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# Collective Case Study Career Critique of Social Entrepreneurs Who Are Gifted Adults

## Abstract

This dissertation describes a qualitative research study that grows our understanding of the career development experiences, supports, and barriers of social entrepreneurs who are gifted adults (SEGA) so that we may nurture the career development of future SEGA. Research questions for this study probed the career development experiences, supports, and barriers of SEGA and the shared social value they create. The conceptual frameworks for this study are the ecological model for human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979); the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016); social cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent et al., 1994); the perceived instructional arc (Uhrmacher et al., 2017); and my curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs. The methodological frameworks for this study are a collective case study of the quintain of SEGA (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2006) and my collaborative connoisseurship and critique (CC&C), which incorporates methodologies from educational connoisseurship and criticism (C&C; Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017). A systematic review of qualitative literature explores themes of social entrepreneur education in the United States. A recruitment survey consisting of the Ksiazak Adult Giftedness Scale (KAGS; Ksiazak, 2010) and the Social Entrepreneurship Orientation Scale (SEOS; Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018) supported intensive purposeful sampling of five participants. Each SEGA participated in interviews, artifact collection, an observation, and a focus group that fostered CC&C. Collective case study descriptions are reported and incorporate opening and closing vignettes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Uhrmacher et al., 2017). Key findings included that learning about gifted neurodivergence positively develops self-awareness; self-awareness and curiosity impact self-education, which influences self-efficacy; frustration with work experiences spurs positive disintegration of career paths; intellectual knowledge and creativity help SEGA innovate a career for social good; a strong value system and career supports help SEGA develop a career ideal; business acumen or partnerships are necessary to build a sustainable enterprise; a collaborative network provides inspiration, encouragement, and guidance; investments by others help form, grow, and sustain social enterprises; and feedback helps social entrepreneurs understand their impact and refine their work. This study illuminates a gap in the literature by creating an academic understanding of the educational and career development experiences of gifted adults who are social entrepreneurs in the United States, how they achieve secondary integration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016) of a career ideal, and the shared social value they create. This study informs gifted people, education, business, and psychology through CC&C of collective cases to nurture the career development of both social entrepreneurs and the gifted.

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A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Joi Lin

June 2024

Advisor: Dr. Norma L. Hafenstein

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Author: Joi Lin

Title: Collective Case Study Career Critique of Social Entrepreneurs Who Are Gifted Adults

Advisor: Dr. Norma L. Hafenstein

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### **Abstract**

This dissertation describes a qualitative research study that grows our understanding of the career development experiences, supports, and barriers of social entrepreneurs who are gifted adults (SEGA) so that we may nurture the career development of future SEGA. Research questions for this study probed the career development experiences, supports, and barriers of SEGA and the shared social value they create. The conceptual frameworks for this study are the ecological model for human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979); the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016); social cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent et al., 1994); the perceived instructional arc (Uhrmacher et al., 2017); and my curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs. The methodological frameworks for this study are a collective case study of the quintain of SEGA (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2006) and my collaborative connoisseurship and critique (CC&C), which incorporates methodologies from educational connoisseurship and criticism (C&C; Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017). A systematic review of qualitative literature explores themes of social entrepreneur education in the United States. A recruitment survey consisting of the Ksiazak Adult Giftedness Scale (KAGS; Ksiazak, 2010) and the Social Entrepreneurship Orientation Scale (SEOS; Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018) supported intensive purposeful sampling of five participants. Each SEGA participated in interviews, artifact collection, an observation, and a focus group that fostered CC&C. Collective case study descriptions

are reported and incorporate opening and closing vignettes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Uhrmacher et al., 2017). Key findings included that learning about gifted neurodivergence positively develops self-awareness; self-awareness and curiosity impact self-education, which influences self-efficacy; frustration with work experiences spurs positive disintegration of career paths; intellectual knowledge and creativity help SEGA innovate a career for social good; a strong value system and career supports help SEGA develop a career ideal; business acumen or partnerships are necessary to build a sustainable enterprise; a collaborative network provides inspiration, encouragement, and guidance; investments by others help form, grow, and sustain social enterprises; and feedback helps social entrepreneurs understand their impact and refine their work. This study illuminates a gap in the literature by creating an academic understanding of the educational and career development experiences of gifted adults who are social entrepreneurs in the United States, how they achieve secondary integration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016) of a career ideal, and the shared social value they create. This study informs gifted people, education, business, and psychology through CC&C of collective cases to nurture the career development of both social entrepreneurs and the gifted.

*Keywords:* career development, social entrepreneurs, gifted adults, social entrepreneurship education, educational connoisseurship and criticism, collaborative connoisseurship and critique, curricular career spiral, social cognitive career theory, Dabrowski, theory of positive disintegration, ecological systems model

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The current social milieu of the United States forms a fertile ground for innovative social enterprises developed by *social entrepreneurs* who strive to “alleviate significant problems plaguing society” (Greene & Cooper, 2016, p. 2). It is clear there is an ongoing need to foster the career development of potential social entrepreneurs. However, in the United States, social entrepreneurship programs are limited and primarily embedded within business schools (Dees & Worsham, 2012; Solomon et al., 2019).

The talents required of social entrepreneurs overlap with several characteristics of giftedness (Ksiazak, 2010). In general, *gifted adults* have the capacity for high levels of creativity and innovation; abilities to rapidly learn and apply skills in areas of interest, often at a high level of performance; intense sensitivities to stimuli; and existential perceptiveness that encompasses morality, justice, and global issues such as human rights, war, and the environment (Ksiazak, 2010; Silverman, 2013). They also often experience frustrations in traditional work settings (Nauta & Ronner, 2016).

The characteristics, or person inputs (Lent et al., 1994), of gifted people indicate strong potential interest in careers that support social enterprises. However, only some gifted adults choose to start their own social enterprises and are able to become social entrepreneurs. These *social entrepreneurs who are gifted adults* (SEGA) are the specific

population of interest, or quintain (Stake, 2006), for this collective, or multiple, case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2006).

There is a need to deepen our understanding of the career development experiences, supports, and barriers for gifted adults who did not complete a higher education program in social entrepreneurship but were still able to become successful social entrepreneurs. To that end, this research study strives to illuminate the *career development of social entrepreneurs who are gifted adults* (CD of SEGA) using a qualitative (Creswell & Poth, 2018) *educational connoisseurship and criticism* (C&C) methodology (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017) to critique the career development trajectories of SEGA.

### **Organization of the Introduction**

This first chapter introduces the topic of the CD of SEGA and features an overview of the entire dissertation; key concepts of connoisseurship, criticism, *collaborative connoisseurship and critique* (CC&C), *curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs*, gifted adults, social entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurship, career development, and *social entrepreneurship education* (SEE); an overview of the research study including the context for the research topic, theoretical frameworks, the systematic literature review, the research problem and significance, the purpose of the research study, methodology including the research question (RQ) and research design, and the strengths and limitations of the study. The chapter then concludes with a statement of the researcher.



## **Overview of the Dissertation**

This dissertation begins with Chapter 1, an introduction to the topic. Chapter 2 reports findings from a systematic literature review on qualitative research about SEE in the United States. Chapter 3 describes the educational C&C methodology (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017) and collective case study research design (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2006). Chapter 4 describes and interprets findings, evaluates findings, and shares themes (Uhrmacher et al., 2017) of five case studies of SEGA and a concluding cross-case study (Stake, 2006). Chapter 5 discusses the alignment of findings to theoretical frameworks and shares implications and recommendations for practice and policy for gifted adults, education, psychology, and business. The five primary chapters are supplemented with a reference list and appendix with additional resources.

## **Key Concepts**

Several key concepts set the stage for this dissertation: connoisseurship, criticism, CC&C, the curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs, gifted adults, social entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurship, career development, and SEE.

### **Connoisseurship**

Connoisseurship is the art of neutral appreciation, of noticing the nuance and sensory details of anything, particularly educational practices (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017). Connoisseurs are encouraged to observe and experience reality with as many senses as possible for full aesthetic appreciation (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017). I am an expert in educational and organizational practices for career development

and professional learning and use the lens of connoisseurship to understand this research topic from an informed perspective.

## **Criticism**

Criticism is the act of disclosing descriptions, interpretations, evaluations, and themes (DIET) that are sensitive to theoretical frameworks and integrate my unique perspective as a connoisseur (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017). Criticism is a way to point out issues and concerns with a subject. For example, in *Notes of a Native Son*, James Baldwin (1995, p. 10) said, “I love America more than any other country in the world, and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually.”

This research critiqued the career and other educational experiences of social innovators who are gifted adults.

## **Collaborative Connoisseurship and Critique**

My concept of CC&C builds off Eisner’s (2017) education connoisseurship and education criticism, and Miller’s (2018) concept of co-connoisseurship. Though Eisner’s terminology of *criticism* is neutral, today it often takes on a negative connotation of trying to cut someone down, so I instead used the term *critique* to indicate the creation of a positive, transformative criticism that is explicitly intended to improve what is being criticized. CC&C works with other stakeholders (in this case SEGA) to capture shared perceptions of the quintain (Stake, 2006) or phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Stakeholders bring their own perspectives as connoisseurs (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017) that they share with me and other stakeholders to collaboratively criticize a quintain (Stake, 2006) of five SEGA in the United States. Examples of CC&C

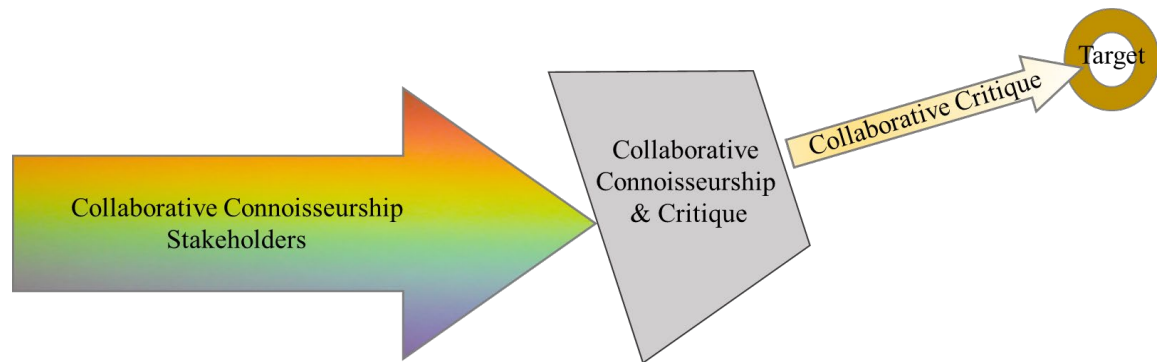
techniques include, but are not limited to, research and professional strategies of focus groups; member checking processes; intentional feedback loops such as check-ins or exit interviews; social media campaigns; “Dear colleague” letters; and legal strategies.

Grounded in Eisner’s educational criticism (2017), CC&C requires the expression of a product (in this case a dissertation) that is strategically shared to make a positive, transformative impact throughout our ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The product could include multiple forms of representation such as written text, videos, or images of content (Eisner, 1994).

One way to envision CC&C is as reverse prism (see Figure 1) that takes in the diverse rainbow of perspectives from participating stakeholders and produces a focused beam of light, aimed to illuminate the community’s perspective of the quintain. As a novel phrase, I assert the terminology of CC&C only applies if there is a positive, transformative outcome of the collaborative critique that is intended, operationalized, and received per Uhrmacher et al.’s *instructional arc* (2017). If a study is conducted using techniques from C&C (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017) with a collaborative perspective from stakeholders, but intends to or possibly results in oppressive, negative outcomes for the stakeholders, critics must question if the process was truly CC&C.

**Figure 1**

*Reverse Prism of Collaborative Connoisseurship and Critique*



*Note.* The figure represents the process of CC&C as a reverse prism. A rainbow arrow of stakeholder voices and perspectives enters the prism, which is angled toward a target of positive, intended impact. A collaborative critique from all stakeholders, like a focused laser beam of light, leaves the prism and achieves a positive, intended outcome through collaborative critique.

### **Curricular Career Spiral of Social Entrepreneurs**

My conceptual framework of the curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs is based most strongly upon Uhrmacher et al.'s instructional arc (2017) and aspects of the ecological systems model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016), and *social cognitive career theory* (SCCT; Lent et al., 1994), which are all discussed more in the conceptual frameworks section in Chapter 3.

The instructional arc consists of intended, operationalized, and received curriculum (Uhrmacher et al., 2017). The curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs consists of multiple instructional arcs: a career input arc, a career output arc, a transformed society arc, and a future arc. The instructional arc (Uhrmacher et al., 2017)

aligns with the career input arc of social entrepreneurs—their career development and the learning experiences that help them become social entrepreneurs—and aligns with the career output arc of social entrepreneurs—the curriculum or products they intend to deliver and operationalize into the world. The audience that receives the career output arc is transformed; this reception, in turn, impacts what this transformed audience intends and operationalizes to future society and what that future society receives, intends, and operationalizes, invoking a spiral of impact throughout the ecological system.

As I designed this spiral, Uhrmacher et al.'s instructional arc (2017) provided the nucleus for the arcs while Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) had me consider the transformation within the individual social entrepreneur and throughout their microsystem, exosystem, and beyond. SCCT (Lent et al., 1994) taught me the importance of learning experiences, with learning experiences from performance domains and attainments also impacting the social cognitive career development process. Through the CC&C process and focus group, it became apparent that the feedback from recipients and society are important to informing the ongoing career input of the social entrepreneur. Dąbrowski (1964/2016) showed the importance of self-education as a learning process that helps to nurture positive disintegration, which I also added as an important learning experience that feeds into the career input arc of the social entrepreneur. I made the instructional arc (Uhrmacher et al., 2017) into multiple arcs I called the career input arc, career output arc, transformed society arc, and future arc; labeled the social entrepreneur and aspects of their career output arc; labeled their transformed audience and their transformed society arc; and represented how self-education (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016)

conducted by the social entrepreneur and feedback from throughout their ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) both continuously feed into the learning experiences (Lent et al., 1994) of their ongoing career input arc.

### **Gifted Adults**

Defining giftedness is controversial, with ongoing discussion (Olszewski-Kubilius & Cross, 2020) around whether giftedness is more about who a person is psychologically (Ksiazak, 2010; Silverman, 2013; Wasserman, 2020), how a person uses their talents (Olszewski-Kubilius & Cross, 2020; Renzulli & Reis, 2020), how well a person does compared to peers (Subotnik et al., 2020), or how resources support a person's development and performance (Cross & Cross, 2020; Ziegler, 2005).

In general, adults who are psychologically gifted may manifest characteristics of sensitivity; introversion; rapid learning; connections; creativity; innovative problem solving; multipotentiality (ability to quickly learn and thrive in varied settings); perfectionism; intense concern with morality and justice; frustration with inefficiencies, ineffectiveness, and cruelty; or intense overexcitabilities, particularly emotional, intellectual, and imaginal, but also sensual and psychomotor (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016; Finlay, 2002; Ksiazak, 2010; Piechowski et al., 1985; Rinn, 2020; Silverman, 2013).

Psychological giftedness has varied cultural representations, but it is present across ethnicities, nationalities, languages, skin colors (typically conceptualized as race), genders, ages, and exceptionalities, and it persists throughout the entire lifespan (Fiedler, 2015; National Association for Gifted Children [NAGC], n.d.; Ruf, 2024).

A common understanding of psychological giftedness is the definition of *asynchronous development*, a definition for giftedness put forth by the Columbus Group in 1991 and shared by Silverman (1997, p. 39):

Giftedness is *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.

While psychological giftedness is pervasive, gifted and talented education services in the United States are too-often inequitably distributed among states and regions (e.g., urban, rural) as well as across students' races, social economic classes, and genders (Gentry et al., 2019; Hafenstein et al., 2020; NAGC, 2011).

Further, while gifted adults can bring many assets to the workspace through positive manifestations of rapid learning, sensitivities, intellectual curiosity, innovativeness, or ability for detailed mimicry, other aspects of their giftedness may manifest negatively as friction with colleagues, frustration with status quo, or failure to perform on demand (Nauta & Ronner, 2016; Scott, 2012).

These frustrations of gifted adults in work settings—along with their sensitivities to existential and moral concerns, multipotentiality, and their ability to create novel, innovative solutions to problems (particularly social problems)—all suggest that gifted people may find strong intrinsic value and purpose in social entrepreneurship (Csikszentmihalyi, 2007; Dąbrowski, 1964/2016; Ksiazak, 2010; Silverman, 2013).

Social entrepreneurs who do not identify as gifted adults may also make positive social impacts. However, this study focuses on critiquing how the educational career

development experiences of gifted adults have led them to become social entrepreneurs, which aligns with my research focus and interests about the career development of SEGA.

This study sought five talented social entrepreneurs who self-identified as being gifted adults: that is, they self-identified as (a) being gifted; (b) having a cognitive intelligence score at the 95<sup>th</sup> or greater percentile; (c) having received gifted and talented identification or services during their education; or (d) scoring at least one standard deviation above the mean on the Ksiazak Adult Giftedness Scale (KAGS; Ksiazak, 2010). Then, I explored how each participant described their giftedness.

Two additional concepts should be discussed regarding giftedness: twice-exceptionality and neurodivergence.

### ***Twice-Exceptionality***

Twice-exceptionality is when a gifted person with high abilities also has one or more learning difficulties, which could include physical or learning disabilities (Baum et al., 2017; Kaufman, 2018). Twice-exceptional people are gifted and may have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, auditory or visual disabilities, or be on the autism spectrum. Davis and Robinson (2018) even discuss the label of *3e* to signify twice-exceptional people who are also members of socially oppressed culturally diverse groups. A person may be multi-exceptional by demonstrating giftedness and multiple additional disabilities. It can be difficult to identify a twice-exceptional person as their disabilities may mask their giftedness or vice-versa, and twice-exceptional people need



unique supports to help them thrive (Baum et al., 2017; Davis & Robinson, 2018; Kaufman, 2018).

### ***Neurodiversity***

Neurodiversity is a portmanteau of neurological diversity. The term is typically attributed to Judy Singer's 1998 dissertation about autism (Singer, 2017); however, there is controversy with some academics saying the term predates Singer's work (Luterman & Sosin, 2024). This concept has expanded to broadly apply to anyone who does not identify as neurotypical and sometimes is applied to people with learning disabilities.

I, along with other gifted advocates, believe that the term should also be applied to gifted people who are neurologically diverse from the norm, so I sometimes use the phrase *gifted neurodivergence* to specify the neurodiversity of gifted people. Neurodivergent people deserve to be supported, educated, and respected, just like twice-exceptional people, gifted people, and all people.

### **Social Entrepreneurs**

The term social entrepreneur was coined in 1972 by Bill Drayton, founder of Ashoka, a social enterprise dedicated to supporting other social entrepreneurs through networking, education, and financial support (Ashoka, 2020). Entrepreneurs are people who form a business that manages financial risk, while social entrepreneurs use their talents to form an innovative social enterprise that focuses on balancing a double-bottom line of profit and social value, or a triple-bottom line that also focuses on environmental sustainability (Dees, 1998/2001; Mueller et al., 2015; Schneider, 2016).

Social entrepreneurs work to make money through innovative business practices that positively impact social communities while creating a stable enterprise with a successful business model. Social enterprises may be organized as non-profit entities or for-profit corporations. A non-profit social enterprise may have a mission focused on social good, and any excess income is reinvested to further the enterprise's solutions and services.

A for-profit social enterprise corporation has a benefit of generating financial income and security for its founder and employees. A corporation may have a primary social or environmental mission, making it staunchly a social enterprise, or it may have other missions, products, and services that generate profit while also investing its energy and resources to make positive social and environmental impacts, which is a form of corporate social responsibility (Rendtorff, 2023).

This study sought social entrepreneurs who founded either non-profits or for-profit corporations with a primary mission to achieve positive social or environmental impacts that align with one or more of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs; 2015).

Reasons for social entrepreneurship vary, but most often social entrepreneurs have a prosocial motivation combined with intrinsic motivation (Stephan & Drencheva, 2017; Solórzano-García et al., 2022). They desire to make a positive impact on others and have strong passion and interest in their work. Social entrepreneurs also consider extrinsic motivation such as reputation and financial motives, which encourage them to start and lead businesses (Stephan & Drencheva, 2017).

Social entrepreneurs can make a large positive impact in our world by creating organizations that are committed to the social good. “Over three-quarters of the [Ashoka] Fellows have changed the patterns in their field (e.g., the environment, human rights, village resiliency) within five years of launch. Over half have changed national policy within the same five years” (Drayton & Thorpe, 2019, para. 8). However, macrosystem ecological constraints may make social entrepreneurship challenging in the United States, particularly for founders who are under-educated, not-white, not-male, or not-wealthy (Steiner & Teasdale, 2016). These constraints show a need to explore social entrepreneurs through an interpretive framework incorporating a GiftedCrit™ or gifted critical race theory (Greene, 2017) lens to learn how different SEGA have been able to become social entrepreneurs and what they output into the world.

For the purposes of this discussion, social entrepreneurs are defined as founders or co-founders of a non-profit or for-profit business that focuses on making a positive social and/or environmental impact in at least two of the 17 categories of the United Nations’ SDGs (2015).

For the collective case study selection, successful social entrepreneurs were defined as people who (a) self-identified as social entrepreneurs; (b) indicated that their enterprises focus on two or more of the United Nation’s SDGs (2015); or (c) had a high score in the upper quartile on the Social Entrepreneurship Orientation Scale (SEOS; Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018). Included participants also: (a) formed a formal business as a non-profit or for-profit; (b) have been in business for at least one year; and

(c) hired at least one employee or contractor other than the founder(s) to demonstrate their shared social value (Dees, 1998/2001; Porter & Driver, 2012).

### **Social Entrepreneurship**

The term social entrepreneurship can broadly encompass people who work in different types of organizations that create positive shared social value and make an impact, such as large corporations that decide to demonstrate aspects of corporate social responsibility, a commitment to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) goals, or other meaningful impacts (Dees, 1998/2001; Porter & Driver, 2012; Zaidman & Feldt, 2022).

Schneider (2016) suggests that social entrepreneurship and overlapping concepts can be differentiated into three spectrums that range from more social foci to more entrepreneurial foci. The three dimensions described by Schneider are creation, allocation, and distribution (2016). Creation refers to how the organization was formed and asks who gets to control the production ranging from an individual entrepreneur to enterprises created by a collective social group (2016). Allocation refers to whether the allocation of the produced value is controlled by an entrepreneur or by social actors such as a public oversight group or workers' cooperative (2016). Distribution refers to the control over the distribution of profits—how much is kept by the entrepreneur and how much is distributed socially (2016). Schneider (2016) categorizes social entrepreneurship as having entrepreneurial creation, entrepreneurial allocation of effort, and social distribution of profits through shared social value (Dees, 1998/2001; Porter & Driver, 2012).

Groups of people, for example corporations that focus on social responsibility, can also make a strong impact for social good. Social entrepreneurship, in general, refers to the use of innovative practices to generate social and economic value. This can be done by any employee at any organization; however, all social enterprises have an original founder or co-founders. This study is more interested in individuals or co-founders who are gifted adults who have become social entrepreneurs, rather than any social good organizations or collectives of people.

### **Career Development**

Career development, as described by SCCT (Lent et al., 1994; Lent & Brown, 2019), is a dynamic process informed by the background context; person inputs (characteristics and background); learning experiences; self-efficacy expectations; outcome expectations; contextual influences; interests, choice goals, and choice actions; and performance domains and attainments.

This study focuses on the criticism (Eisner, 2017) of the career development experiences of social entrepreneurs—centered around learning experiences and informed by adults in the United States who have the person input of giftedness—to determine their career development experiences, supports, and barriers as SEGA within their ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

### **Social Entrepreneurship Education**

In the existing literature (see Chapter 2), the closest research to understanding the CD of SEGA focuses on SEE. SEE is primarily accessible in a higher education institution (HEI) alongside or embedded within other business or entrepreneurship

programs (Dees, 1998/2001; Dees & Worsham, 2012; Solomon et al., 2019).

Organizations such as Ashoka (Drayton & Thorpe, 2019) also offer programs to support the development of social entrepreneurs in HEIs and beyond and have funded over 4,000 social entrepreneurs and changemakers.

In general, SEE consists of experiential learning opportunities (Kickul et al., 2010), service learning (Otten et al., 2022), financial skill building (Mueller et al., 2015), and psychosocial skill building (Dees & Worsham, 2012; Greene & Cooper, 2016; Otten et al., 2022; Smith, 2008; Thomsen et al., 2018). Chapter 2 presents a systematic review of literature further exploring qualitative research about SEE in the United States to learn what career development social entrepreneurs may experience in formalized educational settings.

### **Summary of Key Concepts**

This section shared brief definitions for key concepts of connoisseurship, criticism, CC&C, the curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs, gifted adults, social entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurship, career development, and SEE. This dissertation builds upon these concepts by using connoisseurship (Eisner, 2017) to critique (Eisner, 2017) the career development (Lent et al., 1994) of social entrepreneurs (Dees, 1998/2001) who are gifted adults (Ksiazak, 2010).

### **Overview of Research Study**

This section outlines the context of the research topic, guiding theoretical frameworks, literature review, research problem, research purpose, methodology, and the strengths and limitations of this dissertation research.

## **Context of the Research Topic**

### ***United States of America in 2023-2024***

The United States is a melting pot of peoples, histories, and cultures on the lands of indigenous people that were unjustly taken. United States Americans include indigenous Native American people, immigrants, and those born here in the United States. Immigrant, in this sense, is being used very broadly, encompassing people who arrived, and are still arriving, to the United States as colonizers, trafficked slaves, refugees, adoptees, as well as optimistic and opportunistic travelers hoping for a better life here, as opposed to there.

While the United States has many strengths, such as nationwide access to public education and some human rights, in some places, there are many reasons for social cognitive unrest. The United States is still recovering in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic, which brought a years-long standstill to in-person schools and businesses in March of 2020. While schools and businesses have reopened for in-person services, the economic disruption persists, with the underfunded education sector reeling from pervasive teacher shortages, burnout, and skyrocketing inflation. Global uncertainties—including climate change, overall global warming, global conflicts, the instability of AI and cryptocurrency, ongoing human rights struggles, cruelty, and arguments about objective truth—provide both challenges and opportunities to businesses.

Aspects of a human being's intersection of identities, such as their cultures, communities, race, ethnicity, linguistic background, age, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, religious and political preferences, and divergent abilities can still

result in their systemic persecution or advancement, regardless of their interests, abilities, merit, or potential. We even struggle with whether some people should let other people have freedom and autonomy to control their own bodies and healthcare decisions.

Different generations experience different generational pressures in the United States. Elder adults might worry more about the solvency of Social Security for their retirement, the cost of prescription drugs and Medicare, and about the retention of their estate capital and commensurate social power. Middle-aged adults might worry more about the cost of sending their children to college, the value of their stocks, or whether they will ever have enough to retire. Younger adults might worry about whether they will ever be able to find a job that provides a thriving wage, buy a home, or ever feel that they can or would want to have children. Children might worry about whether they will get shot and killed at school, if the world will be habitable in 50 years, or if they will be selected to travel through space.

The color of one's skin can predict their treatment in our historically racist institutions and communities and, when overlapped with socioeconomic status and locations, can also predict their health, wealth, and well-being. In too many cases, a person's intersectionality of gender and the color of their skin increase their risk of being murdered, even by legally sanctioned law enforcement officers, often with too little recourse, justice, or systemic change.

Civilians also commit many murders and suicides, mainly with the use of guns. Particularly gruesome and traumatizing are ongoing school shootings and mass shootings, defined as shootings that injure or kill at least four people, sometimes



committed with large-magazine assault rifles (Gun Violence Archive, 2023). In the United States, during 2023, there were 656 mass shootings, and 1,697 children under 18 were killed by guns (Gun Violence Archive, 2023).

Climate change, exacerbated by global warming, is straining our systems, with the Colorado River unable to sustain the growing southwest; large reservoirs such as Lake Powell in Utah drying up; wildfires, worse in areas suffering from drought; multiple days of ice and freezing temperatures in southern states like Texas, which strained and broke energy grids; and school buildings that are increasingly too hot in the summer for good health and well-being.

Public education is in turmoil, with underfunding of schools and districts, lack of respect and compensation for teachers and other educators, political and politicized mandates and theater, school shootings, and culture wars jeopardizing the equitable education, safety, and well-being of every student in United States.

Businesses, particularly in the tech sector, are in upheaval from layoffs, the explosion of accessible artificial intelligence (AI), and global uncertainties. Recent layoffs at tech giants including Twitter/X, Amazon, Google, Facebook/Meta, Microsoft, Shopify, and Yahoo have released a glut of global talent into the United States workforce (Stringer & Corral, 2024). Lots of people are looking for a better job. Anecdotally, I recently reviewed two resumes of friends. Both are currently employed but are looking to shift to jobs with better salaries, locations, schedules, and benefits that align with their personal ethics. Since so many try to find a good job, and some organizations work to

make good jobs, I wonder about people who choose to create an organization that makes new jobs by founding a social enterprise.

AI and other types of machine learning have exploded, with competing models and bots transforming work and play as we know it. The ethics of AI are crucial and controversial and will be decided in ongoing battles in the years to come. AI has already begun to revolutionize the business and education sectors, with the potential to streamline organizational operations of the future. AI mandates an investment in education, particularly adult re-education, to ensure that workers in the United States are prepared to transition to roles that cannot be reliably or ethically handled by AI. Additionally, entrepreneurs can use technology tools, including AI and social media to help grow their businesses with fewer employees and preexisting skillsets as part of the fourth industrial revolution of the digitization of everything on demand (Haag, 2022).

While I would love to say that everyone works to improve outcomes for all, unfortunately, that is not the case. Partisanship, fear, cruelty, insecurity, lack of empathy, racism, lack of equitable and sustainable resources, and ignorance might all play a role in why people do not experience meaningful, comprehensive, sustainable change.

Societal change can happen when people share liberatory educational practices to empower people to wield power and organize for systemic change (Freire, 2000). While some people work at organizations that are committed to helping humans and our world, few people become founders of successful social enterprises. To this end, more information is needed about how supports and barriers throughout the macrosystem of the United States impact the career development of SEGA.

## ***Sustainable Development Goals***

The United Nations (2015) developed a 2023 agenda for sustainable development to positively impact social, environmental, and economic factors—the same three factors that social entrepreneurs work to balance (Dees, 1998/2001; Mueller et al., 2015)—centered around the 5 Ps of people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership. In the agenda, they shared seventeen SDGs in areas that have “critical importance for humanity and the planet” (United Nations, 2015, p. 1).

The 17 SDGs are (United Nations, 2015, p. 14):

- Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
- Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture
- Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
- Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
- Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
- Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all
- Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all
- Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation
- Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
- Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable
- Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
- Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
- Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development
- Goal 15. Protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

- Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels
- Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

The 17 SDGs provide a framework for the goals and missions of social entrepreneurs who are seeking to create positive, shared, social value.

In the recruitment survey, respondents were asked which SDGs, if any, align with the mission of their social enterprise (United Nations, 2015). Selected participants had a mission that aligned with at least two of the SDGs (United Nations, 2015).

### ***B Corps***

The B Corp movement (B Lab, 2024) is a non-profit movement to shift the exploitative economic culture of capitalism by addressing society's critical issues with collective actions. As of February 2024, there are 8,298 B Corps in 96 countries across 162 industries. B Lab has established standards and a certification process for corporations (and non-corporations) to plan for and commit to supporting a resilient future that supports social, environmental, and economic outcomes by impacting the environment, community, customers, governance, and workers. The intent of this research was to identify at least one participant who has a B Corp or is working toward B Corp certification.

### **Overview of Theoretical Frameworks**

The design of this research study is guided by several theoretical frameworks that are interpretive, conceptual, and methodological.

The interpretive frameworks include centering equity in career and technical education research (CTERN, 2022); a social constructivist frame (Creswell & Poth, 2018); a transformative frame (Creswell & Poth, 2018); and *GiftedCrit*, or gifted critical race theory (Greene, 2017).

Conceptual frameworks include the *ecological model of human development* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979); the *theory of positive disintegration* (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016); SCCT (Lent et al., 1994; Lent & Brown, 2019); the instructional arc (Uhrmacher et al., 2017); and my conceptual model of the *curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs*, which builds upon Uhrmacher et al.'s instructional arc (2017).

The foundational methodological frameworks used to design this study are a collective case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2006), using methods from educational C&C (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017), and CC&C.

Chapter 3 includes a detailed discussion of all guiding frameworks and the aligned research design for the dissertation study. Together, these methods are used to research and critique the CD of SEGA and the social value they create.

### **Overview of Literature Review**

The guiding frameworks express an interest in qualitatively describing the educational experiences of social entrepreneurs who are gifted. A review of literature quickly revealed a tremendous gap on this subject in academic literature, so I conducted a systematic review of the literature to understand the best practices in SEE as discussed through qualitative research.

I examined SEE in the United States by reviewing 11 peer-reviewed journal articles to glean best practices in SEE (Ballesteros-Sola & Magomedova, 2023; Dees & Worsham, 2012; Greene & Cooper, 2016; Kickul et al., 2010; Mueller et al., 2015; Otten et al., 2022; Porter & Driver, 2012; Smith et al., 2008; Solomon et al., 2019; Thomsen et al., 2018; Thomsen et al., 2021).

A review of the literature—which discusses pedagogical practices, program content, person inputs, and soft skills—revealed that SEE research has so far only been conducted in higher education and highlighted the importance of experiential learning, service learning, and business prototyping.

Chapter 2 shares the conclusions of the systematic literature review to illuminate a gap in academic literature relating to qualitative knowledge about gifted social entrepreneurs, who did not earn an SEE degree or certificate in higher education. This dissertation helps fill that gap using my expert perspective as an education connoisseur and critic (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

### **Overview of Research Problem**

Two pervasive social problems are the need for more, and more-successful, social entrepreneurs to help make our world a better place and the need for excellent and equitable education and career development for gifted people who may be interested in social entrepreneurship informed by research.

To address these social problems, a specific research problem—namely, a lack of qualitative understanding about the curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs—was identified through the development of a collective case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018;

Stake, 2006) using educational C&C methodologies (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017). The curricular career spiral is used to explore the career development experiences, supports, and barriers of SEGA and the shared social value they create (Lent et al., 1994; Porter & Driver, 2012).

Educational policy makers must nurture the talent and career development of potential social entrepreneurs for the betterment of our society (Kenney, 2011; Mueller et al., 2015). Career development that incorporates evidenced-based practices in SEE, tailored to the learning needs of gifted learners, supports the development of gifted adults who are empowered to be successful social entrepreneurs. However, academic research lacks critiques of the specific experiences, supports, and barriers in the career development of gifted social entrepreneurs to inform and transform SEE for SEGA.

This research addresses the research problem by describing, interpreting, evaluating, and thematically analyzing (Uhrmacher et al., 2017) the career development experiences, supports, and barriers of SEGA who did not complete a higher education degree or certificate in social entrepreneurship.

### ***Significance of Research Problem***

Academic research about the CD of SEGA can significantly impact and transform future CD of SEGA by directly addressing the research problem. This research informs gifted adults, education, psychology, and business about the career development experiences, supports, and barriers of SEGA. This research generates qualitative research to nurture the career development of more social entrepreneurs to address the ongoing social problem of the need for more social entrepreneurs.

The need for more social entrepreneurs is a significant social problem because it can reduce other problems in our society and environment. “It falls upon academic leaders to prove there is a scientifically measurable relationship between social entrepreneurship instruction and the reduction of social problems” (Kenney, 2011, p. 83). This quote supports this research problem, with a calling to demonstrate a qualitative (Kenney, 2011) methodology that positively impacts SEE to nurture more social entrepreneurs so they can generate more social, environmental, and economic value.

This study has the potential to positively transform career development and SEE for budding social entrepreneurs who are gifted, for gifted people who may be interested in social entrepreneurship and social enterprise, and for educational, business, and psychological institutions that develop the talents of gifted learners across the lifespan.

### **Research Study Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to critique the career development experiences, supports, and barriers of gifted adults who are social entrepreneurs and the shared social value they create.

### **Overview of Methodology**

An educational C&C (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017) qualitative research method is described to develop understanding about the career development experiences, supports, and barriers, of gifted social entrepreneurs. This overview of methodology includes a brief discussion of the RQs and the research design. Chapter 3 shares a detailed discussion of the study’s methodology.



### ***Overview of Research Questions***

The overarching RQ for this study is: How have gifted adults become social entrepreneurs? To this end, four RQs were investigated during this study to inform the career development of gifted adults who are interested in social entrepreneurship, and these questions are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

- RQ1: How do social entrepreneurs self-report their characteristics of giftedness?
- RQ2: How do SEGA describe their career development?
- RQ3: What supports and barriers impact the career development of SEGA?
- RQ4: How do SEGA create shared social value?

### ***Overview of Research Design***

The research methodology of education C&C (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017) drives the ethical design of this study (CTERN, 2022). A purposeful sample of five participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Uhrmacher et al., 2017) who are gifted social entrepreneurs was recruited to participate in two 45-minute interviews, artifact submission, 60-90-minutes of observation, and a 90-120-minute focus group to collaboratively connoisseur and critique their career development experiences, supports, and barriers (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

Data analysis incorporates my critique as a connoisseur through a four-step process of description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematic analysis (DIET; Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017). Both a priori themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018) that are preconfigured (Uhrmacher et al., 2017) and aligned with theoretical frameworks and

themes that emerge from data analysis (Uhrmacher et al., 2017) are discussed in within-case and cross-case descriptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Strengths and Limitations of the Study**

The support I received from my dissertation committee, including Dr. Uhrmacher, an eminent leader in educational C&C methodology (Uhrmacher et al., 2017) is a significant strength of this study. Other strengths of this study include my connoisseurship of education and gifted education, developed with my eminent advisor Dr. Hafenstein and professors of curriculum and instruction at the Morgridge College of Education; industrial and organizational psychology; business skill development; the qualitative research method of educational C&C (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017); and CC&C in concert with participants.

Limitations of this study include the inability to interview everyone who responded to the recruitment survey and a lack of international perspectives. Rather, this collective case study was limited to five participants from the United States to optimize analysis of each participant without an overabundance of data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Future research could overcome these limitations by utilizing AI or natural language processing techniques to synthesize larger amounts of qualitative data about the CD of SEGA and the shared social value they create. Another limitation was that the systematic literature review only examined *social entrepreneur\* education* and not other terms that might be related to the idea of developing social and environmental entrepreneurs.

## **Summary of Overview of Research Study**

This research is designed to serve an ongoing problem and need for more social entrepreneurs. The purpose of this study is to develop a collective case study critique of the CD of SEGA, and the shared social value they create, using educational C&C methodologies (Dees, 1998/2001; Eisner, 2017; Porter & Driver, 2012; Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

Guiding conceptual frameworks for this study are an ecological systems model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016), the instructional arc (Uhrmacher et al., 2017), SCCT (Lent et al., 1994), and my conceptual model of the curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs, all discussed more in Chapter 3.

The dissertation methodology is a qualitative collective case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2006) that incorporates aspects of educational C&C (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017). Participant stories—including interviews, artifact collection, observation, and a focus group—empower CC&C of the CD of SEGA. Data analysis embeds my perspective and connoisseurship during a four-step process of description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematic generation from preconfigured and emergent foci (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017). Reporting methods include descriptive statistics of participants' recruitment survey responses; in-depth case studies of each SEGA participant that begin and close with vignettes incorporating rich, sensual descriptions of participants; and both within-case and cross-case themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Eisner,

2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017). SEGA stories are told through the lens of my perspective as connoisseur and critic (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

This transformative study recommends SEE experiences to include in the career development of the gifted to nurture the development of more social entrepreneurs who may solve more of our social and environmental problems by creating shared social value (Dees, 1998/2001; Dees & Worsham, 2012; Kenney, 2011; Porter & Driver, 2012). This study has implications for gifted people and the fields of education, business, psychology, and all areas that can be positively impacted by social innovation and entrepreneurship.

### **Statements of the Researcher**

My unique intersectionality is that I identify as a multiracial, multicultural, profoundly gifted woman of color who lives in the United States, and I use she/her pronouns. I am adopted and a naturalized United States citizen who grew up as a military child in the southern United States in North Carolina and Georgia and then attended a missionary school for middle and high school in Okinawa, Japan. I transferred to Colorado for undergrad and have worked as a math teacher and with an educator's union. I earned my master's degree in industrial and organizational psychology and examined the use of cognitive ability testing in the workplace. I am currently completing my PhD in curriculum and instruction with a specialization in gifted education leadership at the University of Denver (DU), which is built on the land of the Ute, Cheyenne, and Arapaho. I volunteer and work with multiple organizations that support the gifted population.

I am also highly interested in entrepreneurship and was delighted when I learned about social entrepreneurship, which aligns strongly with my personal values. I am excited to create this work to further social entrepreneurship and help others improve and benefit our world.

### **On Philosophy**

“Philosophy means the use of abstract ideas and beliefs that inform our research” (Creswell & Poth, 16). The guiding frameworks described in Chapter 3 inform my ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology for this study.

While I am interested in informing knowledge with quantitative data using a postpositivist interpretative framework in future research, this study was not focused on systematizing the qualitative (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Rather, this study focuses on describing thematics of the career development of SEGA using qualitative research methods from educational C&C (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017). As a social constructivist, who seeks to understand the world in which we live and work (Creswell & Poth, 2018), I found the more open-ended (Mueller et al., 2015; Thomsen et al., 2018) and exploratory research methodology of educational C&C (Uhrmacher et al., 2017) was strongly aligned with the purposes of this study.

Educational C&C includes a step for interpretation, so my perspective as a connoisseur in the fields of education, psychology, career development, and SEE is critical and positions me as an expert on the spectrum of connoisseurship. Furthermore, I am not required to epoche, or bracket away, experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to strive for objectivity, because objectivity is not the goal of this research (Eisner, 2017;

Uhrmacher et al., 2017). Rather, I was encouraged to interpret data through guiding frameworks and my own unique perspective (Uhrmacher et al., 2017), intersectional identity, and viewpoint as a connoisseur, scholar, educator, psychologist, and nascent social entrepreneur.

### **On Equity**

Educational equity, which supports our shared common good, means equitable access to resources, according to the needs of each individual. Inequities stemming from how we allocate inadequate resources to different students across the United States, particularly gifted students (Gentry et al., 2019), are reinforced by systemic inequities stemming from people's personal values and beliefs.

All people deserve access to quality (valid, ethical, and meaningful) research-based education resources. Crucial curriculum must be made accessible to people with different physical modalities, linguistic backgrounds, preferences, means to pay, or rights to information. Crucial curriculum is defined loosely as whatever everyone must know in different micro- and meso-systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Greene (2017) conceptualized GiftedCrit to consider and advocate for transformation of education and research to support racially diverse gifted learners. Using GiftedCrit and CC&C are ways to positively reflect on and transform career development for SEGA.

### **On Stories**

In an advanced educational C&C doctoral class I took in 2023, Dr. Uhrmacher and Dr. McConnell challenged students to find a new term to replace the sterile term

*data*. I have taken that charge to heart and, for now, have settled on the term *stories*. Data may be both quantitative and qualitative, but I enjoy thinking about the meaningfulness of stories.

Stories encompass the who, what, where, when, why, how, and more about a quintain (Stake, 2006). As a connoisseur and critic, I strive to be a storyteller, sharing stories about each participant's perceived career arc in a positive, respectful, and transformational way. Stories extend beyond the snapshots provided by data to share the journeys of participants and demonstrate what was, is, and might be. "We listen to storytellers and learn about how things were, and we use what we have been told to make decisions about what will be" (Eisner, 2017, p. 202).

### **Summary of Introduction**

This chapter introduced key concepts, an overview of the research study, and statements of the researcher, revealing the need for more academic understanding of the career development of SEGA. Next, Chapter 2 describes a systematic literature review that explores qualitative research about SEE in the United States. Chapter 3 details the methodology, Chapter 4 shares findings organized as a collective case study, and Chapter 5 discusses implications, recommendations, and areas for future research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review of Social Entrepreneurship Education**

This chapter provides a systematic review of the literature examining important qualitative aspects of SEE in the United States and extracts themes to inform the career development of social entrepreneurs and gifted people. This systematic review reveals gaps in the literature that can be informed by this research study about the educational C&C (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017) of the CD of SEGA. Review the preceding Chapter 1 for key concepts and continue to Chapter 3 for a discussion of the methodology of this dissertation designed to explore the gap in the literature about CD of SEGA through a collective case study that incorporates educational C&C methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

### **Organization of the Literature Review**

This chapter starts with the background and rationale for the literature review and then proceeds to cover the purpose, procedures, and themes of the systematic literature review before ending with strengths, limitations, and areas for future research.

