Midwestern United States	Upper Middle Class	M	3	Graduate Degree
Mary	66	White	Rural/ Southern United States	Lower Middle Class	M	2 3	Graduate Degree (Ed.S. & Ed.D.)

## Summary of Findings for Lifespan Development

### Early childhood.

#### *Kasey.*

The primary recollection of early childhood that Kasey shared was that she started nursery school at age two however; she hated school and would cry regularly. Her grandfather who was a high school math teacher had a former student who worked in the kindergarten classroom and volunteered to take care of Kasey in the kindergarten classroom. Therefore, Kasey had access to early formal education, but not necessarily

access to the kind of early education that advocates for gifted education seek for gifted children. She then remained in the kindergarten classroom for four years. Her parents were concerned that she was the youngest and smallest in the classroom and she felt as though she was bullied. Kasey felt she was bullied partly due to her size and lack of athleticism. She felt in kindergarten there was an emphasis on athleticism and she was not athletic.

Kasey's story of early childhood reflects asynchronous development where her intellectual, emotional, and physical abilities were not aligned. In the literature, it was reported that asynchronous development is when there is an imbalance between intellectual, emotional, and physical development and in addition, emotional development may not be synchronous with verbal ability. An imbalance or asynchronous development can cause frustration and lead to outbursts or meltdowns and it is an effect of overstimulation, overload, or being overwhelmed (Kerr & McKay, 2014). It is likely that Kasey was experiencing some of her problems with school and peers due to asynchronous development in early childhood.

*Isabel.*

Isabel shared that she "was born a woman." In early childhood, she recalled that she had an epiphany, "There is something going on socially that I just do not understand." She was very mature and did not relate well to her peers. She was bossy and told her classmates how to play and how to play appropriately with her toys. She also recalled being self-taught in reading and she could not recall a time when she could not or did not read. The literature reflected, in addition to asynchronous development, how

many smart girls were likely to read at an earlier age and have advanced vocabulary skills. Isabel was never formally identified as profoundly gifted, however she has been told by experts who work with the profoundly gifted population that she exhibits characteristics of profoundly gifted which also support the findings in the literature that the intensities and overexcitabilities, (e.g., intellectual overexcitabilities) are more pronounced in the profoundly gifted population. Isabel remained bored in the classroom and if she is profoundly gifted it could potentially explain why she was never appropriately challenged in school and had a very challenging time relating to her peers in early childhood. Although all gifted children experience these characteristics, profoundly gifted children experience them at a deeper level.

*Dominique.*

Dominique also reflected in her narrative that she could not recall a time that she could not read. She also recalled how many members of her extended family were able to read at an early age. She learned easily with only one or two repetitions and demonstrated intellectual overexcitabilities (e.g., taking anything apart she could get her hands on). She self-described herself as obstinate, precocious, and highly curious. Dominique, unlike Kasey and Isabel, had a mother who was a strong advocate for her needs. She advocated for Dominique to be placed in appropriate classes, which caused Dominique to feel more adequately challenged early in school. Although Dominique is African-American, her socio-economic class was more of a middle class upbringing. She had a stable, loving, and support family environment. Racism surfaced in Dominique's early childhood experiences through teachers questioning if she could be gifted because she was black.



She was even referred for special education because her teacher believed she could not possibly be gifted since she was black. However, her results indicated that not only was she not a special education candidate, she was gifted, and had the highest IQ of the student body population. The lack of teacher ability to accurately refer gifted students and the effects of racism that is found in the literature is reflected in Dominique's story of early childhood.

***Elizabeth.***

Elizabeth was identified as profoundly gifted at a young age and she cannot recall a time that she could not read. She does not remember anyone teaching her to read and her own son was able to read at a very young age. She also referred to herself as a very challenging child who was fiercely independent, similar to Isabel and Dominique. One could state that not only Isabel was born a woman but so were Dominique and Elizabeth. Although Elizabeth was identified early as profoundly gifted and attended private schools, she did not find them challenging and was bored in elementary school. Elizabeth, as Kasey and Isabel, had much turmoil in her early childhood and lacked a strong, supportive home environment.

***Mary.***

Mary had a loving, caring, and supportive home environment during early childhood and entered formal education in first grade, which is reflective of her age difference with the other participants and the requirements of kindergarten that changed over time. Her parents sent her to the city school district, instead of the county school district, so she would have greater educational opportunities. She has many happy

memories of her childhood and was very close to her mother and father. She could vividly remember a program in the primary school for non-graded classes and a professor coming to do research in her school. She did not recall asynchronous development or being an obstinate child, she also was not a highly emotional child, she feels like she related to her peers and adults well and was well balanced in early childhood.

### **Middle childhood.**

#### ***Kasey.***

Kasey's story reflects what is stated in the literature about having high self-esteem and working industriously to achieve in projects of interest. Although, she still felt disconnected from her peer group, she found literature, which she was very passionate about, and worked very hard to be accepted into the literature program. This is the time that she recalls working to her full potential, or finding her *flow*. However, her passion was met with hesitation from her parents and instead of going into the gifted literature track; she instead went into the gifted mathematics track. Once she was not able to follow her passion she fell into a period of underachievement. Although literature reflects there needs to be an additional emphasis on STEM careers and opportunities for girls, Kasey's story reflects this needs to be a choice that the girl makes for herself, not forced upon her by parents, teachers, or administrators. Kasey did not have a passion or interest in STEM programming and being forced to take the track of STEM caused her unnecessary emotional distress. Children need to be able to pursue passions and interests that are engaging and interesting to them. The literature regarding underachievement discusses how gifted children are not underachievers if they are achieving in an area of interest to

them personally. Unfortunately, many times parents and educators will inflict their own hopes, dreams, wants, and wills upon children which can cause underachievement. Kasey slipped into a fantasy world where her imaginal overexcitabilities took primary importance to escape from her reality of not being able to make choices for herself. The literature reflects nurturing talent at this age can prevent underachievement, but it must be of interest to the gifted girl where she feels she has a choice and voice.

*Isabel.*

Isabel recalled middle childhood holding the opportunity for talent development that is reflected in the literature through her sixth grade teacher. She found that autonomous learning was synonymous with her personal learning style. Her teacher potentially reflected her love of being an educator, which is also reflected in the literature regarding teacher relationships. Although her home environment was unstable, she found a safe place at school where she could engage in personal interests and pursuits. Sixth grade was potentially Isabel's best year in school. This was also Kasey's favorite year in school as well as Dominique's.

*Dominique.*

Dominique went to a new school in her fifth-grade year and she recalled being challenged on a higher level at the new school. She attended Chess Club, built a space rocket, and was able to work on creative projects. The literature reflects this is the time that some girls start going towards popularity pursuits instead of intellectual pursuits. None of the participants reflected a pressure to go towards popularity pursuits. It is possible since all of the participants were part of gifted programming that their

intellectual peers challenged them in intellectual pursuits. It was not encouraged in their peer groups to be popular and all five participants seemed to not be affected by the pressure to be the pretty girl, which is in opposition to what is reflected in the literature.

*Elizabeth.*

Elizabeth's narrative did not reflect significant memories of her middle childhood and she never attended high school. She was the only participant who did not attend high school. She was transient at this time, which is similar to Isabel's story, and she traveled extensively. There is no data collected that can be analyzed for Elizabeth's middle childhood.

*Mary.*

Mary began to develop intense forms of perfectionism in middle childhood and pre-adolescence. She is acutely aware this was an internal pressure, her parents, teachers, and peers did not place pressures of perfectionism upon her. She began to realize that she was a terrible perfectionist who placed extreme pressure upon herself. She is highly self-critical and she is not sure where it originated from except an innate characteristic. The literature reflects this is the time to engage girls and that they will work industriously in projects that are meaningful to them. However, many gifted children have perfectionistic tendencies that talent development opportunities can expose these extreme levels of perfectionism. This is an appropriate time for social and emotional, or affective support to help gifted girls understand what healthy and unhealthy perfectionism is. Mary had a teacher who tried to intervene; she even told Mary's mom that she wanted Mary to take a break from homework because she was doing too much. Mary remembered always doing

too much. This can be an indicator for parents and teachers to provide an intervention though coping skills to help overcome unhealthy perfectionism.

**Pre-adolescence.**

***Kasey.***

The literature reflects in pre-adolescence there is a shift in achievement, boys begin to outnumber girls in achievement, especially in STEM focused academics. The literature also claims that this may be due to parent and teacher attitudes that it is not acceptable for girls to stand out for their achievement or academic prowess. For Kasey, this statement would not be an accurate portrayal of her teacher and parent expectations. She was placed into the gifted math track, or STEM track, and there were very high expectations for her to be the best in her school. In her Chinese culture, Kasey shared that women are expected to achieve highly. Kasey and the other girls wanted to outscore the boys, they wanted to be number one, and that is what is expected of them. Nevertheless, she was not gifted in mathematics and she fell to number three hundred out of four hundred in the ranking system of her program, which in her culture was shameful. Kasey's story can inform literature that not all gifted girls want to excel in STEM, nor do they want the pressure to be the number one in a ranking system that tracks their progress. For highly sensitive gifted girls this environment can cause maladjustment issues and perfectionistic tendencies. STEM opportunities should be available to girls who choose to pursue the opportunities, not to force the opportunities upon girls who have no interest or passion for STEM programming. With the emphasis of gifted programming being upon strengths not deficits in a gifted child, it is only appropriate that

the opportunities be encouraged for girls who show an interest and desire to be involved in STEM programs.

*Isabel.*

Isabel dealt with major issues in her home life and she also faced racism during pre-adolescence and adolescence. Her mother left her and her sister alone for an unspecified amount of time and there was no parental figure, which caused an abnormal amount of stress, or toxic stress. Isabel dealt with imaginational overexcitabilities, which resulted in nightmares during this time. She managed to make good grades, but she did not put forth effort into her schoolwork, she was focused on basic survival skills. In regards to racism during this timeframe, her ethnicity took front and center because she was living in Arizona and the majority of the other children who were Hispanic spoke Spanish and were from Mexico. She did not speak Spanish and she was only half Puerto-Rican. She seemed more white than Hispanic. This caused unusual racial tensions within her school environment. She always felt different and with her home life being so dysfunctional and her ethnicity issues with other Hispanic students, she felt like she did not fit in or belong anywhere. This is where the literature is lacking; there are many children who extend the boundaries that are written in the literature. It is reported in middle school girls begin to underachieve, however, as in Isabel's story there are many causes for that underachievement including parental role models and support.

*Dominique.*

Dominique did not reflect what the literature states regarding pre-adolescence. She did not lose self-esteem or self-concept during pre-adolescence. Boys did not begin

to outscore her and she did not begin to underachieve. She was not given the message that girls should not speak up for themselves or show academic prowess. She was very strong in pre-adolescence and enjoyed her experiences in school. She was excited to try new adventures in school such as band and dance. She continued having a close relationship with her family. She remembered being obstinate and debating her teachers and she was a strong advocate for herself and her needs in school. She did not feel adequately challenged in school by her teachers, even algebra, but she liked the additional opportunities to explore outside of the academic classroom in creative and performing arts.

***Mary.***

Mary enjoyed pre-adolescence and remained close with her family, which is also evident in Dominique's narrative. She discovered she had a strong musical ability in middle school. She also did not feel the pressures that are reported in the literature for pre-adolescence. Mary did not feel like she lost her enthusiasm for learning, instead she felt inspired by the newly available classes (e.g., band). She did not have a decline in achievement nor did she feel that the boys began to outscore her. She also did not feel that she began to lack self-confidence, granted that she was still a terrible perfectionist, and she possibly always struggled with Imposter Syndrome, which will be discussed in depth under the analysis of perfectionism and Imposter Syndrome. In regards to the literature that exists on the lifespan for pre-adolescence, Mary's narrative did not reflect the concepts derived from the literature that exists. Mary had a very well-balanced and well-adjusted pre-adolescence according to the data collected.

## **Adolescence.**

### ***Kasey.***

The literature reflects that gifted females can be overwhelmed by the physical and emotional changes that are taking place during adolescence. In some ways Kasey reflected this by feeling that girls were too complicated. She seemed to relate to her teachers or navigate towards friendships with boys instead of girls. She stated in her junior year of high school that she “burned out.” She hit a place where she was failing chemistry and physics because she quit doing her homework and procrastinated. She admits she was in rebellion because she hated school. She retreated to a period of aloneness and was very depressed. This is when she decided to change from the STEM track to the literature track because she was failing. However, once she changed the trajectory she could not enjoy it because she felt she had disappointed her parents and was a failure in their eyes. Clark (2013) provided goals that gifted girls need to implement in order to continue achieving in adolescence. The first goal was to achieve independence, but Kasey’s narrative reflects that if independence comes at a price of disappointing your parents it may still lead to sadness and depression. Especially if you are a highly sensitive person who cares about your parents’ opinion of you. Also Kasey’s Chinese culture places emphasis on familial relationships. She so desperately wanted to please her parents, yet she could not force herself to be good at something she did not enjoy or find engaging. The literature also revealed that historically girls begin to lose their authentic voice and this trend is changing for millennials. However, this was not true for Kasey, most likely due to cultural expectations, which is reflected in societal



pressures. However, there are many girls, all over the world, that due to cultural or religious beliefs are not allowed to have an authentic voice. The conversation with Kasey leads me to believe this will be a challenge or external barrier for her for a long time. Even if she gets what she wants, to live life on her terms, she will never have what she really wants: acceptance of her parents.

*Isabel.*

Isabel had an opposite experience of Kasey, there were no expectations placed on her by her parents. She hardly knew her father by adolescence and her mother was anything but a role model in Isabel's life. Isabel decided for herself that she wanted something more for her life. Although she could have easily become an underachiever, and she did drop out of school for a period, she returned and decided she was going to college. She went to numerous high schools, in numerous locations across the United States, but she graduated high school. This was one of her greatest accomplishments. She stated that she always knew that going to college was her only way out of the cycle of poverty and abuse. That was not found written in the literature, however knowing the rates of underachievement and how many underrepresented populations come from cycles of poverty, it may need to be addressed in literature for future generations. Just as gifted education appears to over identify white, middle class and upper middle class families, the literature seems to reflect a home environment and school environment that is a white, middle class and upper middle class environment.

*Dominique.*

Dominique does present more like the literature that exists for gifted females,

although she would be considered a diverse population in gifted programming. This is where it is hard to classify individuals into categories because just like Dominique, not all African American children live in impoverished homes without adequate access to gifted programming. Her parents provided her with a safe, loving, supportive, and stable environment. She had the resources necessary to receive a quality education. She related more to the white population that she was clustered with in school than the African American population. She found high school to be an exhilarating and interesting experience. She attended a new performing arts magnet school. Although she is forty-seven years old, she did not feel like she lost her authentic voice. She always advocated for her needs and did not have any drops in self-esteem. She naturally and intrinsically followed Clark's (2013) list. One could argue that was due to her family structure and support. It is plausible to say that the women in the research study who had parents who provided a safe, supportive, loving environment had a greater capacity to more closely align with the pattern of the literature that exists on gifted females.