### **Background and Rationale**

Existing literature discusses SEE (Dees & Worsham, 2012), career decision-making of the gifted (Jung, 2019), career development of the gifted (Subotnik et al., 2020), and gifted adults in the work setting (Nauta & Ronner, 2016; Scott, 2012). However, no literature explicitly explores the CD of SEGA. When searching DU's databases, I could not find any explicit research on the career development of social



entrepreneurs beyond SEE. Therefore, the systematic review of literature focused on qualitative SEE research in the United States to identify critical educational experiences for social entrepreneurs.

### **Systematic Literature Review**

A systematic literature review of qualitative research about SEE in the United States is described to critique the career development of social entrepreneurs.

#### **Purpose of the Systematic Literature Review**

The purpose of this systematic literature review was to review existing qualitative research about SEE in the United States to critique SEE and the career development of social entrepreneurs.

#### **Procedures of the Systematic Literature Review**

To identify relevant literature, a search in multiple databases was conducted using the search term (“social entrepreneur education” OR “social entrepreneurial education” OR “social entrepreneurship education”). Search results were limited to peer-reviewed, scholarly research published as journal articles. When possible, an additional source-specific search term “entrepreneurship education” or a location-specific search for the “United States” were used to filter relevant results.

The systematic review of literature was conducted in several databases: ABI/INFORM Collection, a business database; Academic Search Complete, an education database; APA PsychINFO, a psychology database; Business Source Complete, a business database; Education Database, an education database; Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), an education database; and finally, All ProQuest databases,

which included both the ABI/INFORM Collection and the Education Database results. All results from the ABI/INFORM Collection and the Education Database were duplicated in the All ProQuest Database search with 19 unique citations remaining.

The January 16, 2023, literature review and hand search identified 10 articles. At the start of the systematic literature review, 227 citations were identified. This was too few citations to further restrict literature to publications within the last few years, and all were included for additional review. Of these 227 citations, 10 studies met the full inclusion criteria and are included in this literature review.

Prior to the defense of this dissertation, the systematic literature review search was replicated to identify additional articles published between January 1, 2023, and April 3, 2024. This second search on April 3, 2024, identified one additional article included in this review (Ballesteros-Sola & Magomedova, 2023). Interestingly, the vast number of articles rejected from this review conducted research in countries beyond the United States, and Ballesteros-Sola and Magomedova (2023) were only eligible for inclusion because they examined the impact of SEE through an international partnership between higher education students in the United States and Spain.

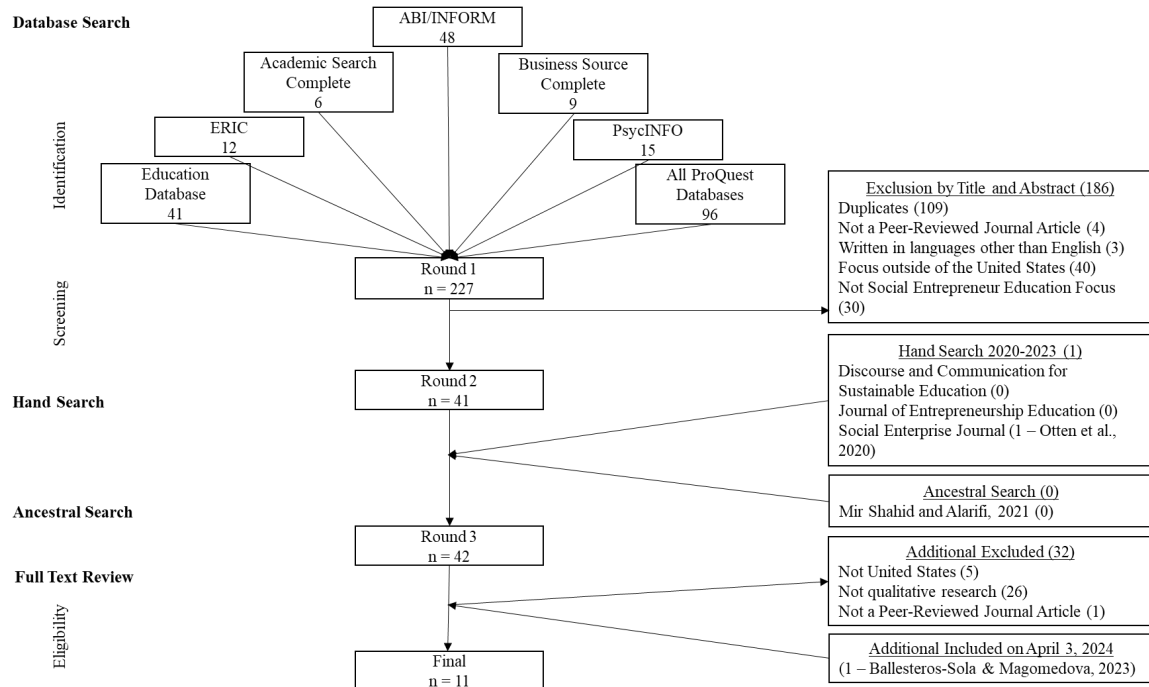
A total of 11 articles were fully-reviewed as part of this systematic review of the literature. These studies are all peer-reviewed scholarly research, written in the English language, that qualitatively explored SEE, often by interviewing or surveying students and faculty at HEIs in the United States or in partnership with the United States (Ballesteros-Sola & Magomedova, 2023; Dees & Worsham, 2012; Greene & Cooper,

2016; Kickul et al., 2010; Mueller et al., 2015; Otten et al., 2022; Porter & Driver, 2012; Smith et al., 2008; Solomon et al., 2019; Thomsen et al., 2018; Thomsen et al., 2021).

Figure 2 shows the process and selection of included literature.

**Figure 2**

*SEE Electronic Database Search*



*Note.* A systematic review of literature related to qualitative research about SEE in the United States was conducted. This graphic describes the systematic process of a database search resulting in 227 references, exclusion, hand search, ancestral search, and identification of 11 articles eligible for full-text review. Hand search of the *Social Enterprise Journal* revealed Otten et al. (2022). The database searches were conducted on January 16, 2023, and again on April 3, 2024. ERIC = Education Information Research Center; ABI/INFORM = Abstracted Business Information.

Table 1 details the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the literature.

**Table 1**

*SEE Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria of the Systematic Review of the Literature*

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Type	Peer-Reviewed, Scholarly Research, Journal Article	Not peer-reviewed, scholarly research, or a journal article
Language	English	Written in a language other than English
Location	Sample included participants from the United States	Sample was not focused on participants from the United States
Methodology	Qualitative methods that reported quotes and comments by participants	Quantitative Methodologies
Topic	Focus on social entrepreneurship education	Focus on only entrepreneurship education (but not social); focus on social enterprise or entrepreneurship (but not education); focus on corporations and not entrepreneurs

### **Themes of the Systematic Literature Review**

This systematic review of 11 articles reveals important aspects of SEE in the United States. As there were few articles at the end of the analysis, this indicates the potential for more career education research that centers on equity and utilizes

educational C&C to understand the CD of SEGA (CTERN, 2022; Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

Eight themes were found in the literature and are described in alignment with the theoretical frameworks: the SEE environment in HEIs; pedagogical practices; program content; person inputs; soft skills; experiential learning; service learning; and business prototyping.

### ***SEE Environment in HEIs***

This review of the literature suggests HEIs in the United States tend to prioritize the business-entrepreneurship aspects of entrepreneurship education and only offer occasional stand-alone courses and a small-but-growing number of programs focused on social entrepreneurship (Ballesteros-Sola & Magomedova, 2023; Dees & Worsham, 2012; Otten et al., 2022; Porter & Driver, 2012; Solomon et al., 2019; Thomsen et al., 2018). As such, there is much space for education leaders to embed social entrepreneurship learning experiences within the preschool through high school continuum and in HEIs to inspire gifted students, and all students, to the potentials of social entrepreneurship.

Business schools that provide entrepreneurship education must provide social entrepreneurship curriculum to inspire and inform students about the possibilities of social innovation and social enterprise (Dees, 1998/2001; Dees & Worsham, 2012; Otten et al., 2022; Porter & Driver, 2012; Thomsen et al., 2018; Thomsen et al., 2021). SEE can even be delivered through international partnerships of HEIs through a collaborative international online learning (COIL) program (Ballesteros-Sola & Magomedova, 2023).

However, SEE should be expanded beyond business schools (Ballesteros-Sola & Magomedova, 2023; Dees & Worsham, 2012) to reach even more people who may thrive as social entrepreneurs or in social enterprises.

This theme stokes curiosity about the career development of people who do not have an explicit learning experience about social entrepreneurship from an HEI.

### ***Pedagogical Practices***

The literature revealed several important pedagogical practices in SEE that could and should inform the intended and operationalized curriculum (Uhrmacher et al., 2017) for social entrepreneurs.

The literature recommended general pedagogical practices such as the use of lectures (Kickul et al., 2010); clear learning objectives (Mueller et al., 2015; Thomsen et al., 2021); classroom dialogue (Kickul et al., 2010); guest speakers (Kickul et al., 2010; Porter & Driver, 2012); exposure to a grounding preparation exercise (Kickul et al., 2010); exposure to business and social entrepreneurship concepts (Ballesteros-Sola & Magomedova, 2023); practical application of social entrepreneurship theory (Ballesteros-Sola & Magomedova, 2023); use of a reflective component (Mueller et al., 2015); the use of social media to support SEE (Solomon et al., 2019); and the use of quality feedback to help align student skills with needs (Kickul et al., 2010).

Three additional pedagogical practices from the literature interested me as a pedagogical connoisseur: *andragogy*, *multiculturalism*; and *integrated curriculum*.

Thomsen et al. (2018) recommend a focus on adult learning theories of andragogy—which is when students share learning experiences; educators act as coaches

and mentors for students; students develop an entrepreneurial mindset; and students are empowered through experiential learning—and advocate further for *heutagogy*, when “educators facilitate learning as students take ownership of their education and ultimately create a new start-up venture” (p. 211). Educators of adult learners must consider adult learning theories to effectively support their students. Educators of adult learners must also learn about gifted learning theories to effectively support their gifted adult learners.

Otten et al. (2022) described the importance of embedding multiculturalism through the development of student values around equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). While students in an EDI program expressed discomfort at first, they were able to process through some of their biases and connect more with their service-learning partner. A student even reported having a long conversation with his parents using information he had learned about EDI, which changed their opinion and resulted in their positive support of the Black Lives Matter movement (2022). Otten et al. (2022) demonstrated the importance of integrating time for developing social entrepreneurs to process through their biases about the communities in which they live and serve. Advocacy for pedagogy that embeds multicultural curriculum is a way of supporting the transformative CD of SEGA of all races (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Greene, 2017; Otten et al., 2022), which echoes the call for culturally responsive teaching and learning from education (Ladson-Billings, 2021) and gifted education scholars (Ford, 2010; Greene & DuBois, 2023).

Integrated curriculum includes the intentional cross-pollination of disciplines to broaden student learning, connections, and innovative ideas (Otten et al., 2022; Porter &

Driver, 2012; Solomon et al., 2019). Integrating topics of social entrepreneurship also supports meaningful student learning (Otten et al., 2022).

This theme asserts the importance of pedagogical practices that consider the adult learner, embed multiculturalism, and integrate concepts across social entrepreneurship and across disciplines. Pedagogical practices mold the intended and operationalized curriculum that impact social entrepreneurs (Uhrmacher et al., 2017). These pedagogical practices are part of the first half of the curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs.

### ***Program Content***

Content used in HEIs develop an understanding of creating positive social value (Porter & Driver, 2012) through social and emotional learning (Greene & Cooper, 2016); learning about human needs and how to respectfully support communities (Porter & Driver, 2016); and development of sustainable and scalable means of impact (Mueller et al., 2015) supported by a process of peer review and feedback (Mueller et al., 2015).

HEI also uses case studies of successful social enterprises and entrepreneurs to develop student understanding about social entrepreneurship and enterprise (Porter & Driver, 2012; Kickul et al., 2015). However, no case studies of SEGA currently exist, indicating the importance of this dissertation research.

Content should include a broad knowledge base of theoretical business models (Ballesteros-Sola & Magomedova, 2023; Greene & Cooper, 2016; Kickul et al., 2010) and of public policy (Porter & Driver, 2012). Content should also develop self-understanding of the individual such as assessing their personal norms, values, interests, ethical standards, and multiculturalism (Mueller et al., 2015; Otten et al., 2022).



Program content aligns with the first two steps of the career input arc of the curricular career spiral, relating to the intended and operationalized (Uhrmacher et al., 2017) career development curriculum received by social entrepreneurs.

### ***Person Inputs***

Person inputs were described in three ways in the literature, and I named this section person inputs in alignment with SCCT (Lent et al., 1994).

First, students of SEE are seen by faculty as asking lots of questions, showing active engagement, and being enthusiastic about learning (Thomsen et al., 2018). Other personal competencies that support SEE students include cognitive flexibility, extraversion, self-agency, self-efficacy, conflict resolution skills, and stress management skills (Ballesteros-Sola & Magomedova, 2023). These traits overlap with characteristics of gifted people who have intellectual overexcitabilities manifesting as curiosity and eagerness to learn (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016; Ksiazak, 2010).

Second, students of SEE should be encouraged to assess their personal norms, values, and interests and to develop their own personal ethical standards (Mueller et al., 2015). Developing one's own personal ethical standards is part of advanced positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016), while interests are a component of SCCT (Lent et al., 1994).

Lastly, Ballesteros-Sola and Magomedova (2023) identified several subject-specific cognitive competencies including exposure to business and social entrepreneurship concepts and practical application of social entrepreneurship theory. And Kickul et al. (2010) described aspects of their selection process to identify students

of SEE who would receive a position on a service-learning project. Kickul et al. (2010) discussed the selection value of course-relevant interest and motivation, course-relevant previous education, course-relevant work experience in social sector or related area, work experience in a developing country, previous leadership experience, and perceived team leadership qualities.

While a person may have great motivation and leadership skills, Kickul et al. (2010) show the value of specific learning experiences in indicating the potential success of a social entrepreneurship student supporting a social enterprise. Students gifted with exposure and access to entrepreneurial talent development opportunities would have been more likely to be selected by Kickul et al., not merely for their potential, but for their past opportunity and achievement. Learning experiences like these are also an important part of SCCT (Lent et al., 1994) as interests, goals, and actions help develop self-efficacy and outcome expectations.

The aspects Kickul et al. (2010) valued and that Ballesteros-Sola and Magomedova (2023) aggregated as cognitive competencies are limited to what opportunities are available in a person's ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These person inputs connect to the Actiotope Model of Giftedness, which describes how a gifted person's access to endogenous learning capital and exogenous educational capital impact the goal attainment of the gifted learner (Ziegler, 2005; Ziegler et al., 2017).

The value of the person input of cognitive competencies (Ballesteros-Sola & Magomedova, 2023) raises two questions: How are people to obtain valuable experiences (Ballesteros-Sola & Magomedova, 2023; Kickul et al., 2010) such as previous education,

work experience in the United States, work experience in a developing country, or exposure to business concepts without intentional SEE learning experiences? And how do gifted adults become social entrepreneurs if they do not have these focused educational experiences?

### ***Soft Skills***

Several categories of soft skills were mentioned as important for social entrepreneurs to develop: self-knowledge such as self-awareness, clarity of purpose, and self-regulation (Ballesteros-Sola & Magomedova, 2023; Greene & Cooper, 2016); leadership skills (Ballesteros-Sola & Magomedova, 2023; Greene & Cooper, 2016; Kickul et al. 2010); maintenance of authentic relationships (Greene & Cooper, 2016; Otten et al., 2022); a positive mindset that anyone can use innovative problem-solving to address complex social challenges (Dees & Worsham, 2012; Otten et al., 2022; Smith, 2008); the ability to respond well to feedback (Greene & Cooper, 2016); and emotional intelligence such as the ability to show humility, be respectful, and engage with empathy (Dees & Worsham, 2012; Greene & Cooper, 2016). Additionally, Ballesteros-Sola and Magomedova (2023) detailed important soft skills including interpersonal competencies, intercultural competencies, knowledge of technology, and project management skills. Ballesteros-Sola and Magomedova (2023) also detailed social competencies such as communication skills, ability to navigate work styles, ability to overcome time zone challenges, and the ability to maintain rapport with mentors, community partners, and faculty mentors.

These soft skills provide examples of psychosocial skills (Olszewski-Kubilius & Cross, 2020) that SEGA need to strengthen for the benefit of their career development. These soft skills are rooted in the individual and develop from social cognitive interactions within the ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lent et al., 1994). An in-depth discussion of these skills goes beyond the scope of this specific study; however, it is important to note that psychosocial soft skills are critical for success (Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2019). As educators intend and operationalize soft skill development in SEE, students will receive and further their soft skill development.

### ***Experiential Learning***

Experiential learning builds on the work of Dewey (1938) and centers on the importance of educating learners with real-world experience (Dees & Worsham, 2012; Kickul et al., 2010; Mueller et al., 2015; Otten et al., 2022; Porter & Driver, 2012; Smith et al., 2008; Thomsen et al., 2018; Thomsen et al., 2021). Experiential learning is a way for the individual to interact within their microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) by practicing their skills. Getting to practice something in context is immensely powerful, especially given the weight of responsibility for the actual impact of a social enterprise on actual outcomes (Ballesteros-Sola & Magomedova, 2023; Thomsen et al., 2021).

Experiential learning provides feedback to entrepreneurs, potentially fueling their process of positive disintegration and developing efficacy and intentions toward organized disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016). Experiential learning also shortens the length of the operationalized and received curriculum arcs (Uhrmacher et al., 2017)

because the student is helping to operationalize their own learning through the experiences they have.

This study is interested in the career development experiences of SEGA and explores how SEGA have practiced developing their skills through experiential learning, including service learning and business prototyping.

### ***Service Learning***

Service learning is a specific type of experiential learning. Several studies examined service-learning opportunities in which students both learn from and help an existing social enterprise through consulting (Ballesteros-Sola & Magomedova, 2023; Greene & Cooper, 2016; Kickul et al., 2010; Mueller et al., 2015; Porter & Driver, 2012; Thomsen et al., 2018; Thomsen et al., 2021), internships (Porter & Driver, 2012), and social innovation teams (Otten et al., 2022). Service learning provides a unique experience of exploring a new organizational culture in the exosystem of students (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Some programs sent students to visit organizations in countries outside of the United States (Kickul et al., 2010) or had students participate in projects with other international students through a COIL program (Ballesteros-Sola & Magomedova, 2023). Service learning projects “seemed to increase the students’ sensitivity to the [community partner’s] social mission” which led to positive student experiences (Ballesteros-Sola & Magomedova, 2023).

Service-learning experiences give budding entrepreneurs knowledge in existing organizations they can transfer and intentionally nurture students who choose to later work within social enterprises. The United States’ ecosystem of social entrepreneurship

strongly relies on business experts with knowledge and passion to support social enterprises, not just as founders, but also as employees.

The theme of service learning inspires questions about the service-learning experiences SEGA may have had that nurtured their career development.

### ***Business Prototyping***

Business prototyping is another type of experiential learning. Studies focused on the importance of students practicing the development of a business by conducting market research (Kickul et al., 2010); determining the role for the organization (Thomsen et al., 2021); developing a business model and business plan (Ballesteros-Sola & Magomedova, 2023; Greene & Cooper, 2016; Mueller et al., 2015; Porter & Driver, 2012; Smith et al., 2008); fundraising capital for social ventures (Greene & Cooper, 2016; Smith et al., 2008; Thomsen et al., 2018); developing authentic relationships to build stakeholder engagement by raising human capital (Dees & Worsham, 2012; Kickul et al., 2010; Mueller et al., 2015; Otten et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2008; Thomsen et al., 2018); practicing peer evaluation and review (Mueller et al., 2015); and launching a social enterprise while still studying at an HEI (Smith et al., 2008; Solomon et al., 2019).

Nurturing the capacity of each person to develop a sustainable and profitable business model for a social enterprise is important for fostering financially savvy entrepreneurs. Business prototypes are a useful strategy for developing the talents of entrepreneurs and employees of enterprises. However, this study focuses on the career experiences of the individual founders who have created successful social enterprises.

These individual founders would get further ahead if they could build their skills by making business prototypes with the support of the HEI or other organizations.

Business prototyping aligns with the curricular career spiral, centering around the intended career output of the social entrepreneur. As the social entrepreneur launches the first business prototype, they move into the next step of the career output arc in the curricular career spiral, which is operationalized career output.

The theme of business prototyping demonstrates a need to learn if SEGA have practiced business prototyping prior to launching their social enterprise or whether their social enterprise was their first business prototype.

### ***Summary of Themes of the Literature Review***

A systematic review of 11 scholarly articles that conducted qualitative research about SEE in the United States identified eight themes: the SEE environment in HEIs; pedagogical practices; program content; person inputs; soft skills; experiential learning; service learning; and business prototyping.

SEE programs are primarily in higher education, often embedded in general entrepreneurship and business degrees and certificates with a growing number of stand-alone programs and often still housed in business schools. However, no current academic literature qualitatively explores SEE outside of higher education.

Content used in HEIs develop an understanding of creating positive social value through social and emotional learning, human needs, and development of sustainable and scalable means of impact. HEIs use case studies of examples from specific sectors to develop student learning about social enterprise and social entrepreneurship. However, no

case studies exist yet in academia that develop a collective understanding of SEGA in the United States or utilize educational C&C (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017) to better understand the CD of SEGA or of any social entrepreneurs.

Students and faculty members report experiential learning as being very meaningful through two types of experiences: service learning and business prototyping. Service-learning experiences let students gain practical, real-world experience by supporting existing social enterprises and nurtures students' ability and interests working with and in forming social enterprises.

Business prototyping experiences such as conducting market research, developing a business plan, building human capital, fundraising, and launching a social enterprise, are experiences that support the career development of entrepreneurs who start new business ventures.

Literature revealed SEE experiences in HEIs that give business students the skills and interests needed to start and work at social enterprises, but the literature had no exploration of SEE outside of HEIs, of SEGA, or using educational C&C methods.

SEE aligns with the first half of the curricular career spiral for social entrepreneurs, the career input arc which is based on Uhrmacher et al.'s instructional arc (2017), while business prototyping begins to impact the second half the curricular career spiral, the career output arc.

This study seeks to explore the CD of SEGA who did not complete a course in entrepreneurship or social entrepreneurship at an HEI to critique the career development



paths of SEGA who have forged their own paths. What stories do SEGA share about career development experiences that echo the thematic aspects of SEE?

### **Strengths and Limitations of the Literature Review**

Strengths of this systematic literature review were clear inclusion and exclusion that made it simple to identify articles aligned with the purposes of this review and conducting the literature review again in April 2024 to identify more recent research into SEE (Ballesteros-Sola & Magomedova, 2023). Another strength was the inclusion of two articles (Dees & Worsham, 2012; Porter & Driver, 2012) with interviews that were not explicitly formal qualitative research, which allowed me to synthesize perspectives of SEE in the United States from researchers and content experts. These interviews with experts in SEE, however, added a critical qualitative perspective about needed practices in SEE from these eminent connoisseurs and critics. The inclusion of these interviews provided more texts to review, and importantly, enriched the depth of understanding about SEE.

Though it did not come up in the ancestral portion of the systematic review because it does not focus on SEE, I was inspired to identify an ancestral interview—in this case, an interview of Bill Drayton, the founder of entrepreneurship (Drayton & Thorpe, 2019). While the Drayton interview (Drayton & Thorpe, 2019) did not explicitly add to this systematic review, it added to my overall understanding of the role of social entrepreneurs in creating shared value (Drayton & Thorpe, 2019; Porter & Driver, 2012).

A limitation of this literature review relates to the jargon of SEE, a term from higher education, applied in higher education, and in research about higher education.

The hand searched edition of Otten et al. (2022) leads me to wonder if I should have conducted a search with more expansive search terms—in this case, social innovation education—or if the databases merely neglected to show Otten et al.’s impactful work around EDI and multiculturalism. I am not only interested in social enterprises, or social innovation, but also the process of an individual becoming a social entrepreneur. Therefore, this literature review focused on social entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education.

Because SEE is an emergent field of research, this review was limited to a small number of results. As the vocabulary is relatively new to academia (Dees, 1998/2001), it is no surprise that SEE, which was formed in HEIs, is prevalent in higher education. While this review met its stated purpose, it did not catch research lacking the explicit terminology of SEE.

Lastly, limiting responses to research conducted within the United States greatly reduced the number of articles, which may be why the research only centered around HEIs and excluded research conducted with international participants and programs. However, the United States is the setting for this research, so limiting research was sensible for this review.

### **Areas for Future Research from the Literature Review**

As this field of research is so new, there are many areas of potential transformative research and action regarding SEE. This literature review raises several questions: How do SEGA become social entrepreneurs if they do not receive SEE in an HEI? Did SEGA have service learning or business prototyping experiences along their

career development trajectories? What career development experiences supported, or were barriers, for SEGA? What SEE experiences are most needed and valued by SEGA?

The themes from this systematic review expose a gap in literature related to a lack of collective case studies about SEGA in the United States and any use of educational C&C methods to qualitatively explore SEE or the career development of SEGA. This systematic review of literature justifies this dissertation research and its use of CC&C to explore the CD of SEGA and the shared social value they create.

An area of future research is to use educational C&C methods to observe preschool through 12th grade classrooms in the United States to determine if aspects of SEE are being taught and how they are received. Another area of future research is to determine the impact of comprehensive social entrepreneurship development programs outside of institutions of higher education. Such programs might include business incubators, accelerators, and fellowships such as Ashoka (2020).

My next area for future research, however, would fill the gap in the literature that justifies this dissertation research by examining the SEE and career development of gifted adults and making educational C&C methodological inquiries about SEE, the CD of SEGA, and the shared social value they create.

### **Summary of Literature Review**

Chapter 2 reported a systematic review of the literature about SEE in the United States that resulted in the identification of eight themes: the SEE environment in HEIs; pedagogical practices; program content; person inputs; soft skills; experiential learning; service learning; and business prototyping. The literature review highlighted the

exclusivity of SEE in higher education, the importance of experiential learning, and revealed gaps in the literature addressed by this research into the CD of SEGA.

This dissertation uses educational C&C to qualitatively explore the CD of SEGA. Chapter 3 details a collective case-study research design using educational C&C methodology to share about the CD of SEGA and the shared social value they create. Chapter 4 shares a collective case study of findings, and Chapter 5 details implications and recommendations for the CD of SEGA.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

Chapter 1 outlined key concepts of this study and described a research purpose to critique the career development experiences, supports, and barriers of gifted adults who are social entrepreneurs and to critique the shared social value they create. Chapter 2 shared themes from a systematic review of qualitative research about SEE in the United States and revealed a gap in the literature regarding qualitative research on the CD of SEGA and educational C&C regarding the career development of social entrepreneurs. The findings from Chapters 1 and 2 indicate a need for a qualitative research design that describes collective, in-depth cases of the CD of SEGA and the shared value they create using educational C&C methodologies that are discussed in this chapter (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Porter & Driver, 2012; Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

#### **Organization of Methodology**

This chapter details a qualitative research study to critique the CD of SEGA with guiding interpretive, conceptual, and methodological frameworks. This chapter also describes a qualitative research design and details the use of educational C&C (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017) procedures organized as a collective case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2006).

#### **Theoretical Frameworks**

This research study is informed by multiple guiding theoretical frameworks categorized into interpretative, conceptual, and methodological frameworks. These

frameworks, adjoined to my lens as connoisseur and critic, form the interpretive frame (Uhrmacher et al., 2017) for this dissertation.

First, this section details four interpretive frameworks and related philosophical assumptions: centering equity in career and technical education (CTERN, 2022); social constructivism (Creswell & Poth, 2018); transformative frameworks (Creswell & Poth, 2018); and GiftedCrit (Greene, 2017).

Second, four conceptual frameworks from the literature and my fifth framework are discussed: an ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979); the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016); SCCT (Lent et al., 1994; Lent & Brown, 2019); the perceived instructional arc (Uhrmacher et al., 2017); and my curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs.

Third, the qualitative methodological frameworks of a collective case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2006) and educational C&C (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017) are described.

Lastly, research alignment driven by these frameworks is discussed to orient the reader to the research design and procedures detailed in the next part of this chapter.

### **Interpretive Frameworks**

Creswell and Poth (2018) outline several interpretive frameworks that align with my values and this study. The interpretative frameworks that shape my paradigm involve centering equity in career and technical education research (CTERN, 2022) by examining the CD of SEGA as a social constructivist (Creswell & Poth, 2018) who is a transformative (Creswell & Poth, 2018) gifted critical race theorist (Greene, 2017).

### ***Centering Equity in CTE Research***

Diverse gifted populations deserve equitable access to career and technical education (CTE) so they may thrive, and this CTE should be considered tangible property (Greene, 2017). CTE research must strive to transform the field to develop the talents of all, including each gifted learner. For each stage of the research process, the Career & Technical Education Research Network (CTERN) recommends six considerations, aligned with the *Equity Framework for CTE Research* (CTERN, 2022).

- Stage 1: Project Management
  - Ensure transparency by being clear about the why, what, and who.
- Stage 2: Research Design
  - Involve the community by collecting participant feedback throughout the process.
- Stage 3: Measurement and Data Collection
  - Develop diverse teams that represent a variety of perspectives and ensure that each team is trained in an equity-based research perspective.
- Stage 4: Data Analysis
  - Take a systems approach by remaining cognizant of vocational education's historical issues with inequity (Leonardo, 2013).
- Stage 5: Cost and Resource Equity
  - Acknowledge and attend to bias by considering ways bias is present among different parts of the research.
- Stage 6: Reporting and Dissemination

- Demonstrate respect by using a strengths- or asset-based perspective.

This chapter describes a methodology that is clear about the why, what, and who—in addition to the when, where, and how—to foster transparency in the project management process. Open-ended participant feedback was captured via the recruitment survey, end-of-interview questions, a focus group, and opportunities for individual email feedback and communications with me.

While I embody a multitude of diversities, I am but a solitary dissertation researcher. I did not develop, in the traditional sense, a diverse team for the measurement and data collection stage. Instead, I relied on the participants who collaboratively connoisseur and critique their career development (Eisner, 2017). However, I am blessed with a strong social network. In addition to beloved friends and family members, a variety of experts supported this research. I am aided in this work by a dissertation committee, supportive friends with doctorates, and a carefully selected sample of participants who share diverse perspectives as we collaboratively connoisseur and critique the CD of SEGA.

I am aware of historical, and often ongoing, inequities in education, including inequitable access to vocational education for the gifted (CTERN, 2022; Leonardo, 2013), and I intend this research to ripple through multiple systems including CTE in gifted education and higher education; business, including social entrepreneurship and enterprise; psychology including industrial and organizational psychology and social cognitive theories; and the ecological systems of our individual selves, our world, and our



futures. My social cognition (Bandura, 1986; Lent et al., 1994) of these ongoing inequities fuel my stance as a transformative critical theorist (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Finally, I demonstrate respect for SEGA by reporting from an asset-based and positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) perspective that seeks to appreciate (Eisner, 2017) each participant's cultural funds of knowledge (Moll, 2019) and their career development experiences.

By centering equity in career and technical education research, I aspire to conduct quality research whose findings positively transform the career development of gifted learners who may thrive as social entrepreneurs.

### ***Social Constructivism***

My paradigm is informed by social constructivism because I seek to understand the world in which I live and work to develop a subjective meaning of experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a social constructivist, I chose to “rely as much as possible” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 24) on participant perspectives and to consider the complexity and nuance of their views as part of CC&C. In alignment with qualitative methods of educational C&C, I worked to “inductively develop a theory or pattern of meaning” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 24) based on emergent foci (Uhrmacher et al., 2017). My own cultural, personal, and historical experiences (Dewey, 1938) among ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) shape my interpretative research interests in connoisseurship, criticism, and the DIET process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

### ***Transformative Frameworks***

Another interpretive framework that informs my paradigm is a transformative framework (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Transformative researchers strongly believe that “knowledge is not neutral and it reflects the power and social relationships within society; thus, the purpose of knowledge construction is to aid people,” specifically groups from marginalized communities, “to improve society” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 25).

The ideal reform agenda of this research is to positively transform career development for gifted learners who are interested in social entrepreneurship; to positively transform SEE so it is responsive to neurodivergent gifted learners; to positively transform society by inspiring new social enterprises; to positively transform the lives of others by encouraging good work and good jobs; and to positively transform my Self into both a Doctor of curriculum and instruction and a potential social entrepreneur.

### ***Gifted Critical Race Theory***

Critical theory (Creswell & Poth, 2018), particularly for gifted people (Greene, 2017), informs my transformative interpretative framework. As a critical theorist, I am motivated to empower human beings to “transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, and gender” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 28) and other aspects of their intersection of identities, including gifted neurodivergence, to learn how people “come to terms with and struggle against cultural forms that dominate them” (p. 29) in their ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Gifted critical race theory (GiftedCrit; Greene, 2017) applies critical race theory to positively impact culturally and linguistically diverse gifted learners. As a framework, GiftedCrit advocates for uncovering system-wide educational and societal mechanisms “that support or hinder access” (Greene, 2017, p. 196) to inform research-based recommendations for improving practices to support diverse gifted learners through anti-racist actions.

As a connoisseur and critic (Eisner, 2017), I use data analysis and criticism in this dissertation to encourage more equitable career development for diverse gifted learners interested in social entrepreneurship. As a GiftedCrit researcher (Greene, 2017), I strive to ensure that this career education research centers equity (CTERN, 2022) and critiques how the race, class, and gender of individuals impact their navigation of ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016), and social cognitive career development (Lent et al., 1994) as SEGA.

### ***Philosophical Assumptions of Interpretive Frameworks***

Philosophical assumptions about critical, pragmatic, transformative, social constructivist interpretive frameworks inform this research paradigm (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These interpretative frameworks contain ontological beliefs about the nature of reality, epistemological beliefs about how reality is known, axiological beliefs about the role of values, and methodological beliefs that inform my approach to inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Ontological Beliefs.** Ontology is the nature of knowledge. As a social constructivist, I maintain an ontological belief that multiple realities are constructed

through lived experiences and interactions with other people. These research interactions occurred during my collaborative criticism with participants, a collaboration informed by our identities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research describes an emergent reality of how career development experiences of SEGA are known to be useful, practical, or how they work to develop social entrepreneurs (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Epistemological Beliefs.** Epistemological assumptions about how reality is known are informed by interpretive frameworks. Reality is collaboratively constructed between me and each participant; is “shaped by individual experiences” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 35; Dewey, 1938); can be known in multiple ways (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Eisner, 2017); is informed by social structures, power, and control; and can be transformed through research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Axiological Beliefs.** Axiology examines philosophical assumptions about the role of different values (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Researcher values, participant values, and macrosystem values (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) all impact perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

For this study’s axiology, each individual’s values were honored, indigenous values were respected, and an emphasis was placed on the nuanced diversity of values from different community perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Methodological Beliefs.** Creswell and Poth (2018) explain different methodological beliefs that align with the overarching research methodology of educational C&C (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017) and interpretive frameworks. These beliefs include the use of a literary style of writing; induction of emergent ideas;

methods of “interviewing, observing, and analyzing texts” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 35); a collaborative process of research; multiple methods of data collection and analysis; and the documentation of challenges to call for action and change (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Summary of Philosophical Assumptions of Interpretive Frameworks.** The philosophical assumptions of ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodologies aligned with critical, transformative, pragmatic, social constructivist interpretive frameworks form a philosophical foundation for this qualitative research study that primarily employs an educational C&C methodology (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017), which is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

### **Conceptual Frameworks**

Several conceptual frameworks inform this research study including the ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016), SCCT (Lent et al., 1994; Lent & Brown, 2019), and the perceived instructional arc (Uhrmacher et al., 2017). I also developed a conceptual model of the curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs based on the instructional arc, SCCT, and our ecological system. Each conceptual framework is now discussed in depth.

#### ***Ecological Model of Human Development***

Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes an ecological model of human development that recognizes the importance of the individual and their interaction within levels of the environment. Human development is defined as “the process through which the growing

person acquires a more extended differentiated and valid conception of the ecological environment and becomes motivated and able to engage in activities that reveal the properties of, sustain, or restructure that environment” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 27). Restructuring the environment applies to social entrepreneurs who use social innovation to design their businesses, and this restructuring aligns with advanced levels of Dąbrowski’s theory of positive disintegration (1964/2016), discussed in the next section.

Bronfenbrenner’s definitions of this ecological systems model for human development include the individual, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem levels of human development (1979).

- 1) The Individual. The “mutual accommodation” and “reciprocity” of a “growing, dynamic” person who “progressively moves into and restructures the milieu in which it resides” (1979, p. 21) with the environment and larger contexts. The individuals of interest for this study are gifted adults who are successful social entrepreneurs in the United States—people who have, in some way, acquired social entrepreneurship career development experiences.
- 2) Microsystem. A “pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22).  
  
Bronfenbrenner asserts the importance of perception compared to reality by drawing on the work of scholars, including Lewin, who posit that the most relevant environment for fostering an understanding of people’s behavior and their development is their reality “not as it exists in the so-called objective

world but as it appears in the mind of the person,” (p. 23). The microsystem activities align with the educational importance of experiences espoused by Dewey (1938) and the learning experiences in SCCT (Lent et al., 1994). The microsystem setting aligns with an individual’s social milieu (Bandura, 1986). The microsystem for this study includes the settings and career development experiences described by participants as part of my own microsystem of completing a PhD dissertation in the United States in 2024.

- 3) Mesosystem. A “system of microsystems” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25) describing the interrelationships of two or more other settings in which an individual participates, such as the expanded microsystems of family, school, work, and clubs. When people share aspects of the mesosystem, they may be able to form stronger bonds and social networks. For this study, the mesosystem of interest is the mesosystem of people who participate in founding social enterprises within the United States.
- 4) Exosystem. Settings in which a person does not participate, where “events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). For instance, a person may choose not to participate in the political system, yet the political system still affects them and their mesosystem; therefore, the political system is in the exosystem of that person’s ecological model. For this study, it is understood that while each participant has their own exosystem, it is important to consider the impact that SEGA in the United States have on the exosystems of others,

especially at a global, and one day *galaxial* level (a term I like to use for the social ecosystem that traverses our galaxy and beyond). Another exosystem of importance is that of commercial enterprises with narrower capitalist perspectives (Porter & Driver, 2012) that impact, and are impacted by, the systems created by social entrepreneurs.

- 5) Macrosystem. Consistencies from exo-, meso-, and micro- settings that currently, or could possibly, exist at the subculture or culture level and any beliefs or ideologies that underlie those consistencies (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Different towns in an urban region may share a macrosystem of similarities that are not present in rural regions. For this study, the macrosystem includes consistencies in social beliefs among all entrepreneurs and business owners in the United States and beyond.

Cumulatively, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) informs my interpretation (Eisner, 2017) of the orientation of aspects of the CD of SEGA. Bronfenbrenner's model (1979) aligns with several aspects of SCCT (Lent et al., 1994): background context of the individual and microsystems of their mesosystem; contextual influences from exosystems and macrosystems; and performance attainments that are part of a reconstructed and transformed macrosystem. The macrosystem of beliefs in each microsystem inform people's learning experiences, influence their perceptions of self-efficacy, and affect their outcome expectations (Lent et al., 1994).

This perspective of human development aligns with a social cognitive developmental perspective (Bandura, 1986; Lent et al., 1994) whereby an individual



person experiences a variety of background contexts that feed learning experiences that differentiate conceptions of the ecological environment. More nuanced conceptions of the ecological environment can inspire people to take action for social and environmental improvement at different ecological levels.

This model also aligns with social entrepreneurship ecosystems such as HEIs (Thomsen et al., 2018) and cross-cultural research about social entrepreneurs to examine macrosystem influences (Solomon et al., 2019).

### ***Theory of Positive Disintegration***

Kazimierz Dąbrowski, a Polish researcher and psychologist who lived through both World Wars, developed the theory of positive disintegration to describe the process of advanced personality development that occurs when emotional forces disintegrate, or break down, previously held values and people reintegrate new, synthesized values as they shift between primary integration, unilevel disintegration, spontaneous multilevel disintegration, organized multilevel disintegration, and eventually secondary integration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016; 1967; Wells, 2023).

During this disintegration process, people experience a period of turmoil and psychoneuroses that is critical for their future development. People who are disintegrating may experience “a crisis of values, existential despair, doubts about their vocation, stage anxiety, depression, and other intensely felt emotional difficulties” (Piechowski & Wells, 2021, p. 65). While current psychology tends to label such psychoneuroses as mental illness, often recommending therapy and medications to dull the pain, the theory of

positive disintegration offers an alternative: psychoneuroses as a critical component for personal development and growth (Dąbrowski, 1972).

Dąbrowski's theory of positive disintegration and overexcitabilities was introduced to the field of giftedness by Michael M. Piechowski in a text about counseling the gifted (1979). Though the theory is and should be considered when examining the developmental potential for all people, it resonated strongly within the gifted community, as gifted people have heightened sensitivities, intensities, and cognitive capabilities. These capabilities may enable gifted people to embark on the disintegration process more routinely as people with "rich intellectual and emotional activity, and a high level of creativity often show symptoms of positive disintegration" (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016, p. 14).

Dr. Chris Wells (2023), expert in Dąbrowski's theory, founder of the DC, co-creator of the *Positive Disintegration Podcast* (Wells & Nicholson, 2021), and also a SEGA participant in this study, explained there are two foundational concepts to Dąbrowski's theory: developmental potential and multilevelness. Wells (2023, para. 16) shared that:

Developmental potential consists of the overexcitabilities, special talents and abilities, and the capacity for inner transformation, or dynamisms. Dąbrowski believed that the course of one's development and potential for inner transformation depended on the strength of one's developmental potential.

Wells (2023, para. 14) detailed more about developmental processes conceptualized by Dąbrowski:

Dąbrowski outlined five levels of development, which he saw as encompassing the entire range of humanity. He identified two kinds of developmental processes: unilevel and multilevel. Unilevel process is without a hierarchy of values and

presents either as an integration or disintegration. The multilevel process begins with the emergence of a hierarchy of values, experienced as a vertical split in which one becomes aware of the higher and lower in oneself. There are two types of multilevel disintegrations as well as what he called secondary integration.

“Secondary integration is a new organization of compact structures and activities” that come from disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016, p. 15). As a person is driven and able to disintegrate their primitive integration of a past value system, they may be able to achieve secondary integration and develop their new hierarchy of values.

Regarding the nature of people, Dąbrowski described five types of overexcitabilities: emotional, intellectual, imaginal, psychomotor, and sensual (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016; Piechowski & Wells, 2021; Wells & Falk, 2021).

Overexcitabilities are developmental forces that mean “to be very alive, perceptive, persistent, energetic, and intense—or quiet but feeling deeply and having vivid mental or aural pictures. Some people call this level of experiencing ‘intensity,’ but the picture is more complex” (Piechowski & Wells, 2021, p. 65).

The social environment a person experiences is another critical factor influencing their personality development (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016). A social milieu of learning experiences has great potential to expose a person to new ideas that can help propel their advanced development as they develop their personality ideal (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).

In concert with forces of nature and nurture, Dąbrowski described a “third factor that determines the direction, degree, and distance” of a person’s development (1964/2016, p. 39) and is the “active will in self-regulation and self-determination” (Piechowski, 2008, p. 65). The third factor is the drive and potential for inner

transformation that propels a person toward advanced development, encapsulating their motivation to better themselves and develop secondary integration.

People exhibiting positive disintegration may also demonstrate several dynamisms, or psychological processes that indicate their current development (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016; Piechowski, 2008). Piechowski (2008) described dynamisms expressed at differing levels of personality development. Unilevel dynamisms include ambivalence with a shifting mood, ambitendencies where actions change and conflict, and second-factor influenced inferiority to others (Piechowski, 2008). As a person develops, they experience multilevel dynamisms where they critically evaluate their self, their world, and others, perhaps glimpsing but not achieving an ideal (2008). Spontaneous multilevel dynamisms include hierarchization and empathy; positive maladjustment; and emotional self-judgments such as dissatisfaction, inferiority, disquietude, astonishment, shame, and guilt (2008). Organized multilevel dynamisms include subject-object in oneself, a developed third-factor, responsibility, inner psychic transformation, self-education, autopsychotherapy, self-control, self-awareness, and autonomy (2008). A person experiencing secondary integration exhibits the singular dynamism of living their personality ideal and embodies additional dynamisms such as the creative drive to perfect oneself, empathy, and identification with higher rather than lower processes, ideally with no more inner conflict (2008).

This rudimentary overview discussed critical concepts of the Dąbrowski's theory. Wells and Nicholson (2021) share much more on the first episode of the *Positive Disintegration Podcast* about Dąbrowski's work and applications of this work, including

an introduction to Dąbrowski, a definition of positive disintegration, unilevel vs. multilevel processes, overexcitabilities, developmental potential, types of development, and dynamisms. The podcast also provides access to additional references and resources relating to Dąbrowski, Piechowski, and Wells's work with the theory.

The theory of positive disintegration frequently applies to individuals but can also be applied to ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Dąbrowski, 1964/2016). While this study does not explicitly focus on the personality development and positive disintegration of individuals, I am very interested in how SEGA disintegrated the values and career expectations from their ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and then worked to reintegrate their new career ideals doing work that aligns with their highest values by building their own organizations to achieve secondary integration of a career ideal.

### ***Social Cognitive Career Theory***

Lent et al. (1994) applied Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986) to the career field to formulate SCCT. Bandura's social cognitive theory was an extension of his social learning theory and suggested that humans learn through cognitive processes in social settings (1986). The SCCT model describes several elements and relationships of career development as critical (Lent et al., 1994; Lent & Brown, 2019).

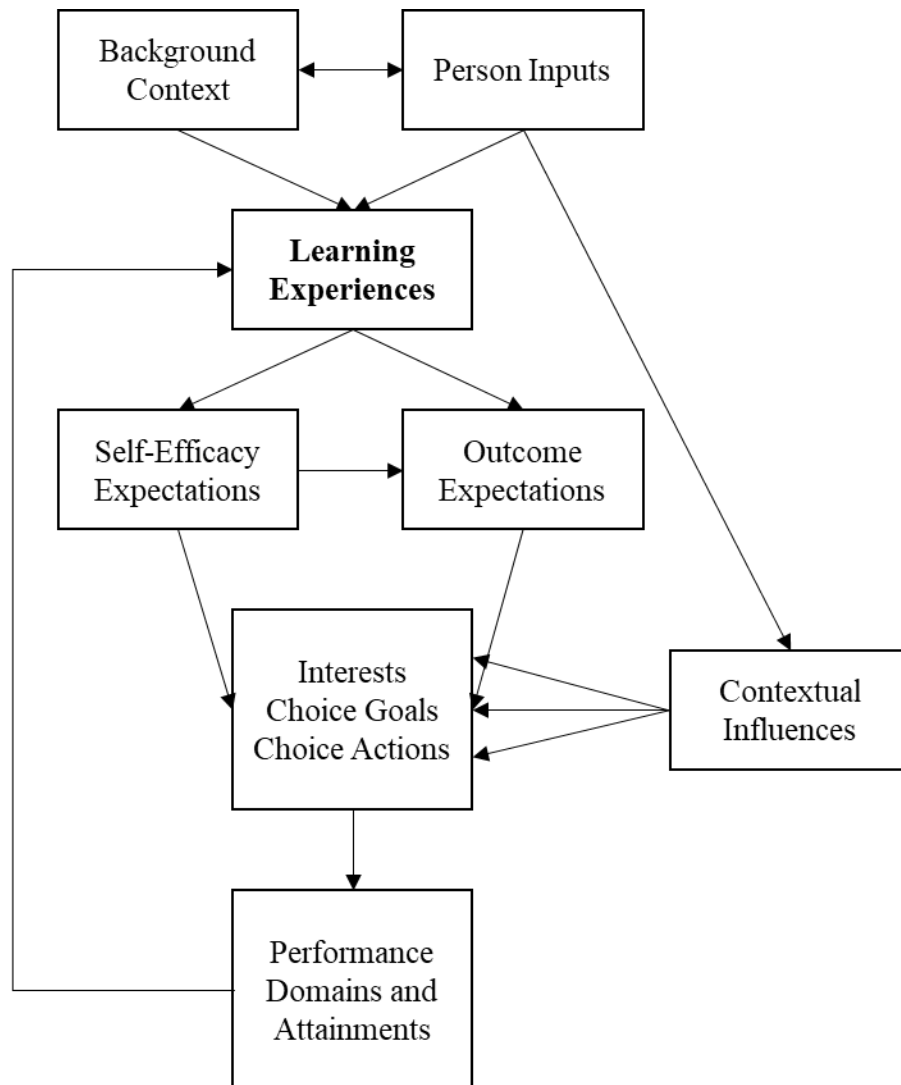
Figure 3 shows the following elements of social cognitive career development: background context; person inputs; learning experiences; self-efficacy expectations; outcome expectations; interests, choice goals, and choice actions; contextual influences; and performance domains and attainments.

In SCCT, background context (Lent et al., 1994) includes the social, cultural, environmental, and temporal setting of the person, which can be understood through the different levels of ecological systems of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and the social milieu (Bandura, 1986).

The most relevant aspects of SCCT to this study are learning experiences and person inputs. Person inputs include the individual's idiosyncrasies including personality, neurodivergence, and other aspects of their intersectional identities. For this study, salient person inputs such as characteristics of gifted adults (Ksiazak, 2010), who are social entrepreneurs in the United States, informed the purposeful and intensive sampling and descriptions of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Figure 3**

*Social Cognitive Career Theory Factors*



*Note.* A simplified version of social cognitive career theory highlighting the role of learning experiences in the model of a person’s contextual and experiential factors.

Adapted from “Toward a Unifying Social Cognitive Theory of Career and Academic Interest, Choice, and Performance,” by R. W. Lent, S. D. Brown, and G. Hackett, 1994, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 45(1), p. 93 (<https://doi.org/10.1006/jvbe.1994.1027>).

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Background context and person inputs influence how a person receives and internalizes learning experiences (Lent et al., 1994). These learning experiences, comprised of educational attainment, experiences, and informal learning, are the primary focus of this research study on the CD of SEGA. Cumulatively, learning experiences inform a person's self-efficacy expectations and outcome expectations (1994).

Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986; Lent et al., 1994; Spector, 2021) describes how confident people are that they can succeed in different settings with different tasks. Learning experiences and self-efficacy inform outcome expectations. Self-efficacy and outcome expectations inform interests, goals, and actions, along with contextual influences. An abundance of research (Lent & Brown, 2019) exists about the importance of self-efficacy as a career development mechanism.

Outcome expectations are what a person thinks will be likely to happen as a result of different career development choices. A person might have outcome expectations about aspects of a career such as the salary, compensation, work-life balance, working conditions, and personal resonance with the work because it is fun, engaging, or meaningful.

Self-efficacy and outcome expectations fuel a person's interests, choice goals, and choice actions, which are influenced by contextual influences (Lent et al., 1994). Contextual influences are analogous to the exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) in that both influence the person's opportunities, and therefore choices, beyond their background context. For example, the marketing of a university's program in social entrepreneurship



toward diverse gifted learners could spike those learners' interests, goals, and efforts to further pursue social enterprise.

Interests are whatever a person desires to learn and do with curiosity and persistence. Holland (1973/1993) theorized six interest dimensions of personality that are popular in the field of career development: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional (RIASEC). The United States Department of Labor sponsored development of a RIASEC test to help identify people's interest in order to match them with job titles, with a special section for veterans (National Center for O\*NET Development, 2024). It is likely that social entrepreneurs share high levels of social and enterprising interests, but their other interests may vary widely and be expressed in the unique social ventures they pursue. Interests connect to goals because, generally, people prefer to spend time working towards goals that interest them.

The confluences of factors of SCCT result in the career development actions a person takes and the feedback they receive. A nascent social entrepreneur might choose to apply for a fellowship or accelerator program because they expect to develop their self-efficacy and therefore have an increased potential for success. A social entrepreneur with low self-efficacy in the domain of public speaking might expect to pitch their business plan poorly to investors alone and may choose to partner with a more efficacious public speaker to reach important goals.

Altogether, interests, choice goals, and choice actions from SCCT resulting from the interaction of people and their ecological systems lead to people's performance

domains and actions—what they do and attain as part of their careers (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lent et al., 1994).

**Summary of SCCT.** There are three relevant aspects of SCCT that are most connected to this study: Person inputs, in this case, adult people who are gifted; learning experiences, in this case, career development experiences, supports, and barriers; and performance domain and attainments, in this case, the development of social entrepreneurs.

SCCT provides a grounding conceptual framework for understanding how people develop different careers and helps researchers better understand the CD of SEGA.

### ***Instructional Arc***

Uhrmacher et al. (2017) described an instructional arc to explain the trajectory of educational curriculum. The first segment of the instructional arc is the intended curriculum, that society or an educator expects to be taught—the content. Intended curriculum is analogous to educational content standards in the United States or the lesson plan of a teacher (2017). The second segment of the instructional arc is the operationalized curriculum, the curriculum that is actually delivered (2017). The third and final segment of the instructional arc is the received curriculum, which the learner internalizes and retains (2017).

**Hidden Curriculum.** Different types of curricula are embedded within the instructional arc. The explicit curriculum is most obviously related to standards and pedagogical practices and is captured on assessments. The *hidden curriculum* involves “the inculcation of values, political socialization, training in obedience and docility, the

perpetuation of traditional class structure—functions that may be characterized generally as social control” (Vallance, 1973/1974, p. 5), which can involve “differing degrees of intentionality” (p. 6).

This study focuses on learning about participant perceptions of the instructional arc rather than exploring the educational curriculum or education practices that supported the SEE of gifted adults from the perspectives of other stakeholders. The perceived instructional arc described by participants informs the process of CC&C.

### ***Curricular Career Spiral of Social Entrepreneurs***

The curricular career spiral builds off Uhrmacher et al.’s instructional arc, which consists of three segments of instruction consisting of: intended, operationalized, and received curriculum (2017). The instructional arc (Uhrmacher et al., 2017) forms the first career input arc of the worker, or contributor. Then the contributor, in this case, SEGA, has a career output arc representing their intention to make innovative change in the world, operationalize a social enterprise, and ideally produce positive social value that is received by the community. As a result of the SEGA’s career output, the community of customers, clients, stakeholders, students, funders, and more morphs into a transformed audience and then produces their own arcs, impacting future society and beyond as the spiral continues.

As the SEGA’s career output filters through their ecological system, they receive feedback from their audience, which iteratively informs their career input arc. SEGA who lack the ability to produce intended career outputs, conduct self-education to seek

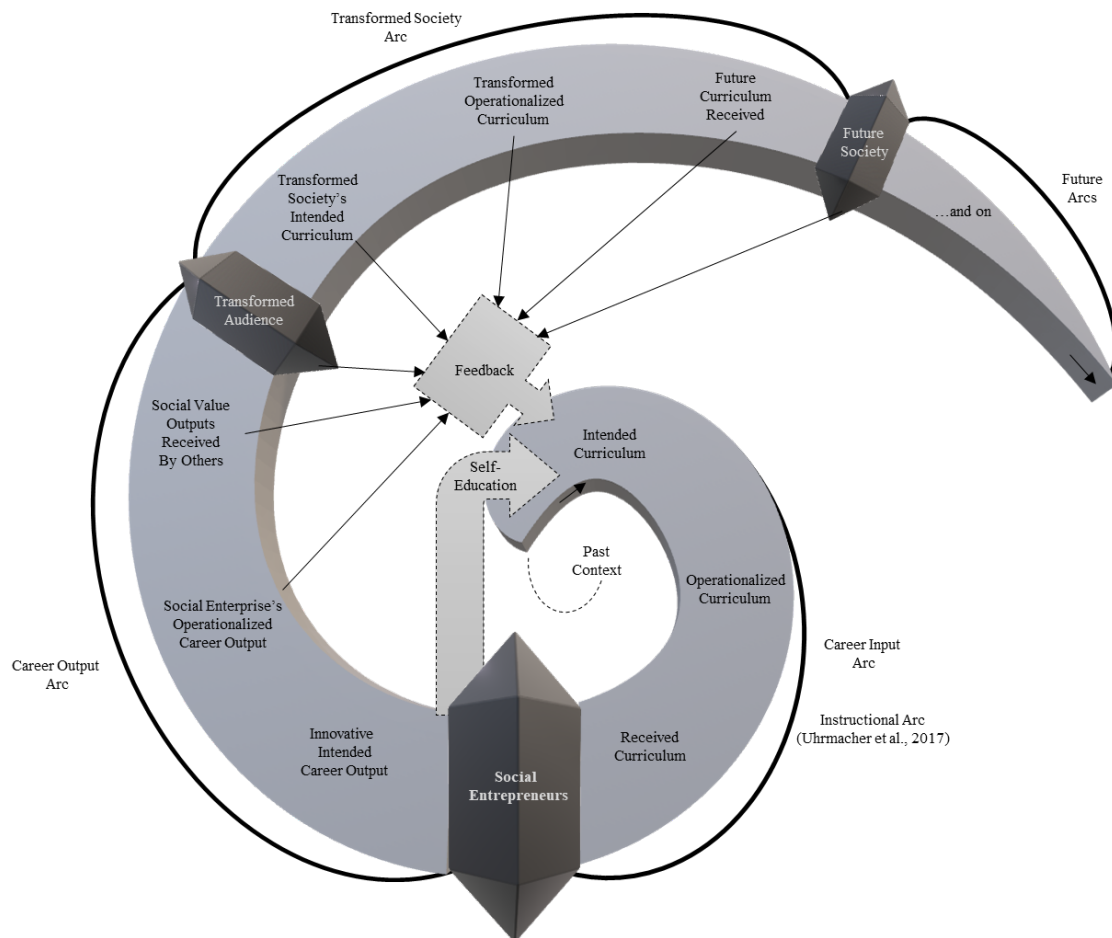
additional learning experiences as part of their career input to develop their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Lent et al., 1994).

The SEGA's social value ripples through the ecological system and positively transforms values in not only the microsystem, but beyond (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Figure 4 depicts the curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs.

**Figure 4**

*Conceptual Model of the Curricular Career Spiral of Social Entrepreneurs*



*Note.* Version 2.0

**Summary of the Curricular Career Spiral.** The curricular career spiral can be applied to frame the career development inputs and career outputs of anyone; however, it

strongly applies to social entrepreneurs when considering the curricular inputs received through intended, operationalized, and received curricula and when considering how the learner, once transformed into a social entrepreneur, intends and operationalizes curricula through business, thereby influencing what society receives and internalizes, which in turn influences new learners, thus continuing the spiral.

### ***Summary of Conceptual Frameworks***

The primary conceptual frameworks for this research study are Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development (1979), the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016), SCCT (Lent et al., 1994), the instructional arc (Uhrmacher et al., 2017), and my curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs. These concepts relate to educational aspects of career development experiences of SEGA aligned with the curricular career spiral. These conceptual frameworks formed the basis for prefigured foci during the qualitative data analysis to describe, interpret, and evaluate the educational career experiences of SEGA. The next section describes the methodological frameworks for this collective case study, which incorporated educational C&C methodologies.

### **Methodological Frameworks**

The primary methodology for this qualitative research study is a collective, or multiple case study of the quintain of SEGA (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2006). The collective case study was conducted using methodologies informed by educational C&C (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017) and incorporates my CC&C methods. These

frameworks allowed for a research design that respects participants and their stories while centering transformative equity for SEGA (CTERN, 2022; Greene, 2017).

### ***Qualitative Research Methodology***

“Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 42). The interpretive frameworks of social constructivism, and the methodological frameworks of a collective case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and educational C&C (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017) align with my desire to conduct qualitative research that describes in-depth cases of SEGA and incorporates participants’ perspectives as connoisseurs and critics (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Eisner, 2017).

### ***Collective Case Study***

A collective, or multiple, case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2006) is the organizing design for this study, which incorporates aspects of educational C&C (Eisner, 2017) discussed in the next section. The research on social entrepreneurship stresses the importance of using case studies to support SEE (Porter & Driver, 2012; Kickul et al., 2015). Therefore, the research from this study is organized into a collective case study that describes the lived experiences and perceived instructional arc (Uhrmacher et al., 2017) of gifted adults who have become social entrepreneurs. Using the terminology of a collective or multiple case study supports future researchers and academics finding this research study in library databases.

The collective case study consists of five strategically sampled SEGA who founded social enterprises. These participants represent the quintain, or group of interest, in this case, SEGA in the United States (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2006). Each individual case study describes the individual, their giftedness, and their social enterprise. Descriptions of social enterprises include participant responses to the recruitment survey and interviews along with observation and publicly available data from online sources.

Participants contributed multiple forms of data collection for analysis to support the development of rich, in-depth case descriptions for each individual, informing the analysis of themes within each case (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, cross-case themes are described. Each individual case study begins and ends with a vignette detailing the participants and their settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### ***Educational Connoisseurship and Criticism***

The collective case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018) was conducted incorporating methodologies from C&C (Eisner, 2017). Educational C&C (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017) is a process of appreciating and then developing a critique about that which was experienced. Educational C&C is often used to explore educational settings; however, Eisner's concepts of C&C (2017) came from the world of art critics, who assess and appreciate art and describe it in a rich, and meaningful way.

Conceptually, I am interested in the career development experiences, supports, and barriers of the gifted. The career development experiences are educational learning experiences (Lent et al., 1994) that are critiqued through my lens of an educational research connoisseur and the lenses of collaborative participants. Therefore, educational

C&C provides a strong guiding methodology, aligned with social constructivism, to describe the nuanced career development experiences of SEGA.

Education C&C has a long history in qualitative research, with two recent dissertations using educational C&C (Eisner, 2017) to explore other educational experiences of gifted learners. Bachtel (2017) used educational C&C (Eisner, 2017) and the instructional arc (Uhrmacher et al., 2017) to explore the intended and operationalized curriculum to empower diverse gifted children at a school serving gifted students. Bachtel's interviews, observations, and artifact collection demonstrate a strategy to foster structural corroboration through the collection of multiple types of data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

Freed (2020) examined the affective development of gifted readers and used educational C&C to explore the perspectives of both teachers and parents by conducting multiple virtual interviews. Freed's thematic analysis included themes of teamwork, compassionate allies, underachievement, and the ability of powerful literature to change lives (2020).

These dissertations provide examples of applying educational C&C in research settings involving the gifted and give credibility to the power of this method for this study on SEGA.

**Connoisseurship.** "Connoisseurship is the means through which we come to know the complexities, nuances, and subtleties of aspects of the world in which we have a special interest" (Eisner, 2017, p. 68) and the art of appreciating "fine-grained distinctions" (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, Chapter 1, para 3).



While anyone can have an opinion along the spectrum of connoisseurship, my perspective has been refined by expertise in gifted education, professional development, and industrial and organizational psychology. Therefore, I am an expert on the spectrum of connoisseurship regarding nuances of the CD of SEGA.

**Criticism.** Educational criticism is a process of making the unseen seen, a way of describing, with rich detail, the “description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics” (DIET; Eisner, 2017, p. 88) of participant experiences in the educational setting.

My critique begins and ends with vivid vignettes that convey sensory details about each participant and their story (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017). My critique resulted in in-depth collective case studies of each case with vignettes and DIET of prefigured and emergent themes both within cases and across cases (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Eisner, 2017; Stake, 2006; Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

### ***Collaborative Connoisseurship and Critique***

As discussed in Chapter 1, CC&C builds on educational C&C (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017) and the concept of co-connoisseurship (Miller, 2018) to develop the methodology of CC&C. CC&C uses C&C in collaborative partnership with participants. While I am an expert connoisseur of career development and educational learning experiences, the SEGA participants are the most informed connoisseurs of their own stories and career development experiences and how they became SEGA. Therefore, participants are encouraged to collaboratively connoisseur and critique their own career development and the career development of the group of SEGA. CC&C was enhanced

through the focus group and member checking (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

While the intent is to apply CC&C in an educational context to explore career development experiences, CC&C could be applied in any field or situation that makes a positive, transformative impact on a target situation.

### **Summary of Theoretical Frameworks**

The interpretative frameworks used for this study include centering equity in CTE research, social constructivism, transformative frameworks, and GiftedCrit (Creswell & Poth, 2018; CTERN, 2022; Greene, 2017). The conceptual frameworks framing this study are the ecological model of human development, the Theory of Positive Disintegration, SCCT, the instructional arc, and my curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Dąbrowski, 1964/2016; Lent et al., 1994; Uhrmacher et al., 2017). The three methodological frameworks used for this qualitative research study are a collective case study, educational C&C (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Eisner, 2017; Stake, 2006; Uhrmacher et al., 2017), and CC&C.

The DIET method of educational C&C (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017) was used to explore the nuanced career development experiences, supports, and barriers of SEGA by providing a description of each case with vignettes, interpretations of the stories shared by participants, evaluation of the career development experiences shared by participants, and the generation of prefigured and emergent themes from within each case and across all cases (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

CC&C builds upon the techniques of educational C&C (Eisner, 2017) by explicating the collaborative use of C&C for transformational purposes with stakeholders.

Together, these frameworks provide an orientation toward a qualitative research study designed to inform and ultimately transform the CD of SEGA detailed in the next section.

### **Research Design and Procedures**

I designed a qualitative research study that centers equity (CTERN, 2022) and uses educational C&C methodologies (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017) to explore the career development within and across collective case studies of SEGA (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Research Questions**

The overarching RQ for this study is: How have gifted adults become social entrepreneurs? Specifically, four RQ are addressed by this qualitative study.

RQ1: How do social entrepreneurs self-report their characteristics of giftedness?

RQ2: How do SEGA describe their career development?

RQ3: What supports and barriers impact the career development of SEGA?

RQ4: How do SEGA create shared social value?

These four RQ allow for the exploration of different aspects of the curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs, and the gifted experience of SEGA. For RQ1, I did not seek external confirmation of the giftedness of SEGA; rather I asked SEGA participants to self-report their characteristics of giftedness on the recruitment survey and at the first interview.

Table 2 shows each RQ and the data collected and analyzed as part of the CC&C collective case study using educational C&C methods such as DIET (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

**Table 2**

*Research Question Alignment*

Research Question	Data Collected	Analysis
RQ1: How do social entrepreneurs self-report their characteristics of giftedness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment survey - demographic question; KAGS; SEOS</li> <li>• Interview responses</li> <li>• Artifacts</li> <li>• Focus group comments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment Survey</li> <li>• Interview Questions: DIET</li> <li>• Focus Group: DIET</li> </ul>
RQ2: How do SEGA describe their career development?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment survey - educational attainment</li> <li>• Interview responses</li> <li>• Artifacts</li> <li>• Focus group comments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment Survey</li> <li>• Interview Questions: DIET</li> <li>• Artifacts: DIET</li> <li>• Focus Group: DIET</li> </ul>
RQ3: What supports and barriers impact the career development of SEGA?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview responses</li> <li>• Focus group comments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview Questions: DIET</li> <li>• Focus Group: DIET</li> </ul>
RQ4: How do SEGA create shared social value?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment survey</li> <li>• Interview responses</li> <li>• Artifacts</li> <li>• Observation</li> <li>• Focus group comments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment Survey</li> <li>• Interview Questions: DIET</li> <li>• Artifacts: DIET</li> <li>• Observation: DIET</li> <li>• Focus Group: DIET</li> </ul>

**Population**

The population for this sample is active social entrepreneurs, who are gifted, who have founded or co-founded a business, and who live and work in the United States. The businesses were required to have a primary social or environmental focus, be structured

as either a for-profit or non-profit organization in the United States, have been in business for at least one year, and have at least one employee or contractor other than the founder(s).

Social enterprises, for this study, focus on outcomes that meet two or more of the United Nation's SDGs (2015) or have founders who scored highly on the SEOS (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018) as indicated on the recruitment survey. Gifted adults self-identified as gifted or scored highly on the KAGS (Ksiazak, 2010) based on the recruitment survey.

### **Sample Size**

Guidance from the educational C&C methodology advocates for a target of at least four participants (Uhrmacher et al., 2017), while collective case studies have a recommended sample size of four or five participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

As I wanted to have a diverse sample of participants, the target number of participants for this study was set to five. This small participant number allowed for in-depth qualitative descriptions of each participant, while also allowing for the representation of diverse SEGA.

### **Recruitment Process**

The recruitment process consisted of advertising, a recruitment survey with fraud detection, strategic sampling, and compensation. Detailed inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to strategically sample five participants. See Appendix A for an outline of recruitment process protocols.

### ***Advertising Plan***

Three advertisements were developed to recruit participants for this survey: an email, a social media post, and a .pdf of a flyer.

I developed a database of over 80 organizations that focus on small business development across the United States or are social enterprises. The first round of recruitment emails was sent to relevant organizations that might have been interested in participating or know others who might have been interested in participating. The first round of emails had an optional personalized introduction, shared a minimal amount about the study, asked the recipient to take the recruitment survey, and requested the recipient to forward the survey to others who may have been eligible to participate.

The recruitment email included survey information, the call to complete the survey, and request to forward the call to others. This content was also formatted into a social media post that incorporated both a QR code and short URL link to solicit responses. I shared the social media post to my personal and professional social media accounts on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter, and personally asked friends to repost and share to broaden the reach of the advertisement. I also shared the social media post to other social media groups that focus on gifted adults, research, and entrepreneurship to increase the response rate.

The third advertisement was a one-page .pdf file of a flyer. The .pdf was attached to the recruitment email, and I printed copies of the flyer to post in public spaces including bulletin boards at the community center at DU, the Daniels College of Business, and at a local coffee shop.

The comprehensive advertisement plan should have elicited responses from at least five quality participants for this study. However, even though there were 72 responses to the respondent survey, initially fewer than five high-quality respondents agreed to participate in the collective case study. Therefore, I specifically re-invited SEGA I personally knew to participate in the recruitment survey to obtain five eligible participants per my sampling size strategy for this collective case study using educational C&C (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

### ***Recruitment Survey***

A recruitment survey captured consent to participate, optional contact information, demographic questions about the individual, questions about the enterprise, KAGS (Ksiazak, 2010), a bot checking question for fraud detection, and SEOS (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018). This data was used to purposefully select a sample of five participants for this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

More details about the recruitment survey are located in the section on data collection. The full recruitment survey can be found in Appendix B; KAGS items (Ksiazak, 2010) are in Appendix C; and SEOS items (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018) are in Appendix D.

**Recruitment Survey Response Rate.** While 50 or more responses to the recruitment survey would have allowed for sophisticated statistical description of the data such as the Cronbach's alpha as coefficients of reliability, correlation, and/or regression analysis (Bobko, 2001), respondent data was lacking. While several participants indicated eligibility and willingness to participate, some never responded to researcher emails.

Ultimately, the five participants who completed this study were all SEGA I knew personally. This shows that personal relationships are very useful when recruiting research participants.

### ***Compensation***

The consent questions, prior to the start of the recruitment survey questions, invited respondents to share their email addresses to receive future research communications. Participants who shared their emails were entered into a raffle for 30 \$20 gift cards to SimpleSwitch based on valid completion of the survey.

However, I struggled to identify 30 respondents who completed the survey, provided valid responses, and shared their emails. Ultimately, I purchased 30 \$20 gift cards that were sent to a list of respondents including some people who did not complete the entire survey. I requested that respondents reply to confirm receipt of the gift cards for documentation purposes, but only nine recipients emailed back to confirm. This leads me to believe that people were not merely motivated by gift cards.

Additionally, the five strategically sampled participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018) all completed the data collection including two interviews, artifact collection, observation, and participation in a focus group, and all were compensated for their time with a \$200 gift card to SimpleSwitch, or a \$200 donation to an organization of the participant's choosing, in several cases, their own non-profit organization.

In sum, I compensated up to 30 recruitment survey respondents with \$20 each for a total of \$600.00 and compensated five collective case study participants with \$200 each



for a total of \$1,000.00. This was a grand total of \$1,600.00 USD I spent out of pocket, in a commitment to compensating participants for their meaningful contributions.

### ***Fraud Detection***

Doctoral student colleagues of mine have recently struggled with an onslaught of bots or other ballot stuffers who quickly flood surveys with bogus data to obtain compensation gift cards. To mitigate this problem and ensure valid completion of the survey by individual, honest human beings, I practiced fraud detection using four recommendations by Qualtrics (2023): (1) In the Qualtrics survey settings, I turned on V2 Captcha which asked participants to select “I’m not a robot” (2) I used the Qualtrics setting for Bot Detection, which embeds Google’s invisible reCAPTCHA to additionally identify bots. (3) The Qualtrics setting to prevent multiple submissions was also turned on, prior to collecting any respondent data. (4) Finally, per a colleague’s recommendation, I added one question between the KAGS and SEOS sections that stated, “I am an attentive human taking this survey and will select number two for this question.” Responses that failed these fraud detection tests were segregated from other respondent data prior to data analysis with the notable exception of Nth’s response.

Nth is a participant who had a preexisting professional relationship with me. Nth did not select “2” for the fraud detention question but still completed the entire survey. When I realized eligible participants were limited, I reached out to Nth and inquired about the question—Nth indicated they thought they had selected “2” and were still interested in participating, blaming the issue on a typo/missed click. As Nth was an intense and eligible participant otherwise, I made the decision to still include Nth as a

participant. Nth provided an amazing perspective and diversity to this study. However, this situation leads me to wonder if, and how often, other gifted and neurodivergent people lose opportunities due to minor typos, missed clicks, and missed deadlines.

Examples of fraudulent responses excluded from this study were respondents to a question asking, “What is your enterprise’s primary industry/mission?” with “industry,” or “no.” If the survey were the only tool for data collection, fraud would have been a greater concern; however, though potential fraud could have impacted descriptive statistics of the recruitment survey data had there been enough responses, the primary focus of this study is on the creation of a detailed collective case study with multiple types of data collection from very real social entrepreneurs.

### ***Inclusion and Exclusion Sampling Strategy***

I reviewed respondent survey responses and strategically sampled cases that are intense and instrumental cases that are also intrinsically interesting to me as connoisseur (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Eisner, 2017). Table 3 shares the study’s inclusion and exclusion sampling strategy to identify five participants for the collective case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The strategies from Table 3 were used to purposefully and strategically sample diverse, intense, cases of SEGA. Participants were then invited to consent to and schedule additional data collection for this collective case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Table 3***Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria and Sampling Strategy*

Type	Criteria
Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age 18 or older.</li> <li>• Live and work in the United States.</li> <li>• Founder or co-founder of a social enterprise focused on positive social and/or environmental impact determined by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ a) self-identification as a social entrepreneur,</li> <li>○ b) indication that the social enterprise focuses on at least two of the UN's SDGs (United Nations, 2015), or</li> <li>○ c) a high score on SEOS (Dwivedi &amp; Weerawardena, 2018).</li> </ul> </li> <li>• For this study, a successful social enterprise must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ a) be formed as either a for-profit or non-profit,</li> <li>○ b) be in business for at least one-year, and</li> <li>○ c) have at least one employee or contractor other than the founder.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Self-reports their characteristics of being gifted by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ a) self-identifying as gifted or probably gifted,</li> <li>○ b) indicating they received formal gifted and talented education services during preschool through 12th grade at school, in the United States,</li> <li>○ c) indicating they have a cognitive IQ score at the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile or greater, or</li> <li>○ d) having a score one or more standards above the mean of the respondents on the KAGS (Ksiazak, 2010).</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Has NOT attended a higher education program in entrepreneurship or social entrepreneurship.</li> </ul>
Exclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children, under the age of 18.</li> <li>• People who primarily live or work outside of the United States.</li> <li>• People who are not entrepreneurs.</li> <li>• People who have not formed social enterprises.</li> <li>• People who do not identify as gifted.</li> <li>• People who have completed a higher education program in entrepreneurship or social entrepreneurship.</li> </ul>
Diversity	<p>Mandatory Diversity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender – Different genders (mandatory, at least 1 male, 1 female; ideally, 1 who identifies as neither only 'male' or only 'female').</li> <li>• Business Structure – Different numbers (mandatory, 1 for-profit and 1 non-profit; ideally, 1 B-Corp).</li> </ul>

## **Participants**

Five SEGA participants were selected to participate in this study and consented to the use and permanent publication of their real names and organizations.

These participants were from the population delineated by the inclusion criteria in Table 3. They were all adults who live and work in the United States, self-reported that they are gifted or have gifted characteristics, did not yet complete a higher education program in entrepreneurship or social entrepreneurship, and are founders or co-founders of social enterprises. Their social enterprises align with two or more of the United Nation's SDGs (2015), existed for at least one year prior to the recruitment survey, and have at least one employee or contractor other than the founder(s).

More detailed demographics of the participants are shared in the Chapter 4 description of SEGA participants.

## **Data Collection**

Two strategies were used to refine the recruitment message, recruitment survey (see Appendix A), interview protocols (see Appendix E), and focus group protocols (see Appendix E) prior to institutional review board submission: cognitive interviews and a pilot survey (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

First, a set of cognitive interviews of three academics with expertise in academic research were conducted to ensure that the questions on the protocols made sense and would be understood by participants. Second, protocols were refined and used in a pilot study with 16 people to ensure the Qualtrics form was working properly. Third, protocols were then further refined, as needed, to ensure valid protocols.

Data was first collected through a recruitment survey. Then, a purposefully selected, intensive sample of five individuals from diverse backgrounds (Creswell & Poth, 2018) were invited to participate in the collective case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). See Table 3 for inclusion and exclusion criteria and sampling strategy for participants.

Additional data collection included two recorded 45-60-minute interviews of each case study participant, the submission of artifacts (related websites, videos, photos, art, etc.), 60-90 minutes of observation, and recorded participation at a 90-120-minute virtual focus group. Participants also reviewed their final case study description and conclusions of the study to provide feedback for clarity and accuracy, which fostered collaborative C&C (Eisner, 2017; Miller, 2018; Uhrmacher et al., 2017). Virtual or in-person observations were optionally recorded based upon participant preference to respect the privacy of their business, staff, and clientele.

### ***Recruitment Survey***

Qualtrics survey software was used to design an online recruitment survey to screen for potential participants. The recruitment survey consisted of questions related to consent, entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, demographics, and giftedness, and it included two scales, the 22-item KAGS (Ksiazak, 2010) and 21-item SEOS (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018). The recruitment survey responses enabled intensive, purposeful, strategic sampling of participants. Additionally, hard-ask questions asked for explicit commitments of willingness to participate in this research study and were shown to participants who met the criteria for inclusion outlined in Table 3. See Appendix B for

the full list of questions from the recruitment survey, Appendix C for KAGS items (Ksiazak, 2010), and Appendix D for SEOS items (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018).

**Ksiazak Adult Giftedness Scale.** The Ksiazak Adult Giftedness Scale (KAGS) was incorporated into the recruitment survey to facilitate intensive case selection and further describe SEGA's self-reported characteristics of giftedness.

Ksiazak (2010) initially compiled the Ksiazak Adult Giftedness Scale (KAGS) by building on the work of Silverman who had previously developed the *Giftedness in Adults* scale (2005), on Dąbrowski's concept of intellectual overexcitability (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016), and on the concept of above-average ability from Renzulli and Reis (2020). Then, Ksiazak (2010) investigated the construct validity of the Ksiazak Adult Giftedness Scale (KAGS) in two studies that yielded Cronbach's alpha reliabilities of 0.877 and 0.825, which are good reliabilities to establish internal consistency, and a one-year test-retest reliability analysis of 0.875 and .786, which are good values for test-retest reliability. KAGS had a correlation of .782 and .732 with Silverman's *Giftedness in Adults* scale (2005), which established convergent validity for measuring giftedness in adults (Ksiazak, 2010). KAGS was then further refined with an exploratory factor analysis that suggested a single-factor model of characteristics of adult giftedness was the best fit (Ksiazak, 2010).

The original KAGS consisted of 23 items, with a seven-point ordinal scale for responses ranging from never to always (Ksiazak, 2010). However, Ksiazak determined that removing item 10 increased the KAGS internal consistency from a Cronbach's Alpha of .872 to .874, while removing item 14 would have no effect on internal consistency

(Ksiazak, 2010). Therefore, the original item 10— “It is very frustrating for me to be with people who don’t learn as quickly as I do” (p. 80)—was removed, item 14 was retained, and the rest of the items were renumbered, resulting in a 22-item KAGS used for this study (See Appendix C).

Some items that seem likely to impact the becoming of social entrepreneurs are item 3— “I think about existential issues often”—and item 17— “I am very concerned about world issues such as the environment, homelessness, war, or human rights” (Ksiazak, 2010, pp. 80-81).

As a valid measure of giftedness in adults, KAGS was used to assist with intensive and strategic sampling and description of SEGA by indicating aspects of intense gifted characteristics of each participant. See Appendix C for a list of all items of KAGS (Ksiazak, 2010).

**Social Entrepreneurship Orientation Scale.** SEOS (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018) is a 21-item, five-point Likert scale with five categories of questions around social mission, proactiveness, innovativeness, risk management, and effectual orientations. Higher scores indicate higher levels of social entrepreneurship orientation (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018). The SEOS was used to select and describe the intensive sample of participants for the collective case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). See Appendix D for a list of all items of the SEOS (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018).

### ***Interviews***

Five purposefully selected participants completed two, 45-60-minute interviews in a one-on-one virtual web meeting setting. Participants were asked to bring their

artifacts to share at the first interview. Interview questions were shared in advance with participants to allow them to think about questions prior to the interview.

Interviews were recorded, transcribed through transcription software, edited by me, and annotated and coded to identify prefigured and emergent themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldana, 2021; Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

In Appendix E, Table E1 has semi-structured, open-ended interview protocol prompts for the first interview, which centered around giftedness, career development experiences of SEGA, and discussion of the artifact. Table E2 has semi-structured, open-ended interview protocol prompts for the second interview, which centered around the intended and operationalized career output of the participants, their social enterprises, and their future goals, and which elicited feedback about a prior vignette identified by me to encourage collaborative C&C (Uhrmacher et al., 2017). During interview 2, I also asked clarifying questions about previous data collected.

These interviews elicited rich participant descriptions about their career development experiences, supports, and barriers; how they manifest their giftedness as social entrepreneurs; and the work they do to impact our world. Protocol questions are provided, along with nudges to probe for more elaboration in Appendix E.

### ***Artifact Collection***

To satisfy the methodological desires of both collective case studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and educational C&C (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017), multiple forms of data are collected to inform in-depth case descriptions and both within-in case and cross-case themes.



Specifically, participants were asked to share artifacts relating to their giftedness or career development experiences as social entrepreneurs. Artifacts could have consisted of art, photos, video clips, drawings, or anything else the participant decided to share. Participants shared websites, books, photos, and test results as artifacts about their development.

Artifacts, or images of artifacts, were observed by me and analyzed using educational C&C DIET processes (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

### ***Observation***

An intriguing part of the curricular career spiral is the curricula the social entrepreneur's output to the world, consisting of their innovative intended career output, their operationalized career input, and the output they perceive as being received by others. To glimpse some of what SEGA output into the world, observations were conducted as part of CC&C and embedded into the collective case study.

Typically, between interview 1 and interview 2, I conducted between 60- and 90-minutes of observations, at one or more times, in virtual or in-person settings, with each participant. One observation was much longer, as I was invited to spend the day at an educational site, and one observation was sent to me as a recording because I could not attend a meeting. These observations allowed me to observe the SEGA working, presenting, pitching, or doing other business tasks—intended and operationalized career outputs. I confirmed the ability to record the observation ahead of time, being mindful of organizational, employee, and client privacy while observing the social entrepreneurs to

learn about their intentions with their social enterprises and how they operationalized their work.

I took notes during the observations and used the education C&C process to generate DIET from observation data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017). Observations allowed me to witness the SEGA in their natural settings and allowed for the extraction of DIET related to the career output and shared social values of SEGA.

### ***Focus Group***

Participants were invited to participate in a virtual, 90- to 120-minute, recorded focus group to understand how they thought and felt. The group involved a planned discussion that sought participants' opinions (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

During the focus group, I presented themes from the study for feedback and discussion to stimulate collaborative C&C with participants. Annotations and coding of the focus group transcript allowed for additional C&C data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldana, 2021; Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

Prior to the focus group, participants received their individual cases and an overview of group themes to foster CC&C conversation at the focus group. The focus group began with group introductions to allow the SEGA participants to briefly meet each other. Focus group prompts were intentionally vague and refined prior to the meeting date based on the education C&C DIET (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017). See Table E3 in Appendix E for the focus group protocol.

### ***Summary of Data Collection***

Multiple forms of data were collected to share detailed stories of the CD of SEGA, including a recruitment survey, interviews, artifact collection, observation, and a focus group.

### **Data Analysis**

For this qualitative study of only a few unique participants, I set aside positivist data analysis techniques that rely strongly on quantitative statistical analysis of large sets of data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Rather, as part of a social constructivist way of knowing, each participant collaboratively critiqued their career development in partnership with me through feedback and focus group participation.

Participants' recruitment survey results from demographic questions, entrepreneur questions, KAGS (Ksiazak, 2010), and SEOS (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018) are reported in Appendix F. Individual participant data was also incorporated into each of their case descriptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Transcripts of the interviews and focus group, researcher notes, and artifacts were annotated to capture research reflections and questions and vividly describe their stories (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Uhrmacher et al., 2017). The two interview transcripts were coded using NVivo software to identify prefigured themes aligned with frameworks and emergent themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldana, 2021; Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

Data analysis explored stories for impacts in our ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), aspects of the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016), connections to SCCT (Lent et al., 1994), and alignment with my curricular

career spiral of social entrepreneurs. Further data analysis of interviews, artifacts, observation, and the focus group followed educational C&C steps described by Eisner (2017) and Uhrmacher et al. (2017) with DIET related to the career development experiences, supports, and barriers of SEGA. Both within-case and cross-case thematic are described that align with a priori themes, preconfigured to the frameworks, and emergent themes I noticed (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

### **Reporting Procedures**

In-depth case descriptions were developed for each participant, incorporating their stories from the recruitment survey data, interviews, observations, focus groups, and artifacts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Reporting procedures include writing strategies, an outline, and a dissemination plan.

### ***Writing Strategies***

The writing of the findings of this dissertation incorporates a narrative tone that shares vignettes of participants that incorporate vivid imagery to describe the people, their comments, and their sensory settings (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

Findings are organized as in-depth within-case case studies with starting and ending vignettes to let the reader see the SEGA participant and conclude with a cross-case case study that addresses RQ (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Eisner, 2017; Stake, 2006; Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

### ***Outline***

Here is a brief outline of the collective case descriptions in Chapter 4: Findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985): Each in-depth description begins with

an opening vignette and contains a description of the SEGA's background; description of the career development experiences of the SEGA; details from the recruitment survey data; interpretation and evaluation from my perspective as connoisseur; a discussion of within-case thematic aligned with RQs with connections to guiding frameworks; and a closing vignette to vividly describe the setting and the participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

Then I explore the DIET of the focus group and follow with a discussion of cross-case thematic that align with prefigured frameworks and that emerged from the open appreciation of participant stories, with themes organized to address each RQ (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

### ***Dissemination Plan***

Confirmed plans for dissemination of this research include the following: publishing in the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database; sending an executive summary to recruitment survey respondents who shared their email address and to people known personally and professionally to me who may be interested in the findings of this study; and delivering presentations at the Idea Café of the GlobalMindEd conference in June 2024 and at the Mensa Foundation Colloquium in July 2024 which has the theme *Giftedness Across the Lifespan: Giftedness in the Workplace*.

Additional plans for dissemination include a paper or presentation in each of the three realms of education, business, and psychology; creation of a professional development for gifted education teachers to develop the talents of budding social

entrepreneurs; and creation of a course or book for gifted adults who may be interested in social entrepreneurship.

### **Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) outline four stances to clarify when designing research to be trustworthy: 1) truth value, also known as credibility and internal validity; 2) applicability, also known as transferability, external validity, or generalization; 3) consistency, also known as dependability or reliability; and 4) neutrality, also known as confirmability or objectivity.