***Elizabeth.***

Elizabeth attended college in adolescence. She skipped high school and went directly to college. She lived alone, not in a dorm, in her own apartment in a downtown community. The literature that exists for adolescence again does not necessarily apply to Elizabeth. She did not conform to any patterns set forth in the literature. She also appeared to instinctively develop all of Clark's (2013) recommendations on her own, without the support or guidance of parents, teachers, peers, or role models.

***Mary.***

Mary had a positive high school experience. In the 1960's she was one of four girls who took advanced level math and science courses for all four years of high school. She played in the band and became first flute. She met her husband and he was the head of the drummers. Literature claims that gifted girls achievement in high school does not always translate to adulthood but Mary remained very successful and has achieved highly throughout her lifespan. She also seemed to instinctively develop Clark's (2013) suggestions. Mary seemed to know what she wanted to do with her life; she did not need specific help or instruction in planning her goals for education and work. She did not appear to struggle with keeping her authentic voice; she had a tremendous amount of support, even being a teenager in the southern, rural United States in the 1960's. She never felt the effects of a drop in self-esteem, except the perfectionism and Imposter Syndrome that has been discussed. This was present with her from middle childhood to pre-adolescence, there was not a spike or increase in her adolescent years that was reported, only a constant innate predisposition.

**Young adult.**

***Kasey.***

Kasey is still essentially a young adult at twenty-four years of age. She is attending graduate school at a prominent university in the United States and will return as an adult to China upon graduation. She hopes to complete her Ph.D., possibly in the United States or in China. Then she hopes to pursue a career as a school counselor where she can influence the social and emotional issues gifted children manifest. Literature

stated that most gifted girls go to college, which is reflected in her narrative. It also stated that many choose to wait to get married, which is also reflected in Kasey's narrative, although if she met the right man to marry she would be willing to get married soon. Literature reflects many are taking a gap year, Kasey did take a gap year. Literature also reflected that girls are going more towards humanities, which for Kasey, she feels humanities is her calling and her passion. She is very happy not to be going towards a mathematical degree, which her parents would have preferred. She has not necessarily felt academic challenge but she has felt unforeseen pressure through the United States evaluation system for school counselors. She became very stressed by the evaluation process that she had to endure for school counselors. One would think after attending school in China where her scores were reported and ranked for everyone to see that she would be comfortable with pressure to perform. This is a topic that the United States education system may want to consider about the pressure that is being placed on people through major evaluative processes. Finally, the literature discusses the role of mentors and Kasey has actively pursued mentorship programs and feels they are extremely beneficial. Of all the literature that exists on gifted females, Kasey's portrait more accurately aligns with young adulthood than any of the other lifespan data contained in the literature.

*Isabel.*

As a young adult, Isabel attended college, which supports the literature. She graduated with a degree in chemistry, which is in a STEM field, however as she worked in the field of chemistry as an adult she did not like the people she worked with, referring

to them as inauthentic, she left chemistry to be an advocate and teacher. Being a teacher aligns to her passion and calling, she loves what she does. Although, she is not a traditional teacher. She has influenced alternative education environments for gifted and twice exceptional students and as she stated she “piece-meals” her work today. She writes, leads professional development sessions, guides educators and parents into strategies for diverse learners, and is able to focus upon the twice-exceptional population. She married right after her undergraduate degree, which does not support the literature that says many women are waiting for their thirties to get married. Although, her marriage did end in a divorce. She won a Fulbright Scholarship, which allowed her to spend a year abroad in Thailand, which supports the literature regarding taking a gap year.

*Dominique.*

Dominique attended college right after high school and continued after her undergraduate degree to a master’s degree, which reflects what is shared in the existing literature. She found college to be more challenging, specifically in the conversations that she had with her professors. Although, she did not feel a true academic challenge until graduate school which she referred to as “academic hazing.” She also, as all of the participants, chose to go into a humanities field. She had opportunities in STEM but felt more drawn to humanities, specifically education. Dominique never really had mentors, except her mother, but she did not share experiences in college with mentors. Dominique has proven to be a good mentor and role model herself and participates in the mentoring program with her current employer. College is where Dominique was mostly influenced

by the effects of racism, although she did deal with racism in elementary and secondary school. During college, she mostly dealt with racism due to the area she lived in where there was a large population of Neo-Nazi's.

*Elizabeth.*

Elizabeth's young adult experience was after college; she graduated from college at twenty and worked until starting graduate school at twenty-seven. She was more of an adult in young adulthood and a young adult in adolescence. Elizabeth chose a career in sociology and strongly feels sociology is her calling and passion. When asked what her greatest strength was in the interview she quickly stated sociology. Again, she would not have been interest in working in a STEM field; she actually avoided mathematics to the best of her ability. She said that she chose a degree in sociology because she did not have to take math courses. Her narrative is reflective of the literature that exists that states many gifted women wait until their thirties to get married. She never felt the pressures of conformity in young adulthood.

*Mary.*

Mary attended the local college due to her boyfriend going to the local college. She could have had other opportunities but she chose to go to college with her boyfriend. That choice could possibly be considered conformity or a culture of romance/femininity. They married shortly after college, which for their generation women were getting married out of high school and not attending college, so in many ways Mary was pioneering the model of women waiting for college to marry. She completed a triple major and took overload courses each semester to complete the coursework in three and a

half years. She was anything but common for her generation of women. She also navigated towards a degree and career in humanities, more specifically education, although she had opportunities in science and mathematics. She felt strongly about her calling and passion of working in education and became a music teacher right after college.

### **Adulthood.**

#### *Isabel.*

The literature that exists on adulthood discussed varied experiences; Isabel started her adult experience as a chemist and transitioned into alternative education where she found her calling. Her experience has been vastly different from the other participants, except the choice to go into education; this was a common theme among participants, which was unintentional in the selection of participants. Isabel is married, this is her second marriage, and she does not have any children. She has not dealt with the Opting Out, Pushed Out, Mommy Wars, or what is termed as the Lucky Ones that was described in the literature. Isabel is thirty-seven so she has not reached forty, which is what is described for many gifted women as a mid-life crisis. Although, speaking with Isabel, it would not seem that she is headed towards a mid-life crisis. She is very happy and pleased with her life: self, career, and marriage.

#### *Dominique.*

Once Dominique graduated from graduate school, she began working as an educator. Shortly after she assumed the role as a Gifted Teacher/Differentiation Coach, which is when she feels she really stepped into her calling and passion. She is forty-seven

and she is single, never married, and does not have children. She is quite satisfied with her life and has no plans in the future for changing her situation. At forty-seven, she has no signs of a mid-life crisis. She enjoys traveling and still spends a significant amount of time with her mother, although they live over two-thousand miles apart.

***Elizabeth.***

Elizabeth married at thirty-one, which is supported in the literature and had her first child in her thirties, which again is supported in the literature. She chose to stay home and work in a consultative role that allowed her to focus on her children's needs (e.g., educational needs). She has homeschooled her children to ensure their profoundly gifted needs are met for almost fifteen years. She has in some ways dealt with the Opting Out, Mommy Wars, and in some regards the Lucky Ones. She reflected through the interview process that the interview questions have caused her to evaluate her future goals. She still has one young son and two teenage sons, and at fifty-one she is still imagining what her life will be like. She placed her husband's career as a priority, which is common for her generation, but she knows that she can achieve her dreams once her children are grown. She has a very different path from the other women who participated; it is a unique walk that many women, including this researcher can relate to. Placing your children's needs above your own wants, especially gifted children's needs, is a priority many women choose. I only had one child, whereas Elizabeth has three, and I had my daughter at twenty-four whereas Elizabeth had her children in her thirty and forties, but taking sixteen years to raise my daughter, which included homeschooling like Elizabeth, was a decision that I do not regret, just like Elizabeth. Elizabeth will reflect the literature



that states in their sixties many gifted women are just getting started. Her greatest accomplishment, like mine, is being a mother and providing for her children. That time goes too fast and is gone all too quickly. However, once her children are grown she has the abilities to achieve highly and contribute to society in other ways than motherhood. Although, I would predict that no matter what she accomplishes, her role and achievement as a mother will always outweigh any other accomplishments or contributions.

***Mary.***

In adulthood, Mary had two children who have also given her three grandchildren so far. She finished her graduate degrees, including an Ed.S. and an Ed.D. She also took time off to raise her children, which she does not regret. She started her career in education, and then took about fifteen years to work in a flexible environment while she raised her children, before returning to education. She never really dealt with the Opting Out, Pushed Out, Mommy Wars and was not classified as a Lucky One because she did not balance a full time career while being a mother. She did not appear to go through a mid-life crisis during her forties. Mary's narrative of her adulthood is not reflected in the literature that exists on gifted women.

**Sixty-five and beyond.**

***Mary.***

At sixty-six Mary is a superintendent or director of schools. She is actively involved in her community and has a strong familial relationship. She is married and her husband is retired. She does reflect the literature in regards to life satisfaction but no one

would call her “old age.” She is active and stays very busy with her professional career and personal pursuits. She is definitely not slowing down or skipping a beat.

An analysis of the lifespan literature revealed that the women do not reflect all of the themes that emerged in the literature. Some of the themes from the literature are represented throughout the narratives but many other themes emerged from the narratives regarding the lived experience of a gifted woman throughout the lifespan. One of the themes that emerged was the importance of relationships, specifically parental relationships. Since an analysis of the lifespan occurred, an analysis of the themes that emerged from the literature will be analyzed for the participants.

### **Summary of Findings for Themes from the Literature**

Predominant themes that emerged from the literature were relationships, societal pressure, social and emotional considerations, conflicts and barriers, characteristics of self-efficacy, and characteristics of feminine talent development. Within each of the themes that emerged, there were also specific sub-themes. The chart below describes the themes and sub-themes. A check mark indicates if a participant demonstrated the characteristic. This analysis occurred to highlight the data collected that reflected the common themes and patterns found in the literature. Multiple analyses occurred to protect the study from confirmation bias. In this analysis, specific examples of the themes and patterns were derived directly from the narratives. Although the chart reflects characteristics found in the narratives, other gifted characteristics may be present that are not listed on the chart. Many other themes and patterns emerged in the interviews that are not reflected in the literature.

Name	Kasey	Isabel	Dominique	Elizabeth	Mary
<b>Societal Pressure</b>	X	X	X	X	X
<i>Family, School, Peer</i>	X	X		X	
<i>Conformity</i>	X			X	
<i>Stereotypes</i>	X	X	X	X	X
Sexism/Feminism	X	X		X	X
Racism	X	X	X		
Multiculturalism	X	X	X		
<i>Underachievement</i>	X			X	
<b>Social &amp; Emotional</b>	X	X	X	X	X
<i>Overexcitabilities</i>	X	X	X	X	X
Emotional	X	X	X		
Sensory		X	X		
Intellectual	X	X	X	X	X
Psychomotor		X			
Imaginational	X	X			
<b>Conflicts &amp; Barriers</b>	X	X	X	X	X
<i>Internal</i>	X	X	X	X	X
Perfectionism	X	X	X	X	X
Loss of Belief in Abilities	X			X	X
Fear of Success					
Imposter Syndrome			X	X	X
Multipotentiality	X	X	X	X	X
Housewife's Syndrome				X	
Cinderella Complex	X				
Superwoman Syndrome					X
<i>External</i>	X	X	X	X	X
Choices about Marriage		X		X	X
Choices about Career		X	X	X	X
Decisions about Duty				X	X
Competition	X		X		
<b>Self-Efficacy</b>	X	X	X	X	X
<i>Feminine Talent Dev.</i>	X	X	X	X	X
Resilience	X	X	X	X	X
Periods of Aloneness	X	X		X	
Mentors	X		X		X

### **Relationships.**

Relationships included parental, teacher, peer, and self. All five participants had relationships in all four categories. The data revealed that relationships had significant influence in the women's lives. Relationships have the power to influence conformity and societal pressures. The literature revealed that relationships could influence one's personal and professional development. The participants who had strong relationships had more life satisfaction and happier memories of childhood.

### ***Parental.***

The literature revealed that parental relationships have a strong impact on gifted females. Kasey had a troubled relationship with her parents, she never felt they understood who she was or supported her wants, choices, and decisions. She had a very low satisfaction with her parental relationships and it affected her emotional and psychological development. She experienced periods of depression due to the strained relationship. Isabel had a very dysfunctional parental relationship. She lacked parental role models and was estranged from her father. Her mother eventually died from a drug overdose. Dominique had a very strong, loving, and supportive parental relationship and she has happy memories of her childhood. She said that her mother was her mentor. Although her father passed away, she continues to have a close relationship with her mother. Elizabeth also had a dysfunctional family in her childhood. She still has a difficult relationship with her mother but has worked through her relationship with her father as an adult and he is a part of her children's' lives. Mary had a very close relationship with her parents and had a happy childhood. She never felt her parents

placed pressure upon her and she felt very secure in her parental relationship. Both of her parents have passed away. The two participants who had a close relationship with their parents also had happy school memories, they feel significant life satisfaction, and have strong self-efficacy skills. It appears parental relationships could have a direct impact on self-efficacy.

### ***Teacher.***

The literature on teachers indicated that successful women often idolized their teachers. Kasey claimed that she got along better with her teachers than her peers. Her professors, especially in anthropology have been extremely influential in Kasey's life. Isabel idolized her sixth grade teacher; he possibly inspired her to be a teacher. Dominique liked her teachers; however, she also liked to challenge her teachers. She stated that she was never impressed just because of someone's title and was not one to just go along with her teacher's opinions or theories. Elizabeth did not share insight about her teachers. Mary remembered specific teachers, like her seventh grade teacher, but she did not elaborate on specific relationships or inspirations in the form of teachers.

### ***Peer.***

The literature on peers discussed gifted girls trying to hide or camouflage their giftedness to fit into a peer group. None of the participants felt this was a part of their narrative. Literature also stated that girls are more adept than boys and are able to pick up on social cues, but Isabel stated that she was acutely aware that she was missing something socially. All of the women participated in advanced programming, which also does not support what the literature stated in regards to gifted girls not wanting to

participate in advanced classes. The women also did not feel like achieving in middle school caused them to lose the acceptance of their peer group. Instead, they felt the pressure to achieve highly to be accepted by their peer group. It is possible that it was due to their peers being their intellectual peers, since they were all identified as gifted and talented and served in gifted programming. This could identify that gifted girls who are identified as gifted and served in gifted programming feel the popularity versus smart pressure less than girls who are not in gifted programming and are not identified as gifted and talented.

*Self.*

Regarding self, the literature discussed how gifted girls can lose their authentic voices and have dropped levels of self-confidence and self-esteem. These five women seemed to have high levels of self-esteem and continued to keep their authentic voice, except Kasey. However, as an adult Kasey is developing her authentic voice. The women seem confident in their gifts and abilities. Reflecting over the question if they consider themselves a gifted woman all five women indicated that they see themselves as gifted. Isabel struggles with seeing herself as profoundly gifted and Mary never felt she was exceptional in any way, but they do identify with being gifted and talented. Mary and Elizabeth shared with me that the interviews caused them to reflect and evaluate their life and choices they made in their life. It created a self-awareness within them to reevaluate what their next steps are and to be able to influence their future choices and decisions. The women all seem to love themselves and do not struggle with a relationship with self.

### **Societal pressure.**

The narratives indicated that all five participants dealt with societal pressures that were influenced by relationships. Societal pressures include conformity and stereotypes (e.g., sexism, racism, and multiculturalism). The literature revealed there are three basic forms of societal pressure: parental, teacher, and peer. The literature suggested that at some point in their life gifted females feel like they have to hide their giftedness in order to survive socially. None of the women seemed to feel they had to hide their giftedness, in opposition to this statement, the women actually felt they needed to demonstrate and display their giftedness.

### ***Conformity.***

The results indicated that one participant dealt with the societal pressure of conformity; however, it is a different form of conformity than what was reported in the literature. In the literature, conformity is concerning hiding giftedness in order to fit into a social group. Kasey demonstrated conformity when she adhered to her parents' wishes to not participate in the literature program but to participate in the STEM program. This was her conforming to their hopes and dreams of her future. It is conformity due to societal pressures closely related to cultural expectations. Kasey ultimately rebelled to their desires and made her own decisions about her career, but there was a period of time that she conformed to the cultural expectations of her parents.

### ***Stereotypes.***

All five of the participants dealt with some form of stereotype (i.e., sexism, racism, or multiculturalism). Not all of the participants dealt with the same forms of

stereotypes, some only dealt with sexism, others only dealt with racism, and still others had specific multicultural considerations. But at some point, in each woman's life, they dealt with some form of stereotype.

*Sexism.*

Four of the participants' narratives revealed sexism/feminism was a stereotype they faced in their lifespan. Dominique was the only woman who did not report any incidence of sexism. Kasey faced cultural expectations of females in her Chinese culture. Isabel faced sexism in her personal relationships with boyfriends and when she was a chemist. Elizabeth faced sexism in earning the same degree as her husband but being encouraged to take positions well below what she was capable of doing in professional endeavors. Mary sometimes faced sexism in her meetings with legislators.

*Racism.*

Three of the participants dealt with some form of racism or multicultural considerations. The two women who did not experience racism were Mary and Elizabeth, they are both Caucasians and did not report any incidence of racism. Dominique faced racism in elementary and secondary school with parents and teachers who believed African American students could not be gifted. She also dealt with racism in college with people who lived and worked in the community that she attended college. Isabel dealt with racism with classmates who felt she was not Latina because she could not speak Spanish. Kasey did not discuss racism or if racism had affected her by being a Chinese student in the United States. She mentioned that her experience in her program of study in the United States was not good but she did not elaborate as to what the negative



experiences had been.

*Multiculturalism.*

Kasey had specific multicultural considerations since she is from China, including parental expectations. The expectations that her parents had on Kasey are common in Chinese culture, however they made her feel very misunderstood. Isabel was in a difficult position because she is half-Latina, but does not know anything about her Puerto Rican background. Her grandparents shared very little with her about her heritage. She was estranged from her father and he did not share with her about the Puerto Rican culture. A white mother essentially raised her and she only knows that it made her feel like she was always half of something and did not fit in anywhere. Dominique is African-American, which she prefers to be called black. She was raised in a predominately white agrarian community and feels she has more interests that are regarded as white than black. She is proud to be black, but more than anything Dominique chooses friends and would like to be regarded for her mind and her interests instead of the color of her skin.

Multiculturalism is another area where a discrepancy appeared in the narratives compared to the literature. Dominique, Isabel, and Kasey cannot fit into the typical literature reflected for Asian, African-American, or Hispanic populations. The three women expand the boundaries and definitions that currently exist in the literature for women from diverse backgrounds.

*Underachievement.*

Three participants showed evidence of underachievement at some point during their lifespan. Kasey was underachieving due to the conformity that has been discussed

and the societal pressures she felt because of parental expectations. She did not like the program and path that her parents chose for her so she decided she was not going to participate which caused her to underachieve. Elizabeth's data is debatable if she ever underachieved. She achieved being a wife and mother through providing for her children's education and focusing on her domestic responsibilities. However, she could have achieved in professional contributions during the time she spent focused on her domestic roles. However, her role as mother took priority of professional endeavors at that time in her lifespan. It would be impossible to determine if she would have felt more accomplished or more highly achieving in the role of a professional. It appears that being a mother is her greatest accomplishment, which would indicate she was not an underachiever. This brings to light that at times underachievement is in the "eyes of the beholder." Which happens with gifted children. They may be achieving in areas that teachers and parents do not consider achieving however to the child it is important and it is an achievement. Isabel did drop out of school for a period of time, which could indicate she was underachieving, but it was a very short time and she returned to school. For all three women, if they ever were technically underachieving, it was for a very short period of time during their lifespan. The data reflects how complicated underachievement can be to define and determine in a person's lifespan, specifically a gifted woman's lifespan.

### **Social and emotional.**

The results indicated all five of the participants exhibited at least one gifted characteristic (i.e., overexcitabilities) that influenced their social and emotional health. For the purpose of the analysis, the social and emotional considerations are focused upon

the overexcitabilities. The five primary overexcitabilities are emotional, sensory, intellectual, psychomotor, and imaginal.

*Overexcitabilities.*

Of the five participants, three demonstrated emotional overexcitabilities. Emotional overexcitabilities deal with the intense experience of emotions. Kasey, from a very young age and throughout her lifespan demonstrated emotional overexcitabilities in her narrative accounts. Specifically when she started school and she would cry uncontrollably, this pattern continued through elementary school. In addition, her bouts of depression are common characteristics of emotional overexcitabilities. The other participants are Isabel and Dominique who shared emotional overexcitabilities in their stories. Two participants demonstrated sensory overexcitabilities in their narrative. Isabel demonstrated sensory overexcitabilities in her narrative through her love and appreciation of artwork. Similarly, Dominique has a love for the finer things in life (e.g., fine dining). Dominique attends Food Network events throughout the United States each year and has developed a palette for fine foods. All five participants demonstrated intellectual overexcitabilities. All of the participants indicated they were highly curious. They all enjoyed intellectual experiences that challenged them with higher-level thinking. All of the participants indicated that school was never quite challenging enough. One participant demonstrated psychomotor overexcitabilities, Isabel. Isabel indicated that she had nervous and impulsive habits. She also had a surplus of energy and needed physical outlets. Two participants demonstrated imaginal overexcitabilities. Isabel talked about how she had nightmares and Kasey shared how she escaped into a fantasy world

with romantic novels.

### **Conflicts and barriers.**

Conflicts and barriers were evident in the narratives in both internal and external characteristics. The internal barriers results indicated all five of the participants dealt with perfectionism at some point in their narrative story. Three participants dealt with loss of belief in abilities and self-confidence. One participant dealt with the Cinderella complex. Imposter syndrome was evident in three of the narrative accounts. All five of the women demonstrated qualities of multipotentiality. External barriers (i.e., choices and decisions about marriage; career; duty, nurturing, and caring) were evident as external factors for the participants. Competition was indicated in two of the participants' narratives. First, the analysis of the internal barriers will be reported followed by the external barriers.

#### ***Internal barriers.***

##### *Perfectionism.*

Perfectionism was evident in all of the narratives. Kasey's narrative reflected perfectionism in that she believed she had to be perfect in everything that she did to please her parents. The literature revealed that gifted girls would construe parent's expectations as a need to be perfect. When Kasey was not able to keep her grades at the top percentage in her class, she chose to not try versus try and not be perfect. In Isabel's narrative perfectionism is reflected in her having to be hospitalized when she left her career as a chemist because her identity was wrapped up in being a chemist. In Dominique's narrative, it is reflected in her assuming the role as a general education teacher and trying to be perfect in her lesson planning and delivery of her lessons to her

class. In Elizabeth's narrative, it is reflected in how she precisely tries to meet everyone's needs: her husband and her children. In Mary's story, it is reflected from her high expectations upon herself. Although each woman's perfectionism manifests differently, they all share this common trait.

*Loss of belief in abilities.*

Kasey, Elizabeth, and Mary at some point in their lifespan demonstrated characteristics of the loss of belief in abilities. Mary stated she never saw herself as exceptional. Literature revealed that girl's belief in high accomplishment could decline over time. Mary is still able to achieve and accomplish at high levels, however, she does not necessarily contribute her abilities to her achievement potential. Elizabeth believed she could achieve high levels in her professional career through the degree that she received, however, since she did not use the degree and she has chosen to stay home and focus primarily on meeting her family's needs. This caused a loss of belief in her abilities and her ability to provide for her family at the level of her husband. Kasey had a loss of belief in her abilities during middle and high school; once she was able to focus on anthropology, she had a renewed sense in her belief about her abilities.

*Imposter syndrome.*

Three out of five women demonstrated characteristics of Imposter Syndrome: Dominique, Elizabeth, and Mary. Dominique shared her experience with Imposter Syndrome is never really feeling as smart as people told her that she was. Elizabeth shared her experience as expecting to be pulled out of the line at graduation for her graduate degree and being told she did not pass the test. Mary's story reflected Imposter

Syndrome throughout her lifespan, she believes her accomplishments stem from luck, being in the right place at the right time, or another power out of her control.

*Multipotentiality.*

All five women demonstrated multipotentiality, or the ability to be good at multiple career choices. Isabel demonstrated multipotentiality in being able to be a chemist and a teacher, she also stated that she was really good at poetry. Kasey demonstrated multipotentiality in being accepted into both the math and the literature programs at school and in college. Dominique demonstrated multipotentiality in her ability to do well in dance, piano, ecology, and teaching. Mary demonstrated multipotentiality in her musical abilities and her strong teacher and administrative skills in education. Elizabeth demonstrated this through sociology, being a strong mother and wife, and her advocacy roles. All of these women have the potential to achieve highly in multiple areas.

*Housewife's syndrome.*

The literature revealed that some women choose to be a housewife and others have it thrust upon them. It also stated that for women who have had a dysfunctional family background, being a homemaker could be very rewarding for them. Through analyzing the data collected from the participants, the data revealed that only one participant could have potentially dealt with Housewife's Syndrome: Elizabeth. However, it is important to note that Kasey dreams of being a homemaker one day. Being a wife and mother is very important to her; possibly, due to how she felt her mother was not there for her. Elizabeth has not solely been devoted to being a housewife, and

personally I do not consider her a housewife, however; she has placed her personal interests and pursuits as a lesser priority and placed her family as the main priority. This decision has been satisfying for her and she considers making her children's education her priority and it is one of her greatest accomplishments. She maintains a healthy consultative business but her demands as a wife and mother take top priority. I felt a sense that she does *know* she could have accomplished more, she could have been in a high-powered executive position, but she chose to remain in a predominately-domestic role for the benefit of her children.

*Cinderella complex.*

The literature described the Cinderella Complex as women who are waiting for a man to "rescue" them such as Cinderella was. Upon review of the narratives, Kasey is the only participant that seems to have some characteristics of the Cinderella Complex. Only because she is so anxious about getting married and starting a family. She does not feel complete or whole without a husband and family. She is hopeful this will bring her the love and happiness she has been longing for since she was a young girl. Although, she does not completely fit the description because she has completed her graduate degree and plans to work in a school environment when she returns to China, she does have some characteristics of Cinderella Syndrome.

*Superwoman syndrome.*

Superwoman Syndrome is defined in the literature as the woman who strives to have it all: work outside the home, be the kindergarten room mom, coach the soccer team, fix a homemade dinner each night, create the Halloween costumes by hand, and

still wear size six jeans. The woman who believes she has to do everything and be everything without asking for help. In reviewing the narratives, Mary has some tendencies towards Superwoman Syndrome, but she does not necessarily fit the full profile. It is hard to determine if perfectionism or Superwoman Syndrome has been a prominent theme in Mary's life. She has tremendous motivation and drive, but she does feel an innate pressure to be good at everything. That was evident in her being a stay-at-home mother who sewed all of her children's clothing while being the PTO president, working on a graduate degree, and tutoring music students. She is the only participant who seemed to deal with this internal barrier.

***External barriers.***

*Choices & decisions about marriage.*

Isabel, Mary, and Elizabeth are the three women who have encountered choices about marriage. The literature revealed gifted women who marry spouses who are supportive of their professional and creative contributions are overall more satisfied. Isabel said that she is very satisfied in her current marriage and that she is married to a supportive spouse. Her first marriage was not as supportive and ended in divorce. She now has very high satisfaction in her marriage and attributes meeting a spouse who is supportive as one of the reasons her marriage works so well. Mary is also married to a supportive spouse. Her husband took an early retirement and she shared that he will have dinner ready after work when she gets home and that her daughter's family will come to their house for dinner. He has been supportive of Mary's role as Superintendent and takes on responsibilities around the house so she can focus on her responsibilities within the



school district. Elizabeth has a spouse that may be less supportive. Although they have the same degree, he has recommended in the past that she pursue positions that are below her potential and ability. Regardless, all of the women have had choices regarding marriage. They have varying degrees of how their spouse supported their personal and professional interests. Nevertheless, it does appear that how supportive their spouse is has affected their life satisfaction.

*Choices & decisions about career.*

The literature revealed that gifted women need challenge, contribution, and creativity in their careers. It also stated that women need to focus on passions and interests when selecting careers. All the participants have careers, except Kasey, however she is in graduate school and is actively planning for her future career. Isabel first started her career in chemistry and when she chose to leave her position, it caused some very intense situations because her value and worth was found within her career at that time. She referred to it as her greatest disintegration; nevertheless, it led her to find her true calling and passion in life. She found alternative education and was even able to author a book. She is now in a flourishing career and feels great satisfaction in the work that she does. Dominique found a career that allowed her to focus on passions and interests. She has a career that is challenging and she feels she is contributing to educating the next generation of gifted learners. She is able to incorporate creativity into the learning environment for a diverse population of gifted learners. Elizabeth, although she does not have a full time permanent position with benefits and retirement does have a consultation role, runs a parent group for advocacy, is involved in state led advocacy efforts, is a home

school mom, and presents at various conferences. She does a tremendous amount of work without having a specific title. She is busy contemplating what her *career* or *calling* will be in the future. Possibly more closely aligned with her graduate degree, but she had to make many decisions about her current career. Mary made many decisions regarding her career for many years, beginning with when her children were young and she chose to leave her teaching position to create a flexible environment at home. She created her own business in tutoring students after school in musical instruments. Then she returned to her teaching career, which led to a career in higher education and ultimately led to her role as superintendent. She has had the greatest potential to influence learning in her role as superintendent, which is challenging and at times creative.