### ***Credibility***

The credibility, or truth value (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), of this study was supported by prolonged engagement (1985) with participants through multiple interviews, an observation, and a focus group; triangulation (1985), or structural corroboration (Eisner, 2017), of the quintain of SEGA by collecting multiple types of data including interviews, artifacts, observations; and a focus group with all stakeholders participating in CC&C (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Eisner, 2017; Stake, 2006; Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

**Ecological Validity.** Ecological validity (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) is the extent that the subject's environment and experiences have the properties they are supposed to have, per researcher assumptions. The quintain (Stake, 2006) of SEGA, who live in the United States, and who have not completed a degree in entrepreneurship or social entrepreneurship at an HEI, required ecological validity to support the credibility of this study.

Ecological validity of this research was supported by the recruitment survey, which addressed whether respondents were social entrepreneurs, gifted adults, live in the United States, and have completed a degree in entrepreneurship or social entrepreneurship. Strategic, and purposeful sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018) of social entrepreneurs, resulting in an in-depth collective case study critique (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Eisner, 2017), indicated ecological validity of the quintain (Stake, 2006) further establishing the credibility of this study.

### ***Generalization***

Generalization means whether information can be applied past the original context and transferred to other situations or tasks (Eisner, 2017). This qualitative study does not seek to create generalizable data in the quantitative sense; rather this study seeks to create a nuanced collective case study critique (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Eisner, 2017) about the quintain of SEGA that the reader can explore. It is up to the reader, and ultimately out of my control, what aspects of this research are retained and what the reader thinks, and does with whatever was received and learned. However, I share generalized implications and recommendations for the practice and policy of gifted adults, education, business, and psychology in Chapter 5.

### ***Reliability***

Reliability considers if the results are consistent enough that they could be replicated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To foster confirmability, the research maintained an inquiry audit trail containing raw data, annotations and vignettes, themes, and process notes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Uhrmacher et al., 2017). Additionally, this dissertation

includes guiding frameworks and purpose statements aligned with the research's intentions, protocols, in-depth descriptions, themes, and other findings, which all further reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Using these tools, another researcher could conduct their own CC&C about the career development of a quintain population (Stake, 2009), which, in this case, was SEGA in the United States.

Now, whether the unique findings of this study could be replicated exactly is a philosophical question. I reported factual and subjective information about each participant, used member checking, and conducted a focus group, so any particular question asked again of these SEGA should generally receive similar responses. However, a participating SEGA might continue to think about this research and have a different opinion or answer to something later, or their work might shift and need to be described differently. Replications of this study with completely different SEGA may yield a different set of findings per their individual experiences and shift in settings or temporality. Overall, reliability is less interesting than the truth and nuance of what is, or was, during this specific study.

### ***Subjectivity***

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest a discussion of neutrality, of objectivity. However, objectivity is minimally the point of this qualitative CC&C that explores in-depth cases of SEGA. Rather, my perspective as a social constructivist most highly values a subjective voice as researcher, expert, connoisseur, and critic. My subjectivity is an asset and required to make the knowledge of this research known to readers in the domain (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017).



### ***Summary of Trustworthiness***

This section discussed credibility, generalization, reliability, and subjectivity. The next section on the ethical design of this dissertation research also increases trustworthiness.

### **Ethics**

This research study follows the three ethical principles as delineated by the Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979) of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice.

Respect for persons is protected by my internal deep respect and reciprocity (Flinders, 1986) for SEGA and for all respondents, but also through the obtainment of informed consent regarding research procedures and the publication of real names and personally identifiable research data. Respect for persons was met through interpersonal interactions between each participant and me, through politeness, development of relationships and trust, and reminders that participants could skip questions as desired.

Beneficence concerns whether the research is of benefit to the participants. This research intends to benefit participants by helping them reflect on their career development and the shared value they create and by sharing a collective case study critique resulting in positive press about their social enterprises. The largest intended benefit, however, is to positively affect the career development of both social entrepreneurs and gifted adults, and these benefits should have a ripple effect for all of society.

Lastly, this study achieved justice by ensuring that participants were treated well and equally shared the burden of data collection and participant compensation.

As an educational critic, I was responsible for demonstrating reciprocity beyond informed consent (Flinders, 1986). Reciprocity means efforts to value the two-way relationship between participant and researcher and requires recognizing that participation in this study is an opportunity for participants to share their stories and committing to neither harm nor wrong participants or their professional standings (Flinders, 1986). I practiced reciprocity by obtaining detailed, informed consent, by gaining permission to use the identifiable information of participants and their social enterprises, by seeking confirmation before including details I viewed as sensitive, and by member checking. Each participant was able to read and revise their cases and participate in a focus group where cross-case themes were shared. I knew these efforts were recognized when, at the beginning of our second interview, a participant, Janiece, told me, “Thank you for this research. I think it’s really—I’ve been experiencing it. It’s very humanizing and dignifying. So, thank you.”

I strived and succeeded in conducting this study about the CD of SEGA ethically by valuing respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979).

### ***Institutional Review Board***

As part of conducting ethical research, I obtained dissertation committee approval, conducted cognitive interviews and a pilot study of the survey and protocols, and received institutional review board (IRB) approval prior to conducting any

recruitment or data collection. IRB approved consent, recruitment, and data collection protocols for this study, ensuring ethical alignment with human subject research requirements.

### ***Data Management***

**Consent.** Implied consent was obtained prior to the start of the recruitment survey. Additionally, detailed participant informed consent was obtained from the five collective case study participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I requested explicit, additional permission to publicly and permanently publish their names, photos, images and videos, social enterprise information, and other data collected through this study.

While general consent for the recording and observation of participants was included in the informed consent form, I specifically re-confirmed that there was consent before recording any observations of the participants.

Participants were able to request the removal of any pieces of information from their case study profile and could drop out of the study at any time prior to April 2024, when this dissertation research was defended and permanently published in the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database.

**Confidentiality of Data.** The consent questions, prior to the start of the recruitment survey, invited respondents to share their email addresses to receive future communications from me and to be entered into a raffle for 30 \$20 gift cards to SimpleSwitch based on valid completion of the entire survey.

I will maintain a private and confidential archive of recruitment survey respondent email addresses to be used for communication about future research and

research studies, including potential longitudinal research studies that build off data collected in this study.

This research sought five collective case study participants who were willing to consent to the publication and critique of data that identifies their names, organizations, photos, videos, artifacts, observations, and individual responses to the recruitment survey. However, if I had been unable to identify five participants who willingly consented to publication of their identifiable data, I would have used pseudonyms for participant names and organizations.

### **Role of Researcher**

I worked to ethically incorporate my personal and professional perspective as connoisseur to critique the CD of SEGA and the shared social value they create (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017). I developed this research study to investigate a problem of personal and professional curiosity. I sent the recruitment survey to potential snowball recruiters, posted the recruitment flyer, and reached out to potential participants. I scheduled and conducted interviews, observations, artifact collection, and a focus group with participants. I then applied my lens of connoisseurship and openness to nuance to annotate and code transcripts and other participant stories, identifying prefigured and emergent themes (Uhrmacher et al., 2017). I strived to produce in-depth, vivid, narrative descriptions to tell stories about each SEGA participant and their curricular career spirals. Finally, I work to share salient findings with populations of the gifted, and researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in education, business, and psychology.

## **Summary of Research Design and Procedures**

This section described a collective case study research design (Creswell & Poth, 2018) incorporating methods of educational C&C (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017). The research began with a recruitment survey; then I used intensive purposeful sampling to select five participants who completed two interviews, submitted artifacts, consented to an observation, and participated in a focus group. Data analysis incorporated the educational C&C methodology of DIET (Uhrmacher et al., 2017). Both within-case and cross-case themes were revealed through this ethically conducted research to illuminate the CD of SEGA and the shared value they create.

## **Summary of Methodology**

Chapter 3 described grounding theoretical frameworks and detailed procedures for a qualitative research design to learn about the career development experiences, supports, and barriers of SEGA. The research design is of a collective case study organized to produce detailed within-case and cross-case descriptions with both prefigured and emergent themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The collective case study incorporated methodologies from educational C&C to allow five, purposefully selected participants to be collaborative connoisseurs and critics of the CD of SEGA and the shared social value they create. Chapter 4 reports findings, including descriptive statistics of recruitment survey responses, and is organized as in-depth within-case case studies of each participant that incorporate vivid vignettes and a cross-case case study, while Chapter 5 concludes with a discussion of implications and recommendations.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

### **Overview of Research Design**

Society needs career development that generates more social entrepreneurs and the research problem guiding this study is a lack of understanding about the curricular career spiral of SEGA. The purpose of this dissertation is to critique the career development experiences, supports, and barriers of gifted adults who are social entrepreneurs and the shared social value they create, organized into a collective case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2006).

### **Research Questions**

The overarching RQ asks: How have gifted adults become social entrepreneurs? Specifically, each case study addresses four RQ.

RQ1: How do social entrepreneurs self-report their characteristics of giftedness?

RQ2: How do SEGA describe their career development?

RQ3: What supports and barriers impact the career development of SEGA?

RQ4: How do SEGA create shared social value?

### **Summary of Overview of Research Design**

To meet the purposes and answer the RQs of this study, this chapter outlays dissertation findings organized as a collective case study with themes using DIET (Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

## **Organization of Findings**

This chapter began with an overview of the research design, continues with a description of the five SEGA participants, then presents five within-case case studies, one for each participant, and concludes with a cross-case case study of all SEGA participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2006). Each case study starts and ends with a vignette, shares details about each participant's background and social enterprise, and contains findings about their career development and the shared social value they create. These findings are organized into themes for each RQ using a DIET process (Uhrmacher et al., 2017). The cross-case case study synthesizes findings and then shares themes of the group organized by RQ also using DIET (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2006; Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

## **Description of SEGA Participants**

Five SEGA participated in this collective case study and consented to the use of their real names, organizations, and the permanent publication of their personally identifiable data. Table 4 shares a brief overview of the SEGA participants: (1) Kristopher Tetzlaff, co-founder of You be You Early Learning (YbY); (2) Janiece Mackey, primary co-founder of Young Aspiring Americans for Social & Political Activism (YAASPA); (3) Shalelia Dillard, founder of SCD Enrichment Program (SCDEP); (4) Chris Wells, founder of the Dąbrowski Center (DC); and (5) Nth Bar-Fields, primary co-founder of Elysian Trust (ET).

Each participant completed all data collection. Participant quotes in the case studies are from interview transcripts or responses to the recruitment survey.

**Table 4***Overview of SEGA Participants*

	Kristopher	Janiece	Shalelia	Chris	Nth
Full Name	Kristopher Tetzlaff	Janiece Mackey	Shalelia Dillard	Chris Wells	Nathaniel Bar-Fields
Role	Co-Founder	Co-Founder	Founder	Founder	Co-Founder
Social Enterprise	You be You Early Learning (YbY)	Young Aspiring Americans for Social & Political Activism (YAASPA)	SCD Enrichment Program (SCDEP)	Dąbrowski Center (DC)	Elysian Trust (ET)
Age	40-49	30-39	30-39	50-59	40-49
Gender	Cis-male	Female cisgendered	Female	Nonbinary	Intersex male
Race/Ethnicity	White U.S. American	Black, African American	Black / African American	White	African-American (Afro-Latino, Afro-Caribbean)
Skin Tone	18	7	15	17	9
Region					
State	Colorado	Colorado	Colorado	Colorado	Texas

Visit Appendix F to view SEGA recruitment survey responses including more detailed SEGA demographics (Table F1), SEGA organization demographics (Table F2), SEGA organization alignment with SDGs (Table F3; United Nations, 2015), SEGA self-identification of neurodivergence and giftedness (Table F4), SEGA responses on KAGS (Table F5; Ksiazak, 2010), and SEGA responses on SEOS (Table F6; Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018).



### **Case 1: Kristopher Tetzlaff, Co-Founder of You Be You Early Learning**

Kristopher sits in front of the web camera in a neutral room in front of a white-painted wall and a tall black door that is closed. Two framed pieces of art are behind him: a small picture of perhaps two red birds on a branch and a medium-sized piece of lightly-colored art—a bright glare renders the image indistinguishable through our web meeting software. Two round ceiling lights above Kris are turned off, but the bright sunlight provides plenty of ambient light.

He sits calmly with alert blue eyes, and his light brown hair is cut short and swept back from his forehead. Kris has tanned white skin, and his lips softly smile behind a neatly trimmed, short mustache and beard with a few flecks of grey. He wears a dark t-shirt underneath a lightweight navy fleece that is partially zipped.

Kris informs me that he is taking this first virtual meeting with me from Bogota, Colombia, in a temporary rental on the north part of the city, while on vacation. I greatly appreciate his willingness to meet with me during his trip, and I swiftly begin the interview.

#### **Kristopher's Background**

Kristopher identifies as a “White, cisgendered male” who grew up with a low socio-economic status as he was born and raised in a small midwestern town in Wisconsin. His father was a factory foreman who worked at the factory for nearly his entire life. His mother works for an electric company. His parents divorced, and he has three half-siblings.

Kris identifies as a minimalist who is passionate about languages, music, reading, travel, meeting new people, and having new experiences. He has lived in seven countries and traveled to 100 countries on six continents. He shared, “I don’t have many things, but I have many rich experiences in my life.” He described how travel helped expand his worldview—that as a child he was very ethnocentric, but after “having wonderful, rich experiences with so many different types of people, I’ve really become an ethnorelativist.”

Kristopher is currently a PhD candidate of curriculum and instruction at DU where he has worked as an adjunct professor in three different departments: Languages, Literature, and Cultures; Center for World Languages and Cultures; and at the Office of Internationalization—he loves to teach. He currently serves as a visiting teaching assistant professor of French for the Center for World Languages and Cultures at DU.

Kris is in the same PhD program I am completing, and we met through a DU connection, though we later learned we had mutual activist friends. As a student, I frequently saw Kristopher and his organization mentioned in student profile pieces and newsletter announcements of nominations and awards, and perhaps we met briefly online during the pandemic. But the first time we met in person was in the spring of 2023, at a mutual friend’s graduation party, and we had a great conversation. When I expressed my recruitment woes, he graciously completed my recruitment survey and agreed to participate in this study.

## **RQ1: Kristopher's Self-Reported Characteristics of Giftedness**

During this study, Kris self-reported multiple characteristics of his giftedness including an “insatiable” intellectual curiosity, perfectionism, meticulous performance, creativity, and more. Kris learns things “rather quickly compared to some folks” and sometimes takes his “interests to an extreme.” For example, in his PhD program, his goal is to earn a 4.0. Kris explains, “I have to finish every course with 100%. It’s almost to me like a psychosis. I feel like I’m a perfectionist, to my detriment sometimes. I have a lot going on in my head.” He described himself as “meticulous” and said that his passion manifests in things he creates, such as newsletters, grant applications, and marketing materials. He also described his empathy and anxiety. Kris attributes his passions for social activism and social change, as well as his ability to connect with likeminded people, to his giftedness.

On KAGS (Ksiazak, 2010), Kris responded “always” to six of 22 items, “almost always” one item, and “often” to nine more items (see Table F5 in the appendix). This section discusses how Kris self-reported his giftedness and details five themes: (1) growing certainty of giftedness; (2) lifelong love of learning; (3) intense empathy; (4) distracting anxiety; and (5) concern about social issues.

### ***Theme 1: Growing Certainty of Giftedness***

Kris had historic uncertainty about whether he is gifted, but he now accepts that he is. On the recruitment survey, Kris indicated he was “probably” gifted because someone told him he might be; however, he has never taken an IQ test, and he did not receive any gifted education services in school.

As a child, he noticed peers getting selected for gifted education services and was confused because he felt more capable than some of them. He saw peers identified as gifted accessing “more rigorous and challenging classes, but also extra-curricular opportunities and activities.” “I never had access to those things, but I was curious as to why not, and I would have liked to have had them.”

Kris shared the transformative impact of participating in this study and how he now considers himself a gifted social entrepreneur. He has learned that “the talents that I think maybe stem from my giftedness are part of a bigger picture that makes this endeavor possible.” This study piqued his curiosity, and he started “taking deeper dives into some of the research [learning] what it means to be gifted or twice-exceptional,” feeding his own curricular input with learnings. Now, he happily shares his takeaways with other colleagues:

Other folks in this endeavor have been able to relate to that. They’re like, wow, that totally makes sense about you. And then they start to understand themselves a little bit better too, and they’re more curious to take a deeper dive into what [giftedness] means and to what extent that may have played a role in this social endeavor.

These statements demonstrate a growing awareness and acceptance of Kristopher’s own giftedness. While Kris has lots of self-awareness and understanding, he also needed to learn what giftedness meant in order to identify as such. Kris lacked learning about giftedness when he was a younger student but has since leaned into learning more about it.

While Kris clearly appears gifted, he unfortunately did not receive knowledge about giftedness or access to gifted education services as a student. Kris did not have teachers who recognized his giftedness or who advocated for him in the classroom. However, he has been taking more initiative to learn about giftedness, and he can now speak to his self-identification with gifted characteristics with accuracy and self-awareness.

### ***Theme 2: Lifelong Love of Learning***

Kris said, “I love to learn.” Kris is a lifelong learner who has a strong intellectual curiosity who “learned things rather quickly compared to some folks.” He detailed, “I love music. I love to play guitar. I love learning languages. I love reading. I love to just walk around and explore. I love international travel, meeting people, having new experiences.” He added, “I love teaching. I love the reciprocal process of teaching and learning.”

He talked about his passion studying “cultures and intercultural communication and communicative competence.” He likes to learn about different languages. He studied French in college and has full control of English and French and intermediate proficiency in Spanish. He is learning Arabic. He also likes to learn from others and watch them grow.

On the KAGS (Ksiazak, 2010), he indicated the importance of being intellectually challenged and that learning throughout life is one of his most important priorities. Kris is also a current PhD candidate of Curriculum and Instruction, indicating his commitment to lifelong learning. He both learns and shares what he has learned with others. Since

participating in this study, he has started studying more about giftedness and is “just so happy to share that with other folks.”

Kris described many instances of learning throughout his lifespan which suggests his giftedness, including his intellectual curiosity, has persisted throughout his lifetime (Fiedler, 2015; Ruf, 2024).

Kristopher’s commitment to learning is a positive force in his life, enabling him to stay stimulated intellectually and to gain resources about anything he needs to know. This constant acquisition of knowledge supports his expertise as a co-founder of YbY and enables him to continuously help YbY grow.

### ***Theme 3: Intense Empathy***

Kris described himself as an empath who can “feel very deeply” and who experiences intense sensitivities to “crowds, noises, and artificial lighting.” He feels “the emotions of others deeply, to the extent that it adversely affects [his] mood and cognition for inordinate periods of time.” While he can “feel others’ emotions,” sometimes he feels he cannot emote himself.

Kris is really “sensitive to injustice” especially when he travels and connects to others “through emotion, through feeling.” He explains, “I can sense and feel their joy and their pain very deeply, even with folks who I don’t know very well or have never met.”

Sometimes, Kris is incredibly social, but sometimes he is highly introverted. He reported getting excited and passionate about learning from others and watching others

grow. Kris also reports having frequent community listening activities with YbY to increase engagement and provide feedback.

Kris described intense empathy and emotionality clearly aligned with Dąbrowski's emotional overexcitability (1964/2016). Kristopher's sensitivities to "crowds, noises, and artificial lighting" indicate sensual overexcitability (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016), but is included here as he connected it with his empathy. Though Kris identified as an introvert, he is interested and excited by other people. Kris not only feels other people's emotions but experiences a lingering negative affect that brings down his own mood.

This theme is both a strength and a challenge for Kris. While empathy helps him connect to others and be sensitive to the needs and values of the YbY community, negative emotions from others have a potential to weigh Kris down emotionally for "inordinate periods of time."

#### ***Theme 4: Distracting Anxiety***

When the recruitment survey asked if he identified as having any disabilities or types of neurodivergence, Kris replied, "I am living with severe anxiety," and described that empathy with the feelings of others "adversely affects [his] mood and cognition for inordinate amounts of time." In our interview, he further explained, "I also suffer from severe anxiety and—full disclosure—I try to work around that with exercise and sometimes [marijuana] edibles and stuff like that." He has "chronic insomnia" and "just can't shut [his] mind off at nighttime." He is "constantly thinking about things, about possibilities" and this is "definitely to [his] detriment."

I confirmed Kris's willingness to include his use of marijuana edibles to help with anxiety in this dissertation. He wanted to be open and honest, expressing that edibles helped calm his anxiety and allowed him to sleep. More research into the interactions of marijuana with gifted adults and impacts on their anxiety would be of interest to academia.

Kristopher uses the term "anxiety" to describe his mental health distress, which demonstrates his psychological intensities. He is constantly thinking about everything. The need to manage anxiety is common in the gifted population (Subotnik et al., 2019) and the possibilities Kristopher thinks about indicate both intellectual overexcitabilities, positive disintegration and futuristic thinking (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).

While it is typical to evaluate anxiety and other types of mental distress as completely negative and something to medicate away, Dąbrowski (1964/2016) described anxiety as a dynamism that indicates the process of positive disintegration that is necessary for advanced development. Therefore, Kris's anxiety has both positive and negative influences on his life.

#### ***Theme 5: Concern about Social Issues***

An important characteristic of Kristopher's giftedness is the theme of concern about social issues. On the KAGS (Ksiazak, 2010), Kris indicated that he is "always" very concerned about world issues such as human rights and the environment. This concern appeared in interviews too. He stated that, "I feel very deeply. I'm really sensitive to injustice, especially when I travel."



When he moved to Denver in 2007, he got involved with social activism organizations and was part of Occupy Denver. At Occupy Denver, Kris met his future co-founder, Roya. He also got involved with social justice organizations such as Padres & Jóvenes Unidos (now Movimiento Poder) and Denver Urban Gardens.

Kris surrounds himself in social circles with people who really care about “justice, economic justice, and different areas of social justice, health justice,” and the environment. He “flourished” in those social circles, where they all shared a similar, “humanizing worldview and praxis.”

Kristopher’s passionate concern about social issues and commitment to social justice is evident in his history of activism and in the values and practices of YbY and aligns with characteristics of giftedness (Ksiazak, 2010). His interests are broad, encompassing not only people who mirror his identities, but also people of different races and linguistic backgrounds.

While Kristopher’s passion may lead to pervasive anxiety and worry in our social milieu, his concern about others and our world is a positive, guiding force that helps him take positive actions in support of the social good.

### ***Summary of Kristopher’s Self-Reported Characteristics of Giftedness***

Kristopher is clearly a gifted adult, whose intensities and sensitivities impact his daily life and his work. Kris exhibits a growing certainty of his own giftedness, a lifelong love of learning, intense empathy, distracting anxiety, and a strong concern for social issues.

## **RQ2: Kristopher's Career Development**

This section details how Kristopher described his career development, shares a metaphor for how Kris became a social entrepreneur, and introduces two themes: (1) value-aligned partnerships and (2) prototyping, pivoting, and persevering.

At age 16, Kris had his first overseas experience and visited France for a summer, which started his lifelong passion for travel and fueled his desire to study languages, cultures, intercultural communication, and communicative competence.

Kris studied French at the University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire, before moving to western Pennsylvania where he studied education in a post-baccalaureate program. Later, he completed his student teaching in Ireland. After that, he earned a master's degree in French at the University of Connecticut before moving to Colorado. In Colorado, Kris became an International Baccalaureate (IB) teacher and was an IB French teacher for seven years before moving to the Middle East. In the Middle East, Kris lived and worked for seven years in Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Qatar before repatriating to the United States during the Covid pandemic.

Kris ran into his future co-founder Roya Brown a second time when teaching high school French. Roya was a substitute teacher at his school. They reconnected and started to discuss their concerns over the inequitable and oppressive United States educational system. They wanted to create "a system that was sustainable, that was equitable, that was inclusive," Kris explained.

Kris and Roya started to create an application for a Colorado charter school with a teacher-led cooperative model and repeatedly encountered systemic barriers, the most

prevalent being school districts who were unwilling to work with their horizontal, cooperative governance model—districts wanted a vertical, hierarchical structure instead. As their charter application was repeatedly rejected in multiple Denver area school districts, they pivoted to the creation of a mobile preschool instead. YbY applied for a single-subject preschool license, rather than a full early childhood education program license, due to being short-staffed. As a single-subject preschool, they were able to quickly operationalize their vision for YbY. Kris does not work primarily as a preschool teacher; however, he has his early childhood education teaching credential and has taught preschool in the past. He helps YbY’s teachers conduct leadership and community meetings and has input into the curriculum and strategic plan alongside the teacher leaders.

### ***Kristopher’s Metaphor***

When asked how he became a social entrepreneur, at first, Kris struggled to think in metaphors; he could only tell me literally how it happened. But then, *two ships passing in the night* came to mind. The metaphor reminded him of his initial meeting with the “brilliant” Roya Brown during the Occupy Denver movement, and his serendipitous reconnection with Roya when he happened to see her in the principal’s office at his high school, where she was subbing for the day.

### ***Theme 1: Value-Aligned Partnerships***

Kris co-founded YbY in partnership with Roya and a third co-founder, Shaun Parkins. Roya is currently the Executive Director of YbY while Shaun serves on the YbY advisory board and cooperative leadership committee and has been instrumental in

developing YbY's teacher-led cooperative. Kris describes working for years on their organization's charter alongside "local experts who shared a lot of our same values," and he credits these people for helping him "really flourish, diversify, and develop [his] skill sets" and "make an impact at a local level." YbY leadership attended retreats with knowledgeable people from different charter schools who all wanted a different governance model for their schools.

Kris credits his giftedness with helping him to "make connections with folks who were in it for the right reasons, folks who valued justice, who value diversity, who will view diversity as a strength" and to foster solidarity, a sense of belonging, and relationship trust, all of which are important in a social endeavor.

Kris described partnerships with people who share his social justice values as being critical for his career development because such partnerships helped him to develop his business skills and his social enterprise, YbY. By forming partnerships with people who share his values, Kris is able to access ecological resources not only within his microsystem and mesosystem, but also within a macrosystem of social justice and activism (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Kris described value-based partnerships as a positive part of his career development.

### ***Theme 2: Prototyping, Pivoting, and Persevering***

Kris describes working with Roya and partners in 2012 to develop a charter school application that incorporated their innovative cooperative governance model, which is a form of business prototyping (Mueller et al., 2015; Thomsen et al., 2021).

When their application was repeatedly rejected, to get YbY off the ground, they pivoted to offering a cooperative preschool program, and then pivoted to offer only a single-license preschool program. In 2019, YbY got its first bus, a 2012, 32-foot Blue Bird bus that had previously been a library bus. YbY retrofitted the bus after completing state-level paperwork and inspections.

Initially, YbY wanted to host the mobile preschool at a local community college for staff and students to use for their children. However, as the Covid pandemic ramped up, lots of people were now staying at home, and so were their children. YbY pivoted again and partnered with the Aurora Housing Authority to offer its free preschool program to community residents. In the summer of 2020, YbY was finally able to enroll students and start delivering preschool services.

This story illuminates great perseverance on the part of Kris and YbY to keep working to manifest their vision and find a solution that fit the market. This process took over eight years and a variety of business prototyping before YbY was fully operational (Mueller et al., 2015; Thomsen et al., 2021).

While business prototyping, flexible pivots, and sustained perseverance are all admirable goals for social entrepreneurs, this story seemed rife with challenges and barriers, from local district values to the Covid pandemic. Kris did not indicate that these challenges were positive; rather, YbY's positive perseverance is simply part of its origin story as a social enterprise.

### ***Summary of Kristopher's Career Development***

Kristopher's career development as a social entrepreneur was greatly impacted by his serendipitous connection with Roya Brown, value aligned partnerships, and a process of prototyping, pivoting, and persevering that helped develop his skills and build out the plan that became YbY.

### **RQ3a: Kristopher's Supports for Career Development**

Kris has a strong social entrepreneurship orientation which supports his career development and described his role models and two themes of additional supports: (1) a collective endeavor and (2) critical holistic education resources.

On SEOS (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018), Kris responded “strongly agree” to 19 of 21 items, and “somewhat agree” to two items (see Table F5 in the appendix), which indicates a very strong social entrepreneurship orientation that supported Kris's career development. Kris indicated he is highly effectual and skilled in social mission alignment, proactiveness, innovativeness, and risk management.

### ***Kristopher's Role Models***

Kristopher worried it would sound cliché, but he was sincere when he said his role models are “the students and families that [he] works with” at YbY. They are his “inspiration,” especially when he sees students “learning and growing” and “engaging in things, these opportunities that [he] never had.” His other role model is a lead teacher in the program who joined YbY as a parent volunteer, transitioned into the role of a teaching assistant, and then became a credentialed lead teacher who is now an expert of curriculum development for the preschool program. The teacher is active in fundraising

for an expanded program and was recently nominated for an award at an early childhood conference. Kris said, “Folks like that are who keep me going. They’re my inspiration. They’re seeking connection, opportunity. I don’t always see that in the real world or in academia in a real, authentic, genuine, wholehearted way.” Kris explained his role models, “Keep [him] motivated. They keep [him] grounded.”

***Theme 1: A Collective Endeavor***

In addition to his role models of parents, students, and teachers, Kris repeatedly referenced the partnerships and community members that helped YbY form and thrive including co-founders Roya Brown and Shaun Parkins, like-minded educational programs, community leaders and organizations, and grant funders. Kristopher’s community helped him develop his skill sets, particularly around grant writing and bringing “invaluable resources into the community.” With as much talent as Kris can bring to the project, it’s “insufficient, you know, without the contributions of others. This social endeavor is really a collective endeavor. I am because they are. Because others are.” Kris said:

[I am] able to find comfort and solace and peace with the folks who I surround myself with in the communities that we serve and in the cooperative itself, because I feel I’m able to explore my giftedness with the folks with whom I work and thrive. And it’s because of that and because of them that I feel like I’m resilient and that I’m just motivated to continue this journey alongside community stakeholders.

Kristopher's belief in YbY as a collective endeavor demonstrates, once again, his deep value of community, especially community that shares YbY's values. These values help guide the social enterprise's formation and operationalization of work that aligns with intended and operationalized career outputs in the curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs.

The collective endeavor is a huge positive support for Kristopher's career development and is also a great positive strength of YbY that supports its success and will help fuel its expansion into more Colorado communities. Taking collective actions can result in great power to make positive social change, and YbY and Kris have taken this to heart.

### ***Theme 2: Critical Holistic Education Resources***

When talking about educational resources that helped his career development, Kris shared that an important part of his career development is his experience as a PhD student at DU, where he studies curriculum and instruction. "The program has helped," Kris explained, "exponentially really, to bring that critical lens to—well, I feel I've always had a critical lens, but really to deepen that and to put that into practice." He brings his critical lens and educational resources to help ensure YbY's critical lens at cooperative leadership meetings.

Kris said one of his favorite DU classes was called Spirituality and Education. He shared how he uses his learnings to support YbY:

Bringing some of those pieces, the Parker Palmer pieces, the Lingley pieces, like really tying in the spiritually responsive practices, because we have folks in the



cooperative who really value holistic education, humanizing education, really nurturing the whole child, looking at holistic growth and really bringing in those different and diverse ways of knowing. ...Being part of the curriculum and instruction program as a PhD student has given me access to a lot of these things that I'm able to share not only with folks in the cooperative, but with the community at large.

Kris credits his experience as a PhD student with providing him with critical, holistic, and humanizing educational resources that support YbY's transformative work with students, teachers, and the community (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Access to critical holistic educational resources is a positive support for Kris's career development and the development of his social enterprise, YbY.

### **RQ3b: Kristopher's Barriers to Career Development**

Kris described several barriers for his career development that form the themes from this section: (1) systemic barriers, (2) value-aligned hiring, and (3) service beyond racial identity.

#### ***Theme 1: Systemic Barriers***

When Kris and Roya began writing a charter with a cooperative governance model, they were, according to Kris, repeatedly "met with 'No' every time." Kris explained that the model proposed by YbY is a "cooperative governance model whereby each stakeholder has an equal voice [and] for whatever reason, folks at [the school districts] were unable to move past that. They weren't interested in that." Even though school districts claimed to like the charter school idea, the districts were really "aligned

with that vertical hierarchy whereby you have a head of school and so on down the line” and YbY’s “axiology just didn’t align with [those] districts.”

This story reveals a mismatch of the values of school districts that gatekeep charter school applications and the social innovations of YbY, a mismatch that affected both the creation and allocation intentions of the social enterprise (Schneider, 2016) and led to a repeated barrier for Kris and his career development. Kris and YbY experienced conflict with districts and kept striving toward an ideal education system in alignment with a process of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).

The systemic barriers YbY faced appear arbitrary and short-sighted. While authorities might have initially instituted policies for good reasons, it is unclear why some gatekeepers are unable to be open to others’ creative innovations and unwilling to let others try something new. Kris and Roya persevered to overcome these barriers and found a way to bring their cooperative governance model of a preschool program to life with YbY.

### ***Theme 2: Value-Aligned Hiring***

Kris excitedly described the community members who first volunteered for and then began to work at YbY, highlighting the ascent of a lead teacher who served as a parent volunteer before becoming a licensed lead teacher at YbY. However, Kris said YbY found that it is “difficult recruiting teaching staff who are really axiologically aligned with our program, with our vision and mission, because we want folks who are passionate about the work, who value DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion), belonging, and social justice.” While working through this challenge, YbY brought back a former

employee from Costa Rica (with a recently approved H-1B visa) to serve as YbY's associate director, "because," Kris explained, "he was such an asset to our program while he was here."

Hiring quality employees is a pervasive challenge for businesses, but hiring employees who are axiologically aligned with a social enterprise is critical in sustaining the mission of the organization and aligned with Kris's personality development (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).

While value-aligned hiring has been a barrier to YbY, the organization has been able to hire people aligned to its mission while maintaining its integrity.

### ***Theme 3: Service Beyond Racial Identity***

"I don't look like the communities that we serve," Kris said, admitting this fact is a barrier that's been an "invaluable learning process." He elaborates:

Because I'm a White, cis-gender male, folks in the community can be reticent to connect and share. And I totally understand that. But at the same time, sometimes I can be viewed as a gatekeeper because I have access to a lot of resources that other folks don't and opportunities that other folks don't.

Kris is aware that YbY serves community members beyond his racial identity, and he clarified:

This is not a White savior endeavor. If you see the folks who are part of our cooperative, with the exception of two of our board members, there is so much diversity as far as multiculturalism, multilingualism. We onboard teachers and

teaching assistants directly from the community who look like our students, who have deep connections with the communities themselves.

Despite not sharing a racial identity with most of the community YbY serves, Kris explains, “I work directly with families and students who also share [my] identity of lower socioeconomic status, so it definitely helps to emphasize my connection.”

Kris described a sensitivity to the optics of his service and the work of YbY. Though Kris is White, he does not only seek to serve White communities; rather, his salient identity as a person from a lower socioeconomic status encouraged him to support other communities of lower socioeconomic status—including people from different racial and linguistic backgrounds. Kris helped to overcome this barrier by nurturing intentional connections with board members and teachers who represented the diversity of the communities served by YbY.

This barrier is neutral—simply an artifact of the mismatch of Kristopher’s racial identity with the communities he serves, though his awareness of the barrier and steps to mitigate any harm through inclusive diversity of leadership and faculty members are extremely positive and ultimately benefit the cooperative governance and programs of YbY.

### ***Summary of Kristopher’s Career Development Supports and Barriers***

Kris described several career development supports and barriers. Supports included that YbY is a collective endeavor of many people committed to YbY and its mission and that Kris incorporates critical holistic educational resources to help guide YbY’s work. Barriers included systemic barriers which delayed the start of the YbY

program, difficulties with value-aligned hiring, and a need to navigate service for a community beyond Kristopher's racial identity.

#### **RQ4: Kristopher's Shared Social Value**

The shared social value Kris has created is through his social enterprise, the YbY preschool program and is visible through his artifact, the YbY website (YbY, 2024). Kris shared that YbY's social value aligns with seven of the United Nation's SDGs (2015): no poverty; zero hunger; good health and well-being; quality education; gender equality; reduced inequalities; and peace, justice, and strong institutions.

Three themes about the shared social value of YbY are (1) cooperative governance, (2) community development, and a (3) transformative preschool.

#### ***Kristopher's Social Enterprise: YbY***

Kristopher co-founded YbY with Roya Brown and Shaun Parkins. YbY is "Colorado's first and only nonprofit mobile preschool and teacher-led cooperative" (YbY, 2024, para 1). The mission of YbY is to provide "equitable and affordable access to high-quality, inclusive programming for historically marginalized and underserved communities in the Denver metro area" (YbY 2024, About Us section, para. 1). YbY's vision is to "transform social landscapes and educational outcomes for every child. We value cooperative leadership and work to inspire young children to grow, create, dream, explore, and innovate in a just and democratic way" (YbY, 2024, About Us section, para. 2). YbY's core values are equity, inclusivity, creativity, and sustainability (2024).

YbY currently works with the Aurora Housing Authority to provide science, technology, engineering, arts, and math (STEAM) science preschool to children whose

families live at two locations. YbY has two converted buses with bathrooms that serve as the preschool classroom. While the buses could move, they are left stationary in a housing parking lot, easily accessible by families that live in the low-income housing communities.

Thanks to generous grantors, donors, and strategic partners, YbY provides preschool services to families at no cost. The Aurora Housing Authority helped YbY write grants and provides a free, permanent location for the preschool bus. A local news station raised \$40,000 to buy a third vehicle for a future expansion, and YbY is working to become a full preschool to access Colorado's recent funding for early childhood programs.

YbY seeks community members to volunteer with the program or work as teaching assistants and has helped the teaching assistants to complete requirements to become licensed early childhood teachers. Volunteers also donate time and participate in activities to support student engagement. For example, a person brought their chickens and ducks for students to observe and nurture.

The next goals of YbY are to create a five-year strategic plan enhanced by community listening; bring in more resources through community partnerships; grow their cooperative model by partnering with people from other schools that share their values; start a third mobile preschool in Montbello, a community in far northeast Denver; and rehire an employee from Costa Rica who just received a J-1 visa to return and work in the United States.

I had a lovely time observing Kris spending the day with one of the preschool programs and saw him emerge into a supporting classroom role with joy and curiosity about the students and their learning. Kris helped students practice phonics, finger paint outside, and played them songs on his guitar, sharing his gifts and excitement with the children.

***Kristopher's Artifact: The YbY Website***

Kris is a creator who has worked to develop YbY's website, which he shared as an artifact of his career development. The YbY website (2024) is very meaningful to Kris "because it reflects all of the beauty, and the passion, the joy, and just the diversity that really exemplifies our organization."

Kris explains that the website features videos about the start of YbY and "what this endeavor really means to us, what equity and inclusion really mean to us." It has "beautiful pictures of students and teachers and community members, and it really showcases our mobile preschool," Kris tells me. It is very important to Kris to showcase everything they do and "all of the folks who make this endeavor possible." The website is an important artifact to Kris because it "evolves with us ... it talks about our values ... it showcases our mission and vision ... it elucidates our programming" and it talks about the "different experiences students and families have in our program."

***Theme 1: Cooperative Governance***

YbY has a teacher-led cooperative governance model that Kris describes as a "horizontal hierarchy whereby everyone has an equal voice, every stakeholder, so it's more democratized." Kris and Roya went on retreats with others interested in cooperative

models to learn more. Kris explained that they researched other education cooperatives, such as the EdVisions Cooperative in Minnesota, and realized YbY was “actually axiologically aligned with their mission and vision.” They found other cooperative school models in California, but in Colorado, there were no cooperative schools for preschools. So YbY “decided the most equitable and accessible model would be to make a mobile preschool.”

YbY preschool meets Mondays through Thursdays, with Fridays reserved for collaborative lesson planning and robust professional development with all teachers and teaching assistants. Teachers take the lead in planning the day and they have opportunities to develop skills in community and restorative justice and restorative yoga. An advisory board member is an expert in cooperative business models and recently delivered an interactive presentation online about cooperative governance and how YbY could improve its cooperative governance model. YbY also has monthly equity meetings, weekly cooperative leadership meetings, and cooperative community committee meetings to elicit parent, volunteer, and community stakeholder voice and engagement.

With a cooperative governance model, the allocation of control and distribution of resources (Schneider, 2016) are decided by teachers and stakeholders equally. This is a stark difference from how school districts traditionally operate, typically with a top-down approach. This indicates that YbY is providing social value to employees by being a worker cooperative.



The concept of a cooperative school model that allows teachers to lead their curriculum, lesson planning, and professional development is a great example of the shared social value created by Kris and YbY.

### ***Theme 2: Community Development***

Kris explained that he and Roya realized there are many “early childhood educational deserts” especially in Colorado and wanted to “eliminate cost access and transportation barriers for families in need of early childhood educational programming” which YbY does through grants and donations.

Currently, YbY operates in two diverse, low-income neighborhoods managed by the Aurora Housing Authority and exclusively serves preschool students from families who live in those communities. Kris explained YbY “wanted to afford families opportunities to work if they wanted or get stuff done at home or enjoy time with their family or do stuff that they wanted to do while their children are in our care.” YbY is cognizant that the communities they serve sometimes have “limited access to other resources that other communities have, like access to healthy food [or] access to more equitable and inclusive educational opportunities,” so they want to be a “one-stop shop for folks who are in need of those things but also who desire to really get involved in their community in a positive way.”

Kris mentioned that YbY provides “opportunities for families to get engaged in their community in a meaningful and impactful way” and hosts bi-monthly community engagement activities. Kris appreciates that “all the community members ... not just parents and students of our school, are actively involved in volunteering and

participating. YbY hosts Fall Festivals and community excursions and connects the community with resources including the library, haircuts, free hearing and vision tests, and a weekly healthy food delivery. YbY also participates in an urban garden tended by students and families. Kris said these opportunities help “cultivate things in their community that they’re proud of, that they love, that are beautiful and that help others.”

YbY affords families the opportunity to volunteer or access employment with YbY. Kris shares that sometimes volunteers are interested in “pursuing continued education to get their early childhood educational credential [so eventually] they can teach with us. And along their journey, they can ... serve as a teaching assistant.”

These examples of community engagement exemplify YbY’s commitment to the social good at a local level of the mesosystem of families living in the Aurora Housing Community neighborhoods it serves (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The ripple of impacts in the community, particularly in the development of local early childhood education teachers, aligns with the career output arc of the curricular career spiral and what a transformed society receives and then begins to intend and operationalize.

The shared social value YbY creates for its community goes far beyond that of a typical preschool, and the theme of community development is powerful, positive, and connects to Kristopher’s lifelong commitment to impactful social justice and activism.

### ***Theme 3: Transformative Preschool***

Kris said that YbY seeks to “offer holistic and humanizing approaches to teaching and learning for young children, which a lot of early childhood programs don’t offer.”

This is important, Kris said, because when children go to K-12 schools in the metro area, “they don’t always have positive experiences.”

Kris explained that “our students learn best through semi-structured and unstructured play-based discovery” so YbY has a lot of STEAM corners and boxes they use for students to be able to “just create and innovate and imagine.” Kris described a wooded area nearby that “students affectionately refer to as the Jungle” and said that during a lesson using simple machines, levers, and pulleys, students were able to create their own simple machines with local materials found in the Jungle. A lot of music is incorporated into the curriculum. For example, when learning about the five senses, students make their own instruments and create songs and rhythms.

“Teaching and learning spaces aren’t just limited to the bus,” Kris said. Preschool students go on many excursions, usually one or two trips a quarter, to places like a local aquarium, a reservoir to connect to a unit on oceanography, or a place with dinosaur fossils. These experiences really help to bring the “curriculum to life through experiential learning and applied learning,” Kris said. Thursdays are for community integrated learning such as picking up trash in the community with a safety-first mindset or tending their urban gardens to help students build what Kris called a “positive self-concept and positive community concept.”

Kristopher’s comments highlight his educational C&C (Eisner, 2017). He both recognized what traditional early childhood programs lack and is excited about how YbY has transformed the preschool experience for students. YbY exemplifies the educational ideal Kris had for a preschool which aligns with the secondary integration of the theory

of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016). YbY both intends and operationalizes (Uhrmacher et al., 2017) an innovative curriculum that transforms preschoolers into learners with a positive concept of themselves and their community in alignment with Kristopher's career output arc of the curricular career spiral as a social entrepreneur.