*Decisions about duty, caring, and nurturing.*

The literature regarding decisions about duty regards how gifted women feel a responsibility to care for others before thinking about taking care of their own needs or wants. Gifted woman can feel responsibility for placing the needs of their children and spouse above their own, in this way it is comparable to Housewife's Syndrome. In the data collected, this was reflected in Elizabeth's narrative. Elizabeth has placed her children's needs, specifically providing for their educational needs, above her own needs. She does find talent development in being a mother and providing for her children. She stated that providing for her children was her greatest accomplishment. The literature also stated that when chosen "There is talent development for women in nurturing children, building strong primary relationships and making a home – particularly for women worldwide whose pasts are marked by dysfunction, lack of health services, and other

obstacles” (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013, p. 344).

### *Competition.*

Kasey and Dominique both indicated competition as being a theme in their narrative. During data collection, Kasey regarded how in the Chinese education system there is a ranking system. This ranking system created a competitive environment between Kasey and her peers. When she began to underachieve and was at her lowest depressed state of mind was when she was ranked three hundred out of four hundred in her academic program. The literature revealed there can be healthy and unhealthy competition. It also stated that girls need to learn how to deal with competitive environments because they interpret a winner and a loser. Kasey was feeling like a disappointment and it was not a healthy competitive environment, although, this is the cultural norm in the Chinese education system. The literature addressed how not everyone wins all the time and learning how to cope with loss is essential in the development of gifted women. Gifted women will not always win and learning how to lose is an important concept for gifted girls to learn. Kasey developed a flight or fight response and she immediately wanted to leave the math track to move to the literature track because of her ranking. Once she decided to fight she found out it was too late. She had placed into motion an irreversible outcome. Ultimately, she found greater success, especially in college when she chose a degree in anthropology.

### **Characteristics of self-efficacy.**

Characteristics of self-efficacy that emerged through the research were “determination, love of learning, willingness to take risks, and an indomitable will to

achieve goals” (Kitano & Perkins, 1996, p. 1). It also revealed other characteristics of high achieving woman as “cognitive and emotional flexibility, willingness to take risks and aim high, tolerance for making mistakes, persistence in the face of adversity, and the ability to resist the tendency to internalize limiting messages from the outside” (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013, p. 345). Feminine talent development, role models and mentors, as well as resilience are also common factors of eminent women. The results of the data collected from the narratives indicates areas of commonality between the five participants in self-efficacy.

#### *Characteristics of feminine talent development.*

Feminine talent development is regarding high achievement in an area women choose and making authentic contributions to that chosen area. Mary’s data collected in her narrative revealed as a superintendent of schools she is demonstrating the characteristics described about feminine talent development. It could be partially be due to her age of sixty-six and the ability to accomplish high achievement within the educational system. She is being able to influence a school district and their policies and procedures, which has a lasting impact upon the students, teachers, and parents within her district.

#### *Resilience.*

Resilience was also a common thread that was evident in the narrative results for all of the participants. Resilience is described as an internal locus of control, positive sense of self, or empowerment (Ford, 1994). Other characteristics of resiliency are autonomy, competence, independence, and self-sufficiency. The data collected and

analyzed showed that each woman had characteristics of resiliency in their stories. Kasey showed resiliency in her self-sufficiency to study abroad in the United States for her graduate degree and be willing to make choices about her career that her parents may not approve of but demonstrated independence and autonomy. Isabel demonstrated characteristics of resiliency through her positive sense of self and empowerment regardless of her lack of parental role models. Dominique demonstrated resiliency through her internal locus of control and positive sense of self. Elizabeth demonstrated resiliency in her competence, independence, and self-sufficiency of not only starting college in lieu of high school but also living independently in an apartment instead of the college dormitory.

*Periods of aloneness.*

The literature reflects that eminent women have periods of aloneness whether it is thrust upon them or self-selected. Three of the five women demonstrated periods of aloneness in their narrative accounts: Kasey, Isabel, and Elizabeth. The data revealed that Kasey retreated to periods of aloneness when she was in middle school and high school. It was a coping method that she used and during the periods of aloneness she spent a large percentage of her time reading romance novels. Isabel had a period of aloneness thrust upon her when her mother left her alone in middle school. Elizabeth had a period of aloneness when she moved into her own apartment in college at a young age. These periods of aloneness potentially allowed characteristics of resiliency to develop.

*Mentors.*

Role models and mentors resulted as one of the overarching themes that affected

the participants' self-efficacy. The literature stated that mentor relationships are a key factor among eminent women. Kasey, Dominique, and Mary revealed in the narrative accounts that role models and mentors were an influential part of their story. Kasey found the value and worth of mentors in college and sought out mentor experiences. Dominique found a mentor and role model in her mother. Mary also had a mentor and role model in her mother and she herself has been a mentor and role model for other women.

### **Summary of Findings for the Individual Narratives**

An analysis of the main themes that emerged from the literature was reviewed. The data that are being measured are the lived experiences, they are real world measures, and they are means of capturing “complex, multi-layered and nuanced understandings so that others can learn from the lived experiences” (Etherington, 2013, p. 2). Some of the themes that the literature revealed were supported, such as perfectionism, whereas the five participants did not demonstrate others, such as fear of success. It is evident that not all women demonstrated the same characteristics and themes. Although certain themes emerge in literature, not all gifted females will demonstrate the same characteristics, especially since the data that are being measured are the lived experiences. Now an analysis of each individual narrative will occur. It is important not only to research the characteristics of gifted women, but also to share the beauty of each gifted woman's journey and provide help, support, and insight for gifted girls and gifted women. The narratives themselves have shared each woman's unique story. The analysis will be an interpretation and reflection of the narrative observed by this researcher.

### **Kasey.**

Kasey embodies the essence of love. She is kind, compassionate, sensitive, caring, and full of love. Kasey demonstrates the characteristics of a kind and beautiful young woman who has so much potential to affect the world with love and compassion. She desperately wants a family and to be a good mom. She has so much love to share with a family. Although she was very close to her grandmother, she has never had a relationship in which she felt deeply loved, appreciated, understood, and respected. She has suffered much sadness and loneliness in her life. She has felt the effects of being different and had a difficult time relating to her family and peers. She is courageous and brave and although there is a sense of sadness and tragedy in her story, she is not a victim. She traveled to a foreign land to receive her graduate degree and to search for meaning. She was searching for a place where she belongs only to learn the privilege she left in her homeland are a treasure. As she returns to Beijing, a new life awaits her. The quest of finding and fulfilling her hopes and dreams continues; at twenty-four, her life has only begun to take shape and form.

The main themes and patterns that emerged in Kasey's narrative include societal pressures, especially from her parents and peers, including conformity and stereotypes. A societal pressure or external influence that resulted due to Kasey's parents' unrealistic expectations was underachievement. Kasey loved literature and worked hard to get accepted into the literature program in middle school; however, her parents expected her to attend the mathematics program that was offered because a science and mathematical ability is highly favored in her Chinese culture. This unrealistic expectation resulted in

Kasey coping with social and emotional issues (i.e., depression and underachievement). She quit doing her school work and fell into an imaginal world to escape her parents' expectations. This behavior of underachievement supports the qualitative and quantitative multiple case study that Baum, Renzulli, and Hebert (1995) performed to examine the phenomenon of underachievement. One of their findings underscored the emotional turmoil that might be experienced in dysfunctional families as a contributor to underachievement (Baum et al., 1995). Underachievement is evident, specifically during Kasey's pre-adolescent and adolescent years as demonstrated through her refusal to do homework and schoolwork instead retreating into a fantasy world of romance novels.

Kasey experienced numerous social and emotional factors (i.e., emotional and imaginal overexcitabilities), which ultimately influenced her abilities and talents. Conflicts and barriers that were primary components of her narrative included both internal and external barriers. She experienced many internal barriers (i.e., perfectionism, loss of belief in abilities and self-confidence). She also experienced a great deal of external barriers (i.e., competition and external pressure from her parents to succeed in mathematics and science although she did not like mathematics and science).

### **Isabel.**

Isabel embodies the essence of authenticity. She is a bold, brave, insurgent, and the epitome of a revolutionist. When I think of Isabel, I think of a woman who has embraced her individuality: she loves dance, music, and art; yet she has the mind of an engineer and chemist. Isabel embraces unconventional educational choices for gifted and twice exceptional children. She became a published author and alternative education



consultant. She supports coloring outside the lines and understands that life does not fit neatly inside a box with appropriate labels. She is familiar with embracing the eccentricity especially when life gets messy and it is necessary to develop grittiness. When using the word Latina or Hispanic it often represents Mexico, Central America, or South America; however, females from Puerto Rico and Cuba are also considered Latinas. Isabel has faced this misconception her whole life. Born into a blended white and Puerto Rican family she never felt she belonged anywhere. Being Latina people expected and assumed she spoke Spanish, when in fact she never learned Spanish. These challenges and obstacles are what helped her form into the unbelievable entrepreneur who is a mighty and strong advocate for gifted and twice-exceptional children. At thirty-seven, she has turned tragedy into triumph. She single-handedly turned her life from the cycle of poverty and abuse to a life that is healthy, functional, and meaningful.

A theme or pattern that emerged from Isabel's narrative was social and emotional factors such as overexcitabilities (OE's). The OE's identified are all five of the OE's: emotional, psychomotor, imaginal, intellectual, and sensory. In regards to psychomotor OE's, she always had an access of physical energy; she was always a fidgety person. She loves dance and was able to connect with dance early on. She has sensual OE's in terms of her appreciation of art. She also has sensitive skin and does not like to wear sweaters or anything too tight on her arms. She also feels pain in a way that she thinks other people do not. Her intellectual OE's identified are always wanting to know everything that she can know; being highly curious and inquisitive. She experiences imaginal OE's in the form of night terrors, especially when she was a

child, because of her active imagination. She would think of worst-case scenarios and worry what could potentially happen to her. She said, “I would really spin out at night when I was trying to go to sleep.”

Although, she never really dealt with Imposter Syndrome in her mind, she acknowledges that it is hard for her to wrap her mind around being profoundly gifted. Isabel wished she would have known how smart she was and what she was capable of accomplishing earlier on in her life. She thinks it would have saved her from a lot of anxiousness and self-doubt. She spoke with Annemarie Roeper’s protégé once and she told Isabel that she thought Isabel was probably profoundly gifted. Isabel recognizes being profoundly gifted would match the work and experience that she has had working with gifted children. She has come to terms with being a gifted woman but not necessarily being a profoundly gifted woman. She said, “The higher level of giftedness I have not quite overcome in terms of self-acceptance.”

In regards to underachievement, Isabel is unsure how much she could have accomplished if she would have been in the right environment with access to resources from an early age. She does not feel she was an underachiever but recognizes that she may have had a higher potential to achieve if provided with the right environment and support. She stated, “I mean I know I did not live up to what I could have lived up to. I could have gone farther, taken it deeper or done something bigger. However, I have always just done the best I could with what I have. So while I feel like an underachiever I do not think it is necessarily because I underachieved.”

Another theme that emerged in Isabel's story was perfectionism; however, Isabel deals with what she refers to as a strange sort of perfectionism. Her perfectionism is in regards to her behavior. She gets frustrated with herself, stressed out, and anxious when she does not present the self that she wants to present. It causes her to want to shut down and hide. She has very high standards but her high standards do not cause her to become crippled or unable to make choices and decisions as some forms of perfectionism manifest.

### **Dominique.**

Dominique embodies the essence of a genuine, fearless, independent, and perseverant woman. When I think of Dominique, the traits that come to my mind are strength, resiliency, an adventurous spirit, a poised, and a confident woman with wisdom beyond her years. Her infectious smile and laughter is bigger than life and embraces a person's heart with a warm hug and a feeling that you are accepted and welcome. She is a valiant warrior who would defend the loner, the outsider, and the outcast. People are drawn to her and feel an ease in sharing their personal stories of trial and tragedy with her. She has an aura of knowledge that far exceeds her forty-seven years and projects a confident, intelligent, and intuitive heroine. She loves traveling and has traveled extensively. She has a thirst for experiencing all the world has to offer. Dominique has an exquisite appetite for the finer things in life, especially the culinary arts; yet she has a remarkable sense of restraint. She is quick-witted, resourceful, practical, and self-controlled; a woman that you can always depend on.

One theme that emerged from Dominique's portrait was early reading which is

one of the common traits of gifted females in early childhood. “Academically gifted girls are usually precocious readers and most of the gifted eminent adult women were precocious readers whose talent was nourished at an early age” (Kerr et al., 2012, p. 648). Growing up in a predominately-white area of California and being a black female, Dominique felt many societal pressures (i.e., stereotypes and racism). Her kindergarten teacher referred her for special education services because she believed her behavior was more consistent of special education than giftedness. Consequently, the referral for special education revealed that Dominique is gifted. She was clustered with the same group of gifted children from elementary through high school. Many of the parents of the students she had been clustered with for over a decade commented she should not be in the gifted classes because she was black. Then she faced racism in college with white Neo-Nazis and with minorities who worked at the university, (i.e., groundskeepers). She faced racism through accusations of trying to act white because she enjoyed things like big hair bands in the eighties. People from various racial backgrounds: black, white, Hispanic insulted her with forms of racism.

Dominique had many relationship factors including parental, teacher, and peer that influenced her story. Most of the relationships were positive, such as her mother being a strong advocate in her life, which ultimately affected Dominique’s ability for self-efficacy. Social and emotional issues that Dominique identified were a strong sense of social justice; she recalled arguing with her teachers and professors due to her strong-willed personality. She had high intellectual OE’s such as her curiosity as a child and how she would take anything and everything apart to see how it worked. She stated that

her mother would send her to stay with her grandmother when she had enough of her constant inquiry. Conflicts and barriers that Dominique's narrative identified were perfectionism as evidenced in her devotion as a teacher and working herself to an impossible standard to meet students' needs because she knew what she was providing as a teacher was so important. She dealt with Imposter Syndrome and really does not see herself as "smart" as other's claim she is. She has a tremendous amount of multipotentiality but her mother's guidance helped her choose a career that she felt called to as a teacher. She has a highly competitive spirit.

**Elizabeth.**

Elizabeth embodies the essence of determination. She is fiercely independent and has an extremely strong commitment and devotion as a mother. She has sacrificed personal ambitions to meet her family's needs. She is capable of tremendous multipotentiality and can accomplish in any field that she chooses to place as a priority. Her goals so far have been to take appropriate steps to ensure her three children's needs always come first. When I think of Elizabeth, the characteristics that come to mind are pure elegance; a classic and timeless natural beauty combined with an insatiable intelligence. She is extremely well spoken and has a calm, confident, and mature demeanor. She is resilient and tenacious. She has faced some rather challenging situations in her life; however, she has always risen above the circumstances to be victorious in her endeavors.

Elizabeth's narrative reflects many of the common traits of gifted females explored in the literature review. One of these common traits is issues with relationships,

more specifically her relationship with her parents. As revealed in the literature review, childhood family experiences and parental attitudes have a strong impact on gifted females. “Pre-eminent among the influences on talented females are parents’ attitudes and beliefs about their children’s academic self-perceptions and achievement” (Neihart et al., 2002, p. 127). These obstacles with her parents helped her develop resiliency to overcome and care for herself. Ford (1994) stated that an internal locus of control and positive sense of self are common characteristics of resiliency. Elizabeth’s story reflects that she possesses both an internal locus of control and a positive sense of self, which results in resiliency. She was able to succeed and rise above the chaos in her childhood to become a nurturing and loving mother who places her children’s needs as a priority.