YbY has been able to foster delightful educational opportunities for preschoolers under its single-subject STEAM license while building a positive self-concept with a humanizing pedagogy.

### ***Summary of Kristopher's Shared Social Value***

Kris has produced shared social value through the creation of a social enterprise, YbY which engages in cooperative governance and community development and offers a transformative preschool for early childhood students.

### **Closing Vignette**

In late August, when I visit the YbY preschool, Kris is working as a teaching assistant for the day and invites me to observe him and their program. I navigate through multifamily homes until I see a bright blue 32-foot long Blue Bird bus with two doors and steps on the side. I park across the parking lot and head to the bus. I step out of the car, inhaling the fresh, clean air. It is a bright, sunny day, with wispy white clouds spread across the bright blue sky. Trees around the bus are full of dark green leaves, swaying in the gentle wind.

The outside of the bus has been repainted from a traditional yellow and depicts a dark blue silhouette of trees, a farmhouse, and a city skyline in front of a light blue background. A maroon swirl guides the viewer into an assembly of educational icons—a

book, smart phone with ear buds, and music notes—surrounded by stars. After so many interviews and observations conducted virtually, I am excited to visit YbY in-person, and the cheery bus warms my heart.

The bus is parked against the sidewalk, perpendicular to about four parking spaces, and has orange cones marking a protective space in front of the doors. Leaning against the bus are a disassembled plastic green table and stacked red chairs, a bucket, game board with holes, and two hula hoops. Kris greets me and walks me across the parking lot to the nearby housing office and explains that SECOR Cares, a local nonprofit, has donated lots of leftover food for residents, and the preschoolers are helping to organize the items for pickup.

Four preschool students, under the guidance of their teacher, C., unbag and sort goods into piles. They shyly give me brief smiles but stay focused on their task. Nearly all of the individually wrapped sandwiches appear to be from a popular coffee franchise with stickers indicating they are only a few days past their prime.

Many sandwiches have the same shape, and the preschoolers start new rows for sandwiches with different items inside them. One student just puts a sandwich on the table, but not in order, and starts to walk away. The teacher redirects, “Where does this go?” She tells them they can each pick one item when they finish. We file out of the office and go to the parking lot. The teacher says, “Let’s count our steps back,” and before we cross the parking lot, the teacher chimes in unison with the students, “Look left, look right, no cars in sight!”

We walk up the steps of the bus, sanitizing our hands before sitting on a low bench inside the bus. The teacher and a student volunteer lead us through circle time. Then we head outside for paint time. Kris stays behind, doing some extra work on phonics with a student inside the bus on a whiteboard until the child is ready to transition outside.

Students screw the plastic legs of the table into the bottom of the tabletop and set up the tables and chairs in their section of the parking lot. The teacher helps them put aprons on, before putting down paper and paints and letting the students use brushes and hands to paint. Kris and the other student emerge from the bus and join us at the bustling table. A student wants them to join and says, “Let’s make the table bigger!” Another asks, “How do we do that?” And another turns to a neighbor and says, “Hi, will you please move your chair?” After some shuffling, Kris and the student take their seats and join the painting, happily welcomed and included.

### **Summary of Kristopher’s Case Study**

Kristopher shares many traits of gifted adults including intellectual curiosity, perfectionism, creativity, anxiety, and a concern for social justice. He is a strong example of a gifted social entrepreneur with a deep interest in social justice and activism who has applied his knowledge of social needs and holistic educational practices to the problem of a lack of early childhood educational programs that have a cooperative governance model and serve lower socioeconomic communities in the Denver metro area. He co-founded YbY preschool as a collective endeavor to develop the community and positively transform educational experiences for preschoolers.

## **Case 2: Dr. Janiece Mackey, Co-Founder of Young Aspiring Americans for Social & Political Activism**

Janiece joins the web meeting for our first interview in the middle of a busy day in June. She is a Black, or African American, woman with medium-brown skin and dark brown eyes. For the first interview, her dark brown hair is pulled back with a soft part and gentle puff indicating its dense, curly texture. She wears a pair of glasses with black, plastic, rectangular frames that rest on her nose. She wears a light blue top with a scooped neckline that has thick and thin vertical stripes of dark blue.

Janiece exhibits skilled web meeting etiquette by projecting a blurred video background; however, I can make out a few blurry details behind her. She is sitting in a maroon booth in a corner between two yellow walls and has a soft yellow light above her head. Behind her and beside her are two framed pieces of art, with blurred blues, greens, and whites.

I ask her to describe her setting. She is sitting at a local bakery café, which explains her need for earbuds with bright blue wires that connect to her laptop to ensure she can hear me. Janiece mentions that the restaurant is close to the site for her summer programming. Because her two daughters are participating in the program, she has decided not to go home and to instead “camp out” in the café to “get a lot of work done and not have too much transition time.”

As Janiece’s long-time friend, I know her broad, beautiful smile indicates genuine happiness to see me, and I am grateful she has agreed to participate in my study. I can

hear the chatter of the restaurant in the background. Fortunately, however, I am able to hear her clearly, so we proceed with the interview.

### **Janiece's Background**

Janiece identifies as a Black, African American, cisgendered female “race scholar activist” who was born and raised in Colorado. She is married to her high school sweetheart and has four teenage children, three girls and one boy. She is a wife, mother, daughter, and a sister. She is the CEO of YAASPA, a nonprofit she and her husband, Ernest Mackey, co-founded when she was 25 years old. She has a PhD in higher education.

Janiece said her maternal grandfather owned a speakeasy in Arkansas, which provides an “ancestral understanding of entrepreneurship in my family [that] highly roots and grounds me.” Her maternal grandparents got their bachelor’s and master’s degrees in social work at DU, Janiece’s alma mater, and at the women’s college when it was in Park Hill, Denver. Her paternal grandmother was an educator too—a substitute teacher in Denver Public Schools—while raising eight children.

Her parents went to trade school, and she detailed:

Dad’s gift was culinary arts, but he worked with young men who were system-engaged at Lookout Mountain (a juvenile detention center), and while he was teaching and cooking, he was also filling their souls ... teaching them life skills and trying to support them with morals and ethics. My mom has always been a Sunday school educator, and she’s an elder in our church. And I feel that’s much of what shapes who I am.



She attended private school through fourth grade and was grade accelerated past second grade. At the private school, there was just her and “maybe a couple of other Black children.” In fifth grade, she transitioned to public school, and that’s when she “started deeply noticing tracking, unfortunately.” She began to internalize a lot of meritocratic thinking and “didn’t understand educational inequities at the time and the ways in which they were racialized.” In sixth grade, she “ended up unhoused, and that’s when I first kind of understood educational inequity without having that language, like oh, things happened outside of school, right, that actually impact how you navigate school.” She was tracked into honors courses in middle school and detracked in high school, and though she took some college prep courses, Advanced Placement (AP) Spanish, and a semester of AP physics, she was “not invited to the AP party.”

I love serendipity, so I will share this brief story of how Janiece and I met. My name is Joi, and during my first year as a doctoral student at DU, I briefly crossed paths with an alumna of my program, Joie, at a student mixer event though we did not meet. Then in May that year, I got a random email from Janiece to “Dr. Joi” with an email signature that mentioned YAASPA. I replied she must have confused my email address for the other Joie. I told her I didn’t have any other details about Joie, but as YAASPA looked awesome, we should meet for coffee. We later met for a delightful brunch in June. Imagine my delight when later that month Dr. Joie Norby Lê happened to give a guest lecture about her dissertation (Lê, 2016) in a summer research class, and I was able to foster a connection between Janiece and the real Dr. Joie! I signed up for YAASPA’s mailing list and have participated in their annual karaoke fundraiser several times.

Janiece invited me to attend the defense of her dissertation about Black Finesse (Mackey, 2020), which was extremely helpful to me as a doctoral student. Without this chance encounter from a missent email, Janiece might not have been a participant in this study, which would be a great loss as she exactly exemplifies the SEGA I was seeking.

### **RQ1: Janiece's Self-Reported Characteristics of Giftedness**

Janiece self-reported multiple types of giftedness including being spiritually gifted, artistic and creative, how she craves and produces knowledge, and that she skipped second grade. When asked if she was gifted on the recruitment survey, Janiece indicated “probably yes” and shared, “I am artistic, I innovate, I am creative, I crave knowledge,” and that she is “able to produce knowledge ... and support others to unveil their gifts.” She also shared resonating with qualitative characteristics of being gifted, that someone has told her she might be gifted, and that she skipped second grade. However, Janiece has “never tested well on standardized tests.”

On KAGS (Ksiazak, 2010), Janiece responded “always” to 17 of 22 items and “often” to four more items (see Table F5 in the appendix). This section details Janiece's self-reported characteristics of giftedness and highlights three themes: (1) myriad of manifestations, (2) frustration and boredom in school, and (3) external attributions of giftedness.

#### ***Theme 1: Myriad of Manifestations***

Janiece tells me that “giftedness comes in a myriad of forms” and that she plays instruments and is bilingual. She thinks her “giftedness has shown up in different modalities of sharing wisdom and knowledge.”

She said, rather than “just thinking about the written word ... as a way to communicate,” she uses “lots of artistic wisdom too.” She loves artistic methods, graphs, and visuals.

Janiece shared that she is spiritually gifted and is “very spiritually grounded.” As a Christian, she was taught that she is “beautifully and wonderfully made.” She explained, “So spiritually, I always knew that I was gifted in favor.”

Her “embodied wisdom” helps her make “folks feel in a space.” It is, she explained, “how you design a space for the feel.” She elaborated:

I know in education we talk about this a lot. It’s less about the content ... it’s about what they felt from the experience you created. Because if they feel that sense of belonging, that goes a long way more than anything [to helping them feel a] sense of dignity.

Janiece demonstrates her giftedness through multitasking, “as weird as that might sound.” She said it was a “gift” to be “able to multitask” and “build a vision” while also going to graduate school, being a mom, and building a new organization.

Janiece recognized that her gifts manifest in many ways that support her overall career development. While Janiece indicated many types of giftedness on the KAGS (Ksiazak, 2010), she also touched on types of gifts such as spiritual gifts and embodied wisdom along with artistic abilities and visual thinking (Silverman, 2013).

Janiece’s awareness of self and her inclusion of spiritual gifts and embodied wisdom valuably informed her self-reported characteristics of giftedness. The myriad of

her manifestations of giftedness is a strength for Janiece and has nurtured her positive self-concept and self-efficacy throughout her career (Bandura, 1997; Lent et al., 1994).

### ***Theme 2: Frustration and Boredom in School***

In both her private and public schools, Janiece was frustrated and bored because she was not challenged. Janiece described her experience in elementary school: “I went to private school up through the fourth grade, but I actually skipped the second grade because I was bored, and I was zipping through things.” She was on the honor roll and was “always deeply curious and really enjoyed the learning process at that time.” Though she was accelerated, there was no discussion of identification, and she is curious whether her parents had any understanding about giftedness.

Later, she expressed deep frustration in public middle and high school. Initially, she was tracked into honors courses in middle school and then detracked in high school, so she had to “get a whole new different friend group.” In high school, she said she was “placed in college prep courses, but not necessarily AP courses. The only AP course that I had was Spanish, which is a huge part of why I’m bilingual.” Though she had a semester of AP physics, she “was not invited to the AP party” as she calls it.

She scored low on a college entrance exam but “it wasn’t,” she explained, “because I wasn’t good at school. I was just bored.” No one consistently supported her needs “to develop all [her] creative genius at the time.”

Being grade-level accelerated past second grade indicates Janiece’s early academic abilities and demonstrates that her teachers realized her gifted potential; however, as no one discussed giftedness or identification with her, it is likely that her

teachers lacked robust understanding of giftedness (World Council for Gifted and Talented Children, 2021). Janiece also ended up unhoused during middle school and that temporary experience of homelessness may have negatively impacted her academic performance. Janiece's divergence of experiences from a private school where she was one of only a few Black students to her experiences at public schools with more Black students may have impacted her feelings of frustration and boredom at school.

Feelings of frustration and boredom are unfortunately common for gifted learners, perhaps because they are unchallenged with understimulated interests in their learning environment (Scott, 2012).

### ***Theme 3: External Attributions of Giftedness***

Janiece shared that her tendency to move quickly through school material "was actually because my mom would ensure that I was doing work over the summer and so I was just always ahead." She also explained that her birthday is right after the school cutoff date, "So technically, maybe where I was ending up [was] where I was supposed to be."

These statements recognize the positive impact of her mother's support and of school policies that determined which grade level she should be in; however, both statements minimize Janiece's confidence in her own internal giftedness, attribute her giftedness to external factors, and suggest giftedness as achievement and academic performance.

Janiece's mother made sure to continue her work over the summer to combat learning loss and maintain achievement; however, it would be good if Janiece did not

minimize, her giftedness and conceived of it as consisting of not only her academic achievement in school, but also her psychological intensities.

### ***Summary of Janiece's Self-Reported Characteristics of Giftedness***

Janiece self-reported many characteristics of giftedness on the KAGS (Ksiazak, 2010) indicating intellectual curiosity, concern about existential and world issues, and creativity. Themes from her self-reported characteristics of giftedness include her giftedness having a myriad of manifestations, the frustration and boredom she experienced in school, and her tendency to attribute some aspects of her giftedness to external factors.

### **RQ2: Janiece's Career Development**

In high school, Janiece wanted to go to college, but the only support she received from her counselor was that information was in a filing cabinet around the corner. While “not technically first gen,” Janiece described a “generational gap” as her maternal grandparents had graduated from college, but her parents had gone to trade school, so there was just a very “different experience and navigation [of college].” Janiece described this as a “cool developmental piece that I always like to share because that’s often where seeds are planted, through these ideas that you get from coursework.”

Janiece is sensitive to the “racialized experiences” that impacted her career development such as the lack of strong career guidance in high school and college. When Janiece entered college, she “didn’t understand what a major was.” She told a career advisor, “I want to major in law.” But the career advisor said something like, “Well, not so quick there. How about political science or criminology?” And Janiece said, “Oh,

okay. I guess if that's going to get me to law school." There was, Janiece described "this disconnect again and this reckoning of what I did not know that was a huge developmental thing for me."

Janiece said, "The concept of YAASPA came from a paper I did in a psychology class in undergrad. I was trying to create a program. I was wondering: How do Black students get support right at the high school level with navigating a career? Navigating their academic trajectories?"

"And then I didn't end up becoming a lawyer," Janiece recounted, "I ended up in education because we had our first child when I was in college. I got pregnant my junior year, and I needed a job, and I was like, I'm not going to law school. I'm going to take a gap year." She then worked as a bilingual counselor and case manager with foster youth. But she realized "it would be way too late to actually have an impact the way I want to definitely have an impact with young folks." She decided she would like to stay in education rather than pursue law, though she completed her bachelor's degree in political science and criminology.

Next, she worked in a dropout recovery program, helping to open two schools for youth who had dropped out of school. Janiece said that this experience:

Taught me many lessons about entrepreneurship because essentially the job I was hired for, the job description was actually very limited and I basically was able to create whatever I wanted to—so they were like, "Hey, go connect with kids, figure it out." Basically, "Here's your number." "Here's your metrics of how many kids you have to recruit to go to the school we're opening," but the methods

and everything was up to me. And I think I developed [my mentality to] know what it's like to manage my time, how to create goals for myself, how to engage in an entrepreneurial way in a workforce setting.

Janiece loved working with youth engagement because, she said, "I could really create my own systems, I could create my own processes, I could create my own forms of communication, [and] family engagement to open up the school, which was super exciting." Janiece knows she did well because she "ended up with a waitlist and helped the organization to open up a whole other school in Aurora."

While working with dropout recovery stuff, she got pregnant with her third child and started to think, "I'm kind of seeing how this thing works. And I realized, quite frankly in some ways, I was being taken advantage of, quite frankly, and I wasn't necessarily being honored for my leadership."

She went to graduate school, where she earned a master's degree in social justice. In 2020, she completed a PhD in higher education with an emphasis in both public policy and curriculum and instruction at DU. During graduate school, Janiece attended school part-time, worked as an adjunct professor, and got a job in a research position, which "helped anchor [her] away from working for someone else and working in higher ed while building a business further." She also worked in the educational policy space at a job that wanted her to engage White families Janiece said they told her to "get them engaged in that policy, do whatever you want." She continued:



And that was another learning for me of ... how policy works, how whiteness works in this space. This is how I'm perceived. This is how Black families are perceived. So that was huge developmental learning for me too.

She further outlined how racialized experiences also contributed to her career development:

[I was] struggling in navigating my racial identity development at that time in my early 20s and didn't have a lot of language around, even just whiteness, quite frankly. I was internalizing a lot of it; I was projecting a lot of it. I wasn't a great wife; I wasn't a great mom at the time. And because I was enduring a lot of racial battle fatigue along the way, there was always this ceiling for ... my leadership trajectory. So, it's like, "We think you're really effective on the community-based level, but management? Things of that nature?" Kind of, "Know your place." And so, just from being overwhelmed with the shock with that and being sick of seeing the same cycle over and over with the young folks I was working with, who look like me, who had backgrounds similar to myself as well, I was like, I'm going to create an organization, YAASPA, for us to reclaim academic and career spaces as far as career development.

Janiece did not go to business school, but her husband has a bachelor's in finance and marketing, and together they co-founded YAASPA "for us to reclaim academic and career spaces as far as career development." She explained, "Once I had started [YAASPA], I had to laugh because when I was first starting and trying to get business acumen [and learn] how to raise money, I was going through some really cringey

trainings.” Janiece said these trainings were “all about who you know ... pull out your Rolodex and just call up 50 people and [ask them to] give to your cause and you’re going to be great!” But Janiece said this would not work for her because, “I did not come from a background where I was going to be able to do that,” but she committed to “build [her] own efficacy in navigating the nonprofit ecosystem as a new entrepreneur.”

The final piece Janiece highlighted regarding her career development is that “youth are amazing.” She found great value in being able to ask early cohorts of students things like, “Hey is this working? What’s not working?” and responding to their feedback. She appreciated “seeing them deeply as the experts along the way of developing what I was developing ... there was some sort of co-creation along the way.” This co-creation included the legal name of the organization too, which was also a racialized experience. Legally, YAASPA is “Young African Americans for Social and Political Activism.” However, Janiece said:

[There were] barriers for me getting into school partnerships ... I was being asked by school leaders, counselors, and folks, “Well, what about our other students? There’s not just Black students here. Oh, by the way, there’s not even that many [Black students] here.” Just lots of comments as though what I was doing was not sufficient, essentially ragging that we aren’t worthy supposedly of an organization that just focuses on us.

With this racialized barrier, Janiece decided to ask a high school cohort how they would feel if she changed their doing business as (DBA) to “Young Aspiring Americans for Social and Political Activism.” She said her students responded, “Yeah, Miss, if it’s

going to help the organization grow.” She credits this as a “huge developmental moment” as she was already “questioning [her] racial identity development.”

The rest of this section discusses Janiece’s metaphor of “blooming season,” her artifacts, and two themes about her career development: (1) multiple roles for economic stability and (2) other-mothering.

### ***Janiece’s Metaphor***

The metaphor Janiece said she has been using at this stage of her life is *blooming season* because “there’s a lot that happens in the soil before you see the blooms.” This metaphor describes Janiece’s career development because as she became a social entrepreneur, there was a lot within herself that was invisible. She had to work on believing in and trusting herself, particularly because she did not have a career background. She was worried about being broke and about how to raise money. She was concerned about how to raise children while starting a business and internalized these worries, which was indicative of her soul and soil work. Janiece explained, “Things that happen beneath the surface ... I feel like [aren’t] discussed.” She continued:

Nonprofits can be very performative, especially because of the nonprofit industrial complex and trying to get funders ... so they tend to focus on the blooms, only what they can see. How many staff do you have? How many students are you working with, right? Things that are visible. So, I feel [blooming season] is the best metaphor to describe becoming social entrepreneurs. That the blooming season requires shifts in the soil and lots of individualized labor that needs to be made visible.

With soil work, Janiece said, “[I am] constantly trying to prove my worth. And as a [person of color]—I do know what I’m doing. I am organized. I am able to build capital for us. I am able to hire. Like just the constant I’m able to clause that I felt like I had to perform.” This metaphor indicates Janiece’s awareness of the work that goes on underneath the surface, how that work helps her develop the blooms of her social enterprise, and that she, as a person of color, must demonstrate her work.

***Janiece’s Artifact: Teen Bible, CME Sash, Mirror***

Janiece provided three artifacts to describe her career development: a teen Bible, a graduation sash from the Center for Multicultural Excellence (CME) at DU, and a mirror. Janiece explained that she used to take notes all over her teen Bible, the first artifact:

My late pastor prophesied into my life, essentially like, hey, you’re going to be well known. And people are going to say, I wish I was there. I mean, I was 13 or something ... I didn’t know what that meant at the time. I thought I was going to be the next Johnnie Cochran because I wanted to be a lawyer and I was a teenager. So that’s what I thought it meant ... maybe I’ll get a big case ... I had no idea that what he was in fact talking about was really the village work that we do at YAASPA.

To Janiece, this is indicative of her career development—having “spiritual anchoring and having a prayer life ... constantly seeking spiritual wisdom in order to make decisions.” This helps her “decide how to pivot, how to move, how to build, how to grow, not just for the team and the youth, but even for myself as a leader and a founder.”

The CME is a space at the predominantly White institution of DU where Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) students could go “to have a sacred space on campus and to fellowship and get resources,” Janiece said. CME had a graduation ceremony specifically for BIPOC students where they provided the graduation sash, Janiece’s second artifact. She added:

So much of my career development has to do so much with Ubuntu, I am you, and you are me. And really meeting supports and mentors and sister friends—folks like yourself—to help get me along the journey to do what I do.

The final artifact she provided was a picture of a generic mirror, symbolic of her idea of mirror work. Janiece explained:

Being a leader can be a very vulnerable experience and an experience that can teach you a lot about yourself if you’re willing to pay attention—if you’re willing to do the mirror work [to seek a] better understanding of your full self. I really feel like through leadership actually I’ve really come to understand my full self.

All that I am, all that I’m not, all that I desire to be, all that I know I shouldn’t be.

She further explained that her learnings from childhood, adolescent development, and academic and civic experiences have shaped the way she thinks and the assumptions she brings to the world, so she is “constantly trying to engage in that mirror work.”

These artifacts exhibit how Janiece’s career development has been impacted at different levels of her ecological system—her individual spirituality, prayer, and decision-making; her microsystem of BIPOC supports; and her reflection of experiences throughout her mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

### ***Theme 1: Multiple Roles for Economic Stability***

A theme of how Janiece describes her career development is the way she has juggled multiple roles as a mother, student, counselor, research scientist, adjunct professor, and co-founder and chief executive officer (CEO) of YAASPA. These multiple roles were required to support Janiece's economic stability as a Black mother in the Denver metro area.

While a young mother, Janiece completed bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees and attended extra trainings to develop her business acumen. While in college, Janiece worked as a bilingual counselor, as a bilingual coordinator in a dropout recovery program, as an outreach coordinator at an education policy organization, as an adjunct professor, and as a research scientist. Additionally, Janiece co-founded YAASPA and serves as its CEO. While she is CEO of YAASPA, and while YAASPA employs other workers, it does not provide enough of a salary to support Janiece and her family, so she still works for other organizations. She explained:

All of our kids were under five or six years old when [we started] YAASPA. I didn't have the luxury of being able to say, "I'm just going to focus on this and that's it." I had to work, so I was working full time while starting an organization. That was hard. I was in school while also building the organization and working. I'm even currently still a research scientist, which is like a whole other full-time job while being a CEO, and I consult too. So that's three jobs ... because of socioeconomics and the way I'm positioned in the ecosystem. Having to build

something to even get to a certain level of salary while simultaneously the economy's out of control.

Janiece stays very busy serving in multiple roles, which is a critical aspect of her career development. Janiece's commitment and success in multiple roles is a positive testament to her cognitive abilities, intellectual curiosity, and commitment to her communities and her family. But it would be even better if YAASPA received enough support through gifts, grants, donations, and services fees so that it could provide a thriving wage for Janiece to support herself and her family, because then Janiece could focus more on developing YAASPA and less on other jobs that split her attention and time.

### ***Theme 2: Other-Mothering***

Janiece discussed "other-mothering," or the idea that as a woman, she is expected and relied on to perform mothering duties for others. She shared:

It's because of that intersectionality of me being Black and a woman and this expectation around other-mothering that tugs at me a lot in my position and in my development along the way too, because I do have a big heart. And I think people know that. I think sometimes it positions me to be allowed to be taken advantage of ... So, I've been working with my life coach on acknowledging, yes, I engage in a lot of other-mothering. But how do I still protect my own soul ... and my CEO position that requires a lot of technocratic things from me—head space in strategy [and] mind space for me to be effective—for the organization to continue to be sustained?

As a cisgendered female woman who birthed four children, Janiece's role of mother is very meaningful in her life. She strives to be present as a wife and as a partner to her husband. While she shares parenting responsibilities with her husband, being pregnant four times took a lot of energy. She got pregnant with her first child in undergraduate school, leading her to take a year off. She had baby number two and became pregnant with her third child while doing dropout recovery work. As a young mother, she now has four teenagers, aged 18, 16, 15, and 14, who participate as students and leaders in YAASPA. Regarding the role of being a woman and CEO, Janiece further explained:

Because I'm a woman, I get asked to do things—to be things that I know my male counterparts don't get asked ... which takes me away from really engaging in CEO duties. My mentors will ask me, how many CEO activities did you do this week? And I'm like, I'm doing better this week. Or I'm like, "Oh, I haven't honestly done enough CEO activities this week because I've been pulled into conflict management over here," or "[I'm] providing a healing circle for our team over here," ... or "[I'm] being expected to process unfair asks of the organization." And I'm like, "I know y'all wouldn't ask [a male CEO] this, so why do you expect this of me and YAASPA?" And it's an unfair ask, and we cannot be, and I will not be, everything to everybody. It's unfair.

It is apparent that Janiece has a "big heart" and wants to care for people in her life; however, the expectations placed on her because she is a woman feel unfair and limit her productivity as a CEO. This theme indicates the role of the individual woman being



required to perform mothering duties, in the microsystem, due to macrosystem expectations (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

This theme serves as a warning of potential expectations that are additionally placed on women in entrepreneurship, as well as recognizing their potential strengths. This theme raises the questions: How can the care of others be developed for all social entrepreneurs? How can women entrepreneurs protect their time to work on their businesses? Is this theme more prevalent in social entrepreneurs compared to entrepreneurs?

### ***Summary of Janiece's Career Development***

Janiece's metaphor for her career development is the idea of a "blooming season" in which much of the work she does is in the soil and not visible to others. Janiece shared artifacts for her career development relating to her spiritual development, BIPOC community connections, and reflective "mirror work." Janiece's described her career development as navigating multiple roles with expectations for other-mothering, along with her actual mothering. The next sections discuss specific supports and barriers for Janiece's career development.

### **RQ3a: Janiece's Supports for Career Development**

Janiece has a social entrepreneurship orientation, and described her role models and two themes of support for her career development: (1) service-learning developed business acumen and (2) appreciation for and by students.

On SEOS (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018), Janiece responded "strongly agree" to 13 of 21 items, and "somewhat agree" to four items (see Table F5 in the appendix)

which indicates a strong social entrepreneurship orientation in innovativeness and social mission; however, Janiece strongly disagreed with (S2) because YAASPA only takes actions aligned with their purpose, and somewhat disagreed with (R2), (R3), and (E4), which all related to having guaranteed funding prior to completing projects. Janiece's responses indicate certainty that the work YAASPA does is clearly purpose-driven and that they are willing to do work aligned with their mission, regardless of guaranteed funding.

### ***Janiece's Role Models***

Janiece credits her parents for being her role models for this work because of how they focused on "doing village work." Janiece explained, "They deeply inspired me, their steadfast commitment to doing that [village] work for decades, plural, and doing it relentlessly while raising a family." She added, "[They] really provided me with the spiritual anchoring ... that's the greatest gift they could've given me ... the gift of God ... to be able to even do this work and be spiritually anchored while doing it."

### ***Theme 1: Service-Learning Developed Business Acumen***

Janiece does not have a business degree but did seek out business trainings that felt "cringey." She credits developed business acumen through service learning (Kickul et al., 2010; Mueller et al., 2015) as the first employee in a nonprofit organization that did dropout recovery work while it was a startup. She explained:

I still had kind of close proximity to the founder. So having that close proximity, I think really helped me to see how he thought, see how he moved, see how he engaged in decision-making ... I was one of five employees at the time actually,

and the organization still exists today—it's in multiple school districts across the state. ... I think that proximity of being able to bear witness really helped in a tangible way that I didn't realize until later.

Because the job description was very limited, she said she was basically “able to create whatever [she] wanted to ... the methods and everything was up to [her].” Janiece added, “I didn't necessarily know that I wanted to be an entrepreneur at that time, but I really felt a lot of joy from this freedom to essentially just freedom-dream up my job.”

At the startup, she was close with the founder. She said working there, “Helped me to know what it's like to manage my time, how to create goals for myself, how to engage in an entrepreneurial way in a workforce setting.”

That experience also helped her “see the way entrepreneurship can work in tandem with an organization and a district partner as well”—a model YAASPA uses to work with districts in the Denver metro area. She realized, “the district has a need, [and] this organization is filling that need quite pragmatically.” The organization used that relationship to “diversify their revenue stream outside of grants based upon that per pupil funding model.” She said this was very “insightful” as part of her development.

Service learning is an important part of SEE (Kickul et al., 2010; Mueller et al., 2015), but Janiece was not assigned to participate in service learning; rather it happened in harmony with her on-the-job experience. Exposure to the dropout recovery startup helped Janiece ideate her future enterprise structure and business model. Service learning exposed Janiece to a social milieu that fostered her career development (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).

Janiece's on-the-job exposure to service-learning skills was a positive support for her career development and potentially the career development of employees and students who might apply their learnings from YAASPA to their future endeavors.

***Theme 2: Appreciation for and by Students***

The feedback Janiece receives from students, for the work YAASPA does, reaffirms her confidence in YAASPA's integrity and impact. Janiece asked high school students whether she should change the doing business as name of YAASPA—changing the first two “A”s from “African Americans” to “Aspiring Americans” in order to be more palatable for school districts and funding partners. Janiece said the students told her:

Oh, we trust you, Miss. We know you're going to play the game. We know you're always going to center race. We know that you're always going to center blackness in your work. So yeah, Miss, if it's going to help the organization grow ... We just want to see it grow.

This “developmental moment” was important for her because, “being affirmed by... young Black folks at the time, [having] them understanding what I was trying to build—it was huge.”

Janiece also appreciates the experiences of students and former students when gauging her success with YAASPA. She described:

I feel like the soul of YAASPA still exists and that's how I know we're doing well—by retaining young folks. So, when young folks go through YAASPA and they come back and they're like, “Do you have an internship available? Can I

work with you this summer? Do you have any teaching positions open?” I’m like, “Oh really? You want to come back?” That’s how I know we’re doing well ... this young person is coming back because they felt seen.

The positive feedback loops Janiece experiences in her interactions with students connects to SCCT (Lent et al., 1994): performance domains feed Janiece’s learning experiences, which feed her self-efficacy (and organizational efficacy) and her outcome expectations.

The reciprocal relationship Janiece and YAASPA have with students is a beautiful and wonderful support for Janiece’s ongoing career development and aspirations.

### **RQ3b: Janiece’s Barriers to Career Development**

Janiece described two barriers for her career development: (1) cringey trainings and (2) racial battle fatigue and resilience.

#### ***Theme 1: Cringey Trainings***

Janiece did not feel fully prepared to lead a nonprofit and sought trainings to help her develop business acumen, because she was “starting from scratch.” Though she was “taking money out [her] pocket” for these trainings in hopes of learning “how to raise revenue for [her] organization,” she explained, “Much of the training was dismissive of, you know, like first-gen entrepreneurship. I’d say [they were] very dismissive in class-based ways ... expecting people to roll out a Rolodex of people” to ask for large amounts of money. She also said:

[These trainings were] missing that community organizing aspect because I don't want to have a deficit lens. Our communities are amazing, and I deeply believe in cooperative economics and believe in folks donating at whatever level they can, and [our communities are] really contributing to the fuller vision of an organization ... But that wasn't talked about in trainings. It was not a community organizing type of lens—where it's really about, who's your neighbor? Who even are you serving that [is] maybe interested in, like reinvesting in your work? That lens was just not at all there.

She described attending a training on how to do budgets for grants, but they just gave her, “a blank spreadsheet populated with what you think you're going to spend money on for your business.” However, she explained:

I [didn't] even know how to answer that question at that point in my entrepreneurship journey ... so it felt very cringey in that regard because it didn't really feel like capacity building ... It felt almost kind of [like] teacher situations where you're just given a worksheet and expected to know what to do on it.

Janiece shared that these trainings were not hands-on and did not teach her about the “hidden curriculum of groups ... the hidden understandings, the hidden oftentimes ways of being and etiquettes of even proposing a budget” (Vallance, 1973/1974). Janiece further described her experience with these trainings:

Funders don't want to be the only one funding your budget or things like they don't want to pay for like a ton of overhead. What's overhead? Even being told what you can ask for—oh, I can actually ask them to pay for meals? Oh, I can ask

for mileage reimbursement? What are those budget line items even that [funders] would be okay with? And how do other people manipulate those line items in order to really grow their business? That's what I really needed to know. And that's what I've come to know. But that training did not do that.

Janiece is both an educational connoisseur and an educational critic of the trainings she attended as a start-up co-founder (Eisner, 2017). The trainings did not explicate the hidden curriculum of groups (Vallance, 1973/1974). She particularly critiqued these trainings as being unresponsive to the needs and circumstances of first-gen entrepreneurs from a lower socioeconomic class and as failing to deliver adequate capacity building. While Janiece has fortunately been able to gain these skills in other ways, these trainings appeared costly and were not the best use of her time and energy. Janiece's interest in self-education aligns with the theory of positive disintegration and SCCT (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016; Lent et al., 1994).

Janiece recognized her need for more knowledge and she took initiative to attend trainings to develop her business acumen. However, it is disappointing that these trainings were not responsive to the needs of Janiece as a fledgling co-founder.

### ***Theme 2: Racial Battle Fatigue and Resilience***

A second barrier for Janiece's career development was an ongoing theme of "racial battle fatigue" as she called it. One of Janiece's artifacts, the graduation sash from CME, revealed the benefits from building community with students of color at a predominantly White institution. The CME sash was representative of Janiece's awareness of her racialized self and desire for an emotionally-safe haven while

navigating university; however, her racial battle fatigue also impacted other areas of her life.

In her early 20s, Janiece said, “[I] didn’t know what racial battle fatigue was at that time. I didn’t have any of that language. I just felt it in my body.” This impacted her roles because she “wasn’t a great wife and wasn’t a great mom at the time,” as she was “enduring a lot of racial battle fatigue along the way.” She explained:

And I know my husband felt it—I know my kids felt it—to the point where I told my husband, “Please put on a timer, because it’s also unfair for me to just talk about this all night and not be fully present as a wife, as a mom,” ... We started putting on a timer—[and he’d say], “Hey babe, your 10 minutes is up,” and I’m like, “Thanks, babe,” because you got to cut yourself off some time, so that you’re not holding on to it. You have to release it. That was the breaking point for me where I was like, my family is not getting that Janiece, or niece, or momma that I should be. I’m not being fully present. They’re growing up too fast. We’re getting older. I don’t want to not be fully present—even for myself.

During this time, Janiece was “struggling in navigating [her] racial identity development... and didn’t have a lot of language around even just whiteness.” She was, “internalizing a lot of it... projecting a lot of it.” She further described this struggle:

That next stage of racial identity development for me, in my career, was this obsession around whiteness. So, in grad school, I became really obsessed with whiteness and interrogating it and becoming really good at it, quite frankly. And it [was] becoming part of my professional identity, but it [was] also becoming a part



of the identity of [YAASPA] like, those kids—they know how to talk about whiteness. They know how to interrogate whiteness. But you know what? It was taking up too much space.

Janiece explained the frustrations and fatigue she experienced regarding her leadership trajectory in other organizations:

There was always this ceiling for me as far as my leadership trajectory. So, it's like, "We think you're really effective on the community-based level, but management? Things of that nature?" ... kind of, "Know your place." And so, just from being overwhelmed with the shock of that and being sick of seeing the same cycle over and over with the young folks I was working with, who look like me, who had backgrounds similar to myself as well, I was like, I'm going to create an organization, YAASPA, for us to reclaim academic and career spaces as far as career development.

In fact, Janiece said, "I got my doctorate because I felt like I had to play the game right to demonstrate my worth of being a Black female CEO and specifically entrepreneur, because I wasn't being taken seriously prior to that."

YAASPA had initial difficulty securing school partnerships and funding because its original name centered "Young African Americans," but things improved once they changed the DBA to highlight "Young Aspiring Americans" instead. Janiece explained:

In my position, it can feel very isolating at times because of what I experience racially... whether it's blunders or witnessing other folks come into this ecosystem, or White males, or even POC—people of color. And being able to be

more deeply resourced than us and just coming out of the woodworks... I've been told by some partners in many ways, "Oh, well, they're more digestible. They center other identities besides race, and we feel more comfortable with that, whereas you're always centering race and we don't feel comfortable with that." I've witnessed that.

She further described:

... being socialized into a policy space where if you didn't know certain vernacular or certain terms or certain types of policy, whether cases, precedents, ordinances—depending on the level of governance—you supposedly were incompetent. And I dealt with a lot of mansplaining quite frequently in policy spaces in my courses too, and it was constantly being told, "Your racialized experiences don't matter because actually what happened to you is this—insert white male narrative."

Janiece also described a "huge unlearning for me that was rooted in how we're racialized in doing this work," because at the beginning of her work she was:

... imposing and projecting on young folks in some ways saying, "They think that we don't care about being civically engaged, so we need to go to board meetings, we need to go to the capital." Even if they asked us 2-minutes ago. We need to be performing essentially in all of these spaces and going to all of these meetings again to [prove what] we're capable of ... And that's unfair. It's an unfair ask. And I learned that too. And so, I've talked with the youth village, who was a part of those earlier cohorts of the time, about that to reconcile that.

She credits Dr. Toni Morrison’s “super dope” message from the 1970s for teaching her that “racism is a distraction for Black folks ... We know whiteness is there, name it. But, what about ourselves and our souls ... in our collective cooperative economics and our own village work?”

She said that in 2020, there was a cultural “reckoning, an acknowledgement of race and racism in this country alongside COVID—folks were asking us to perform again.” And she finally got to the point where she felt:

Your awakening to white supremacy is not our emergency. Sorry, we’re not going to perform for y’all. We’re not coming to divulge over and over again how we were impacted by George Floyd, because unfortunately he’s not my first name. He may be your first name, but he’s not mine.

She shared how that catalyzed YAASPA to pivot toward “healing-centered engagement and racial justice around healing for ourselves so that we could exude what I call Black Finesse (Mackey, 2020) and cultural capital,” rather than “allowing whiteness to take up too much space in our work.”

Janiece also discussed recent interactions with funders:

All the [work] is JEDI work: justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion: the new acronym. And because of that fetishization of that work, it’s actually becoming more taxing, for Black-led organizations, I would say... I built the organization intentionally as a Black scholar activist with kind of that ethos in mind. But now I’m kind of having to prove [it] because of funders wanting specifically White organizations to prove that they’re diversifying. Well, my whole staff is BIPOC.

Our entire youth village is BIPOC, my whole board is ... and I'm still having to, in applications, put percentages. And I'm like, this is a time suck for me. But because y'all are fetishizing this and trying to hold White organizations accountable, it's become a checkbox situation ... more taxing on Black leaders. Janiece said that a value she and YAASPA bring to funding conversations is being able to see:

... that kind of sociopolitical shift and to deeply discern and understand it in ways that a lot of folks aren't able to sometimes—even in the funding space, because they're not the ones writing the grants. They're not the ones that are having to now shift to these different ways of reporting and being because of trying to hold other folks accountable.

Janiece also shared that when partners treat youth like they do not have enough knowledge or experience to participate in decision-making spaces she will:

Always turn it back ... on [the] adults, whether they're adults who are BIPOC, or even White-predominant adults in policy spaces, to say, "And here's some areas where you don't seem to know much about racial identity development. But yet you're still here. So, we're not going ... to treat these young people like they don't deserve to be here because of not knowing some technocratic things that you should know in your position."

In summary, Janiece described the racial battle fatigue of sometimes being one of a few people of color at an institution, the exhaustion of internalizing racialized experiences, the isolation of making other partners and funders uncomfortable due to her

focus on race, the unfair racialized expectations placed upon her and her students, the fetishization of JEDI work with funders, and how she challenges gatekeepers. She continuously works to overcome these challenges with strength and resilience.

Janiece is a strong educational connoisseur and critic (Eisner, 2017) of her racialized experiences. Janiece's stories highlight the historical and ongoing inequities in education and in society as a whole, including inequitable access to CTE education, which is tangible property to which all students deserve access (CTERN, 2022; Greene, 2017; Leonardo, 2013). Janiece's "unlearning" and shift in the expectations and performance of YAASPA youth indicate her process of positive disintegration as she rejected what she once knew and created a new paradigm for YAASPA students (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).

Janiece has encountered many racialized challenges throughout her career development. However, her racial battle fatigue was less of a barrier that blocked her development and more of a continuous obstacle she resiliently navigates to further the work and mission of YAASPA.

### ***Summary of Janiece's Career Development Supports and Barriers***

Janiece's career development supports included service-learning developed business acumen and appreciation for and by students she works with through YAASPA. Barriers to her career development included cringey trainings and racial battle fatigue. Janiece navigates these supports and barriers, amidst her career development, to the benefit of YAASPA.

#### **RQ4: Janiece's Shared Social Value**

The shared social value Janiece outputs into the world is exemplified by YAASPA, her social enterprise. Janiece shared that YAASPA's social value aligns with seven of the United Nation's SDGs (2015): no poverty; good health and well-being; decent work and economic growth; industry, innovation, and infrastructure; reduced inequalities; sustainable cities and communities; and peace, justice, and strong institutions. This section describes YAASPA in more detail, then shares three themes that emerged from Janiece's interview and observation: (1) a space that centers race, (2) transformed youth activists, (3) youth who are seen and heard, and (4) thriving communities.

##### ***Janiece's Social Enterprise: YAASPA***

YAASPA, which stands for Young Aspiring Americans for Social & Political Activism, is a non-profit social enterprise co-founded in 2010 by Dr. Janiece Mackey and her husband, Ernest Mackey, to help cultivate youth's academic and career self-efficacy, self-awareness of racial identity development, civic literacy, and civic engagement (YAASPA, 2024). Ernest created the logo and helped support the business development of YAASPA in the first year, and now works with the operations and management of YAASPA's next project, which involves building a community hub in a former school building.

Janiece described the Colorado Paradox, an idea that "young people who are from Colorado are actually not necessarily going into higher ed, yet Colorado is deemed as one of the most highly educated states—but it's because folks are coming in who have

already been educated elsewhere.” Janiece explained that educational policy and funding flows to:

Just make sure that BIPOC students have more quote-unquote, rigorous classes or access to the trades or access to STEM ... Let’s make sure they have higher-paying jobs, so they can contribute to the economy. So, [it] was more about kind of that neoliberal, one size fits all lens, but also about the economy and less about really the dignity of the young people they were talking about...

[But] what about those who actually want to go into public service to actually transform these systems and transform even small fee policy as well within organizations or within organizational structures or governmental structures? What about that type of education? ... That’s really the work that needs to be done ... pipeline and pathway work.

YAASPA was created to address this need to support students in their pursuit of degrees and careers in the field of social sciences (YAASPA, 2024) and has expanded their focus to include public health. YAASPA does this through several ways including (2024, para. 1):

... community organizing, advocacy and our programs which are: a course entitled civic engagement in community and career, scholarship fairs, social sciences and policy institutes and a new partnership with Community College of Aurora to award students a two-year scholarship who are interested in pursuing social science degrees. YAASPA also partners with organizations collaboratively to facilitate education advocacy to increase social equity.

A talented group of individuals lead the work at YAASPA. Janiece said, “We’re an all-BIPOC team, which is super dope, but also... we always center race.”