Elizabeth’s narrative identifies that she had some challenges relating to peers or building lasting peer relationships. The intellectual differences and asynchronous development are even more exaggerated for profoundly gifted people than for those in the gifted range. One choice that Elizabeth made was to attend college and forgo a high school education because of her intellectual potential of being profoundly gifted. Her intellectual abilities were well beyond that of her same age peers. Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross (2004) stated, “For profoundly gifted students, for example, AP coursework may need to be combined with grade skipping, taking college courses early, and even going to college early” (p. 32). Elizabeth’s early college experience was partly due to her family’s dysfunction; however, it again demonstrates her resiliency. It also provided her with a necessary opportunity for self-efficacy that ultimately led to her growth and development. It supported her understanding as a mother; she is acutely aware of her profoundly gifted

children's needs and is able to advocate on behalf of her children's needs. One example of her advocacy efforts is that they are able to attend university level courses to have their needs met specifically in mathematics and science.

Themes of societal pressures that emerged in Elizabeth's narrative were stereotypes (i.e., feminism, sexism, and choices and decisions about marriage and career). Gifted women can feel guilty for choosing a career over starting a family (Arnold, 1993, Randall, 1997). Sometimes gifted women feel their husband or soon-to-be husband's career is more important than their own. Randall (1997) stated, "Women's careers have a lower status attached to them, even though the amount of schooling required for the career may be equal" (p. 43). Many times gifted women will choose to allow their husband to get started first because they believe or are convinced that his career is more important for providing for the family (Randall, 1997). This was evident when Elizabeth graduated from higher-level education with the same degree her husband received. Although, collectively, they chose to pursue her husband's career because they felt he would be more prosperous and she willingly chose to focus on her duties and responsibilities for care and nurture it is obvious that she had every ability to achieve at the same high level that her husband did. Arnold (1993) discussed that, "Although gifted women equaled or excelled men in school achievement from first grade through college, after school days were over the great majority ceased to compete with men in the world's work. [This is not due] to lack of ability" (p. 2).

One could argue that underachievement was a factor in her life because Elizabeth could have pursued a high-level corporate career; however, another perspective to

consider is that she knew the importance of a family. Reis (2003) stated, “There is no clear path for any of us, as our lives and creativity are both more connected with our love for our family and our friends and are more diffused than the lives and creativity of our male counterparts. Because relationships are central to the lives of most gifted and talented women, they often run at parallel levels of importance to their work” (p. 155). Elizabeth continues to actively pursue very important and meaningful work and is making significant contributions to society. One of her greatest contributions is as a mother and coming from a dysfunctional family in her childhood is meaningful work for her. “There is talent development for women in nurturing children, building strong primary relationships and making a home – particularly for women worldwide whose pasts are marked by dysfunction” (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013, p. 344).

Elizabeth not only faced choices and decisions about marriage and career but also about duty, caring and nurturing at a greater level than any of the other participants in the study. She made selfless decisions to allow her husband’s career to take front and center while she focused on starting a family and taking on the primary role as the nurturer and caregiver. She has very successfully balanced being a wife, mother, and professional on her terms and conditions. She sees many future opportunities to consider and in her early fifties, she is only getting started in defining herself. Kerr & McKay (2014) stated, “There comes a point in a smart woman’s life when she wonders, ‘Is this all there is?’ This is the time that women begin thinking about what they always dreamed of being or what they imagined themselves being before life happened” (p. 211). Elizabeth has always had many options, as multipotentiality is one of her dominant traits, and she can



be successful in any endeavor that she chooses to pursue. Kerr & McKay (2014) stated, “Despite all manner of setback and struggles, these women used their adaptability to transform their lives and create a new narrative” (p. 217). Elizabeth contains the potential and intellectual ability to accomplish anything she sets her mind. She is currently in a season of her life that is primarily dedicated to being a mother and celebrates the time she has been dedicated to being a mother. She would not trade the time that she has had with her children for the world. She has established a stable, predictable, and safe environment for her children. In hindsight, she admitted she might consider making some different choices. She does recommend that younger married women consider all of their options before placing their husband’s career before their own. In retrospect, Elizabeth has lived a very fulfilling life, as a profoundly gifted woman.

**Mary.**

Mary embodies the essence of a true blue, highly committed, and faithful leader. Family, kindness, humility, and southern hospitality are a few of her characteristics; however, she is a strong, powerful, and influential leader. When I think of Mary, I think of a public education superintendent who is devoted to educational excellence, meeting the needs of the whole child, and providing appropriate access to education and health equity for everyone. She is intense; driven, with deep perfectionistic tendencies, has extremely high expectations of herself, and possesses strong leadership skills. She is kind, sincere and honest with extremely high standards, ethics and morals. Family is embedded into her every breath; however, her family extends to her faculty, administration, teachers, students, and parents. She is constantly busy and is always

trying to implement a new initiative: whether it is free and reduced lunch access, meal backpacks for the weekend, summer food trucks, student day at the local university, or free medical clinics inside schools. You can catch her fast and furiously writing grants to obtain funds for her district and then running over to attend the local basketball game at the elementary school. She is a change maker and has changed and shaped the community, where she was raised since childhood, in a very positive way.

Mary's story reflects numerous traits and characteristics of gifted females reported in the literature review. One of the most prominent traits I discovered in Mary was relationships; she had a strong parental relationship with exceptional role models as parents. "Pre-eminent among the influences on talented females are parents' attitudes and beliefs about their children's academic self-perceptions and achievements which often supersede children's self-perceptions about their own performance" (Neihart et al., 2002, p. 127). Mary shared that her parents never told her what to do or placed their own expectations on her but supported her in whatever endeavors she chose. One of her fondest memories was practicing the piccolo endlessly in the kitchen, she realized it must have been so annoying and irritating to her parents, but they never yelled or screamed at her to stop playing the piccolo at midnight in the kitchen. She was able to model that behavior to her own children. She shared how her parenting style was to support her children, they are honest with each other, but she does not project her ambitions for them on her children. Possibly due to her parents supportive measures Mary never felt pressure to rebel or challenge authority. She was not sure if it was due to being in a gifted program and having access to intellectual peers or other factors but she never tried to "dumb it

down” or consider that being pretty was more desirable than being smart. Callahan & Cunningham (1994) found that middle school gifted females avoided “displays of outstanding intellectual ability and searched for better ways to conform to the norm of the peer group” but this was not the case for Mary (p. 4). She was secure in her parent, teacher, and peer relationships.

Being challenged in high school through taking higher level math and science courses when other girls were taking home economics courses could have also supported Mary’s confidence in her abilities. Although, she was an extreme perfectionist and hid her work from her teacher’s due to fear of failure, her motivation for excellence compelled her to complete higher-level coursework. Rimm (2007) stated, “While the pressures of perfectionism may lead to high achievement motivation, it may also lead to underachievement. In important ways, perfectionism is very different from the motivation for excellence” (p. 247). Mary’s low self-concept, unrealistically high expectations, and perfectionistic tendencies could have been why she left her teaching job after her first year of teaching. She stated that when she ran into her former principal and he told her what a good teacher she was, she would have stayed if she had known that. It is very possible that unrealistic expectations and perfectionism caused her to leave her first teaching position. However, she turned that obstacle into a positive in her life by tutoring over sixty music students and starting a family. She found value in being “home” during such a crucial time of development for her children.

Her parent’s example of showing care and compassion for other’s needs provided a foundation for Mary and her high social justice advocacy. She works diligently to

ensure students and families basic needs are met in her school district. At sixty-six years old, she has no plans to retire from being the director of schools anytime soon. Although her husband took an early retirement, she is not skipping a beat. Her work has brought tremendous value to her community. Recently, when her district had to close for a snow day she ensured schools were open for any student who needed a safe place during the regular school day. She also made sure the school cafeterias were open to feed anyone in the community under eighteen years of age. She also sprang into action to ensure all students had coats and gloves. During the interview she shared with me that when it is time to move on she would just know it, but she never gave an indication that she would consider retiring. Her actions have demonstrated that serving and supporting people is so ingrained into her fabric that she will work in some capacity until the day of her last breath. Her legacy will last for generations and although she dealt with some forms of feminism and sexism over her lifespan, she never let it stop her or even offend her; she has not allowed it to be a part of her life story.

### **Summary of Findings for the Research Questions**

The themes and patterns that emerged from the literature was analyzed as well as the individual narratives, now the focus of analysis moves to the research questions. The research questions influence the research study and the questions that are asked during the interview process. The focus of the research study was: *What do the narrative stories of gifted women reveal about the lived gifted experience?* The sub questions supported the research questions and divided the analysis into lifespan, internal characteristics, external influences, and characteristics that influence self-efficacy. In the analysis of the

research questions, the impact that the project had upon the women is analyzed as well as shedding light upon important themes that will continue to influence the literature regarding the lived experience of being a gifted woman.

**Research question: What do the narrative stories of gifted women reveal about the lived gifted experience?**

The research revealed, primarily, that each gifted female's lived experience is unique and different. Sometimes gifted women possess characteristics and traits that the literature on gifted women reveal, however many times their lived experiences do not reflect themes and patterns in the literature. Based upon the relationships in their lives (e.g., parental relationships) and the foundation (e.g., extended family, cultural considerations) of their circumstances they may or may not reflect what the literature reveals about gifted women. Just as each individual's fingerprint is different and cannot be compared, so are each gifted woman's narrative. Where one is born, whom they are born to, and what available resources one has available to them can influence and shape the narrative of a gifted woman. This study provided a voice for five gifted women to share their story of living the gifted experience. This research study may influence the field of gifted education because the common themes and patterns that emerge from the research adds to the existing literature on gifted women, however the most powerful influence this study had was providing a voice to each gifted woman who was interviewed.

Shkedi (2005) described how in narratives [we] "tell stories about ourselves that are historical, explanatory, and in some way foretelling of the future" (p. 11). Sharing

their individual stories allowed the participants to reflect upon their past, consider their present, and reevaluate their future. It is foretelling of their future because they are able to shape their future narrative into a story they are excited and proud to share. Interviewing a diverse population of women, I anticipated and predicted a variance in narratives, but I was surprised at how profound the differences were. Some of the women interviewed are married, while others are not. Some have children, others want to have children, and others are satisfied not having children. Although there was a diverse range of ages, ethnicities, geographic locations, and socio economic classes there were many similarities (e.g., all are involved and advocate for gifted education, all deal with some form of perfectionism). Their individual stories also revealed many differences, however they have one common truth; they are all gifted women.

This researcher realized that each participant's truth would be her own unique, individual truth. If I interviewed her sister, mother, or grandmother the story would change. "The truth of [our] stories is not the historical or scientific truth, but rather something which can be called a 'narrative truth'" (Bruner, 1990, p. 111). Each of these women revealed that the lived gifted experience is their personal story; it is their narrative, their journey in life. That is one of the most profound findings of this research study and ultimately answers the questions of what the lived experiences of gifted women share. Each individual story is to be respected for its own unique perspective. It is the woman's *voice*, her truth, her story, her unique fingerprint.

Kasey struggled to find her authentic voice due to her parents' expectations and pressures. Although she battled depression and underachievement in an attempt to find

her voice, she overcame the obstacles in her life through persistence and perseverance. She left science and mathematics, to her parents' discontent, to pursue a journey in school counseling. Although she feels her parents do not respect her life choice of leaving science and mathematics, it is her choice, her story to write. There has been hardship for her along the way, even in coming to the United States, which she imagined would be a dream come true. Now, after coming to the United States, she desires to return to Beijing and start a school counseling program within the public education system in Beijing. She has a high and lofty goal but at twenty-four years old, her story has only begun to be written. Shkedi (2005) explained:

Experiences themselves do not exist independently. We experience them as parts of a temporal whole, and they get their meaning from the totality of the whole to which they belong. The story tells us in a meaningful way what life itself is about. This implies that the meaning of life does not exist independent of the stories that are told about it. Thus the stories told about life in fact change it and give it more meaning because it is lived according to a narrative script. (p. 11)

Dominique came from a loving and supportive family however, her life was not without challenges. She overcame various forms of racism during her lifespan and persevered to create a life she truly enjoys. She is highly respected in her community: by her students, parents, fellow teachers, and administrators. She is in a season of her life where she is able to see the fruits of her labor through hearing her students' narratives of how they are going on to pursue their dreams due partly to the influence she has made in their lives. She is a forty-seven-year old, gifted and talented, single black woman who is

full of adventure and living life to the fullest. She has traveled the world and loves to experience the finer things in life, such as world-class dining and Food Network food festivals. She is very close to her family, especially her mother, and she has many close friends. She is a leader, mentor, and is involved in helping people whenever she can.

“The question of personal identity is embedded in the unity of life, the coherence of one’s life story, and an individual’s choice to make one kind of unity rather than another in his or her life” (Shkedi, 2005, p. 12). Dominique has developed self-actualization with her gifted and talented characteristics and her keen self-awareness allows her to mentor the next generation of gifted girls.

Isabel’s story revealed that not all gifted children come from loving and supportive homes. She came from an impoverished home that was neglectful. She felt the effects of abandonment as a young pre-adolescent. She attended multiple schools due to her parent’s transient lifestyle and felt as though she was isolated from extended family members. Her ethnicity of being half Latina and half white caused challenges within the boundaries of racism. There were false expectations placed upon her because she was Latina to know and speak Spanish fluently. She never felt as though she belonged or fit in anywhere because she was half Puerto Rican and half white which caused her to feel like she was not whole.

She also dealt with sexism the majority of her life. She recalled when she was a teenager she loved music. One of her hobbies was learning everything about her favorite artists, for example, when the band was formed, why the band broke up, how they became other bands, and the bootleg albums they produced. She never realized it was



seen as a cool boy thing to do. So, she feels her boyfriends would find her hobbies and interests weird because she knew more than they did about the Indy and punk rock bands they listened to and would feel uncomfortable that a girl knew more than they did, which made her feel rejected as a female. She said, “It was like the first time I felt rejected because of my gender because I was not living up to some gender ideal.

As a female chemist, she also felt the effects of sexism. In college when she tutored chemistry with another classmate who was a male. She said people would get help from her and then they would go check the help she gave them with him. She strongly feels it is because she was a female chemistry student. When she was living in Thailand, she felt like trying to be a woman chemist was impossible. Where she lived in Southern Thailand it is much more Muslim and traditional. She had problems in the lab. If something was broken in her lab, she would ask the maintenance person if they could fix it and it would never happen. Then she figured out that if she asked her boyfriend to ask the maintenance man to fix it, then he would fix it. She also had problems with the male students wanting to learn from her. Another form of sexism she endured was that male chemists made more money than the women chemists did. She also dealt with discrimination with the other women chemists because they did not have it easy starting out and they wanted to let her know that she was going to suffer because they suffered. She strongly feels as though she has dealt with sexism for the duration of her life.

Elizabeth’s narrative revealed the lived gifted experience is not always an easy road to navigate. Many times the higher the multipotentiality and intellectual ability; the

more intensity one will experience and potentially greater challenges and struggles to overcome. Giftedness many times includes intense feelings, and when you, your children, and your husband are all profoundly gifted with various overexcitabilities and super sensitivities, living under the same roof can become challenging. Living with intensity is reflected in Elizabeth's narrative along with resiliency. Her narrative reveals that it can be hard to relate to people who do not have the intellectual ability that you have, that is why it is so important for children to have access to intellectual peers within the classroom. It also revealed that sometimes you have to be the voice of reason even when the adults in your life are not making smart choices and decisions; as a parent it is required to put other's needs, especially those of your children before your own wants. Elizabeth reflects the willingness to seek out wholeness and balance when everything around you feels like it is spinning out of control. She learned early in life the art of coping and specific strategies to help cope with characteristics that are common to gifted individuals.

“Discovering the overexcitabilities provides a positive interpretation of negative-seeming personality traits, and perceiving the obstacles, pains, and struggles of one's life as the necessary steps in the direction of personal evolution can fundamentally change the effects of those obstacles, pains, and struggles” (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009, p. 230)

Mary's narrative reveals the benefits and struggles of high social justice intensities. Although they are beneficial in changing people's lives, it requires a drive and passion that causes Mary to work tirelessly. Mary has changed countless lives through being a superintendent in a diverse school district. She has ensured that all children have free and reduced breakfast and lunch readily available, even in the summer and on snow

days. She has brought social workers into all of the school buildings that she oversees. She is fighting to get medical care in schools for families to be able to access. She has shaped the vision of the school through emphasizing the “whole child” and attending to a child’s social and emotional needs as well as physical needs and academic needs. A connection to her care, concern, and compassion comes from the examples she had as role models: her parents. Her parents modeled for Mary what it meant to look out for neighbors who had less than they had and who were from a different racial background, even in the early fifties, in a rural southern community. Her father also developed the first bus program to connect rural students to city schools. Hard work, good morals and ethics, care and compassion, and making a difference was modeled her whole life. In addition, she had the opportunity to participate in gifted programming and was appropriately challenged to learn beyond what was expected of girls in the fifties and sixties. She was placed with like-minded peers early in her education. The roles of mentors and access to gifted programming are themes that were foundational for Mary’s story. Daniels & Piechowski (2009) stated, “Some gifted individuals seem to sail through life on untroubled waters, fully enjoying the opportunities available to them, while others battle inner storms and strong seas that seem to batter them from all sides” (p. 169). Mary’s narrative does not necessary reflect that she is sailing through life; however, her positive attitude and motivation to excel and exceed provides her with the resiliency to have a narrative that reflects the power of transformational leadership.

**Sub-question one: What is the personal experience of being a gifted female in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood? (Lifespan)**

One of the main findings about the personal experience of being a gifted female through the lifespan is when women find their calling in life they begin to feel a sense of accomplishment and worth. The women who have found their calling in life have a feeling of a life well lived with no regrets. Mary found it hard to name what she would change if given the opportunity. Ultimately, the research revealed some common themes that emerged from the interviews for each period of the lifespan (e.g., early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence). In early childhood, one of the themes was reading early. The majority of participants cannot remember a time they could not read and do not remember learning how to read. Isabel recalled teaching herself to read in late preschool. Early access to school is another theme that emerged from the interviews. Dominique, Isabel and Mary started school in Kindergarten and Elizabeth and Kasey started school in preschool; however, Kasey moved to Kindergarten early. Kerr et al. (2012) advocates for early entrance to school through the means of early admission to kindergarten or skipping kindergarten and starting first grade early to meet the needs of young gifted girls. All of these gifted women may have been challenged on a higher level because they each accessed early entrance to school.

During middle childhood, Kerr et al. (2012) reported that gifted girls' self-esteem is high. They will work "industriously and achieve in projects that interest them" (Kerr et al., 2012, p. 648). Four of the participants confirmed this. Kasey remembers her highest and greatest achievement at this timeframe, around fifth grade, when she was working

hard to get into the gifted literature program in Beijing. She was very passionate about attending the gifted literature program and admitted this was the time in her life that she remembers working hard to achieve and excel in her academics. She knew that she could always get a good grade in school but if she really applied herself to studying, she could accomplish far more than she was normally achieving. Isabel recalled sixth grade being her greatest year in school, mostly due to her teacher's understanding of the needs of gifted students.

Pre-adolescence is often referred to as a challenging time in one's life. Olshen & Matthews (1987) coined the phrase "disappearing giftedness" which means that gifted girls begin to underachieve and potentially underachieve through the remainder of their lifespan. I did not see evidence in the data to substantiate this claim. Isabel, Kasey, Dominique, and Mary were all part of gifted programming beginning in elementary school and Elizabeth was identified as profoundly gifted in first grade, but none would say their greatest achievement or challenge occurred in elementary school or earlier. Isabel had a terrible experience in middle school, especially seventh grade, but much was due to her dysfunctional family. Middle school seemed to be significant for Kasey and Dominique. Dominique was challenged with new schools in middle school and high school. Although she never had to study to receive straight A's she felt adequately challenged in higher level thinking skills. Elizabeth never attended high school but was accelerated into college at sixteen years of age. Mary was challenged by taking accelerated classes such as physics in high school when other girls were taking home economics.

Kerr & McKay (2014) reported girls experience a greater decline in body image and social self-esteem in adolescence (p. 142). None of the women in the study reported a greater decline in body image or social self-esteem in adolescence. For Elizabeth it could have been due to the fact that she was in college, she did say that she chose a sociology degree because she didn't have to take math classes and at that time her identity was caught up in her intellectualism so taking a class she knew she would not be successful in was not an option. Mary, Dominique, and Kasey all felt being part of gifted programming during adolescence kept them focused on their intellectual ability and they never felt the pressure to "dumb it down" because the expectation with their peers was being smart. Isabel struggled with the transient lifestyle in high school, she even dropped out of school for a period, but she returned to school and graduated. This could potentially determine that gifted girls who are in gifted cluster models with intellectual peers or participate in gifted programming are less likely to have adverse affects of the girl poisoning culture or pressure to "dumb it down." Further research would need to be conducted to assert these claims.

During young adulthood, college and relationships are prominent themes in young gifted women's lives. All the women interviewed went to college; none seemed to be challenged with peer pressure in college. Mary and Kasey both had relationships in college. Mary married in college, but Kasey broke up with her boyfriend due to his inability to balance their relationship and college expectations of excellence. Elizabeth was married at the end of graduate school. Isabel moved to Thailand with her boyfriend after college but did not share specific events from their relationship. Dominique did not

expand upon her dating history only that many boys in her intellectual group did not know if they could date her because she predominately hung out with white boys and she was a black girl. She felt that they did not know if an interracial relationship was appropriate. Which connects back to the racism that she encountered and still encounters. She still struggles with finding the right men to date. One important note about the period of young adulthood in the literature review is that for some women this is a time to thrive and challenge cultural stereotypes or break external barriers that have prevented them from succeeding or living life on their own terms. This is true for Kasey; she ultimately changed from a trajectory in mathematics to anthropology. She broke out of the box her parents tried to place her in and began living life on her own terms. She found her passion in anthropology, which led her to her graduate school experience in the United States. That ultimately led her to school counseling which is what she feels is her life's work or calling in life.

Regarding adulthood, what the personal experiences of being a gifted woman revealed in the interviews, was that adulthood is a time for varied experiences of gifted women. Four of the participants went on to pursue goals of higher education in graduate school: Kasey, Dominique, Elizabeth, and Mary. Isabel had a disintegration from chemistry and found her calling in life to work with gifted and twice exceptional children but only after having a serious episode, which required hospitalization. She married twice but never had children. Elizabeth and Mary were married and both had children during adulthood. Mary also became a grandmother. Kasey would love one day to get married and have children. Adulthood memories showed that each woman has found what works

for them individually. They were true to themselves and pursued being the best person they could be. Their gifted characteristics is just simply a part of their life and they do not necessarily view themselves through a vantage point of being a “gifted woman,” only a woman.

**Sub-question two: What gifted characteristics influenced gifted women’s relationships, social and emotional health, achievement, and overall wellbeing? (Internal Gifted Characteristics)**

The data that are being measured are the lived experiences, they are real world measures, and they are means of capturing “complex, multi-layered and nuanced understandings so that others can learn from the lived experiences” (Etherington, 2013, p. 2). Analyzing the internal characteristics collected from the narratives, the researcher derived from the data what the internal characteristics were compared to what exists in the literature. One internal gifted characteristic the research revealed that influenced all of the women interviewed was perfectionism. Although, perfectionism manifested differently in each participant. “Perfectionists set high standards for themselves, and they experience great pain if they fail to meet those standards. They are besieged with guilt and shame that few seem to understand” (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009, p. 146). Kasey not only experienced perfectionism but she also experienced emotional intensities and overexcitabilities. She spent much of her life feeling rejected, alone, and misunderstood. “Most gifted adults have repeatedly felt misunderstood by others. Furthermore, they have often found themselves on a lifelong quest to understand themselves, while longing to find kindred spirits with whom they might share life’s journey in meaningful ways”



(Daniels & Piechowski, 2009, p. 169). Although Kasey faced these difficult challenges, she persevered in the face of adversity. She continued her educational pursuits and still has hopes and dreams of falling in love, getting married, and starting a family one-day. She never let the tragedy overcome her persistence. She developed a tolerance for making mistakes and starting making choices for her life that she knew would benefit her mental and emotional health, although it hurt those she loved dearly; her parents.

Internal gifted characteristics that influenced Elizabeth's social and emotional health were her advanced intellectual abilities and her exceptional ways of experiencing the world. "Being acutely aware of both their physical environment and their emotional life, gifted children tend to be more intense, more sensitive, and more prone to experiencing emotional extremes – whether exuberance or despair" (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009, p. 33). Elizabeth learned early in life that she had to develop coping skills and resiliency. Her emotional intelligence allowed her to overcome the instability in her life and provide stability for herself.

Isabel identified internal gifted characteristics (i.e., perseverance and resiliency). Although, she struggled with a toxic, stressful home environment she overcame her obstacles and rose above her circumstances to find a joyful, meaningful, and fulfilling life. She proclaimed that she broke the cycle of poverty and abuse.

Internal gifted characteristics that influenced Mary's achievement potential were intrinsic motivation and healthy perfectionism. Although perfectionism is many times viewed as unhealthy, there are some healthy forms of perfectionism. "Perfectionism is a potent force that can immobilize or energize, depending on where we focus our attention"

(Daniels & Piechowski, 2009, p. 146). A combination of healthy perfectionism and a high sense of social justice has been “spurring the individual to work towards agreement between their actions and their ideals” (Bailey, 2010, p. 2). She heeds a strong sense of responsibility for others, which is marked by a motivation for growth. Mentors, specifically her parents, were influential to her developing a high sense of social justice.

Finally, internal gifted characteristics that influenced Dominique’s overall wellbeing are found in her concluding statement: “Because I presented like a male, I think that was one of the things that ended up really pushing me into being seen because I was obstinate, I was a problem, I was attention seeking.” She resisted labels such as the label that she was acting white. She said no, this is who I am and you cannot say that is white: that is me! Her deep self-actualization was mature and self-loving. Noble et al. (1999) stated, “Gifted girls do not become gifted women by avoiding adversity” (p. 140). Dominique’s mother taught and modeled for her how to advocate for her needs. She had strong role models and mentors. It also demonstrates how gifted girls are many times told not to be too assertive. Women who are confident, assertive, and powerful are frowned upon by society many times. But these tenacious women are the women that our gifted girls need as role models and who will teach gifted girls to advocate for their needs.

**Sub-question three: What external influences have contributed to gifted women’s relationships, social and emotional health, achievement, and overall wellbeing? (External Influences)**

The data that were measured for external influences reflected in the lived experiences, or the real world measures, included relationships. “Pre-eminent among the

influences on talented females are parents' attitudes and beliefs about their children's academic self-perceptions and achievements which often supersede children's self-perception's about their own performance" (Neihart et al., 2002, p. 127). Kasey struggled in her relationship with her parents and it greatly influenced her. She felt her parents were so focused on cultural expectations that they neglected to hear what was important to her, what she was good at, and what would make her happy. Goertzel (2004) tells parents, "Encourage and help your children develop their strengths instead of trying to make them well rounded. Being really good at one thing is more important than shoring up weak points" (p. 15). Kasey was ranked as one of the top students in the middle school for gifted literature, but one of the lowest in the school for gifted math and science. Due to the cultural focus on STEM her parents wanted her to go to the math and science school which made her miserable. Then the same thing happened in college. Finally, in graduate school she was able to follow her dreams and pursue her passion in school counseling but at the cost of feeling guilty for making her parents disappointed in her. The external influences and societal pressures from her parents caused her to conform to their wishes, which led to underachievement. Another negative external influence that contributed to Kasey's relationships was bullying by her peers. Due to the bullying that she endured in her school as a young child it caused an already super sensitive young girl to feel unloved and unwanted. With her parents' inattention, she also began feeling a deep feeling of being unloved by her parents. She shared that she felt no one really understood her. She learned how to have relationships but there was no one who really "got" who she was. This feeling influenced her self-actualization and it caused her to desperately look for

love. She desperately wants to find a husband and have children. This exemplifies the “Cinderella Complex,” which is defined as, “Like Cinderella, these women are still waiting for something external to transform their lives” (Kerr, 1997, p. 164).

Isabel’s second stepfather was a positive external influence in her life. He was probably one of the first people that was a positive influence in her life. He was he was an artist and was living life really on the fringe when he first came into her life. He had some unhealthy baggage but also was one of the first people who recognized that she had “a lot of stuff going on and that she could do something really cool with it.” She also stated that he had no ulterior motives. She remembers he was just very matter of fact and expressed, “This does not have to be your life and you have like a really deeply creative spirit that could take you someplace.” He was one of the only role models that existed in her life and had a big influence on her at that time.

A positive external influence in Kasey’s life was her relationship with teachers and professors. “Successful women often idolized their teachers early and were thus inspired to learn in school” (Davis et al., 2011, p.427). Even when she went attended a Chinese university for her undergraduate degree, Kasey attributes the mentoring she found through her anthropology professor to be life changing for her. That relationship helped overcome the negative external relationships to create a passion and love for her work. The literature indicated that characteristics of high achieving women that allow them to overcome cultural and gender discrimination include, “cognitive and emotional flexibility, willingness to take risks and aim high, tolerance for making mistakes, persistence in the face of adversity, and the ability to resist the tendency to internalize

limiting messages from the outside” (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013, p. 245). Through Kasey’s mentor relationships, she was able to establish these bonds and develop characteristics of high achieving women.