Community organizing is an important aspect for YAASPA. “Our communities are amazing,” Janiece said, “and I deeply believe in cooperative economics and believe in folks donating at whatever level they can, and that really [contributes] to the fuller vision of [YAASPA].”

Janiece’s work as the CEO includes meeting with key partners; building strategic partnerships; writing grants; working on new contract relationships to diversify revenue so YAASPA is not solely dependent on grants; checking out the vibe in programs and “experiencing how that sacred space is being created” as an observer; serving as a listener and notetaker at weekly team reflections; praying before sending emails with “piercing soul words that I need to share with some spiritual wisdom to the team”; showing grace to stakeholders; holding healing circles; handling timesheets, vendor approvals, and collaborating with her chief financial officer; and working to be reflective.

Janiece said she uses an “executive director journal” at least once a month to “reflect on my journey” and also talks with a life coach to stay on track professionally. Programmatically, Janiece described work such as visiting the capital, teaching classes, facilitating youth council, creating policy reports, co-creating and conducting school board candidate workshops, small key policy work with school leaders, developing summer programming, and working to evaluate the work of her program.

The observation I conducted of Janiece was a meeting between Janiece and her program evaluator, Dr. Elizabeth Anderson, a former professor of Research Methods and



Statistics at DU who founded the Embraced Wisdom Resource Group. At the observation, they discussed types of data to collect for an ongoing program evaluation and experiences Janiece was having with hiring and firing staff to support the organization's growth.

YAASPA is in a growth phase, and Janiece described several next goals for her organization: (1) moving towards standardizing roles and responsibilities "in tandem with evaluation and program evaluation so that people know what does success look like at YAASPA"; (2) "operationalizing the liberatory touchstones I've created and putting that into a rubric and evaluation"; and (3) working on "infrastructural planning so I can get an executive assistant and a deputy or whatever those titles are going to be." Janiece's goals indicate a desire to streamline and codify the work and measurement of YAASPA in order to sustain its growth and development.

### ***Theme 1: A Space that Centers Race***

A value Janiece's social enterprise, YAASPA, brings to the world is centering race. Janiece said:

Folks are very comfortable centering other identities, [but] folks are not centering race as much. It requires a different level of commitment. And so, I think that's something of value too, that we're very much anchored in that way. We've been doing and centering identity development since the inception [of YAASPA], even before it was a thing. Now it's becoming more of a thing ... in recent years.

Janiece said of her team, "We always center race because racial identity development is one of our four pillars that anchors all of our programming, regardless of

what program a young person interfaces with at YAASPA.” YAASPA builds a community of scholars that can acknowledge White supremacy exists in education and higher ed, but Janiece explained that then students are “able to pivot and say, but you know what, I’m okay, and I’m brilliant, and I’m capable, and I’m worthy of being in this space and claiming my space at the same time.”

Racism has been and is prevalent in the United States’ educational systems (Leonardo, 2013), so Janiece has created a space for students that intentionally recognizes the importance of race. This helps youth understand their own racialized identities while helping them to use that as a starting point in a larger conversation about how youth can recognize their own brilliance and support thriving communities. The race-centering aspects of YAASPA indicate Janiece’s experience of secondary career integration, aligned with her ideals and values (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).

YAASPA intentionally provides a space for education and discussion about race and racialized identities, and such positive spaces are rare—even as this dissertation highlights two social enterprises that do this work: YAASPA and SCDEP (see Case 3). The work YAASPA does to address and support positive racial identity development for youth is a much needed positive force for good.

### ***Theme 2: Transformed Youth Activists***

Janiece works to limit performative civic engagement, striving for more authentic engagement via youth participatory action research, “which is a way of approaching the work, not just a methodology.” She said:

I literally have a funder who was trying to push back because we do youth participatory action research ... And they were like, “Well, we know you do that, but how many school board meetings are you going to? And [a school district] is a mess right now! And so, we’re just wondering what students are going to do about it for this grant.”

We’re not doing [anything] about that because these people are grown. And it’s not incumbent upon our young people to go perform for your purposes of measurement, in order to make y’all look good, while it’s killing their soul in the process, in a waste of their time. No, I’m not picking them up to get pizza just to show up so y’all can say like, “Oh, look at the youth activists.”

Rather than provide mere optics of youth activism, YAASPA works to foster effective engagement. For example, YAASPA sent me a recent email newsletter saying that their youth-led coalition conducting youth participatory action research will give a presentation on barriers existing within education systems of two Denver metro school districts. This is an example of the voices of youth being engaged in the meaningful work of research and presenting their findings and recommendations to school district communities.

Janiece detailed the self-actualization of students who are dignified in the YAASPA program:

I would say we put out folks who are—I don’t want to say fully actualized, because I don’t think we deserve that kind of credit ever—but I feel like we’re putting out folks who are on that journey to becoming fully actualized in ways

that they see desirable and dignifying and confident... We're putting out folks who understand the nuances of policy as well as practice.

Janiece described how YAASPA supports youth in conducting participatory action research, rather than performative civic engagement, as a means of fostering the transformative growth of youth activists. Janiece's intentional adjustment of experiences for YAASPA's youth, to strive toward higher ideals and be more than just performative civic engagement, demonstrates her process of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).

The participatory action research YAASPA youth conduct is a way of transforming youth activists so they can make meaningful positive impacts within their communities.

### ***Theme 3: Students are Seen and Heard***

Janiece works to ensure that youth voice is centered, honors the racialization of the lives of youth, and teaches them that their lived experiences matter. Students feel seen and their voices are heard because YAASPA cares about their individual and collective well-being. Janiece shared:

We put out folks who are claiming their space with their racial well-being too. So not just having a kind of deficit lens on their racialized experiences, but going out and saying, "Yeah, I'm a proud Chicana," or however they identify, and naming that as a part of ... why that matters even in the conversation.

Though external partners may want to know how many students are served, or what growth occurred during the semester, Janiece described metrics that are meaningful to her and indicative of the soil work YAASPA does to nurture its blooming season:

We're pollinating so we may not see some of the things that [they're] expecting to see or the things that we see [that external partners] don't even measure as growth ... So-and-so felt really seen. So-and-so decided that they were going to only come to our class, but they weren't really going to other classes. [External partners] would see that as a negative outcome, whereas we're like, this person's connected to a caring adult ... [which matters] because they're not connected elsewhere.

Janiece feels YAASPA is doing well when, "This young person is coming back because they felt seen." She explained:

I also know that we're doing well because ... we're able to serve multiple demographics of young folks. Just because we're all BIPOC, it doesn't mean it's a monolithic-feeling space because there's other identities within the BIPOC space, whether it's you just got here from Ghana four months ago and you don't really speak much English ... Which is okay yet you still somehow feel held.

In addition to serving diverse BIPOC youth, Janiece discussed the impacts of YAASPA's summer programming and the intersectionality of students:

And our summer program, which is cool. You still feel seen. You still feel honored all the way ... [there is] this notion if you're ... a middle-income young person of color or who's Black, you wouldn't need something like this. No, you

do, because you're in a [predominantly White institution] space and you need a space where you can see yourself and really, truly be seen as your full self. So that's the class component, even gender as well, and sexual orientation as well. So, I feel there's a multitude of identities that we're able to hold in tandem while centering race and [having] folks feeling honored and seen.

YAASPA intends to center youth voice and teaches young people how to politick because their lived experience matters. Janiece said they teach students:

Storytelling matters, and here's what you're going to be coming up against.

People are going to [say] you don't know this and you're a young person, so come back to us. You shouldn't be in this policy space, or you shouldn't be talking about school boards. [We're] really making sure that [our youth] know that their [voice] matters.

BIPOC students, like all students, deserve access to educational spaces that recognize and nurture their diverse identities. Janiece's examples demonstrate a positive intended curriculum of helping students feel seen and heard which alludes to her perception of what is also being received by youth (Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

A program that recognizes and elevates the voices of BIPOC youth is beneficial to supporting the identity development, empowerment, and transformation of future adults who are primed to lead in our communities.

#### ***Theme 4: Thriving Communities***

Janiece shared that YAASPA develops BIPOC youth so they "don't have a deficit lens of their own communities" because there was an idea that, "you need to escape your

community [for] good living or a successful ... life.” She explained that YAASPA’s idea of success is “being rooted in your community” and they encourage youth, “Come on back and teach ... Come on back and be a public servant ... Come on back and be a part of the village and give back based upon your experiences and be that mentor.” Janiece asserted, “That work was needed and necessary and vital for the thriving of our communities, especially to mitigate the Colorado Paradox.”

Ultimately, Janiece reported that YAASPA outputs scholars who desire to positively impact and nurture their communities. She explained:

We’re putting out folks who are desiring to be of public service, that maybe thought they weren’t as interested in that because they’re like, “Well, I think I really want to be a doctor, actually—that’s how I want to help people.” But because [of] YAASPA, “Actually, I’m going to get my degree in education. I’m going to study political science. I’m going to study social work.” And... they’re going into the ecosystem, graduating, and getting those types of positions where they’re being of service.

This theme connects to the fight or flight response (Cannon, 1915), an idea that a person may either stay and fight or run away in a stressful situation. If people view communities through a deficit lens, they may exhibit a flight response. However, if people are given tools to enact positive changes in their communities, they may be empowered to stay and fight to foster thriving communities. Youth who reinvest their energy in supporting their thriving communities are nurturing their microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

YAASPA helps transform youth into people who will stay and fight for positive change in their communities, which is an incredible social benefit of the program.

### ***Summary of Janiece's Shared Social Value***

Janiece has built an organization, YAASPA, that innovates career outputs to create shared social value for BIPOC youth and community. YAASPA is a space that centers race, transforms youth into activists, ensures that students feel seen and are heard, and develops people who commit to helping their communities thrive.

These themes highlight the last portion of the curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs—the instructional arc (Uhrmacher et al., 2017) of a transformed society. Through Janiece's career outputs, students are transformed and intend to make further positive impacts. Individuals in the microsystem of YAASPA work to counter values from the exo- and macrosystems, resulting in transformed individual youths who then aspire to positively impact their microsystems. This impact then ripples throughout their ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

### **Closing Vignette**

Janiece told me during our interview about an experience with YAASPA and, as she called it, “performative civic engagement”:

Early on in my journey, I projected [performative civic engagement] onto youth. Unfortunately, it's a big learning and unlearning dynamic for me from early in my journey when we [were] doing service learning. And I was like, “Oh, we're going to position Black kids as being of service,” instead of always being served. That deeply mattered to me early on. And I came to realize that that's not sufficient.



We were at a Christmas party, being of service. And my children were with me because I like to have them with me so that they can be a part of the journey too. And someone had the nerve to ask, “Oh, are you all excited to get your presents today?” And we’re like, “We’re actually here serving the presents.”

... For me, that racialized experience quickly pivoted me away from service learning as this kind of simple notion of positioning us, and [toward a] different way of being of service.

### **Summary of Janiece’s Case Study**

Dr. Janiece Mackey is a Black race scholar; a daughter, wife, and mother of four; and the co-founder and CEO of YAASPA. She has worked to develop her education and business acumen to lead her organization with skill. Janiece reported many characteristics of giftedness, described a myriad of manifestations, recounted frustration and boredom in school, and attributed some of her giftedness to external factors. Her career development path led her to assume multiple roles for the sake of economic stability while being called upon to do other-mothering work. Supports for her career development included service learning (Kickul et al., 2010; Mueller et al., 2015), which developed her business acumen and appreciation for and by her students. Barriers to her career development included cringey trainings and racial battle fatigue, which she works through with resilience. The shared social value Janiece outputs into the world through her social enterprise, YAASPA, includes the development of a space that centers race, the transformation of youth into activists, an environment and culture where students feel seen and heard, and development of activists who nurture thriving communities.

### **Case 3: Shalelia Dillard, Founder of SCD Enrichment Program**

It is 10:30 am in late September. Shalelia joins the web meeting with white, wireless earbuds protruding from her ears. She gives me a great big smile, and I notice that her very light brown skin is lit up by the strong industrial lighting above her. She has medium-length dark brown hair in microbraids, with the top half pulled into a ponytail while the rest of her hair dangles on her collarbones. Her face is adorned with glasses that have large gold-rimmed lenses stretching from her eyebrows to her cheeks, and she wears thin silver hooped earrings nearly as large as her glasses. She dons a white shirt underneath a dark navy-blue hoodie with large capital letters across the chest: HAMPTON. Hampton University, in Virginia, is Shalelia's undergraduate alma mater, a historically Black college and university (HBCU) founded in 1868 to educate free African Americans after the U.S. Civil War.

She sits in front of a wall covered with abstract art—on the left of her are white, grey, and black curves and shadows while on the right are greens and purple lines with reddish-orange tufts almost evocative of foliage. I ask her to describe her setting. She tells me she is at her workspace, located in a boutique hotel's social membership club, which provides her access to a co-working space, a lounge, and more amenities that are useful to her as an entrepreneur with no physical location. She is sitting at a table looking at the kitchen and tells me that in a few minutes a fire alarm test will occur. With that warning in mind, we begin our interview.

## **Shalelia's Background**

Shalelia was born and raised in Denver, Colorado and is in her 30s. Shalelia met her best friend and husband in the eighth grade, and they have been married for 10 years. She has two sons, ages 18 and 10, and two doggies, a pug and a mixed German shepherd and Australian cattle dog. Shalelia described herself as both an educator and artist who likes to paint and write poetry.

She mentioned how important it is that both of her parents are still alive. She is the only daughter of a single mother and has two older brothers who are also gifted and half-siblings and sisters in an extended blended family. At age 25, she developed a great relationship with her dad when he moved back to the United States from France. Her father is from the Bronx in New York and has worked in IT, computer science, and technology her whole life. Her mother was born in Denver, with country grandparents from Louisiana. Her mother is a retired accountant who did not have a formal accounting degree but “was always sought after [by] high-level firms or different companies because of her giftedness,” Shalelia explained. Shalelia described her mother as being “very resilient,” and said, “[I] just saw her face a lot of adversity. And that was just embedded in who she is, and therefore me. Because I looked up to her and still do.”

Shalelia stated:

I was able to cultivate my gifts through education and just through being around other folks like my brother. He's my best friend. And so, sharing those different questions, or different thoughts, or different models, the ways that we process the world ... also allows me to even want to explore, to even create something.

During her school-aged years, Shalelia was identified as gifted in first grade and was bussed to elementary schools in south Denver that had gifted programming because her home schools did not. Around that same time, she became homeless on and off and frequently moved to different places in many different parts of town. In seventh and eighth grade, she received gifted services at a middle school with a highly gifted and talented program. She then took honors courses, AP classes, and concurrent enrollment during high school. Shalelia has a bachelor's degree in psychology with a minor in Spanish from Hampton University, an HBCU.

Shalelia identifies as a "Black woman with mixed race ancestry." She grew up in a Black community on the east side of Denver and said, "I just felt so much love and community and connectedness to where I came from."

Shalelia formed SCDEP to help recruit and support students of color in accelerated courses and has gotten very involved in Colorado's gifted education community. At this point, I would like to explain a bit more about Shalelia's background, how we met, and how our professional lives are intertwined. I serve on the board of SoulSpark Learning, founded by Dr. Kate Bachtel, and during 2020, amidst the pandemic, Kate hosted a virtual Empowerment Summit and asked if I would moderate a presentation with another speaker, Shalelia Dillard. Shalelia and I first met virtually to plan our presentation titled *Making the most of opportunities for gifted Black, Indigenous, and People of Color*. Later that year, Shalelia and I were some of the many co-founders of a new group called Gifted and Talented Leaders of Color and Allies. Currently, Shalelia and I are both finishing our terms serving on Colorado's Gifted Education State

Advisory Committee. I love that our serendipitous meeting has led to such meaningful connections and impact for the two of us as gifted women of color who are advocates for equitable gifted education.

### **RQ1: Shalelia's Self-Reported Characteristics of Giftedness**

Shalelia self-reported a variety of characteristics that indicate her giftedness including curiosity, learning everything she can about what she is interested in, formal gifted identification, her ability to make connections, and affinity for intense conversations with other gifted people. On KAGS (Ksiazak, 2010), Shalelia responded “always” to 18 of 22 items and “almost always” to three more items (see Table F5 in the appendix). This section details her self-reported characteristics and two themes: (1) nurtured gifted pride and (2) traumatic access to educational opportunities.

Shalelia said, “My giftedness manifests literally in everything I do.” For example, she has a tendency to “go really deep into concepts” and is “consistently asking why questions [with] that curiosity that... has a lot of gifted folks in a chokehold at all times.” She said that her curiosity manifested in a way that helps her “dig deep into research to say, ‘Oh, okay, these are the reasons why, or this is how it’s affecting this [or] these populations,’ and just wanting to learn more.” When she has an interest, she learns everything she can about it. She shared an example from her childhood:

I had an interest in dolphins, and you know, back then we didn’t have Google, so I would just get all the encyclopedias and cross-reference research based in the encyclopedia that had anything to do about dolphins ... at the bottom it [would

say] see catalog G for more information about, you know, certain topic. And so, I would go to that to figure out more information about dolphins.

While her teachers first recognized her giftedness in elementary school, Shalelia said, “[I] eventually knew it for myself from how I interacted with my peers. I always just felt like I was more grown than the average child.” In elementary school, Shalelia said, “I was excited because I was educationally stimulated. And I knew that I needed that because of ... the obsession/need for internalizing information. So, it was great.”

Because of the way her “mind is wired,” Shalelia said she was able to “connect different topics to all the things that [she does in her] nonprofit.” She is extremely grateful for her gifts. She added, “I knew they would take me a long way... I am proud of myself. I trust myself and I trust the process ... I didn’t give up.”

Shalelia also described her affinity for conversations and collaborations with other gifted people: “When we are together, people are just like, ‘Whoa, like, y’all are very intense.’ But I love it, it’s great” because having “really deep, intense conversations with people like that fuels you and encourages you because [being gifted] could be very isolating.”

### ***Theme 1: Nurtured Gifted Pride***

Shalelia stated, “I felt very confident in being such a geek at my house.” Shalelia credited her mother for nurturing her curiosity and creativity. Her mother would talk about her own experiences and say she used to do the same things. Her mother encouraged her to explore her interests and find more information about them which Shalelia thought “was just so beautiful.” Shalelia said her mother was:

... the only person that really did that for me. I didn't really have any other family or teachers ... I was just a really quiet kid, so I just fit in any classes. But they weren't really like, "Oh my goodness!" until middle school. [Then] they were like, "Whoa, can we sell some of your art at like, this art exhibit," or something like that. But really, it was [my mom] cultivating those intricacies of me being proud of being a nerdy, geeky, gifted kid.

Shalelia's mother encouraged her to keep going, "to be proud," Shalelia said, "of my brain. She encouraged me to explore and invent and question and just dig into my curiosities. And I don't think I would have been able to create [SCDEP] if it wasn't for that."

Shalelia "know[s] a lot of gifted students don't have that environment at home, and... that really did encourage [her] to go out and do all the things" she has accomplished.

Shalelia has confidence in her gifts and describes how her mother helped nurture her curiosity and learning. It was very meaningful to Shalelia to have her mother's support, which made her feel like it was okay to be a "nerdy, geeky, gifted kid." Her mother's support provided critical background context that influenced Shalelia's career development (Lent et al., 1994).

Shalelia described her mother as nurturing her curiosity and creativity rather than setting expectations for academic achievement. This is a positive example of the importance of having a trusted adult value and nurture one's gifts.

## ***Theme 2: Traumatic Access to Educational Opportunities***

Shalelia was told by her teachers that she was gifted. She was identified as gifted in first grade. During elementary school, she was bussed to schools in south Denver that had gifted and talented programming because her neighborhood schools in east Denver did not provide gifted education. Around that same time, she became homeless on and off, moving to different places in many different parts of town. Later, she was placed into a highly gifted and talented gifted program in middle school. During this time, she started to feel disconnected from gifted education because she:

...felt that competitiveness that is typically embedded in gifted education. And I'm not a competitive person. I'm more of a community person. We all could work on this together—I'm that type of person. So, it didn't really mesh with me in middle school.

In high school, she took honors courses, AP, and concurrent enrollment courses that enabled her to complete both high school and college credit requirements, and Shalelia said that is when:

[I] experienced trauma from being in advanced classes with predominantly White students. I was the only Black girl in my classes for four years until I attended concurrent enrollment at [University of Colorado Denver]. But that was alienating because I went to the most diverse high school in Denver [at a school] that has an international program. [I] had international friends, and they were not in any of my classes. So, I was just like, why? I always had that question.



Shalelia also described experiences of microaggressions and feelings of isolation during high school as a gifted young woman of color. She shares a story as an example:

I wasn't ever invited to anything outside of school, whereas all of the AP kids all hung out with each other. And I was never invited, ever, to anything. The only way that I got invited was because I was in Student Senate and [we] needed to do a project in the summer, and so I was invited over. But that is when I realized, oh, they meet all the time about a whole bunch of stuff. And yeah, so I never was invited. It was traumatic.

Shalelia described access to gifted education opportunities such as gifted education programs in elementary school, highly gifted programs in middle school, and access to advanced coursework in high school. However, she also described her traumatic and often racialized experience of being bussed across town because her neighborhood schools in her Black community did not serve gifted students, the competitive atmosphere in middle school, and microaggressions and isolation in high school.

All students deserve an excellent and equitable educational system and quality public schools that can support students in their neighborhood communities, so it is disappointing that Shalelia had to be bussed across town. The insufficient educational experiences of under-identified gifted students of color are worrying, during Shalelia's childhood and now. Shalelia also experienced traumatizing feelings of isolation in her high school program. While the emotional burdens Shalelia dealt with were negative, it was beneficial for Shalelia that her giftedness was recognized and nurtured in her educational system.

### ***Summary of Shalelia's Self-Reported Characteristics of Giftedness***

Shalelia self-reported many characteristics of giftedness including her fixation on learning and the connections she makes between ideas, which helps her work. Two themes were also discussed: Shalelia's nurtured gifted pride and her traumatic access to educational opportunities.

### **RQ2: Shalelia's Career Development**

This section provides an overview of Shalelia's career development, shares her metaphor, and details two themes: (1) critical learning experiences and (2) accelerated development of business acumen.

Shalelia holds a bachelor's degree from Hampton University with a major in psychology and a minor in Spanish. She is currently working on her master's degree in educational psychology with a gifted and talented endorsement at the University of Northern Colorado.

Shalelia was a former educator who taught math and science for 11 years, but she said, "I just couldn't take being a teacher anymore," because there was too much bureaucracy. Around 2015 she realized she wanted to start a nonprofit. She explained:

I always had a dream when I was 19. I had the dream that I was going to create a nonprofit that worked with students in the community. I thought it was going to be more art based, because, like I said, I do art. But I think I needed more experiences to realize exactly what it needed to be in.

However, a school "begged" her to teach, which she did for two more years, even though she did not want to work there. At the last school where she worked, there were a

lot of gifted students. Because they finished their work so quickly, she wondered if she could give them college work:

I did and it worked, and I was just like, oh my gosh! And so that was the first time that I was able to sneakily be creative in the level of work that I gave to students... [at a] predominantly Black and Hispanic school. I just thought that was really cool. And then I just connected that to my development in education. So, I think I just had all the tools, and it was just the end of the road. I couldn't do it anymore. I couldn't deal with adults... that had like a skewed mentality of the capacity of students. It wasn't working for me anymore.

Because of her gifted tendencies to go deeply into concepts and make connections, Shalelia said, "I think that's what allowed me to realize that there was a disconnect between Black and Brown students and gifted and talented [programs], not only based off my own experiences, but my teaching experience." She kept asking why questions, and digging deep into research and realized, "Oh, okay, these are the reasons why, or this is how it's affecting this, [or] these populations."

During her last years of teaching, Shalelia was already fixated on her future nonprofit. "I already had the concept in my mind and would kind of dabble some notes here and there over those two years about what I wanted to do," she said. "[But] once something is in my head, I start obsessing over it and I just can't stop." She explained how she decided to work on her specific nonprofit:

I created a nonprofit that's specific for giftedness, so I think that is really important to know ... I can't even tell you, like, all the things that I got out of all

the different things that I learned and the things that I taught. It was April 2018; I was sitting on my bed. And the vision of this program came to me. So, I didn't have prior [knowledge that I wanted] to do a gifted program, that didn't happen. I just happened to write down exactly what it was. So, it really just came to me, which is exciting.

She attributed the development of her social enterprise to her personal experience being a gifted person and “talking to [her] brothers as well and their experiences in gifted education... and listening to students from [her] previous years teaching gifted and talented.” These experiences “accumulated” and enabled her to “realize that this is what [she] needed to do.” However, Shalelia shared, “I didn't actually know that until I wrote it down, which I'm really grateful for.” Though she had a plan, Shalelia said:

I didn't have any experience in running a business. The only experience I had was teaching. And so, with teaching, you learn how to lead, right, obviously your classes, but I just didn't have that business experience, that I knew was going to work—that I needed in order to be sustainable. So ... accelerators were really helpful in gaining those skills. But I knew that I needed those because I did my research before and my research told me, you need this experience. And I was like, “I don't have that experience.” So, I just researched different ways in which I could get that.

She completed various accelerator programs to develop her business acumen, which helped her connect with experts and mentors to guide her along her path and

ultimately develop a “nonprofit that’s specific for giftedness” with a focus on getting secondary BIPOC students into advanced coursework.

Shalelia created a nonprofit for SCDEP and a separate for-profit limited liability corporation (LLC) called SCDEP Equity Consulting and refers to her organization as a hybrid. The nonprofit works in schools with students, and the LLC works to deliver professional development for educators and to sell educational resources to generate more revenue for Shalelia and her nonprofit.

### ***Shalelia’s Metaphor***

The metaphor Shalelia used for her career development was *hitting the end of the road*. She explained, “I just couldn’t take being a teacher anymore. It was just too much bureaucracy. My last principal also—it was very traumatic for me because she was an extreme micromanager ... I just couldn’t take it anymore.” And from this frustration, she turned toward entrepreneurship.

### ***Theme 1: Critical Learning Experiences***

Shalelia always wanted to make a nonprofit to support her community but was not sure of its exact mission until her career development path took a critical turn when she taught gifted Black and Hispanic students. Seeing students’ giftedness and capabilities, but also recognizing how the educational system did not challenge them or recognize their gifts and talents, helped her determine the focus of her organization: SCDEP. SCDEP focuses on recruiting and retaining gifted BIPOC students in advanced coursework.

Shalelia's dissatisfaction with low expectations for BIPOC students and teaching indicate her multilevel disintegration resulting in her rejecting her former career trajectory (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016). Shalelia's critical learning experiences align with SCCT (Lent et al., 1994). After learning about the needs of gifted BIPOC students, and learning about her ability to support them educationally, Shalelia's self-efficacy and outcome expectations were developed, which nurtured her interests, goals, and actions in developing SCDEP (Lent et al., 1994).

Though Shalelia did not want to work at her last teaching assignment, it was a fortuitous moment that catalyzed her career development by helping her find the mission she wanted to accomplish with her nonprofit for the benefit of her gifted BIPOC community in Denver. These experiences were a very positive aspect of Shalelia's career development.

### ***Theme 2: Accelerated Development of Business Acumen***

Because Shalelia "didn't have any experience in running a business" she realized that "business—like foundations were really all that I needed." Shalelia described how she accelerated her learning to develop her business acumen as a fledgling entrepreneur:

I don't have any skills on being an entrepreneur and so I will do all the accelerators that I could possibly do. So, I did. I did a pitch competition, and that helped me fine tune my why. And then I was in, I believe, four different accelerator programs around entrepreneurship, building a nonprofit or building a school-based nonprofit and just other business skills that I needed in order for myself to feel sufficient and to go after creating my nonprofit.

Shalelia described two accelerator programs that helped her development: SistahBiz Global Network and another focused on educational social entrepreneurs. She said, “Those accelerators were really helpful in gaining those [business] skills.”

At SistahBiz, Shalelia had a business coach and was able to meet and connect with other Black women social entrepreneurs and create her pricing scale. This experience was great because she was able to “dream big” and think about questions such as, “How is it going to be in 10 years? How many staff are you going to have?” She was also told to write out her vision and make a concept map of staff, salaries, and everything. This was the first time Shalelia had done that, and she said, “I still actually visit that quite often and I think it’s super valuable. My experience [at SistahBiz] was like ten months.” SistahBiz was a space for Black women entrepreneurs, like Shalelia, which helped her find and feel supportive community that shared her intersection of identities.

The second accelerator program Shalelia detailed was a program designed for social education entrepreneurs who would like to create their own schools or programs. The intensive weekly accelerator covered a variety of topics, and Shalelia did three phases of the program: design, implementation, and evaluation. The program also provided an expert bench of professionals, which Shalelia said, “really helped me” because she was able to refine her pricing scale and connect with lawyers to finetune her nonprofit. Overall, Shalelia said the program, “helped me in recruiting students ... especially for my summer camp ... So, I was really grateful for that opportunity.”

These accelerator programs helped give Shalelia confidence that her niche is needed, and it was “leadership development” that helped her “cultivate the leader that

[she is].” Shalelia explained, “Through those incubators and accelerators I was able to gain professional expertise from different experts, pro-bono, which I think was extremely helpful.”

Shalelia’s interests in developing her business skills led her to seek out accelerator programs to further her self-efficacy and outcome expectations per SCCT (Lent et al., 1994).

These accelerator programs seemed to be incredible resources that helped Shalelia develop her business acumen in focused ways—with Black women entrepreneurs and with social education entrepreneurs. This was a great way for Shalelia to develop the skills and connections she needed to develop SCDEP.

### ***Summary of Shalelia’s Career Development***

Shalelia’s career development clearly aligns with SCCT (Lent et al., 1994). Shalelia had critical learning experiences while teaching, but then she hit a wall and could not do it anymore. She attended business accelerator programs aligned with her intersectional identity and worked to develop a nonprofit enterprise, SCDEP, to support gifted BIPOC students.

### **RQ3a: Shalelia’s Supports for Career Development**

Shalelia has a social entrepreneurship orientation and described several supports for her career development including role models and three themes of (1) community supports, (2) self-efficacy fueled by giftedness, and (3) hiring for capacity building.

On SEOS (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018), Shalelia responded “strongly agree” to 12 of 21 items, and “somewhat agree” to seven items (see Table F5 in the appendix),



which indicates a social entrepreneurship orientation that supports Shalelia's career development. Shalelia indicated she is highly driven by a social mission, innovative, and effectual, but she did not score herself highly on proactiveness—she rarely engages in financial modeling or forecasting to prepare for the future.

### ***Shalelia's Role Models***

Shalelia is part of a special cohort of social educational entrepreneurs who all attended New Profit's Equitable Education Recovery Initiative, which focuses on school-based educational social enterprises that focus on equity. Shalelia described the people in her cohort as her role models: "They really inspire me. And they also just explicitly say, 'Shalelia, don't stop what you're doing. This is needed. The programming you do is valuable. You are valuable.' They pour into me." She feels really encouraged by her cohort: "If I have questions, we can meet up and talk about it ... being in spaces with people like that is so inspiring for me."

### ***Theme 1: Community Supports***

Shalelia has found different types of community that have supported her career development in an accelerator program with other Black women entrepreneurs, in an accelerator with other social educational entrepreneurs, and with a cohort of equity-based social educational entrepreneurs. These communities have helped her develop her business acumen while inspiring her and providing a support network:

I'm not very individual. I know that the reason why I am the way I am is because of my community and I'm grateful for that. And I think that's why I embedded so much into my programming, because I know how valuable it was for me.

Shalelia said, “Just kind of being around other social entrepreneurs that are gifted will allow you to see, oh, that’s what I do. Okay. I need to focus more on this. And then those people could help me [learn about] their thought process and how they operate.”

Conversations with different social entrepreneurs have helped Shalelia model decisions:

Even me taking the step to offer our services or our expertise through community workshops was like an idea through them. Doing the research in order to validate our multicultural gifted rating scale (MGRS) and partnering with a college or university was definitely inspired out of conversations [with] them. Yeah, building out systems, etc., plans, all of those different types of things, really came out of conversations with these different social entrepreneurs.

Shalelia has participated in and joined the microsystems of accelerator programs and cohorts that enabled her to form connections throughout her mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). A social environment of entrepreneurs who aligned with Shalelia’s identity and values supported Shalelia’s secondary integration of a career ideal (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).

These community connections are very positive and meaningful to Shalelia and continuously inspire her to stay the course and continue her work with SCDEP.

### ***Theme 2: Self-Efficacy Fueled by Giftedness***

Shalelia’s giftedness was an incredible support for her career development. She said, “I am so appreciative of my gifts. I knew they would take me a long way. I just—I am proud of myself. I trust myself and I trust the process. She credits her mother’s

nurturance of her giftedness and her encouragement to “explore and invent and question” for helping her to create SCDEP. She explained:

I know a lot of gifted students don’t have that environment at home, and I think that really did encourage me to go out and do all the things that I have. So, I was able to cultivate my gifts through education and... [conversations with gifted people which] allows me to even want to explore, to even create something.

Shalelia’s pride in her giftedness fuels her confidence and self-efficacy, which supports her career development (Bandura, 1997; Lent et al., 1994).

Shalelia’s self-efficacy and confidence in her abilities and appreciation of her giftedness are positive influences for her career development.

### ***Theme 3: Hiring for Capacity Building***

Shalelia reported, “The very first person that I hired outside of our mentor supervisor who was already working with us was the education coordinator and instructor, and they actually went into the schools and did the programming.” This was important to develop SCDEP’s capacity because, as Shalelia said, “Before, I was the only one doing all the different things. So that’s been really helpful.”

Hiring her first employee expanded SCDEP’s capacity and the size of SCDEP’s microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), enabling Shalelia to focus more on growing SCDEP and in turn enabling SCDEP to reach more students.

The fact that Shalelia and SCDEP grew enough to hire a first employee was a huge positive benchmark for the program and supported Shalelia’s career development as a social entrepreneur and executive director.

### **RQ3b: Shalelia's Barriers to Career Development**

Shalelia describes three themes of barriers to her career development: (1) creating her own lane, (2) funding for a Black woman entrepreneur, and (3) deficit-based funders.

#### ***Theme 1: Creating her own Lane***

Shalelia said, "Creating my own lane has been very difficult." She explained that the work she does to explicitly support gifted BIPOC students in accessing advanced coursework "isn't [an existing] niche. I have not heard of a lot of different other nonprofits that do the work that I do, even on a national capacity." Shalelia's focus required her to forge her own path and to do lots of work garnering "support for a mission that people wouldn't even think they would need to support."

Many programs work to support gifted students, and many programs work to support students of color, but it is rare to find an organization specific to explicitly supporting gifted BIPOC students. As the ideal organization did not exist, Shalelia had to create her own social enterprise to do the work she values so deeply. This process aligned with secondary integration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016) of Shalelia's career ideal.

While creating her own lane has been a difficult barrier for Shalelia to navigate, she has successfully been navigating throughout the nonprofit space, and she can be a positive inspiration to future social entrepreneurs with an explicit mission to support gifted BIPOC students.

#### ***Theme 2: Funding for a Black Woman Entrepreneur***

One of the largest barriers Shalelia reports facing is access to funding, which she attributes partially to her intersectional identity. She explained:

I would say I didn't realize the impact of being a Black woman entrepreneur and how that would have a huge impact on raising money and funds for the nonprofit. I think that if I would have known that prior to creating a nonprofit, I probably would have done more of a [for-profit] social enterprise type of situation. But I have a hybrid, so that is really helpful. But I think I didn't realize the severity of Black women entrepreneurs that are being underfunded. I didn't realize that it would be this difficult.

The National Association of Black Accountants ([NABA], 2023) shares several distressing statistics about funding for Black female entrepreneurs: businesses founded by Black female entrepreneurs have an average of \$24,000 in annual revenue, which is six times smaller than the revenue of other female owned businesses; and the gap between funding is widest between White males and Black female entrepreneurs. Furthermore, Black women receive only 0.35% of the billions of dollars spent on venture capital funding. NABA said, "The irony here is that the same barriers and microaggressions that caused many Black women to flee Corporate America and venture out on their own are still obstacles when they reengage with these same spaces as entrepreneurs" (2023, para. 10).

The inequities in access to funding for Shalelia as a Black woman entrepreneur imply either a lack of resources in her mesosystem or a larger issue with values in the macrosystem that limit an investment in either Shalelia or in a program that focuses on supporting gifted BIPOC students.

The inequitable access to funding that Shalelia describes is disappointing and an unfortunate reflection of the priorities of too many nonprofit funders and philanthropists.

### ***Theme 3: Deficit-Based Funders***

Another financial hurdle for Shalelia is the expectations of deficit-based funders. She elaborates:

So, explaining to deficit-based funders what we need for our program, and the need for good education, has been very difficult because they have myths and perceptions of what giftedness is, and a lot of those [myths] are that students that have this [gifted] identity do not need any help.

Because of these myths, Shalelia said, “I typically have to front load information surrounding giftedness and especially [giftedness] in Black and Brown communities” and to confront “inter-cultural issues with giftedness or whether [giftedness is] being disenfranchised from school” because some funders struggle with “seeing the relevancy and the need for gifted and talented within our culture.”

In the beginning, deficit-based funders liked to hear “a lot of like deficit-based stats. And to me,” Shalelia said, “that’s very difficult because my program is strengths-based, and so it’s very difficult to have them brush aside the needs of gifted learners.” Shalelia has found it very difficult “garnering support” with these funders.

Funders that are deficit-based have preconceived notions that gifted students may not need programs that support them, or that giftedness is lacking in communities of color—both false myths that harm gifted people. The lack of understanding about

giftedness among funders and educators is a pervasive issue in our society (WCGTC, 2021).

Shalelia's challenging but impactful efforts are necessary to educate funders about the true importance of supporting gifted students, BIPOC students, and especially gifted BIPOC students. Though Shalelia has experienced a barrier with deficit-based funders, she has been able to form relationships, often with private funders, who are aligned with her mission to support the work of SCDEP.

#### ***Summary of Shalelia's Career Development Supports and Barriers***

Supports for Shalelia's career development included community supports, self-efficacy fueled by giftedness, and hiring for capacity building. Barriers to Shalelia's career development included creating her own lane, funding for a Black woman entrepreneur, and deficit-based funders.

#### **RQ4: Shalelia's Shared Social Value**

SCDEP's social value aligns with two of the United Nation's SDGs (2015): quality education and reduced inequalities. This section on Shalelia's shared social value discusses her social enterprise, SCDEP; her artifact, a flyer about the program; and three themes: (1) nurturing gifted BIPOC students, (2) community orientation and involvement, and (3) sharing impact.

#### ***Shalelia's Social Enterprise: SCDEP***

SCDEP is a nonprofit that specifically focuses on giftedness, supports gifted BIPOC students, and emphasizes three main areas of work: in-school programming,

community involvement, and the development of mentors. “I’m really proud of the work that we’ve done over the span of five years,” Shalelia said.

SCDEP works in schools to directly support students. So far, SCDEP has served 14 middle and high schools in the Denver metro area, primarily in east Denver and Aurora, and reached over 350 students of color. Each school is different, but often formally identified gifted students or students who are likely gifted but do not yet have a body of evidence to establish a formal identification of giftedness are recommended by teachers, community members, or other students to enroll in the SCDEP courses.

SCDEP teaches elective courses that teach students about giftedness and how their giftedness manifests through their diverse cultures while also nurturing students’ racial identity development, preparing students for college, and building portfolios that demonstrate their gifts and talents. SCDEP works with unidentified gifted students to build a robust body of evidence and then advocates within the school district to help those students receive formal gifted and talented identification in order to access additional gifted education services. During her interview, Shalelia said, “This quarter, we have four students that we want to recommend [districts] identify as gifted and talented.”

SCDEP also works to involve the larger community. With mission-aligned donors, SCDEP is able to provide a free summer school program in Denver, Colorado and in Austin, Texas. The LLC of SCDEP Equity Consulting also works to provide train-the-trainer professional development to organizations and school faculty to grow their understanding of giftedness and what giftedness means for BIPOC folks and to learn



ways to support different learners at their schools. Shalelia said SCDEP has “even supported schools in creating gifted programs that didn’t have any.” Shalelia described a new initiative of SCDEP “to provide train the trainer workshops for larger community organizations that we know are serving gifted students, but they don’t know how to [fully] support them.”

SCDEP also hires and develops mentors, including former students who went through the SCDEP program and local BIPOC college students who are interested in supporting current students in school or during the summer programming.

Shalelia shared, “I’m proud of being creative in how we are funded.” For in-school programming, schools pay a fee for service to the nonprofit. Then, anything regarding school or staff development runs through SCDEP Equity Consulting, the LLC, so there can be another stream of income to supplement grants, gifts, and donations.

***Shalelia’s Artifact: SCDEP Initiative Flyer***

Shalelia’s artifact is an informational flyer about SCDEP that helps people, such as school and community partners, better understand the programming they offer. She said:

I’m really proud of this flyer because I think that it summarizes more efficiently the programs and initiatives that we have and our impact. This is the flyer that I give to interested schools and other community organizations that I work with for them to see the three different areas in which we impact students in our community. So, we have in-school programming and community involvement, and mentor development.

Shalelia sends this flyer to interested partners to demonstrate the programs that SCDEP offers and to encourage them to follow up and learn more.

***Theme 1: Nurturing Gifted BIPOC Students***

Shalelia recognized the “disconnect between Black and Brown students and gifted and talented” based on both her own experience as a gifted Black student and her teaching experience working with gifted Black and Brown students. She said, “I have seen a disconnect between cultural, academic, and gifted identity development within our culture as well, or Black and Brown cultures, I would say. So, well, I definitely have incorporated that into our curriculum.”

Shalelia and SCDEP nurture gifted BIPOC students in several ways with their strengths-based programming by developing portfolios to help formally identify students as gifted and talented, developing students’ positive racial identities, providing mentors, and encouraging students to take advanced coursework and attend college. Shalelia has also developed and uses the MGRS with her gifted BIPOC students. This tool helps students learn what giftedness is and how to recognize their own giftedness as expressed through their cultures.

Shalelia knows that her gifted BIPOC students value SCDEP and explained:

I always like to hear from the students and our mentors that serve our students [who] say ... “I wish I would have had this in middle school or high school.” Or our high [schoolers] are saying, “I wish I would have had this in middle school because I really struggled with my gifted identity.” So really, just listening to what [and] how the students take in our program is the most valuable for me.

Learning about their giftedness helps students to understand themselves more and helps develop their confidence and interest in doing advanced coursework at school and in college.

Helping students develop a positive self-concept of their racial identity and their gifted identity is a valuable aspect of the SCDEP that ripples throughout the ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

### ***Theme 2: Community Orientation and Involvement***

Shalelia has a strong community orientation and works to involve the community in the work of SCDEP. She mentioned several times that she is “a community-based person” who thinks “we all could work on this together.” She said, “I’m not very individual. I know that the reason why I am the way I am is because of my community, and I’m grateful for that. And I think that’s why I embedded so much into my programming, because I know how valuable it was for me.”

Shalelia and SCDEP work to provide professional development to community organizations and recruit mentors to further expand community involvement within SCDEP. Shalelia also said she is, “really looking to expand to district level impact instead of just school-based impact.”

Shalelia’s caring commitment to community makes her feel as if her mesosystem is actually her microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). She considers larger communities as being close to her. Her microsystem does not consist only of SCDEP; rather, she talks with close fondness about all gifted BIPOC students, local organizations and educators, and her community in East Denver. Shalelia’s work, especially to educate others about

giftedness and gifted BIPOC students, is a strong effort to shift the values and expectations of the larger macrosystems in both education and in funding and indicates her development of her ideal social milieu (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).

Shalelia's interest in supporting her community is beautiful and strongly aligned with social entrepreneurship's values of supporting the social good in creative ways that generate revenue.

### ***Theme 3: Sharing Impact***

SCDEP primarily shares its impact with two entities: funders and school districts. A lot of Shalelia's funders are private funders that like to build relationships with Shalelia and her program. These relational funders ask Shalelia to share about her impact with questions like: How many students did SCDEP serve? How did SCDEP use the money to serve those students? Shalelia said some funders just check in and ask questions like: How did it go? What was the final experience? What are some impact stories? Then, Shalelia described funders that say, "No, I need actual receipts from you to ... tell us how you use our money," and detailed having to develop a mix of qualitative and quantitative feedback when doing grant reporting work.