External influences that contributed to Elizabeth’s social and emotional health are the relationships with her three profoundly children. “There is talent development for women in nurturing children, building strong primary relationships, and making a home – particularly for women worldwide whose pasts are marked by dysfunction and other obstacles” (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013, p. 344). Elizabeth’s sons are her greatest accomplishments. They completed a piece of her that was missing from her family dysfunction as a child. They made a positive impact on her social and emotional development as a gifted woman.

External influences that have influenced Dominique’s achievement are her relationships with her students. She continues to thrive because of her students. Her mother is a tremendous external influence in her life as a mentor; however, her students motivate her each day. Rimm et al. (2001) stated, “Many of the successful women from our study listed ‘winning in competition’ as an important positive experience for them” (p. 7). Dominique referred to a competition where she won teacher of the year and how it was such a good feeling but an even better feeling is her being able to instill values into her students to help them become good citizens. She stated that her greatest accomplishment was having “true impact.” Having a hand upon thousands of lives is what inspires her to achieve each day. Another characteristic that Dominique possesses is the ability to resist the tendency to internalize messages from society regarding racism.

She did not let societal influences impede upon her self-confidence through racist comments.

External influences that influence Mary's overall wellbeing are the relationships with all of the countless people she is able to support, serve, and encourage. Rimm et al. (2001) stated, "Challenge, contribution, and creativity were the three words most frequently used to describe why [our] successful women chose their careers" (p. 17). Her wellbeing is measured by the impact she has on her community. It is clear that she does not consider her own wants or needs; she leads by her heart and always puts the needs of the students, parents, and employees of her district before her own. She is willing to aim high and take risks to benefit her community and organization.

**Sub-question four: What are the internal and external influences that impact self-efficacy in gifted women?**

The data that measured for self-efficacy were "complex, multi-layered and nuanced understandings" (Etherington, 2013, p. 2). Specifically in regards to resiliency, periods of aloneness, and mentors and role models. Common characteristics eminent women possess were used for the analysis (e.g., determination). Whether parents, (e.g., Isabel's second stepfather or Mary and Dominique's parents) or teachers (e.g., Kasey's teachers) or children (e.g., Elizabeth's story), it is clear that relationships had the greatest impact on self-efficacy. The characteristics that Kitano & Perkins (1996) gleaned from their research (i.e., determination, love of learning, willingness to take risks, and an indomitable will to achieve their goals) applies to all of these incredible women. Parents and teachers of the gifted need to help gifted girls develop self-efficacy skills (i.e.,

determination, resiliency, and self-motivation).

Each of these women demonstrated self-motivation that influenced their self-efficacy. Including the drive for social justice and the betterment of the world. Kasey demonstrated the self-motivation to leave her country of origin and travel to a foreign land to obtain her graduate degree. She also wants to return home to make Beijing's schools a better place for gifted children. She desires to begin a school counseling program and help administrators, teachers, parents, and students understand gifted characteristics and the social emotional effects of giftedness. Isabel's self-efficacy supported her creating a healthy, positive, and functioning life for herself as an adult. Dominique's self-motivation led her to a graduate program of "academic hazing" to learn how to meet the needs of gifted middle school students, which led her to a career as a "Gifted Teacher." Elizabeth's self-motivation is evident in her balance of work, mom, wife, and coordinator of her children's unique educational needs. Her drive for social justice has caused her to serve on numerous boards and councils to promote fairness, justice, and equality for profoundly gifted children. Mary's self-motivation and drive for social justice is evident in her work as director of schools and her advocacy on behalf of serving the needs of the "whole" child.

## **Conclusions**

The research study on gifted women revealed that each woman has a lived experience as a gifted woman that is unique. Although common themes and patterns emerge in the literature regarding the lifespan and common traits and characteristics of gifted females, not all gifted women will possess the common traits and characteristics

represented in the literature. Just as not all diverse populations will exhibit the same multicultural considerations that are listed in the literature. Isabel and Dominique defied the literature regarding Hispanic and African American populations. Kasey did reflect some of the cultural considerations due to her Chinese heritage but she is in opposition to the traditional values of her Chinese culture. Although there are some common themes and characteristics that emerged (e.g., perfectionism) they may not have manifested as the literature described.

The purpose of the study was to share the stories of a diverse population of gifted women. This research study accomplished that goal. Five diverse women, with various age ranges and ethnicities, from various geographical locations, and from various backgrounds of socio-economic populations were interviewed. Their stories of growing up as a gifted female were shared. The similarities and differences of each story was illuminated. There were some areas of the literature that were reflected and revealed and other areas that were not reflected in the data collected. Ultimately, the women were empowered to share their personal story, at this point in their life, to this researcher, for the specific purpose of this study.

The research study caused the women to share their narrative truth of their past, evaluate their present situation, and consider their future possibilities. Two of the women shared with this researcher how they will now reevaluate where they want their future to lead. The study gave them a tool that empowered them to reflect upon their lifespan. As in Isabel's narrative, no matter where a person starts at in life it does not dictate where they end in life, which was also true in Elizabeth and Kasey's narrative. A gifted woman



who begins with no parental support, a lack of resources, or a dysfunctional family has the ability to change their narrative and recreate a narrative that more closely aligns to their hopes and dreams.

In regards to Mary and Dominique, when the story has a good beginning and a strong foundation, keep the momentum going and continue to a good ending living out the legacy that has already been assigned to you. I personally relate to Isabel, Kasey, and Elizabeth's story more than Mary and Dominique's, however, I have worked hard in my life to change my legacy and provide my daughter with a different narrative. I hope that a narrative more closely aligned to that of Mary and Dominique is my daughter's narrative. Especially that of a close, stable, loving, and supportive home environment and a mother who was a mentor and role model for her. This research project was a personal journey for myself and reflecting upon the stories of the five diversely gifted women has caused me to reflect over my own narrative. It also caused a reflection of the narrative of the other gifted women in my family: my daughter, mother, and grandmother.

My daughter is the only person in my family who was officially identified as gifted. She was identified in fifth grade and self-nominated herself to be tested. She tested on the highest level of gifted in all areas, except math, which was not surprising. Her gifted programming was developed through homeschooling, similar to Elizabeth's story. I provided for my daughter's educational needs by homeschooling beginning in fourth grade through high school. That is where I fell in love with teaching and ultimately chose to return to school after twenty years to begin my bachelor's degree and continued through to my doctorate. I now have a passion to advocate on behalf of gifted children's

needs, that is my passion and calling in life, and one specific area of interest is gifted females.

This research project was a personal journey to celebrate the stories of gifted women. A thousand women could be interviewed and each story would have its own unique set of fingerprints. Although it is good to know the common traits and characteristics of gifted females, it is more important to celebrate and empower each woman's journey. Celebrating their choices and decisions that influence their narratives. Even times of trouble and turmoil, can lead to a beautiful transformation. My hope as the researcher is that these stories encouraged, empowered, and illuminated the lived gifted experience of gifted females.

### **Discussions & Implications**

When discussing qualitative narrative research, one must bear in mind that the narratives shared are “reconstructions of the person's experiences as remembered and told at a particular point in their lives, to a particular researcher and for a particular purpose” (Etherington, 2013, p. 4). This ultimately has a bearing on how stories are told, which stories are told, and how the stories are presented and interpreted (Etherington, 2013, p. 4). The narratives collected do not represent life as “lived,” but are representations of those lives interviewed, as told through the interview process (Etherington, 2013, p. 4). The stories that have been shared are from the perspective of each participant at this point in their life. They are the recollections and reflections of their lived experience being a gifted woman that were told to this researcher according to the interview questions that were asked. The purpose of this study was to collect the

narrative accounts of each woman's lived experience. The literature only acts as a guide to what currently exists in the literature regarding gifted women. The literature review is an exhaustive collection of relevant research materials that affect gifted women. Neihart et al. (2002) stated:

Not all gifted females experience the same issues, but almost all face a combination of the following: dilemmas about abilities and talents, personal decisions about family, ambivalence of parents and teachers toward developing high levels of competence, decisions about duty and caring (meeting the needs of others before one's own), as well as other personal, religious, and social issues.  
(p. 126)

The literature guided the study and what questions should be asked in order to collect the narratives. It is important to hear the stories of gifted women in order to shed light upon the lived gifted experience and add to the existing literature.

In developing the study, the feminine talent development definition used by Callahan & Hertberg-Davis (2013) states:

Feminine talent development occurs when women with high intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership ability or potential achieve at high levels in an area they choose, [and] make contributions they consider meaningful to society; these contributions are enhanced when these women develop personally satisfying relationships and pursue what they believe to be significant and consequential work, resulting in the betterment of some aspect of society or their personal work.  
(p. 344)

All of these women, although in different stages of the lifespan, reflect this definition. This study provided insight into the lived experiences of five diversely gifted women. It shed light upon some of the internal and external barriers gifted women face including perfectionism, Imposter Syndrome, and choices about career, marriage, and family. This study has added to the literature by providing information on the diversity of the lived gifted experiences of five diversely gifted women.

The stories illuminated that there is not a singular lived experience of being a gifted female; instead, there is a uniquely intertwined web of similarities and differences among gifted women. Each gifted woman's story is unique and valuable. Common themes and patterns emerge among the stories; however, the individuality of each story is what makes each narrative irreplaceable. Each narrative was respected without judgement or bias because the inimitability of each gifted woman's story is what makes it special. Countless gifted women could have been interviewed and each of them would have a matchless, timeless, irreplaceable story to share. The purpose of this study is to share the unique narratives of five diverse women. To add to the literature that exists on gifted women. To contribute new evidence to the collection of information that exists on gifted women. Finally, to continue efforts to study the lives of gifted women.

### **Limitations of this Research Study**

This research study is limited to the data collected and analyzed by the five participants. It is an oral history and representation of the narrative truth as told by each individual. The individuals featured in this research study possess a range of intellectual gifts, social and emotional gifts, and visual and performing art gifts including musical

abilities as well as being profoundly gifted. Their stories illustrate the self-efficacy skills to negotiate on behalf of their personal ambitions, resiliency to overcome challenges such as racism and sexism, and the ability to overcome overbearing parents. Readers will identify with the triumphs, challenges, and obstacles these gifted women overcame and celebrated on their lifespan journey. The narratives are limited to the purposive sample selected but they are rich and diverse in their ages, ethnicities, geographic locations, and socio-economic classes. Care was given to provide the audience with a variety of carefully selected stories that share the lifespan experience of being a gifted female from early childhood through adulthood.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

The first suggestion for future research would be to research homogeneous groups of gifted women versus a diverse group of gifted women. Kasey being a twenty-four-year-old graduate student living in the United States from Beijing, China has lived a very different life from Mary who is a white, sixty-five-year old mother and grandmother who has lived in the same community her entire life. To be able to interview five foreign exchange students who were identified as gifted from Beijing, China and who are all in their twenties would provide an ability to compare their lived experiences more closely and search for patterns and themes. This would be true for all the women who were interviewed. Although I sought out a diverse population of gifted women because I was focused upon providing a rich, diverse group of women, for future research I believe a wealth of knowledge and information could be gleaned from a comparable research study of similar age, ethnicity, and geographical locations.

A future study on the experiences of gifted girls who are in gifted programming versus those who are not in gifted programming would be beneficial to add to the literature on gifted women. A study focused on the differences in experiences for those who have participated in programming for gifted students compared to those who did not participate in programming for gifted students could provide insight into the challenges and similarities that gifted programming has on female students. It could also shed light on internal and external barriers that may result from gifted females not having access to a specialized academic or affective enrichment program that focuses on their gifted needs.

Another suggestion for future research would be to continue this research project with more participants. Selecting five additional participants to add to the five narratives collected during this study would allow a greater understanding of gifted women's lifespan. Examining five additional participants to create a collection of ten narratives could allow for even more insight into gifted females and add to the existing literature. Additional narratives could provide even more understanding about common traits among gifted females.

A cross-generational study on gifted females could also provide insight into common gifted characteristics shared among family members. This suggestion for future research could analyze three generations (e.g., grandmother, mother, daughter) to compare common gifted characteristics and traits. This study could provide insight into genetic links between giftedness and gifted characteristics among female family members. This suggested study could contribute valuable information on the ties of

giftedness between generations and common gifted characteristics among generations that could help future generations of gifted females.

The next suggestion for future research would be a follow-up study in five, ten, twenty, and thirty years to see how these five incredible women's lives have changed. It would be beneficial to see how the lives of the five participants changed over the lifespan and to hear lessons learned throughout the lifespan. Research on gifted females needs to continue because although much progress has been made in understanding gifted women throughout the generations, there is still much to learn about the unique lives gifted women lead. It is important to understand the common traits and characteristics of gifted females to help develop coping skills for the next generation of gifted girls. The stories of gifted women provide insight into the everyday life of gifted women and these stories uncover the unique challenges of growing up as a gifted female. Focus groups, surveys, quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research is all needed to explore the lives of gifted women.

### **Chapter Summary**

In conclusion, this qualitative narrative study, "Exploring the Lives of Gifted Women" has revealed the lived gifted experience for five diversely gifted women across their lifespan. The purpose of the study was to collect their narrative accounts. The narratives shared the lived gifted experience and exposed what being a gifted female reflects throughout the lifespan for a diverse population of gifted women. It has shared what the personal experience of being a gifted female in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood was for each of the five women who participated in the research study. It

revealed what gifted characteristics influence the internal and external barriers that gifted women face. Finally, it revealed what the internal and external influences are that affect self-efficacy including characteristics that eminent women possess.

Gifted women are a diverse group of women who come from all cultural backgrounds, ethnicities, socio-economic classes, geographic locations; essentially, all walks of life. The narratives revealed the lived gifted experience for a twenty-four-year old graduate student attending school in the United States as a foreign exchange student from Beijing, China. It illuminated the lived experience of a thirty-seven year old Latina who was raised in an impoverished and transient home but found success as a chemist and alternative education pioneer. It has shared the lived gifted experience of a forty-seven-year old black woman who was raised in the west and is now a teacher for gifted students in a middle school environment in the southern United States. The research told the lived gifted experience of a fifty-one-year-old profoundly gifted wife and mother. It also revealed the lived gifted experience of a sixty-six-year old, white, grandmother, mother, and superintendent who was born and raised in a rural southern community. The narratives of these five extraordinary gifted women are just one piece of an exquisite puzzle of gifted females across the world.

Using a narrative lens, examination of the themes and patterns that emerged from Kasey, Isabel, Dominique, Elizabeth, and Mary's narratives were analyzed. The interviews provided the necessary data to compare patterns and themes that emerged to the existing literature on gifted women. Some of the common threads that were revealed in the research findings were that each woman dealt with societal pressures, whether



those pressures were from parents, teachers, or peers. They also each dealt with some form of stereotype, whether sexism or racism. All of the women demonstrated social and emotional traits, (i.e., overexcitabilities). The women all have multipotentiality and are able to achieve highly in multiple areas. Resilience was also a common thread that was evident in all of the narratives.

The research question: What do the narrative stories of gifted women reveal about the lived gifted experience? Primarily, evidence revealed, that each gifted female's lived experience is unique and different. Shkedi (2005) described how in narratives [we] "tell stories about ourselves that are historical, explanatory, and in some way foretelling of the future" (p. 11). Kasey shared how she hopes in her future to be married with a family of her own. She is excited to be a mother one day. Through sharing her historical story, or oral history, it explained why being a wife and mother is so important to her, and foretells of the future she hopes to experience.

One of the limitations of the study is that it is restricted to the five women who were selected as the purposive sample. Care was given to select participants with various ages, ethnicities, socio-economic populations, and from various geographic locations. A suggestion for future research would be to research homogenous groups of gifted women instead of a diverse population of gifted women. Being able to comparable the lifespan of a homogenous group of gifted women could provide information on additional themes and patterns that exist.

In conclusion, this qualitative narrative study, *Exploring the Lives of Gifted Women* revealed the lived gifted experience for five diversely gifted women across their

lifespan. The purpose of the study was to collect the narrative accounts of gifted women. The narratives shared the lived gifted experience and exposed what being a gifted female reflects throughout the lifespan. It has revealed what gifted characteristics influence gifted women's relationships, social and emotional health, overall wellbeing, and achievement. Finally, it has revealed what the internal and external influences are that affect self-efficacy in gifted women.

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## **Definition of Terms**

**Asynchrony** – “A term used to explain when a child’s development in one area is at a different level in other areas” (Kerr & McKay, 2014, p. 104).

**Counterculturalism** - “A culture with values and norms that run counter to those of established society.” (Merriam-Webster, 2017).

**Dabrowski’s Theory of Positive Disintegration** – “Theory of human personality development where the guiding role is assigned to emotions” (Mika, 2002, p. 1). There are five levels of development: primary integration, unilevel disintegration, spontaneous multilevel disintegration, organized multilevel disintegration, and secondary integration. There are five overexcitabilities (OE’s) that are of special consideration for gifted populations: emotional, psychomotor, sensory, intellectual, and imaginal. The theory proposes that gifted individuals have the potential to experience all or some of these areas with intensities. The greater the intellectual ability, the greater the person may experience the intensities.

**Gifted or Giftedness** – There is not one universally accepted definition of gifted or giftedness. For the purpose of this research project, The National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC, 2017) definition of gifted will be utilized. The NAGC (2017) defines gifted as:

Gifted individuals are those who 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).

**Imposter Syndrome** - Clance & Imes (1978) defined the condition known as imposter phenomenon in 1978. They stated, “The term imposter phenomenon is used to designate an internal experience of intellectual phonies, which appears to be particularly prevalent and intense among a select sample of high achieving women” (Clance & Imes, 1978, p. 1).

**Levels of Giftedness** – “The terms for the levels of giftedness - moderately, highly, exceptionally and profoundly gifted - are not standardized, and they seem to mean different things to different people, and based on scores from different tests” (Gillespie K, 2016). Generally measured through an IQ assessment, the majority of institutions use the following measures to identify levels of giftedness, although some states or school districts have lowered the IQ scores to identify underrepresented populations of students, which is highly controversial. Generally, the higher the IQ score, the more intensities, over excitabilities, and differences can be experienced and evident in the lived experience of the gifted person.

Mildly/Moderately Gifted – (G or MG)	130 – 138 IQ
Highly Gifted – (HG)	138 – 145 IQ
Exceptionally Gifted – (EG)	145 – 152 IQ
Profoundly Gifted – (PG)	152 – up IQ

**Multiculturalism** - Merriam-Webster (2016) defines multiculturalism as, “relating to, reflecting, or adapted to diverse cultures.”

**Multipotentiality** - The ability to accomplish and excel, achieving at high levels, in various areas of personal and professional endeavors.

**Profoundly Gifted** – Davidson Institute for Talent Development (2017) defines profoundly gifted as:

Profoundly gifted individuals score in the 99.9th percentile on IQ tests and have an exceptionally high level of intellectual prowess. These students score at least three standard deviations above the norm on the bell curve, so they are at the extreme end of the intelligence, or IQ, continuum.

**Sexism** – “Prejudice or stereotyping against women on the basis of sex” (Merriam-Webster, 2016).

**Twice-Exceptional** – The NAGC (2017) defines twice exceptional as:

“Students who give evidence of the potential for high achievement capability in areas such as specific academics; general intellectual ability; creativity; leadership; AND/OR visual, spatial, or performing arts AND also give evidence of one or more disabilities as defined by federal or state eligibility criteria such as specific learning disabilities; speech and language disorders; emotional/behavioral disorders; physical disabilities; autism spectrum; or other health impairments, such as ADHD. Twice-exceptional students represent a unique group of learners with diverse programming and emotional needs due to the fact that they may have both gifts and disabilities.”

**Underachievement** – Underachievement does not have one universally accepted definition. “Educational researchers disagree about the nature, even the existence of

gifted underachievers” (Colangelo, Kerr, Christensen, & Maxey, 1993). Dowdall & Colangelo (1982) cautioned that “teacher observations, judgements, and grades” about underachievement can be biased (p. 181). Ralph & Tannenbaum analyzed more than 90 empirical studies for over 30 years and could never find “one unified explanation of underachievement” (Delisle & Galbraith, 2015, p. 178). There are many disagreements of how to define underachievement and there are controversies regarding the term underachievement. “Underachievement is usually described as a discrepancy between expected performance (ability or potential) and actual performance (achievement) that cannot be explained by a learning disability or the documented need for any other category of special education services” (Callahan & Hertberg-Davis, 2013, p. 377). A discrepancy between IQ scores and achievement test scores, IQ scores and grades, high potential and low productivity, or high potential and limited opportunity may suggest underachieving (Emerick, 1992).

## Appendix A – Community Partner Agreement

### Community Partner Agreement

Dr. Joy Navan and Christine Winterbrook

Beginning fall of 2016, Dr. Joy Navan agrees to be Christine Winterbrook's community partner for her research and dissertation project for the Doctorate of Education in Gifted Education at the University of Denver under the supervision of Dr. Norma Lu Hafenstein. The doctorate is part of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED). A key component of the requirements is to obtain a community partner. Researchers must disseminate their work to interested community members as defined by the nature of the research. Community partners can be in attendance (which can occur via Skype or telephone) during the defense of the dissertation, which will occur in Spring 2017 for approximately two hours in length, although they are not required to be in attendance, and based on feedback from the community partner the research project may need revision to meet the practical needs of the community of partner.

Dr. Navan and Ms. Winterbrook will meet (either in person or over the telephone) twice: once in fall 2016 and once in spring 2017, to discuss the research project and dissertation. The project is focused upon gifted women utilizing a narrative research approach that shares the voice of gifted females. The rationale for the choice in research is:

Empowering gifted women to share their personal story to:

- Recognize self-worth and ultimately meaning for their life.
- Find common characteristics gifted women share.
- Explore the phenomenon of gifted women.
- Help other gifted females.
- Reflect the beauty and uniqueness of each individual story.
- Reveal external and internal barriers as well as strengths such as tenacity, grit, and perseverance.
- Share how they rose above challenges such as racism, sexism, negative influences, etc.

At the core of research for gifted females is ultimately the questions of: Why are some women successful and others aren't? Or "Why do some talented women achieve ambitious goals and gain prominence or eminence while others who once had at least as much potential fail to achieve the dreams they had as young girls?" (Neihart et al, 2002, p. 125).

The research question for the narrative research study of gifted women is:

(Q1) What do the narrative stories of gifted women reveal about lifelong achievement and how do their dreams, expectations, and relationships evolve over their lifespan?

The sub-questions that support the research question are:

- (1) What was the personal experiences of being a gifted female in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood?
- (2) What are the primary influences that impacted gifted women's self-efficacy reflecting achievement, satisfaction, and ultimate happiness?
- (3) What primary characteristics influence gifted women's relationships, social and emotional health, and overall wellbeing?
- (4) What primary influences have contributed to success and achievement in gifted women's educational pursuits and career opportunities?
- (5) What internal and external expectations were placed upon gifted women in elementary school, middle school, high school, and post-secondary education?

  
Dr. Joy Navan

  
Christine Winterbrook

## Appendix B – Recruitment Letter

Dear Potential Participant,

My name is Christine Winterbrook and I am a graduate student from the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver. I am writing to invite you to participate in my doctoral research project, “Exploring the Lives of Gifted Women.” This is a qualitative narrative study about the lived gifted experience and the purpose of this study is to collect narrative accounts of gifted women. You are eligible to be in this study because you self-identify as a gifted woman, and/or you went through a formal evaluation and were identified as a gifted female, and/or you were served in elementary or secondary school through a gifted program.

If you decide to participate in this study, I will come to a place of your choosing to interview you or we can set a time to interview through an online method at a date and time that is convenient for you. I will ask you what it was like to grow up as a gifted female. How and when you were identified as a gifted female. What your personal experience of being a gifted female in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood has been. Other questions will include what gifted characteristics influenced your relationships, social and emotional health, achievement, and overall wellbeing. I will also ask what external influences have contributed to your relationships, social and emotional health, achievement, and overall wellbeing. Finally, I will ask what are the internal and external influences that have impacted self-efficacy in your life.

I expect to conduct one to three interviews which will last one to three hours in length. You will be audio and video recorded for transcription purposes only. The recordings will be destroyed once transcription is complete. All of your information will be kept confidential and an alternative name will be used in the study. I will provide you with a copy of the completed transcription and any connections that I make to the existing literature on gifted females. You will have the ability to check the validity of the narrative and approve the final transcription details.

This is a completely voluntary research project. If you would like to participate or have any questions about the study, please contact me at 303-263-5014 or email me at [christine.giftededucation@gmail.com](mailto:christine.giftededucation@gmail.com). You may also contact the faculty sponsor, Dr. Norma Hafenstein, with any questions. She can be reached at 303-871-2527 or by email at [nhafenst@du.edu](mailto:nhafenst@du.edu).

Thank you very much!

Sincerely,

Christine A. Winterbrook, M.A.

[christine.giftededucation@gmail.com](mailto:christine.giftededucation@gmail.com)

(303) 263-5014



## **Appendix C – Informed Consent**

### **University of Denver Consent Form for Participation in Research**

**Title of Research Study:** Exploring the Lives of Gifted Women

**Researcher(s):** Christine Winterbrook, M.A., University of Denver

**Study Site:** Location of Participant's Choosing

#### **Purpose**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this research is to collect narratives of gifted women. These narratives will share the lived gifted experience and reveal what the experience of being a gifted female is throughout the lifespan.

#### **Procedures**

If you participate in this research study, you will be asked to participate in one to three interviews that will not exceed one to three hours in length and will be audio and video recorded for transcription purposes only. Once the transcription process is complete all recordings will be destroyed.

#### **Voluntary Participation**

Participating in this research study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You may choose not to continue with the interviews, not answer a question, or not be recorded for any reason without penalty.

#### **Risks or Discomforts**

There are no perceived or potential risks in gifted adult females participating in this study. There is little to no risk associated with this study because the data collection is completely anonymous and the topic is not highly sensitive or controversial in nature.

You will be able to take a break at any time that you feel uncomfortable or overwhelmed or you may terminate the interview at any time. Likewise, if the researcher observes that the interview appears to be troublesome they will suggest that the interview be paused or terminated. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and is in no way an obligation of our relationship, if there is a relationship between the participant and the researcher. You may, at any time, decline to answer any question without having to qualify a reason for doing so. You may, at any time, request a break, terminate the session, or remove yourself from this study, without any loss of benefit, and without having to qualify a reason for doing so. You may withdraw from the investigation with full confidence that any information that you have shared will not be included in the study. You will be given

a copy of your interview transcripts for your records and if you decide to remain in this study, you will receive a copy of the research results.

**Benefits**

If you agree to take part in this study, there will be no direct benefit to you, except the ability to share your voice about being a gifted woman. However, information gathered in this study may provide insight into the challenges and triumphs of living life as a gifted woman.

**Incentives to participate**

You will not receive any payment for being in the study

**Confidentiality**

To keep information safe, the researcher will ensure that the information shared will remain confidential. In addition, the participation will not be shared with others by ensuring names will not be attached to any data, but an alternative name will be used instead. The interview will be audio and video recorded for transcription purposes only. The data will be kept on a password protected computer so no one can read it. The researcher will retain the data including recordings for the duration of the study, then the data will be destroyed.

**Questions**

The researcher carrying out this study is Christine Winterbrook. You may contact her with any questions or concerns at 303-263-5014 or email her at christine.giftededucation@gmail.com. You may also contact the faculty sponsor, Dr. Norma Hafenstein, for this project with any questions, she can be reached at 303-871-2527 or by email at nhafenst@du.edu.

**Options for Participation**

Please initial your choice for the options below:

\_\_\_\_\_ The researcher may audio/video record or photograph me during this study.

\_\_\_\_\_ The researcher may NOT audio/video record or photograph me during this study.

**Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.**

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Participant Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

## **Appendix D – Interview Guide**

Thank you so much for your willingness to participate in this research study, “Exploring the Lives of Gifted Women.” During this interview you will be asked questions pertaining to your lived gifted experience. The purpose of this interview is to collect your narrative account of being a gifted woman. Please use this guide in framing your thinking around the interview questions. The interview itself will be a conversational interview, not a scripted interview, there are no right or wrong answers, only your memories and reflections of your lived experiences.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even though you have decided to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. If you decide to withdraw early, the information or data you provide will be destroyed. If you feel uncomfortable at any point during the interview process, you may terminate the interview. If you feel uncomfortable answering any of the interview questions you may decline to answer the question. Your name will not be used but an alternative name will be assigned to you. Your information will be kept confidential, I am audio and video recording the interview for transcription purposes only. The audio and video will be destroyed once the transcription is complete.

Once I transcribe the interview and place it into a chronological story, I will provide you a copy of the “narrative.” You will have the opportunity to make any changes to the narrative to ensure that your voice is heard. Once the narrative is complete it will be included in the doctoral research project. You will receive a copy of the doctoral research project upon completion.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns. Again, the interview will not be scripted this is only a guide to help frame your thinking around being a “gifted female.”

1. First, I will just collect some basic information from you.
  - a. Current age
  - b. Racial/ethnic background
  - c. Socio/economic status growing up
2. I am going to ask you some questions about your family background and your childhood years.
  - a. Where were you born?
  - b. What can you share with me about your family?
    - i. Parents?
    - ii. Siblings?
    - iii. Extended Family?
  - c. Any recollections of toddler/preschool years?
  - d. Where did you grow up?
    - i. Where did you attend:
      1. Elementary School (Did you receive gifted services?)
      2. Middle School (Did you receive gifted services?)
      3. High School (Did you receive gifted services?)
      4. College
        - a. Bachelor

b. Master

c. Doctorate

ii. In adulthood where have you lived and worked?

1. Career

2. Marriage

3. Children

e. What do you believe are your greatest accomplishments?

f. What you would change if given the opportunity?

g. What are your hopes and dreams for the future?

3. Any last thoughts or comments?

4. Any suggestions or words of advice for gifted girls or other gifted women?

5. Do you identify with being a “gifted woman?” Why or why not?