Shalelia also discussed sharing her impact with schools:

It's wild because they actually don't really ask for data. We have to share it with them to be like, "Hey, here's what we're doing. Here's how our program is making a difference." ... And I think it has a lot to do with them just being super busy and maybe even just believing in our mission. But I actually would like for

more schools to ask, “What has your impact been?” Whether it’s qualitative or quantitative, they don’t really ask those questions. And I think that they should, because it’s kind of vital, you know. And [they are] paying us. So, we don’t have to do any reporting for them. But we do offer it to them. So, I think we’re doing best practice, even though they’re not asking for it.

The variety of expectations of funders and schools is intriguing, especially the lack of interest schools demonstrate in knowing what and how SCDEP is doing with their gifted students of color. Funders and schools learning more about what and how SCDEP is doing would inspire more investment and partnerships with the program to the benefit of even more students. This is why Shalelia is excited about her informational flyer about SCDEP’s initiative and impacts—because it provides a brief overview of their work to funders and schools.

The impact of SCDEP is positive; the questions funders ask are mostly positive; the questions school districts do not ask are concerning; and SCDEP’s practice of sharing impact stories with both funders and districts is critical for marketing this program and its benefits for gifted BIPOC students.

### ***Summary of Shalelia’s Shared Social Value***

Shalelia’s shared social value is manifested through her hybrid structure of a nonprofit, SCDEP which provides in-school student programming, and an LLC, SCDEP Equity Consulting, which supports educators through access to professional development and other resources. Her artifact was a flyer of SCDEP initiatives and impact. Three themes of Shalelia’s shared social value were discussed: how SCDEP nurtures gifted

BIPOC students, SCDEP's community orientation and involvement, and how SCDEP shares impact with funders and schools.

### **Closing Vignette**

Shalelia shared an empowering story about how her mother cultivated giftedness with her and her two brothers:

I feel [my mom] lucked out as far as children are concerned, because ... all three of us were the type of kids that once we had an interest in something, we could sit there for hours and just dig really deep into those interests. I think ... our temperaments were just really ideal [for her to] cultivate that within us. For example, I would be drawing all the time, and she would just get me more crayons or just really encourage me and be like, "This is really good! No, really, kids really can't draw like this at your age." And so, she would encourage me and just praised me a lot.

Shalelia's mother made a point to be very encouraging and to tell her children that she loved them. Shalelia's mother would tell her, "This is what I didn't get, and I want to make sure that I'm doing this for you all, because I really would have benefitted from it, and so I want to make sure that you feel encouraged." Shalelia credits these explicit conversations with her mother for helping her "explore my feelings and emotions." Shalelia described her brothers:

My brothers were very similar [to me]. My brother was an inventor, and so he would take apart things and ... [my mother would] voice a frustration like, "Oh my gosh, stuff is all over the place." But then she would also, "voice an

excitement to be like, “Whoa, I just can’t even believe that you made that ... but make sure you clean up your mess.” ... Seeing her do that for my brothers as well was really cool ... My oldest brother would help his teachers at school fix computers in the late 80s/early 90s ... seeing how she cultivated that within all three of us ... was really empowering for me.

### **Summary of Shalelia’s Case Study**

Shalelia self-reported many characteristics of giftedness including nurtured gifted pride and traumatic access to educational opportunities. Shalelia’s career development started when she hit a wall as a teacher and grew with critical learning experiences and accelerator programs that helped her expand her business acumen. Supports for her career development included community supports, self-efficacy fueled by giftedness, and hiring, which built capacity for SCDEP. Barriers to Shalelia’s career development included struggles to create her own lane, limited funding access for her as a Black woman entrepreneur, and deficit-based funders she must educate about giftedness. Shalelia’s shared social value is primarily expressed through her organization, SCDEP, which nurtures gifted BIPOC students, involves itself in the community, and shares its impact with funders and schools.

### **Case 4: Dr. Chris Wells, Founder of the Dąbrowski Center**

It is a sunny summer day at Chris’s home in a southern suburb of Denver. A thin pale curtain is closed, straining and barely holding back the powerful bright sunlight. Dr. Chris Wells sits in front of a desk, looking intently at their web camera, ready to be interviewed. A large structure with 16 cubes is behind Chris in the closet and serves as a

neatly arranged bookcase. A small, framed artwork is beside the window. Binders, office supplies, paper, and a filing cabinet adorn their in-home office. Chris spends a lot of time working at their desk and says, “Off camera, there’s a lot of other stuff stacked in piles... I have a lot of paper and journals and books all around ... that’s my life ... reading and writing and studying.” Chris apologizes in advance for a lingering cough from Covid and says they will occasionally mute their microphone.

Chris sits comfortably in a black office chair with a mesh back. They have pale white skin and reddish-brown hair with a side part. Their hair is cut short so that the ends barely brush their ears, which have small, silver hooped earrings. Serious dark brown eyes peer through the tops of glasses with black, plastic frames that sit low on the bridge of their nose. Chris is wearing a navy-blue cotton polo shirt with one white button undone which opens up their collar. “Sorry about my dog,” Chris says, as their dog sporadically howls outside the office door.

“No worries,” I say, “Let’s get started.”

### **Chris’s Background**

Chris lives with their husband in Highlands Ranch, Colorado, and they have a son in high school. Chris was born in the northeast United States, in Connecticut, outside of New York City, to a working-class family. Their father worked in a truck stop and their mother was a waitress. The family’s lives were transformed when Chris’s parents experienced social mobility by finding better jobs as elevator constructors. Chris left Connecticut at age 18 and moved west.



Chris said their family is “White and European, so that’s kind of basic.” Chris is also in their early 50s and is non-binary. Chris said, “It’s been quite the journey of spending maybe the first two-thirds of my life feeling out of place and wondering where I could generalize in the world, then learning the language of nonbinary and recognizing myself in that.” Chris added, “It’s been a really wonderful part of my last ten years... figuring out that I’m not a defective woman, that there’s this other way of being myself that matters.”

The other part about Chris’s self-discovery was recognizing their types of neurodivergence. Chris said, “[I externalized my] behavior from my frustration when I was young.” Chris struggled with mental health, drug addiction, and suicidal thoughts before learning about Dąbrowski’s theory of positive disintegration (1964/2016), which Chris often refers to as “the theory,” and they were hospitalized multiple times as a young adult.

Chris received gifted education services in elementary and middle school. In high school, they attended a private high school, but after they were kicked out of high school, they finished at a public high school. They earned a bachelor’s degree in sociology with a specialization in social welfare, a master’s degree in social work, and a PhD in psychology. Chris is the founder of the nonprofit DC and, along with Emma Nicholson, hosts the *Positive Disintegration Podcast* (Wells & Nicholson, 2021).

I had the opportunity to meet Chris in 2018 at a training hosted by the Gifted Development Center on how to deliver and score the Overexcitabilities Questionnaire-Two (Falk et al., 1999). Chris and I became friends, and I’ve supported their work and

growth with both the theory and the DC. I helped Dr. Hafenstein host the 2022 Dąbrowski Congress at DU, where Dr. Wells served on the proposal review committee and gave a keynote address. Now that the Dąbrowski Congress is permanently housed at the DC, I am serving on the conference planning committee for the 2024 Dąbrowski Congress (DC, 2024). Dr. Wells, Nth Bar-Fields, and I served on a panel about our *Experiences Being Profoundly Gifted* at the 2022 Gifted Education Policy Symposium and Conference (Lin et al., 2022), and we later modified that presentation into two episodes of the *Positive Disintegration Podcast* (Wells & Nicholson, 2023, Ep. 25 & 26). Chris has been a big supporter of my doctoral journey and readily agreed to share their experience as a fledgling social entrepreneur. Chris told me, “I’m honored to be a part of your dissertation study, and I am feeling... enthusiastic about talking about the subject with you.”

### **RQ1: Chris’s Self-Reported Characteristics of Giftedness**

Chris self-reported several characteristics of giftedness include intellectual giftedness, intense imagination, accomplishments, the ability to take in large amounts of knowledge, the ability to write and communicate their work, and the tendency to hyperfocus on areas of interest. On KAGS (Ksiazak, 2010), Chris responded “always” to 13 of 22 items, “almost always” to six more items, and “often” to one item (see Table F5 in the appendix). This section discusses Chris’s self-reported characteristics of giftedness, an artifact related to their giftedness, and three themes: (1) emotional intensity, (2) mediocre experiences with gifted education, and (3) learning about neurodivergence.

Chris has known they were gifted and been familiar with giftedness since childhood. At age 11, Chris was identified with a very high IQ and was placed in gifted programming. Chris has had many IQ tests and has been told many times that they are intellectually gifted. Chris also said, “I had this extremely intense experience of imagination compared to other kids.”

Regarding the label of giftedness, Chris explained:

I was identified as highly gifted or really profoundly gifted when I was a kid. But I still feel weird using that language. It’s not something that most people in my day-to-day life outside of the gifted community are familiar with and so I tend to just say that I’m gifted.

Chris told me they always had ideas about things they wanted to do or clubs they wanted to start: “I was very ambitious when I was a teenager and managed to do a lot of this stuff, and it always just came from me and my parents just did their best ... to support me.”

Chris said, “My giftedness is manifested in my work ... I’m there for people and they see themselves in me, [in] my lived experience.” Chris shared another way their giftedness shows up: “I have the capacity to take in enormous amounts of information, to synthesize, to write and produce work for other people. So, for sure, my cognitive abilities are a part of that, in my intellectual giftedness.”

Chris is intellectually gifted but “would argue that [they are] also an emotionally gifted person.” Though Chris recognizes their giftedness, they also work to accept their own limitations. Chris explained, “I’m definitely the kind of person who has a very

interest-driven nervous system ... I hyperfocus on areas that I care about, like the theory.”

Chris’s self-reported description of intellectual giftedness, emotional giftedness, hyperfocus, and characteristics of KAGS (Ksiazak, 2010) all indicate their giftedness.

### ***Chris’s Artifact: Mellow Out***

Chris shared two artifacts. The first is discussed here as it connects to their gifted story, while the second artifact is discussed in the section on Chris’s career development.

Chris’s first artifact was a book titled “*Mellow Out*,” they say. *If I Only Could*:

*Intensities and Sensitivities of the Young and Bright*, by Michael M. Piechowski (2013).

Chris explained:

This book? I mean, I can’t say enough about how it changed my life. And when I read it, I finally understood giftedness as not just what I do, but who I am...

Michael is a mentor for me, and so our relationship has been a big part of my professional development and my personal development. And so, his book is a foundation of that. I remember reading it the first summer when I was getting to know [Michael] and just being blown away by the insights I was getting from [it]. And whenever people ask me, what’s the best book to read about overexcitability, it’s *Mellow Out* for sure.

*Mellow Out* was important to Chris because it was written to help further an understanding of gifted people and because it was written by their mentor, Michael M. Piechowski.

### ***Theme 1: Emotional Intensity***

Chris said they are “emotionally gifted.” Chris explained, “I have the ability to connect with people heart-to-heart, and in a way that reflects that as well, in my clinical work and even just, my ability to connect with people ... I enjoy the personal connection.”

Chris is often “overwhelmed with thoughts” and “needed tools for emotional regulation.” Chris said, “I was having problems ... I felt so different because it’s hard to explain. I felt too emotional. I always felt like I was too much.” Chris continued, “Other kids didn’t seem to have the struggles that I had with my emotions and my strong feelings.”

Critiquing their education, Chris said, “What I needed from a social emotional perspective was to be helped in figuring out how to tend my own nervous system, and I needed tools for emotional regulation ... It would have helped me [understand myself].”

Chris’s emotional intensity is indicative of emotional overexcitability (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016; Piechowski & Wells, 2021); this intensity is more than a mere emotional awareness or empathy; it is overwhelming and problematic. Chris benefitted from Piechowski’s (2013) book, *Mellow Out*, which helped them develop the self-understanding and emotional regulation they needed for stability and growth.

Chris described their historical emotional intensity as overwhelming and problematic. However, merely having emotional intensity is not the issue; rather lacking strategies to regulate emotional intensity is an issue for people, particularly gifted people.

## ***Theme 2: Mediocre Experience with Gifted Education***

Chris indicated their experiences with gifted education were lacking. Chris described the gifted educational services they received in elementary school as “just a pullout program” in fifth and sixth grade. Chris said that in middle school:

It was the same thing where on Fridays, I spent the day in a gifted classroom with a handful of other kids. And that was really the extent of it. And we just did self-directed projects and ... it was nice to have a group of other kids who were gifted, and there was a place where we could kind of be ourselves together, but I wish there had been something else or more.

Chris explained more about what they wished their educational experience had been like for them as a gifted student:

I wish that I hadn't had to go back to a traditional classroom all week...

Acceleration was never on the table. I just was expected to be in class with the whole range of kids that are in a general education class. So, it often felt like torture to me. I spent a lot of time in elementary school sitting at an Apple IIe and programming in BASIC. I mean, they would just let me sit in the library and read... It was not a great educational experience for me.

At a private high school, Chris enjoyed school but said, “I never was really into the classes that I was forced to take or that were offered ... I actually ended up getting kicked out of high school and finishing at a public high school.”

Chris was formally identified and received gifted services but did not feel those services were meaningful. Chris said the traditional classroom because it “felt like torture” to them and they appreciated being able to spend time with other gifted students.

It is impressive that Chris was able to access gifted education programming at all; however, programming could have been richer and more meaningful to Chris if it had connected more to their interests and provided social and emotional strategies and supports.

### ***Theme 3: Learning about Neurodivergence***

“I didn’t know how to operate in the world like other people did. I was obviously very atypical, and I saw myself as abnormal and broken,” Chris said. “I would go to the psychiatrist with a laundry list of issues that I had identified myself, you know, I pathologized myself.” This was an issue for Chris because they did not have “any positive lens through which to understand their struggles,” which led them to “spend their whole 20s, practically in and out of mental health treatment, on a lot of different medication.” Chris said their background of mental illness:

... is really what brought me to this work, to understand myself from this new lens and recognizing that the things that I struggled with when I was young were not defects, but in fact came from this intense experience of reality that I have, [which is partly from being] gifted, and partly from having overexcitabilities [and] these kinds of neurodivergence.

During their PhD, they did an autoethnographic study as part of a personal research project which led to several discoveries:

[I] discovered that there was a lot wrong with how I saw myself and my past, and I discovered that giftedness wasn't just the label that had been applied to me in childhood and didn't matter anymore when I was adult. I realized that giftedness is something that matters across the lifespan.

Chris knew about their giftedness at an early age but said, "When I learned that it was possible to be gifted and disabled, that really resonated with me." Chris added, "I didn't figure out how to live with these things [giftedness, neurodivergence, overexcitabilities, etc.] until I was an adult. If I had been clued into that when I was young, it would have made a big difference for me." Chris further described their types of neurodivergence:

I was identified gifted as a kid, and as an adult, discovered that I'm also ADHD. And sometimes I wonder if I'm autistic. But ... just knowing that I'm different and neurodivergent is enough.

Chris explained that their neurodivergences are "invisible disabilities" and are difficulties they have to overcome, even though others are not able to see them.

Chris's self-reported characteristics of giftedness describe intellectual, emotional, and imaginal overexcitabilities indicating their ability to experience advanced processes of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016; Piechowski & Wells, 2021).

Learning about twice-exceptionality, the idea that a person can be both gifted with additional disabilities (Baum et al., 2017; Kaufman, 2018); the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016); and their other types of neurodivergence (Singer, 2017) helped Chris better understand their state of being. They realized they did not have



“defects” but rather giftedness and other types of neurodivergence, which helped them view themselves through a positive lens. Chris critiqued that learning about neurodivergence sooner in life would have made a big difference in their experiences pathologizing themselves and feeling that they were mentally ill. Learning about neurodivergence was an extremely critical learning experience (Lent et al., 1994) for Chris about Chris, the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

A lack of knowledge about neurodivergence harmed Chris during their development, but learning about twice-exceptionality, the theory, and other types of neurodivergence, albeit later in life, was a great positive experience that changed not only Chris’s perspective on themselves, but also impacted the work they do with others.

### ***Summary of Chris’s Self-Reported Characteristics of Giftedness***

Chris self-reported an ability to take in large amounts of information and to hyperfocus only on areas of interest, a high IQ indicating intellectual giftedness, and emotional giftedness. Important themes include Chris’s emotional intensity and learning about neurodivergence. These characteristics along with their responses on KAGS (Ksiazak, 2010) support Chris’s existence as a gifted, neurodivergent person.

### **RQ2: Chris’s Career Development**

This section provides an overview of Chris’s career development and their metaphor and artifact. Then three themes are discussed: (1) late bloomer, (2) meandering through career crises, and (3) learning about neurodivergence.

Chris described two main areas of focus for their career development. They wanted to write, and they wanted to help people. Chris said, “I’ve published a couple of books, and writing has been kind of a constant in my life since I was a kid.”

Chris said they knew during undergrad that they wanted to get a master’s degree in social work, so they first got a bachelor’s in sociology with a specialization in social welfare, then they earned their master’s. Chris said they finished undergrad at age 32, “so I was kind of late.”

Chris started in child welfare and social work because they wanted to help people. In their classes, they appreciated content related to “social justice ... anti-oppression, anti-racism,” which resonated with them. Chris also appreciated their career development experiences with supervisors as an intern during the social work program. But they soon understood that child welfare was not their ideal career, and Chris then decided to pursue a PhD in psychology. In their doctoral program, Chris encountered Dąbrowski’s work for the first time. As they discovered the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016), Chris realized:

I had really misunderstood myself and pathologized myself when I was young ... and that led me to ... really [want] to find scholars in the field of gifted education where the theory has been applied, who I could learn with, learn from, [and] study in-depth the issues that matter to me.

At this point, around age 45, Chris was, “finishing [their] PhD and realizing that [they] really needed to work with this theory,” but Chris did not know how to work with it as a career. Chris said:

Unfortunately, there was no academic position that was going to allow me to do the work that I wanted to do. No, if I wanted to become a professor, or go into academia ... I just [didn't] see a way to bring my passion for this theory and its application, beyond the gifted even, while trying to do a professor job ... [of] being an academic. So, I really struggled with that.

Chris said, "It was a whole journey, and I didn't have an easy path at first." Chris remained passionate about Dąbrowski's theory and ended up finding two mentors who guided them along their career path. Chris went back to school to get their license in social work in order to do clinical work on the side to help people and earn income. Chris spent a lot of time networking as well with colleagues and other mentors:

For a while, I was working for Linda Silverman, at the Gifted Development Center, and so that was also a big part of figuring out the kind of work that I wanted to do ... Watching other people doing work that they do and understanding where I fit in this puzzle of how to best serve the populations who are dealing with positive disintegration or giftedness and other kinds of neurodivergence ... There have been so many people along the way who have helped me do this work, figure out what it was going to look like, where I needed to go, who was going to do it with me and be a part of it. I mean, you're one of those people, Joi. You are somebody who is also in this gifted community. And ... it's really the kind of thing where, if we want to make a dent in the problems we face, in this gifted community, we obviously have to do it together. We have to have a village for each other where we're supporting each other. And I have

absolutely found that in the people that I have chosen in my life. We can be here for each other to support each other.

Then they founded the DC for a base of operations to do their work with the theory. Chris described the DC as:

... based on the archive of the work that's already been done ... but you know, we're also creating new content—I have a podcast. That's my number one vehicle right now for getting the theory out into the world... There are a lot of people who can benefit from this theory, from this work.

Chris works through the DC, *Positive Disintegration Podcast*, newsletters, and study groups to share the theory with individuals and professionals such as therapists, psychologists, and educators who work with people who experience disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).

### ***Chris's Metaphor***

Chris said the metaphor that best describes their past and future career development is a *mountain*:

That mountain imagery is used for psychological mountaineering and people who study personal development and personal growth or spiritual development and so, that kind of imagery works for me personally because I went through a lot of adversity and overcoming that in my life. That's what led me to the theory I study, which is at the foundation of the work that I do. But I [think] that the mountain also works as imagery for the task ahead of me with this work, because the theory of positive disintegration, that the nonprofit is built around, is an

alternative to mainstream psychiatry. And I know that is going to be an uphill battle—bringing this information and this work to a broader international audience, which is my goal.

***Chris's Artifact: The First Check***

Chris's second artifact was a check for \$500 USD written by their mentor, Dr. Frank Falk. Chris explained why this check is a meaningful artifact for their career development:

Frank wrote this check and sent it to me the day I filed the articles of incorporation for the Dąbrowski Center. And it was Frank who planted the seed that this should happen. So, February 2, 2022, is when I filed the articles of incorporation, and it was May, the year before, when I had a conversation with Frank and he said, "You have such a hard time asking people for money for your work and you're always giving everything away." He's like, "You should found a nonprofit based on your work and that way people will be able to give to you," because he's like, "The more you do this work and people's lives are changed, the more they're going to want to support you and fund you. You have to give them a way to do that and doing it by creating a nonprofit makes sense." And so, I talked through it with him, "Well, what's my product? What am I building it around?" It was like, "You're building it around your archive, this has to be the foundation of your work." And so, without Frank, without his help around the visioning of this and his financial support, there wouldn't be a Dąbrowski Center. For him to send me that check the day I filed those papers was a big deal for me.

### ***Theme 1: Late Bloomer***

Chris expressed that they were a late bloomer and that it was difficult figuring out their career path. Chris said they finished undergrad at age 32 and earned their PhD at age 45, “so I was kind of late.” Chris explained:

It was hard to not know what my path was going to be and to have all of the expectations of giftedness, especially my own expectations of what that meant. And now in middle age, having to create my own organization to meet the needs that I see for people in the world based on the work that I do. It’s been a little overwhelming ... I guess it’s just—it’s not an easy path.

Chris’s career trajectory was delayed due to struggles with mental health and late-in-life learning about neurodivergence and the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).

Though Chris feels “late,” it is wonderful seeing how Chris has merged diverse interests in helping others, the theory of positive disintegration, psychology, and writing into their current career and work through the DC and *Positive Disintegration Podcast*.

### ***Theme 2: Meandering Through Career Crises***

Chris said they knew during undergrad that they wanted to get a master’s degree in social work, so they got a bachelor’s in sociology with a specialization in social welfare, then they earned their master’s in social work. Chris said, “I went into child welfare at first because I thought that was my path.” Wanting to help people brought them to social work because, “When I was trying to decide which kind of helping profession would be right for me, I really appreciated [ideas] like social justice... anti-

oppression, anti-racism, all of that really resonated with me and that's why I chose it."

Regarding their degree in social work, Chris said, "I'm happy with the career development and the experiences I had as an intern—the supervisors I had... that part of my career or career development... I guess it went well." However, Chris noted that soon after starting child welfare work:

... right away [I] knew that wasn't my path because, you know, I went into child welfare and child protection because I really care about children, and I wanted to help them. And I discovered in that role, I was just perpetuating problems, [impacting] family's lives – and was basically an agent of oppression. And so, I couldn't do it. But that created a huge crisis for me.

After realizing child welfare was not their ideal career, Chris decided to pursue a PhD in psychology. Chris told me, "I didn't love the way I got my psychology degree. I didn't have the career development that I wish that I'd had ... it was tough and ... disconnected from my coursework and my experience as a doctoral student." They explained:

I didn't do it the best way. I decided to do it online because I was feeling very ... it's hard to explain. I guess I felt an urgent need to get started and the daunting process of doing it at a traditional school felt overwhelming. And so, I went to an online program in psychology, and it took me forever to figure out where my passion was in that field. Honestly, I didn't like it as much as social work. I had some regrets about going down that path ... but [when I learned about twice-

exceptionality and that] it was possible to be gifted and disabled, that really resonated me.

Through networking, mentorship, and community with gifted people, Chris was able to finally identify their chosen path: working with the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).

Chris had a strong desire to “help people,” particularly children, and started out intent on becoming a social worker. However, they were disillusioned by their impact on families and pursued a PhD in psychology. While the PhD program, the doctoral process, and lack of career development was tough for Chris to navigate, networking, mentorship, and community helped guide them toward their chosen career. Each of these learning experiences impacted what Chris decided to do next (Lent et al., 1994) and aligned with a process of disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).

Though Chris had negative experiences as a social worker and PhD student, these experiences along with networking, mentorship, and community helped them develop positively and figure out their current career goal.

### ***Theme 3: Applying Passions***

When Chris learned about the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016), their whole self-perception changed. Rather than pathologizing themselves with mental illness due to their intellectual, imaginal, and emotional intensities, they realized they had been living with overexcitabilities and experiencing psychoneuroses as part of their unilevel and multilevel positive disintegrations, which was ultimately supporting their personality development (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).



Two mentors, Falk and Piechowski, who were both very familiar with the theory, nurtured Chris's interest in the theory and Chris became passionate about sharing the theory with others. Hesitant about working in higher education and academia, Chris was not sure how to apply their knowledge about the theory at first. But by founding the DC and the *Positive Disintegration Podcast*, Chris was able to apply their passion about the theory in intentional ways and to share the theory with others. Chris explained, "What I need to do for the [DC] around things that I do, like as a writer, has been interesting. There's a lot of overlap between the stuff that I care about and [how] I work with the theory." Chris wants the DC to be able to exist without them:

The Center has to be something that can support itself, that is enduring without me. And that's going to be a real challenge to figure out how to do. You know, I don't have a clear image right now of how it's going to look, but all I can do is my best. So that's just what I do, every day ... I just have to keep trusting in my board and the people that I work with and ... keeping an image of how things are going to look in my mind too. It's hard for me to move forward unless I have a clear view of where I need to go. And I do think that I have that... I definitely do have a vision of where we need to go with the theory.

As Chris is only able to hyperfocus on areas of interest, they only have sustained dedication for work that interests them, and Chris's largest area of interest is the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016). Chris also has a vision for the future of the DC and wants to see it sustained beyond their leadership.

It is wonderful that Chris found a specific niche interest of the theory of positive disintegration, made a commitment to share it with others, and has worked with intension to develop an organization focused on their work.

### ***Summary of Chris's Career Development***

Chris's career development metaphor is a mountain—the mountain they have already climbed and the mountain they have left to summit. A meaningful artifact about their career development is the first check they received as a donation to their nonprofit from their friend and mentor. Other important aspects of their career development include being a late bloomer, meandering through career crises, and applying their passions.

### **RQ3a: Chris's Supports for Career Development**

Chris has a social entrepreneurial orientation, and supports for their career development are discussed in this section along with two themes: (1) meaningful mentorship and (2) hyperfocused interest.

On SEOS (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018), Chris responded “strongly agree” to 10 of 21 items, and “somewhat agree” to seven items (see Table F5 in the appendix), which indicates a social entrepreneurship orientation that supports their career development. Chris has a strong social mission and is effectual but did not indicate high levels of proactiveness or innovativeness.

### ***Chris's Role Models***

The role model that inspires Chris is Jennifer Harvey Sallin, the founder of InterGifted, an online community of gifted people based in Switzerland (InterGifted,

2024). InterGifted has existed for almost a decade. Chris explained why they look up to Jen as part of their work:

It's really cool to watch Jen's evolution with InterGifted and how she's done a good job of bringing in other people to work with her, created her own community online, [and] offers programming on how to work with gifted people—how to do assessments for adults. This is an area that we were really missing.

Chris is part of the InterGifted community and says they took a six-month gifted psychology 101 course with Jen. Chris said, “All of that inspired me to know that I could do this and that I had the authority or expertise in my area to do it.” Chris explained, “Jen is definitely the person who comes to mind when I think of a trailblazer and working with gifted adults and kind of being willing to go outside of what's already been done and create something from scratch.” They added, “It's really cool.”

Chris's role model not only created a community of people who pay to join InterGifted, but also created an educational program that increased Chris's self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Lent et al., 1994) as both a psychologist working with the gifted and as a nascent social entrepreneur.

### ***Theme 1: Meaningful Mentorship***

Chris said they needed mentorship in their youth, and eventually found very supportive mentors:

[Such mentors] would have been helpful to me maybe, to avoid so much of the years of suffering that I had in my 20s, especially when I felt like a failure, and I

just wasn't able to find my place in the world ... I wish that I'd had good mentors then, you know, when I was like 20. I guess better late than never. But I'm the kind of person who learns a lot in relationships. And so that's what I was missing when I was young ... I didn't have people who were professionals in an area that I wanted to study, who I could talk with and learn from. And I think that was something I really missed out on until I was in my forties.

Chris had to find their own mentors, which they did. While finishing their PhD, Chris said, "I really want[ed] to find scholars in the field of gifted education where the theory has been applied, who I could learn with, learn from—like study in-depth the issues that matter to me." In their search for experts to learn from, Chris said, "I ended up finding two people who ended up really being my mentors. One was Frank Falk, and one was Michael M. Piechowski, and it was working with them that really set my early passion for this work." Chris detailed, "Michael is a mentor for me, and so our relationship has been a big part of my professional development and my personal development." Frank gave Chris their first donation for the DC. Chris said, "Without Frank, without his help around the visioning of [the DC] and his financial support, there wouldn't be a Dąbrowski Center."

Mentorship is an important component of talent development and career development as a contextual influence that impacts interests, goals, and actions and also fosters learning experiences that impact self-efficacy and outcome expectations (Bandura, 1997; Lent et al., 1994). The career output arcs of the mentors fed into Chris's input, impacting their career output, per the curricular career spiral.

Finding mentors that were helpful and meaningful to Chris and also experts in Dąbrowski's theory (Wells & Falk, 2021; Piechowski & Wells, 2021) made a huge positive impact in Chris's life, both personally and professionally. Without access to these mentors, Chris might not have invested so heavily into the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016) or started the DC in the first place.

### ***Theme 2: Hyperfocused Interest in the Theory***

Chris is a self-described “natural archivist” with an “interest-driven nervous system” who hyperfocused on the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016) until they had a good grasp on it. Chris describes their early hyperfocus on the theory:

So, I started gathering materials, especially from Michael's work and creating an archive around the theory of positive disintegration. Dąbrowski's work. Michael's work. Beyond. I mean, just, there's a ton of information. And so, I had to study this work first, and along with collecting it, I mean, this was probably three or four years of work [to just feel] like I had a very solid grasp on the literature—on the theory—and then getting to know these people who studied it too. But then I guess after that point where I felt like I had a good grasp on the knowledge base of the theory, then it was like: Well, how do I want to apply this? How do I actually help people with this information that I've gathered? That's what led me to get my licensure. And ultimately, that's what led me to start the Center, because the Center is really, I would say, based on the archive of the work that's already been done, but you know, we're also creating new content.

Chris had learning experiences about the theory and experiences with mentors that developed their self-efficacy and piqued their interest in the theory of positive disintegration (Bandura, 1997; Dąbrowski, 1964/2016; Lent et al., 1994). Chris's hyperfocus on the theory helped them rapidly learn everything they could about the theory, enabling them to begin to create at the edge of the knowledge base and to make a novel impact in their field. This hyperfocus is common for gifted and neurodivergent people in their areas of interest.

Hyperfocus on the theory of positive disintegration has greatly supported Chris's career development, the development of the DC, Chris's creativity, and their work to push the fields of psychology and education forward.

### **RQ3b: Chris's Barriers to Career Development**

The biggest barriers to Chris's career development are (1) a lack of sustainable funding for the organization and (2) a need for business capacity development.

#### ***Theme 1: Sustainable Funding***

"The biggest challenge to me right now is financial," Chris said, "finding money to hire people and do the work that I wish I could do. That's probably the most frustrating part of this work." Chris explained:

I'm at the point right now ... where I'm ready to hire a contractor to start helping me with some of the stuff that I do, which is a big deal. So far, I've had one other person that I've been paying to do work for me, and it's a constant challenge for me of figuring out where you get the money to do the things that I need to do and how to maintain donor relationships.

Chris has a basic goal to obtain more “financial support and backing for the organization.” Chris detailed:

The donor stuff—it’s been challenging to think of: What are our goals? What do we need when it comes to money? It’s not even about finding money to pay me. I don’t anticipate getting paid for this work for a long time. It’s paying for the storage of books or paying for stuff that we use, like the podcast software that we use. Everything that we do costs money in some way.

Chris considers that some of the success of the DC “will be in terms of financial support and being able to be self-sufficient in our programs ... [it’s] such a burden ... to figure out how to pay for things and how to pay for people to do this work.” In five years, Chris thinks it will be good “if [the DC has] enough money to pay a couple full time employees, not just contract employees. Chris said, “I don’t even know about me and how that’s going to look.”

These quotes clearly indicate the struggle Chris and the DC have with acquiring sustainable funds to support their work. Donations to the DC and membership fees from the positive disintegration study groups provide funding for the DC. Though Chris has been able to hire an occasional worker, Chris is not getting paid through the DC—although Chris does earn a small amount of income from donations to the podcast and Substack subscription fees for the newsletter. This lack of attained income reinforces Chris’s learnings about how the DC’s funding reality impacts their outcome expectations (Lent et al., 1994)—they do not expect to make enough money to pay others or themselves for several years.

The lack of sustainable funding is a huge barrier for Chris's career development. They cannot dedicate their time fully to doing the work of the nonprofit because they need to earn income in different ways. Chris also experiences a layer of stress and worry as a nascent social entrepreneur concerned about the sustainability of their organization.

### ***Theme 2: Need for Business Capacity Development***

Chris has a need to develop the business capacity of the DC. Chris is passionate about learning and sharing the theory in different formats. They have written papers and presented at conferences and currently co-host a podcast to share about the theory and their work, but they do not enjoy the business side of being a social entrepreneur and executive director of a nonprofit. Chris said, "I try to ... [figure] out how to do what I need to do for the Dąbrowski Center [and what I need to] do as a writer." "There's a lot of overlap between the stuff that I care about and [my work with the theory]," Chris explained, "but then there are the logistical and kind of instrumental tasks of having a nonprofit that I've just been having to learn on the fly." Chris said it feels like it is a "huge liability to be so out of touch with the reality of the world of business." They explained:

I haven't done any business training. I never took any coursework on business. You know, I don't have [a master's in business administration]. I am very ignorant when it comes to business stuff ... [I] had to learn a lot in a short amount of time. I wish that I'd had more training around this and that I wasn't having to [learn on the] fly. It's been not fun, to say the least.



Chris explained, “I’m really good at the things I do. I’m not so great at the things that don’t come naturally to me. And that’s okay... it’s okay to ask for help and to rely on other people to kind of pick up the slack.” However, their funding is currently limited.

They shared:

I am the one who has to do everything. I mean, everything. Meaning from the start, even figuring out like how to file the articles of incorporation, how to apply for federal EINs, 501(c)(3) status, all that stuff. Nobody was going to do it for me. To some extent you can hire help to do this, right? You can go through places like [legal websites] and stuff like that and get help with doing paperwork if you need it. But if you make the decision to create your own organization, then it’s on you to do it.

Though Chris said they hyperfocus on areas of interest, they shared, “I have not yet managed to find anything that I really want to delve into with hyperfocus interest when it comes to business stuff.” Chris explained, “It’s not stuff that interests me. I don’t care about taxes [or] about the laws around nonprofits. I’ve had to force myself to learn things that I don’t want to learn, which for me is really hard.” Chris added:

I know it’s a lot of work. I don’t know ... I never expected to do this. And ... I wish that I had known that I was going to be doing it before I started. It would have been nice to have the opportunity to educate myself before I was doing it on the job. That’s never ideal.

Chris has had many learning experiences to support their self-efficacy in feeling like an expert and authority on the theory of positive disintegration, which helps them

write and provide clinical therapy to others (Lent et al., 1994). However, Chris does not have many learning experiences about business resulting in dissatisfaction with their current business knowledge (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016) and low self-efficacy and interest in the business side of the operation (Lent et al., 1994). Though there's a willingness to rely on others, Chris cannot afford to hire anyone to do the business administration with the DC's limited resources. This is a barrier for their individual career development, as their role of executive director of the DC is taking a lot of time and energy that could be going into other programming.

Since Chris started the DC before having the time (or interest) to develop business acumen, it makes sense that they feel a concern about handling the business side of the nonprofit, in particular the development of donor relationships. Not every person gravitates toward an interest in business, and Chris clearly does not. However, as the founder and current executive director of the DC, it is imperative that Chris continue to work on legal requirements and continue to develop business skills on-the-job until they are able to secure employees or volunteers to grow the DC's business capacity.

### ***Summary of Chris's Career Development Supports and Barriers***

Chris's supports for career development include meaningful mentorship and hyperfocused interest. Chris's barriers to career development include the need for sustainable funding and for business capacity development.

### **RQ4: Chris's Shared Social Value**

Chris's shared social value is primarily expressed through the work of their nonprofit the DC and includes the DC's work through the *Positive Disintegration*

*Podcast*, a podcast entity Chris co-hosts. This section details the work of the DC and shares three themes: (1) growing community, (2) audience gratitude, and (3) reframing mental illness.

### ***Chris's Social Enterprise: DC***

Chris is the founder of the DC, a nonprofit organization focused on advancing Dąbrowski's theory of positive disintegration (1964/2016) through education, advocacy, and innovation. The DC is a social enterprise aligned with three of the United Nations' SDGs (2015): good health and well-being; reduced inequalities; and peace, justice, and strong institutions. Dr. Wells is on a lifelong mission to advance the theory beyond the field of giftedness and into mainstream psychology to help identify and nurture people who are going through the process of positive disintegration, and they formed the DC as a base of operations for their work.

The DC was incorporated as a nonprofit. So far, the DC has very low revenue but with donations and membership fees from positive disintegration study groups, it is occasionally able to hire gig workers, such as a website developer or graphic artist, to support the work. Dr. Wells has not yet made income from the DC directly; however, donations to the *Positive Disintegration Podcast* and Substack newsletter subscriptions provide a small amount of income.

The DC lists nine values that guide how it interacts with people who utilize the theory: truthfulness, authenticity, inclusiveness, kindness, connection, honor, supportiveness, encouragement, and boldness (DC, 2024). As of early 2024, the DC has three primary functions: (1) providing a resource library archive of research and articles

related to the theory; (2) hosting the biennial 16th International Dąbrowski Congress in 2024; and (3) hosting the *Positive Disintegration Podcast* and newsletter on Substack in partnership with Emma Nicholson from Australia. Additionally, Chris hosts a positive disintegration study group and community for adults and clinicians to learn about, process, and discuss the theory.

In addition to hosting a hybrid Dąbrowski Congress 2024 with international participants, the DC's next big goals are to develop a course on Dąbrowski 101, to introduce people to the theory, and to offer a course to help clinicians develop their understanding of the theory. Chris intends to impact the world of psychology and beyond by helping therapists and clinicians better serve all people, including gifted and neurodivergent people, who are experiencing positive disintegration.

### ***Theme 1: Growing Community***

The DC is home to a growing community of individuals and professionals including therapists, psychologists, educators, and researchers who are interested in learning more about the theory and supporting their own positive disintegration and the disintegration of others.

There are public social media groups in which people participate and share about the theory and their lived experiences. Chris also hosts a private social media group for members of the positive disintegration study group. The study group consists of people who pay to participate and meet regularly, read passages about the theory, and share their lived experiences, questions, and connections with each other.

The *Positive Disintegration Podcast* (Wells & Nicholson, 2021) is a big way that Chris builds community and shares the theory. “The podcast has followers in the thousands at this point,” Chris said, “which is a big deal.”

The DC is now the permanent home for the biennial International Dąbrowski Congress. While the Congress used to be held in-person in the United States and Canada, post-pandemic virtual participation has expanded its reach. The 2024 Dąbrowski Congress will be the first one hosted by the DC with presenters from North America, Europe, Australia, and Africa.

The cultivation of a social environment that aligned with Chris’s values indicate their process of positive disintegration and striving toward secondary integration of their career (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016). These examples show the reach that Chris and the DC have throughout their ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Increasingly, people that Chris does not personally know are hearing the podcast, watching a presentation, or otherwise getting involved with the DC and the theory. These communities receive Chris’s career output and are also part of the transformed society in the curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs.

The growing community indicates the increased interest people have in the theory and that Chris’s work is being valued and shared. This is a positive indicator for the shared social value of Chris’s work through the DC.

## ***Theme 2: Audience Gratitude***

When asked how they measure success, Chris said, “We’ll know that we’re being successful when people continue to tell us that their lives are being changed because of this work.” Chris explained:

I’m an instrument in my work, meaning that I am talking about these constructs from authority that comes from living them. I realize now that I have this podcast that when I share about my story, when I talk about being gifted, people see themselves and what I’m saying.

For example, Chris said, “I’ve had many people reach out and say that it feels like I’m talking directly to them or, you know, no one’s ever captured their experience as well as I have been articulating it in the podcast or maybe in a conference session.” Chris further explained:

Often when I do conference presentations and I share anything about my personal story, there will be somebody in tears at the end of the session to talk to and to console about the fact that they are only now figuring this out about themselves. ... So, part of how my giftedness is manifested in my work is that I’m there for people and they see themselves in me [and] my lived experience.

Chris constantly has adults, often gifted and neurodivergent, reach out to express gratitude or share stories about their connection to the theory. While Chris values taking the time to read and respond to each one, there are so many that it can take a lot of Chris’s emotional energy.

Audience gratitude indicates that the audience is receiving the curriculum about the theory that Chris outputs into the world and appreciating it, which aligns with the instructional arc (Uhrmacher et al., 2017) and the curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs. As Chris performs, audience gratitude also provides feedback that recursively fuels Chris's learning experience, which positively impacts Chris's self-efficacy and outcome expectations (Bandura, 1997; Lent et al., 1994).

Audience gratitude for Chris's work is an extremely positive indicator of the social value Chris shares with others, and arguably is the most important indicator of success to Chris.

### ***Theme 3: Reframing Mental Illness***

Chris said, "I want to be able to provide really useful content for people who want to work with the theory in their practice," and Chris frequently collaborates with and educates practitioners such as therapists, psychologists, and educators who work with people who may exhibit positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016). Chris wants to "make sure [the theory's] being applied in mental health settings." Chris said it is a big goal "to develop best practices for working with gifted people through positive disintegration" but acknowledges it is a tough goal because, "there aren't really that many people in the world who work with the theory right now, but it grows all the time."

Another significant goal for Chris is to spread knowledge of the theory beyond gifted education and gifted communities. Chris's next goal is to "start presenting at conferences in social work or psychology or psychiatry, like taking the theory to, you know, other fields and also talking about giftedness [in] these other fields." Chris thinks

this will be “interesting and challenging” and explained, “I want to be challenging myself and not just staying in the same community that’s already aware of this work but bringing it to a broader base of people.”

There is, Chris said, a “whole frontier out there of people who struggle with mental health issues, who need this theory and haven’t really had access to it yet. So ... my goal, is to bring it to them.” They reiterated, “Reframing mental illness through the lens of the theory is a big deal.”

The mission of Chris and the DC to share knowledge about the theory and help reframe mental illness is important because many people experience crises as described by positive disintegration; without knowledge of the theory, they may feel as though they are mentally ill rather than in the midst of a journey toward advanced development (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).

This goal is dauntingly large in scope and so, so important. If we, as a society, supported and encouraged people through their processes of positive disintegration rather than pathologizing and dismissing their crises as mental illness, the world would be a better place.

### ***Summary of Chris’s Shared Social Value***

Chris’s shared social value is primarily channeled through their nonprofit, the *Positive Disintegration Podcast*, newsletters published on Substack, and positive disintegration study groups. Three themes of Chris’s shared social value are a growing community, audience gratitude, and reframing mental illness.



## **Closing Vignette**

On a Saturday evening in late summer, Chris attends a web meeting, with their video on, in a hotel room. Other faces start to appear on the screen. Chris apologizes for “bad bandwidth” as more people join this positive disintegration study group. Chris has hosted this group online since the pandemic started, though the exact group makeup has changed over time.

Chris tells us, “I’m on a trip with my family—but this is the group that I wanted to see.” I feel bad for intruding in this intimate space, but Chris introduces me and explains that I am there to observe Chris at work as part of my research. Everyone is kind, and I commit to staying muted throughout their discussion. I notice that there are 10 others in the meeting along with me and Chris. Two appear to be male presenting, and the rest appear to be female. I think that all 10 participants are White presenting. I am not sure if they are all from the United States.

The group starts to discuss a passage from Dąbrowski that they read in advance. The group has respectful web meeting etiquette; they take turns raising their hands and speaking. Chris, though technically in-charge and the utmost expert in the room, mostly sits back in their chair. They don’t speak much; rather, they listen as others share about their experiences, questions, and connections. People continue to share and thank each other for voicing their lived experiences.

Participants share a frustration that the world is not all wise to the theory. Chris says, “It’ll take time to move from the medical model and to stop pathologizing everything,” which is what they continuously strive to do through the DC.

Toward the end of the group's time together, Chris says they have two more topics to discuss. One issue is that some people have been paying to participate in this positive disintegration study group but are now not able to attend on Saturdays, which is when the group regularly meets. The second issue is that other people have voiced interest in joining the study group. They could join this one, but Chris worries about them intruding on this group, which has built community over the past few years, and Chris doesn't want the group to get too big. Chris says they will talk to the people who aren't in attendance before making a decision, but it sounds like there will be a second group soon. Chris, recharged from the conversation, says goodbye to the group and returns to spending time with their family.

### **Summary of Chris's Case Study**

Chris is a very gifted person who developed the DC to spread information about Dąbrowski's theory (1964/2016) to the world. Chris self-reported several characteristics of giftedness including emotional intensity, mediocre experience with gifted education, and learning about neurodivergence. Chris's career development is like a mountain, and they were a late bloomer who meandered through career crises and now apply their passion in their day-to-day work at the DC. Supports for their career development included meaningful mentorship and hyperfocused interest. Barriers to their career development include a lack of sustainable funding and need for business capacity development. Chris's shared social value is primarily expressed through the DC, with themes of a growing community, audience gratitude, and a mission to reframe mental illness.

### **Case 5: Nathaniel “Nth” Bar-Fields, Co-Founder of Elysian Trust**

Nth joins the web meeting in the morning on a hot day in early summer. He tells me he splits his time between his family home in California and his home in Texas, but for now he is in his bedroom/office in Texas. He sits in front of a cream-colored wall, between two closed, white doors—I presume one is a closet or bathroom and the other leads into the house. Two switches are on the wall, one for the lights and one for a thermostat.

Nth sits calmly in the web meeting. People kept asking Nth how to pronounce his name, so at the bottom of the video his name is written, “Nth (pronounced “Enth”) Bar-Fields,” in a courteous attempt to save people time. Nth is wearing a black tank top with medium-width shoulder straps and a scooped neckline. His shoulders have light brown skin, even lighter in the glare from the ceiling light, while his upper neck and face are more tanned and appear to be a dark brown, though his nose is more of a medium brown—the skin variations are owing to his chimerism. He has dark brown eyes and very dark brown or black hair that is cut extremely short around his scalp—perhaps it is growing out. Nth has a trimmed mustache and goatee—in a Van Dyke facial hair style.

He wears two adornments. The first is a thin metallic chain around his neck comprised of tiny balls. I can’t see what, if anything, is hanging on the chain, as my field of view only goes a few inches below Nth’s chin, but I wonder if the chain is for dog tags. The second is a black metallic watch with a thick band and a thick watch face.

I cannot directly see it in the frame of his webcam video, but I can tell that a ceiling fan is above Nth, running on high, as a rapid, sweeping pulsating pattern of the

light fluctuates just at the top of the video. Because the fan is on, Nth is in a tank top, and it is June in Houston, Texas, I can only assume it must be hot.

Two large white bookshelves with five or six horizontal shelves each loom behind Nth. The thin shelves are slightly bowed from the weight they are carrying. The shelves are full of mostly vertical books. Some lean, and many lay horizontally across the tops of other books. On top of the bookcase rests four more stacks of horizontal books. The shelves also host an assortment of other items: boxes for computer peripherals, something with a dangling tied-up power cord, boxes and bottles of medication, vitamins, supplements, a stick of deodorant, spray bottles of air freshener, and a piece of decor. Beside the large bookshelf is a shorter stack of two small plastic organizers with three clear drawers each—each drawer filled with assorted items. A coffee pot is perched on top of the shelves. On the web meeting, I cannot make out the titles of each book, but the topmost stack of books consists of at least five about the Miller Analogies Test (MAT)—I can see the large MAT letters clearly on the thick spines. “I do enjoy reading,” Nth says. “There are books all over this place that are out of sight.”

Nth tells me, “It’s great that we’re doing this, that you put together this type of research, because it needs to be done and it needs to be shared. So, I’m just really hoping for the best just because I can see this having a positive impact on a lot of people.” I tell him, “Thank you ... I hope that too,” and we begin our interview.

### **Nth’s Background**

Nth’s legal first name is Nathaniel, though he usually uses Nathan or his preferred name of Nth. Nth is in his 40s. He uses he, they, or any pronouns. Nth said, “I am male-

presenting, but genetically I'm intersex, so I am biologically male and female."

Regarding race and ethnicity, he said, "I, like most African Americans, I'm genetically also multiracial. But in my case, it's also multiethnic because about a quarter of my family ancestry comes from Central America: Belize and Mexico ... so [I'm] Afro-Latino [and Afro-Caribbean] with a lot of extra things mixed in there."

Nth described his intersectional identity. He is involved in many gifted communities and programs and is part of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) community. Nth also said, "I ... am a military veteran and am disabled in part because of that." Indicating his awareness of his multitude of intersectional identities, he added, "I don't have all the marbles, but I got a lot of those Pokémon cards."

Nth's father "was entrepreneurial in a certain way. He and his twin brother were professional bank robbers." Nth's dad "did ten years in prison because of that, but once he got out, he did [a] 100% change and turned his life around" and has owned a business in California since the 1990s. Nth's mother "has never been gainfully employed. She's always been a stay-at-home mom." She did do quite a bit of volunteer work, but her "mental health issues and now physical health issues have prevented her from having a lot of opportunities to work in a traditional way."

Recently, around 2021, Nth was diagnosed as autistic and pointed out, "We did not have that concept when I was growing up." Nth described his childhood as a state of "chaos":

When I was a child, there was a lot of chaos in my life. And ... a lot of autistic people, they like their routines ... so I stayed indoors a lot, read a lot, while my

neighbor was stabbed. I saw his intestines when I was six years old. I was shot when they forced me to go to the park when I was a [5-year-old] kid.

So, it was a lot of chaos and at the time, again, I don't think that Black culture really had a strong understanding of autism. I don't think really any culture does, even now, but that's probably more pronounced in the Black community.

And so, back then they just thought I was "trying to be White," because I spoke grammatically correctly. And you know ... I wasn't interested in the same type of things you're supposed to be interested in if you're a part of a Black culture. And for me, I definitely was not trying to be White—no particular race was on my mind.

Nth's vivid, rich imagination protected him to some degree: "I did not get the huge brunt of how bad my actual physical real childhood was because I wasn't mentally there anyway."

Nth took remedial classes at his predominantly White school until a teacher in high school recognized his gifts and talents. He was accepted into colleges but could not afford to attend and instead joined the United States Navy after high school. He scored very highly on the placement test and worked as an engineering laboratory tech in the Navy's nuclear program.

Using a Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps (NROTC) scholarship, Nth attended Berkeley and earned a Bachelor of Science degree in chemical engineering before taking classes at MIT. During his time as an MIT student, while working a full-

time job, he ended up homeless for a period. “I’ve had a very eclectic education,” Nth said. He realized he could learn a lot from internet videos and textbooks rather than by paying tuition.

Nth formed an online community geared toward gifted people with talents in multiple areas including intellectual IQ, creativity, empathy, and intuition. These groups worked on hard problems and had great ideas about how to solve them but few resources to fund their ideas. Nth recognized this challenge and is the primary co-founder and now Chief Visionary Officer of ET. At first ET was a nonprofit but now it has been reorganized as a for-profit C Corp that is also working toward B Corp (B Lab, 2024) status. ET offers business development services with a focus on grant writing. It serves gifted and neurodivergent people and entrepreneurs, particularly from marginalized communities. As Nth is a SEGA supporting SEGA, this case study is more in-depth than the others. It details Nth’s self-reported characteristics of giftedness and career development, his career development supports and barriers, and his shared social value.

As I started learning more about giftedness, and my own giftedness, I joined the social media groups run by Nth and Elysian Trust. I do not recall what precipitated this, but in 2019, Nth messaged me on LinkedIn, saying he had just learned about my background. He invited me to serve on his educational advisory board, and I agreed. I have been a supporter and advocate of Elysian Trust ever since.

I am grateful that both Nth and Dr. Chris Wells joined me for a panel presentation titled *Experiences being Highly and Profoundly Gifted* at the 2022 Gifted Education Policy Symposium and Conference: Reflecting on Giftedness, hosted by the Office of the

Daniel L. Ritchie Endowed Chair in Gifted Education at DU (Lin et al., 2022). This presentation was developed into episodes of the *Positive Disintegration Podcast* (Wells & Nicholson, 2023).

### **RQ1: Nth's Self-Reported Characteristics of Giftedness**

Nth self-reported many characteristics of giftedness including imagination, mental mathematics, hyperlexia, masking, creativity, intuition, pattern recognition, making connections, a high IQ, persistent desire to learn, and a hobby competing as a mentathlete (mental athlete). He also shared an artifact and story about his MAT scores. He talked about being dyslexic and his experience with being in remedial education until he encountered a teacher advocate who helped him access advanced coursework. On KAGS (Ksiazak, 2010), Nth responded “always” to 14 of 22 items and “almost always” to five more items (see Table F5 in the appendix). This section describes Nth's self-reported characteristics of giftedness and details three themes: (1) critical teacher advocacy, (2) self-education, and (3) neurodivergent terminology.

As a child, Nth said he was “always just thinking about the future ... so much of my childhood was in my imaginary world that was really enriched and wonderful.” Before starting kindergarten, he accompanied his mother when she volunteered to clean the church:

Me being three or four, I was [so] bored ... but I had to go with her, and she gave me her pocket calculator to play with while she was cleaning the church. And so I was like, I can probably predict what the numbers are going to be. I wasn't thinking of it as math, I was thinking of it as like ... this is a game, I'm playing a



game. ... I can make it say 1919191919 if I add this number to this number or if I hit this number with this button and this button, and it got to the point where basically I became a mental calculator. My mom thankfully didn't ... make it different in a good or bad way. She was like, "Oh, that is surprising. I did not know you could do that."

When he started kindergarten, Nth "did extremely well, way better than they could follow when it came to reading and when it came to mental math." However, Nth is dyslexic and said, "When I would actually write things down, the letters would get jumbled; the numbers would get jumbled ... [In] math, I never showed my work because ... the answer just popped in my head." "It was ironic," Nth said, "I was hyperlexic and I was able to do these mathematical processes that even the math teachers can't do. But I also was considered on paper through standardized testing as being behind."

Nth said he was held back for a long time and given remedial education until 10th grade, when a teacher advocated for him to be placed in more advanced classes and taught him how to navigate standardized tests. Nth explained:

It was just like night and day... the school administration started treating me differently because now they were getting all these awards for [me] competing in math competitions and chemistry competitions and stuff like that. All of a sudden: now you're gifted.

But Nth added, "It wasn't different for me; it was always just me being me. It's just learning how to mask better ... to blend in better with what society expects gifted to look like and sound like." Nth said, "I don't have a strong background in gifted education

in the formal way. It's mostly me just hanging out at the library because class was so frickin' boring ... I had horrible attendance, but I aced all the ... tests." Nth explained how he took some AP courses during his senior year of high school:

My school was not [going to] help. It was my teacher ... figuring out that, okay, my school is going to hold me back. I can just take these courses ... at the community college over summer school, and get full credit, and [the school will] have no choice but to put me in Advanced Placement by 12th grade. So, it really wasn't until 12th grade until I was in anything like Advanced Placement or honors or what have you.

Along with intellectual giftedness, Nth definitely exhibits creativity, intuition, and pattern recognition:

My intuition is extremely good at predicting how things could be and pretty much—it's frustrating. I'll come up with an idea, "Oh, let's do it this way." And this is also where the creativity comes in. And it's like, "No, you can't do it that way." I'm like, "Okay, but why?" It's like, "Because it's not done that way." "Wait, that's not a reason!" ... And then years later like, "Okay, we're going to do it this way." Like, "Oh, gee, why didn't I think of that," you know?

I'm always going to come up with things or ideas and solutions that may look counterintuitive on the surface. It's because I am making connections to things that seem otherwise unconnected. Making relationships ... to things that are seemingly unrelated and finding patterns in things that are seemingly chaotic and random.

Nth indicated that psychometricians could not measure his IQ, and when asked if he had an idea about his IQ range, he answered:

I did when I was younger. So, first of all, from what I'm told from quite a few psychometricians, is that any IQ score for an adult that's above 145—it's not particularly reliable ... so it's really like 145+. But I can tell you the tests I've taken and if they're real, then ... you can infer what my IQ score would have been. So, I took the Wechsler [Adult Intelligence Scale] IV, and I maxed out, but according to whatever age you are when you take it, it can vary. And I think they said my extended score was either let's say 179 or 180. And then I took the Miller Analogies Test, and that can be used as an IQ test, and I bet it's equivalent to 175 on that. I maxed out the Raven's Advanced Progressive Matrices and that has a ceiling of like 160. And I maxed out the Cattell Culture Fair Intelligence Test and that supposedly has a ceiling of 183. And you know, it just goes on and on and on.

So, I think at my peak, I probably was somewhere in the 180s. I don't think I'm in that peak anymore ... just because ... as you get older other factors come in as well, including health and not being able to exercise your brain the way you want, so we'll see. I know I'm still up there for sure. I doubt I'll ever be under 145 or 150, but maybe I'm not in the 180s anymore. And that's okay.

Nth told me, "I'm still a work in progress. I probably always will be willing to learn, always eager to learn. It's not just being willing—it's having that desire."

Nth has a goal to resume his involvement as a professional mentathlete (mental athlete), which is a "hobby that makes money." Since 2006, Nth has competed in mind

sports he described as “fun” and “useful in a certain way.” He has “always felt there could be more done with mind sports, and it can actually be more meaningful and useful in the real world than the way it is structured right now.” He realized, “It’s never going to happen until someone actually sticks their head out [to] do it,” so he “came up with a professional mentathlete type of program.” He explained:

That’s definitely on part of my radar and ... my mind sport of choice is largely creativity. I even have a set up to where it’s for professional subsets of creativity, sort of the Grand Slam of tennis, whereas it has four legs ... creative analysis, creative arts, inventing, and then innovation. And [for] each of those things there’s passion projects of mine that I can do, that I was going to do anyway.

There’re really more like hobbies, but now I can do them in a way where I can actually get money from doing them.

Nth self-reported many characteristics of giftedness, particularly in the area of high IQ, creativity, intuition, and how he learned the importance of masking.

#### ***Nth’s Artifact: MAT Score***

“Given the context of the study ... I shared some ... specific and tangible evidence that I am gifted in the way that is officially described as gifted ... [to] confirm what you’re looking for,” Nth said. Nth has lots of documentation about test scores “somewhere,” but he could only find this MAT score to share. The official score report Nth shared as an artifact showed Nth took the test in August of 2013. This was test attempt two. His scaled score was 523, and he scored in the 99th percentile for his intended major and the total group.

Nth shared several stories about his experiences with the MAT. The first time he took the exam, he scored around 481. The second and third time he scored approximately 523. After I inquired about the MAT books on his bookshelf, Nth shared about his first attempt:

I had never heard of the Miller Analogies Test. I only heard of it when someone asked me to join a more rarefied IQ club [that] pretty much only accepted the MAT for people in my age range. ... You have to score really, really high on it, like 500, and the ceiling is 600, and most people, they score somewhere around 400. The first time I took it, I did not study [at] all. I really wasn't familiar with how it worked. ... I scored 481 on it. And that was ... high enough to get into [two high-IQ organizations] ... but not high enough for [the rarefied IQ club] ...

The test is very culturally biased ... [The IQ clubs] like to think it's testing for intelligence ... But the creators of the tests tell you that's not the case. The closer you are to a White, Anglo-Saxon Protestant with a liberal arts major, the better off you'll do on that test ... I was like, okay, it's time for me to basically do a crash course and White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, liberal arts training.

Originally, I got any MAT book I could so I could get a stronger sense of how it's changed over the years and to anticipate future changes. ... I built upon that, and I was like, this is really fascinating. I could actually see this being useful for becoming a nexialist ... which is someone who uses trivia in a useful way. I was always making these little analogous connections to various things ... I realized, hey, you can break up ... the MAT into 40 different subjects and they all

apply to the real world. But you can also expand it to like probably another hundred or so, to a total of 100 subjects. And if you get enough trivia about each, you can start making these really interesting connections. And that wound up becoming this great hobby of mine just to help build upon nexial wisdom.

After learning how the MAT worked, studying the subject areas, and gathering trivia to make connections, Nth took the MAT a second time and scored 523. He detailed:

I don't know who she was, but she was some administrator at the testing session ... I guess she managed the proctors, and she and I were talking. It takes like a minute for the Harcourt computer to give you the unofficial score you're going to get before they mail it to you months later, and while we were talking, mine generated. And she said, "Oh! I feel like I've never seen one so high!" It was just hilarious.

Unfortunately, they felt I cheated. ... When I got the report in the mail, it was actually a request to take it again, because it seemed unlikely that anyone would score as high ... They insisted I take the test again because you're not supposed to improve that much ... So, I had to take it [again] ... [for the] third time. The third time, being mandatory, [I scored around 524] ... almost 525, around there, which is what I scored the second time ... five standard deviations above the norm ... they were very, very surprised.

This artifact demonstrates Nth's high score on the MAT which has been used as a proxy for an intelligence test, though Nth critiqued the test's cultural bias. After learning about the test format and gathering more knowledge, he scored much higher—so high he

was forced to take the test again under suspicion of cheating, and he scored as high the third time.

This story is inspiring because Nth was able to learn how to demonstrate his intellectual ability by improving on the assessment, but it reinforces concern for people, particularly Black people and people of color, who are forced to take culturally biased assessments in the United States to demonstrate their abilities. Should people have to learn about a culture to demonstrate proficiency on a culturally biased assessment? Perhaps. Should culturally biased assessment be the sole determinant for their access to opportunity? Absolutely not.

### ***Theme 1: Critical Teacher Advocacy***

Nth had a very important teacher at his predominantly White high school who was the first to recognize Nth's abilities and who advocated for more advanced coursework:

In 10th grade, I had a teacher who was not from the United States. She came from another country. So, her first year of teaching ... she didn't have a lot of cultural baggage that a lot of Americans in the United States have and aren't aware that they have. And so, she just said something that to her was very obvious. She was like, "Why are you in these classes? You do not belong here." I didn't know what she meant at first. She was like, "Yeah, this is way too easy for you." I'm like, "Well, yeah, I know. I thought that's supposed to be easy." She's like, "No, let's get you in the right class."

Having Nth's gifts and talents recognized by this teacher advocate completely changed his school trajectory. Nth said, "That's when I first realized that there was definitely something different." In addition to advocating for an appropriate educational placement for Nth, this teacher also taught Nth how to better navigate standardized tests. Nth explained:

I've always scored really kind of low [on standardized testing] because I would answer the question the way I [wanted], "Well, that's not the real answer, here's the real answer," right? But that's not how standardized tests work ... She's the first person who sat down and told me, "Don't give them the right answer, give them the answer that they want." And I was like, "Oh, okay. Well, sure, they think it's this." And then all of a sudden, I went from like a 90 IQ to something... well I'm not trying to brag, but they can't measure it.

Nth's teacher was a critical contextual influence that impacted his interests, goals, and actions, which fed his performance and positively developed his self-efficacy and outcome expectations (Bandura, 1997; Lent et al., 1994). The teacher's ability to recognize the talents of Nth, a young Black male-presenting student at a predominantly White school, was a blessing for Nth, and he believes this is partly due to the teacher being from a country other than the United States.

This teacher, who was an extremely positive influence, not only helped Nth to access appropriate educational opportunities in high school and learn how to perform better on standardized tests, but also inspired him to be a champion for others through his work.



## ***Theme 2: Self-Education***

When Nth did not do as well as he hoped on the MAT, he self-educated and did better. Nth reads comic books for fun, particularly X-Men comics, and reads to self-educate about many topics. He has studied many areas of interest over the years:

I've had a very eclectic education. I have studied chemical engineering. Nuclear engineering. Biomathematics. Then I realized I was less interested in something that abstract and more interested in something closer to human. So, I studied psycho physiology. Then I tried to study parapsychology, but that was considered a taboo subject. Then I switched over to economics ...

I also started realizing I could just really go to [internet videos] and get textbooks, and that saves me like \$20,000 a year or more in unnecessary fees. I didn't need the certification; I needed the knowledge and the skills ... I want to become polymathic.

Nth continuously educates himself about areas of interest and areas where he needs to learn more in order to be successful. This tendency connects to the characteristic gifted traits of a love for learning, the ability to learn rapidly, and multipotentiality. Self-education is also indicative of the process of positive disintegration, spurred by feelings of inferiority (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).

It is interesting that Nth was not able to learn much about parapsychology because it was a "taboo subject." External valuations of knowledge prevented Nth from learning about everything he wanted to know. Self-education is a positive aspect of Nth's career development that has helped him learn different things that he is able to connect.

### ***Theme 3: Neurodivergent Terminology***

Nth said he uses the terms of gifted, talented, and twice-exceptional often but does not use them in interviews or with every population because the terminology is best known in education. He tries to “use the right language for the right audience ... it’s an issue of communication.”

In his work, “almost everyone identifies as gifted,” Nth said. “Just to be candid ... especially male entrepreneurs—they tend to view themselves as gifted.” He explained:

Almost every male entrepreneur we’ve ever interacted with, they’re always like, you know, as far as they’re concerned, super, super smart, smarter than possibly anyone else in the room. And ... you need that confidence to go far, I assume ...

In his work with ET, Nth “quickly found out that certain terms are so culturally loaded in certain cultures that it’s best to avoid them.” Nth shared:

I would say the Black community, the Native American community, and among [some of] the Latino community: IQ ... is just such an off-putting term. We just stay away from that whole concept of IQ around them. But gifted and talented? That’s perfectly fine.

Nth is “uncomfortable” being “labeled gifted,” because he focuses on his work and not himself. “It’s the project itself that is the star of the show,” Nth explained. Now Nth can see things from the other side of this:

I’m finding these gifted entrepreneurs and... they’re always like, “What are you talking about? I’m not gifted.” And I’m like, “Yeah, you kinda are” [but now] ... I get a better sense of how it feels ... I guess also you’re kind of scared to identify

with that too much because it [might derail the process]. I'm flattered though [when people think I'm gifted.]

From Nth's perspective, the concept of twice-exceptionality "seems to be a better indicator of who is actually gifted or not." He explained:

"Twice-exceptional" I avoid in a lot of interviews, not because I'm averse of the terms, but because most people don't know it. I didn't know what twice-exceptional was until like 2019—that's the first time I ever heard of it. Prior to that, I was saying "tradeoffs." "Yeah, we know almost everyone we meet, they have these tradeoffs," like, oh, [they're] really good at math, but maybe they're not so great at social cues or something.

Concepts of gifted, talented, and twice-exceptional are prevalent in education and psychology (Baum et al., 2017; Kaufman, 2018). Even within those fields, however, the terms are contentiously defined. Nth's observations about neurodivergent terminology indicate his nuanced perceptions of how terms are and are not used in his micro- and meso- systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

It is understandable that Nth is hesitant to use the terminology of giftedness with people who may not know what these words mean, or what these concepts are.

### ***Summary of Nth's Self-Reported Characteristics of Giftedness***

Nth self-reported many characteristics of giftedness including high-IQ, creativity, intuition, pattern recognition, making connections, and many indicators on KAGS (Ksiazak, 2010). He also shared his story of taking the MAT three times, having a critical

teacher advocate, his process of self-education, and his critique of neurodivergent terminology.

## **RQ2: Nth's Career Development**

Nth's career development had several phases. In school, he was in remedial courses until a high school teacher recognized his abilities and advocated for him to take advanced coursework.

Nth was accepted into every college to which he applied. However, he attended a predominantly White high school and said, "I let my peers get to me ... they were saying, 'Oh, I wish I was Black, that way I could get a scholarship.' I decided, 'I'm not going to apply for any scholarships ... I'm going to work my way through.'" With tuition costs, reality sunk in, and he had to hold off on college. So, after high school, he joined the United States Navy.

Nth said, "I took the [Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery] (ASVAB) test [and] scored perfect on that too, come to think of it." He worked in the nuclear program as an engineering laboratory tech because "back then ... if you were brainy—you had no choice but to be [one]." Then he received an NROTC scholarship, did undergrad work at the University of California, Berkley, and attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

When he "did not want to be an engineer anymore" he decided to "pursue what I'm probably designed to do ... social entrepreneurship." He clarified, "Specifically supporting other entrepreneurs who have a genius project that other people can't really

recognize the potential in, or they can't recognize the potential in the entrepreneur because of [their packaging].”

Reflecting on his learnings from his role model, Henri Landwirth, Nth tried to find a blueprint of how to be a social entrepreneur:

[I learned] you're still going to have to probably make your own [business] just because almost every time you do this, things change so much—technology wise, socially wise, legally wise ... there's always going to be these new types of [circumstances] ... It's not just chess again, with different positions. It's chess with different types of chess pieces.

Nth co-founded ET in 2012 and is the primary founder. ET started as social groups of brilliant people with high-IQ, emotional intelligence, creativity, intuition, and problem-solving tenacity. But as he networked, Nth realized that these geniuses needed support to actualize and expand their entrepreneurial visions. ET has grown into an incubator that supports both geniuses and their projects with professional business services including legal, marketing, and funding support. ET's primary source of income is providing grant writing services to help fund enterprises, particularly founded by marginalized brilliant people with varied neurodivergence.

Nth has continued to learn about how to be a social entrepreneur. He recently graduated from a program Ashoka (2024) offered in social intrapreneurship, which is when employees at an existing organization work to make a positive social and environmental impact. Nth has also returned to school to earn an MBA to further his skills as an entrepreneur.

### ***Nth's Metaphor***

Nth's metaphor for his career development is a *seahorse* because it is "a great symbol for being an incubator." Nth explained:

I realize that was and is my calling. I want to be a champion for others, the way my teacher was a champion for me. She saw that talent, that giftedness, that twice-exceptional packaging, and saw the potential in it where no one else did. And I have that gift and talent as well. I can recognize it in others.

Nth views himself as an incubator that helps birth other entrepreneur's work into the world. As his career output is others who further transform society, this metaphor aligns with the curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs.

### ***Theme 1: If Only I Could be a Worker Bee***

"I was never, ever going to fit into the traditional paths that you are supposed to [follow] for success," Nth said:

I probably should never be anyone's employee. I'm way better off being someone else's collaborator, or their consultant, maybe their contractor if it's a straightforward job with a very clearly defined job description, which is not the case usually. If you're looking for an employee, I hate to say it, but I am not employee material.

For a long time, Nth thought his inability to be an employee was his fault and used to think, "If only I could be a worker bee." If Nth could be a worker bee, he explained, "Then I could get the safe job ... so I never have to worry about dental

insurance or all that stuff.” He added, “People like me were not meant to be employees. But we were meant to change the world.”

Nth’s energy and heart are happy to help others, but not as their employee—an idea he disintegrated as he moved along his career path (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016). Nth appeared slightly wistful that he cannot work for someone else and benefit from that stability, but mostly his self-awareness and self-efficacy have taught him that he is someone who can change the world. Nth has a desire to impact the whole macrosystem in a positive way through his work at ET (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Nth’s self-awareness and desire to change the world positively supports his career development and the work of ET.

### ***Theme 2: Trial and Error***

Nth’s career path has been “mostly trial and error.” He said, “Well, let me try this and see what happens. Oh, no, that didn’t work. Okay, let me... update this new approach and strategy.” This has gotten him to where he is today. He added, “It’s strategy ... and every plan is a refined iteration of the prior ones.” He continued, “I had a sense of how the process of social entrepreneurship logically should work, or even [how] entrepreneurship logically should work. And quickly found out—even if I’m right—logic’s not very popular among humanity.”

An iterative process of trial and error allows Nth to try innovations while being receptive to feedback from successes and failures in a way that influences his ongoing learning experiences (Lent et al., 1994).

This openness to trial and error is a positive example of Nth's ability to iteratively improve and adjust course to the great benefit of his career path and his social enterprise, ET.

### ***Theme 3: Continued Learnings***

Nth recently completed a social intrapreneurship program at Ashoka (2024), and his next professional goal is to finish an MBA program focused on entrepreneurial strategy and economics. Nth is learning some in these programs but does not feel that the learning is very useful or realistic. To him, the most important part of these programs has been the networking, which is discussed as a theme in the section on Nth's supports for career development.

Nth said he was invited to be an Ashoka fellow, which is how he learned about Ashoka's (2024) program in social intrapreneurship with a focus on health care. Regarding Ashoka's program, Nth critiqued, "I hate to say it, but most of it ... I don't think it really works in the real world. But the connections I made in that program? Totally worth it." "[But] the concept[s] of textbook learning and real-life learning ... they don't necessarily reflect each other all that much," Nth explained. "The actual stuff that was taught ... would work in a Disney version of the world, but the real world is just way more wicked than [Ashoka was] teaching. And that's the case pretty much everywhere I've gone."

While networking with people from around the world who were interested in doing innovative things to support health care at Ashoka, Nth explained:



It occurred to me ... wouldn't it be great if we all worked collaboratively? And then I could just apply to a collaborative grant [to support others] doing these innovative things. ... If we could work together and come up with this really awesome system, [there are] plenty of grants out there I can apply to and get all of these projects funded at once.

When describing his learnings from the MBA program, Nth said it has been meaningful to learn about resources he did not know existed: "There's this investment network only for [the MBA's] people ... It's great to know that exists." This frustrates Nth because, "Why couldn't my demographics—or the people I come from—why didn't we think of doing this?"

Nth also thinks these programs have value for people who are visual thinkers and enjoy mathematical models for businesses. Nth explained he will see a model and suggest tweaks because, "this is not how it actually works, but you just change this and that and that, then yeah, it will work ... [and] you better make it adaptive because it's going to change over time." He said, "you wind up with these really cool mathematical expressions [that] would be way more effective."

When asked if he would recommend these programs, Nth said, "It depends on what you're coming in with already ... If you're in my position, you're not going to get as much out of it as someone who really is just a novice and green," but, he added, "Do I recommend it? ... In my case, absolutely." He explained:

I didn't really know a lot of the lingo and ... parlance in my industry ... You just look like an ignorant country bumpkin ... in a lot of the meetings ... even though

you have the concepts down ... people kind of judge you on the vocabulary and ... terminology. ... You do formally learn a lot of that and that helps for people who, again, don't come from this type of background—they don't come from business leaders and stuff like that.

However, Nth thinks that the program content may not be needed by someone whose family “has been in the banking industry for three or four generations ... [they] probably learned more at the dinner table than [they would ever learn] in these classes,” though he said those students would probably still get, “an MBA ... just because it’s almost like a rite of passage for their families.” But even for MBA students from families with generational business knowledge, Nth thinks networking is still critical.

Regarding program content, however, Nth said, “I wouldn’t recommend the actual content. You can really just pick that up from a couple of textbooks on your own free time. But everything else that I mentioned, yeah, there’s value in it.”

Nth has a pervasive desire to acquire more knowledge and resources to support him and his work and continues to access learning experiences to develop his self-efficacy and contextual influences of networking beyond his microsystem to further his career and the work of ET (Bandura, 1997; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lent et al., 1994).

Nth’s continued learning positively supports his career development.

### ***Summary of Nth’s Career Development***

Nth’s career development included his realization that he was not a worker bee, trial and error, and continued learnings that have helped him thrive as a social entrepreneur with ET.

### **RQ3a: Nth's Supports for Career Development**

Nth described some aspects of a social entrepreneurship orientation and shared several supports for his career development including role models, beneficial intersectionality, networking, a strong team, and AI that supports his innovation as a social entrepreneur.

On SEOS (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018), Nth responded “strongly agree” to nine of 21 items, “somewhat agree” to five items, and “neither” to seven items (see Table F5 in the appendix). This indicates only some aspects of a social entrepreneurship orientation strongly supported Nth's career development: proactiveness and innovativeness. It seems that Nth will just act and is not risk averse—he sees no need to pilot programs since he relies on trial and error to improve processes.

#### ***Nth's Role Models***

Nth described three role models who supported his career development: the fictional Professor X, Henri Landwirth, and Marilyn vos Savant.

“Unfortunately,” Nth said, “a lot of times when you don't have a real-life role model, you go with the fictional one ... because there's just way more to pick from.” Nth shared, “In my case, for sure, Professor X of the X-Men [comic books] wound up being quite a bit of inspiration for me doing all of this.” Professor Charles Francis Xavier, known as Professor X, is a fictional mutant character from the X-Men comic books who formed a school of extraordinary mutants with superhero powers and helped them develop their talents to fight evil (Lee & Kirby, 1963). Nth described being an avid X-Men reader as a child and how Professor X became his role model:

While I found Professor X himself boring, his role in finding all these gifted and amazing people from all over the world and empowering them and training them to do something amazing for the world—that resonated with me.

Nth's second role model is Henri Landwirth, a Holocaust survivor from Germany who ran a hotel in Florida where lots of astronauts stayed during training in the 1960s. Nth explained why Henri Landwirth was one of his role models:

[His hotel was] this place where ... innovative people [could] come together ...

He wound up doing a lot of humanitarian things as he got older. And I was like, that is really what I'm doing. It's nice to know someone has done it before.

The third role model Nth discussed is Marilyn vos Savant, a woman whose IQ score placed her in the 1985 Guinness World Records as the world's smartest person (Marilyn vos Savant, 2004), a category that no longer exists. Nth described:

I was a fan of hers ever since I knew she existed ... I did check out her actual books she published, and I loved the way that she tackled any topic you could throw at her and tries to solve it. Sometimes she didn't get it right, but often she did, and usually in a very fascinating way ... It was the first time I came across someone who wasn't afraid to think about anything—because that was definitely not a part of my culture. My culture being religious folk... We say that you can ask any question, but that was not the case ...

In college, I found out that there [were] definitely things you were not allowed to discuss or to disagree with. [But Marilyn] came to any topic [with] a fresh slate, as best she could, and then just tackled it with reasoning and

intuition... I was like, oh, that's an option. Okay, I could do it... I don't feel bad when I was doing this naturally.

Nth's three role models of Professor X, Henri Landwirth, and Marilyn vos Savant inspired him to form and incubate a gifted community and to question, reason, and think things through. These role models had a strong positive impact on Nth's career development.

### ***Theme 1: Beneficial Intersectionality***

Nth's intersectionality of being a Black, male-presenting, individual who is LGBT has impacted his experience as a social entrepreneur:

When I came to the professional world, I kind of got lucky, because it's almost like two negatives [made a positive] because on the one hand, [I'm] a Black, male-presenting individual, and they historically don't do as well as other categories of professionals in terms of money. On the other hand, I'm also LGBT, and they also don't do as well in comparison to other types of professionals. However, if you're Black, male-presenting, and LGBT, they seem to cancel each other out and you wind up doing ... about as well as heterosexual, White male counterparts.

Nth then realized, "Maybe I should just be me, you know? And that helped a lot. Since I was me, actually doors opened in that regard." Nth shared his amusement at the few times he has been mistaken as a White male on phone calls which has also resulted in positive funding outcomes.

While Nth explained that his race and sexuality would typically be a barrier for him professionally, aligning with historic inequities in access to career development opportunities (CTERN, 2022; Greene, 2017), he said that with his intersectionality, he is doing quite well when it comes to accessing opportunities and funding.

The fact that career disparities exist for people due to their race, gender, and sexuality is terrible. However, Nth described his unique intersectionality as a Black, male-presenting member of the LGBT community as a positive support for his career development.

### ***Theme 2: Networking***

In his programs in entrepreneurship, Nth said, “I am getting the value of networking. I would say that’s the biggest thing I’ve gotten out of this program.” He continued, “I’ve met other people who themselves are going to be influential, are in positions of influence, and they also are connected to other influential people.” For Nth, the social networking component has been critical: “I don’t come from people of wealth and influence. And now you’re connected to these people and a lot of them know you and they’ll remember you and you can reach out to them.” However, Nth thinks that networking greatly benefits students from families with knowledge of business and wealth too. Nth said:

[I learned a lot from] actual entrepreneurs who’d gone through these hurdles in the past. I learned a lot from the people who want to hold you back ... If you’re a social entrepreneur and a person [of color], there’s a lot of people like that in power—both politically and in ... business.

Nth has appreciated networking with social entrepreneurs and really enjoys connecting someone from ET to opportunities. He explained:

Sometimes you run into a situation where we'll have a member in Elysian Trust, and they're going through something challenging. I now have this network I can tap them into if it applies to them ... When [Elysian members and clients] speak up and they ask for input or assistance in some way, [I tell them], "Oh, I know exactly what you're talking about. I know exactly who can talk to you. Let me connect you to this person I met."

Meeting other social entrepreneurs throughout the mesosystem and geniuses with entrepreneurial interests within the ET microsystem enables Nth to foster connections to support the development of individuals and their organizations (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Networking connections are part of Nth's career output as a social entrepreneur in alignment with the curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs.

Networking is a positive aspect of Nth's career development and helps him to develop his career and the careers of others.

### ***Theme 3: A Strong Team***

ET has grown to such an extent that Nth's work is now supported by a strong team of board members and employees including a sales board, an operations board, human resources, a grant team, and a social media coordinator. "People in their specific departments," Nth explained, "have way more autonomy now than they did last year." He appreciates ET's team because, he said, "sales meetings were very not my thing," and "operations was also not my thing." He elaborated:

[ET is] very fortunate to have every person on our team... We all know each other well ... There is a spirit of trustworthiness ... not only in behavior, but also in competence. There's the sense that if you [have] someone who's brilliant, [and] you give them the freedom to be brilliant, they will surprise you in a great way.

ET has established a strong team of people interested in supporting their mission and the development of this social environment which indicates Nth's progress and positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016). The capacity of the ET team allows Nth time and energy to focus on his own areas of strength and interest rather than having to run the entire business. Nth's career output at ET has resulted in an increase in jobs and opportunities for others interested in supporting the work of ET to further support geniuses and their ideas to the benefit of the social good, which is in alignment with the curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs.

A strong team at ET is a huge benefit to Nth and supports his career output and ongoing career development in areas of strength rather than merely areas of need.

#### ***Theme 4: Innovation Supported by AI***

Nth said, "The SEGA is still very much the innovator, the one that is the creative thinker," because the strengths of SEGA are important for the development of his social enterprise. However, Nth, a SEGA, found AI helps support his innovation. Nth explained:

If you ask the right questions, the creative questions, you get this really great input from these automation systems. But these automated systems would never necessarily come up with those ideas themselves, at least for now. Twenty years



from now, maybe they'll be smarter than us, I don't know. But right now, what I'm seeing is that they give you the opportunity to be the big dreamer, to have the great vision. And their job really is more or less just to help you get there and to take off a lot of the grunt work.

Nth shared an example of using an AI chatbot to help redo a lot of the language on the ET website:

I'm like, "Hey, this is what we're trying to do. This is the vision we're having. I also want to make this [search engine optimization] friendly so that we can get more optimal hits. And this is the tone I'm trying for, and this is what I want people to feel when they go to our website." Then, sure enough, it started writing language and I started tweaking that ... a little bit here and there. And bam! What would have taken hundreds if not thousands of dollars, and definitely, at least 40 hours of time, it was done in the morning ... Those hours that I saved gave me more time to dream even bigger and add more clarity than I normally had because I actually had the time to do it.

Nth explained that AI cannot appreciate ideas like this "because it doesn't have emotions like that ... it's not going to be able to come up with those types of ideas ... at least not yet." To Nth, AI's strength is that it "can just focus on what it's really good at, which is something that it does with lightning speed." Nth said, "It's a great partnership in that regard because [SEGA still] bring something to the table that [AI] just doesn't have—not yet anyway."

AI draws on knowledge from the macrosystem to generate content that Nth can apply in his microsystem of ET (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). AI is a contextual influence that ultimately provides a learning experience for Nth and impacts Nth's SCCT (Lent et al., 1994).

The pros, cons, and ethics of AI will continue to be debated in society, but to Nth, AI is a positive support that helps operationalize his innovative ideas and gives him more time to focus on dreaming big and to work on other things than mere "grunt work."

### **RQ3b: Nth's Barriers to Career Development**

Nth discussed three barriers to their career development: (1) cost of education, (2) gatekeepers, and (3) intersectional barriers.

#### ***Theme 1: Cost of Education***

The cost of education has been a pervasive barrier for Nth. Nth shared that he got into colleges, but after classmates implied that being Black would earn Nth scholarships, Nth decided to not apply for any and to figure college out on his own. However, the cost of tuition remained a huge barrier for Nth. As he was not able to start college after high school—he joined the Navy instead.

Nth reported studying different areas before "realizing I could just really go to [internet videos] and get textbooks, and that saves me like \$20,000 a year or more in unnecessary fees," because he, "didn't need the certification. [He] needed the knowledge and skills."

Nth mentioned, “Even in the classes where I’m paying tuition ... [of] many, many thousands of dollars a year, I was like, this is wonderful on paper,” but said the programs did not really teach him anything realistic.

Though Nth is a persistent learner, tuition has been a pervasive barrier that prevented him from accessing education and from getting certifications and degrees that he may have easily earned. When Nth has paid for education, he has been critical of the learning he did receive.

The cost of post-secondary education is a barrier for the career development of Nth and many others in the United States. The cost of education is a contextual influence that impacted Nth’s interests, choice goals, and choice actions throughout his career (Lent et al., 1994).

While the cost of education has a negative impact on Nth’s career development, his ability to access education in creative ways that minimize costs demonstrates how he has positively navigated the hurdle of tuition.

### ***Theme 2: Gatekeepers***

Nth has “learned a lot from the people who want to hold you back.” He said, “If you’re a social entrepreneur and a person [of color], there’s a lot of people like that in power—both politically and in... business.” Regarding Nth’s work with ET, Nth described a barrier of gatekeepers within the grant writing community:

It was very obvious to me that the people who needed me, they couldn’t afford me. So, I was like, let me do grant writing on commission, that way they don’t pay unless they win and ... they can actually afford me.

However, Nth said, “The grant writing community has just determined that is unethical.” This threw Nth off for a while because he thought, “I’m doing something horrendous, because now I’m thinking about my dad ... I wound up becoming my father, who did something wrong and ended up going to prison.” But then Nth realized, “I noticed they never said illegal ... [they said] unethical ... I was like, well, why? Why is it unethical?” Nth started getting into arguments with these organizations. Then Nth said, “These organizations [were] like, we’re going to blackball you if you do this.” But then he found out, that was not really the case:

What they’re trying to do is basically protect their own business model, because if commission was the norm in the industry, that opens up the grant writing community to a whole lot more competition than they want. I was like, wait a minute, we’re getting these grants from these foundations. Let me reach out to the foundations and see if they ... have an issue with me working on commission of the clients. I reached out to something in the ballpark of 25 grant-making foundations. Of the 25, I think 22 replied ... They all said ... “No, we don’t care.” No—it doesn’t bother them. They don’t care at all ... So, it’s pretty clear it’s a roadblock that the grant-making community put up for themselves.

Nth said, “Unfortunately there’s a lot of interest and philanthropy in America that’s not really philanthropy.” He added, “It’s just another avenue to control who gets money, who doesn’t, and to shape the world in the way that keeps [them] in power. And we’ve run into that on numerous occasions.”

Over the years, Nth has learned to better determine which foundations he wants to work with and which he does not, though he declined to name any.

Nth's tenacity and research skills have helped him overcome the barriers from gatekeepers who have either actively or passively tried to limit the work of ET in supporting brilliant entrepreneurs who are neurodivergent and who often come from or support marginalized communities. Gatekeeper values or biases in the exosystem and macrosystem have been a challenge for Nth and ET (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Gatekeeping access to grant writing to people who already have means has a negative impact on the innovative social entrepreneurs that Nth and ET work to support. However, ET's commitment to finding creative ways to fund social enterprises is positive and admirable.

### ***Theme 3: Intersectional Barriers***

Nth discussed the intersectional barriers faced by clients that ET serves. Some clients experience barriers within the investment industry, which limits the success ET can generate for all—particularly their clients from marginalized populations. Nth explained:

I had two clients. One is a Black woman-owned business that was making \$20 million a year. Unfortunately, she made a bad decision. She took this predatory loan and needed an investor to pay it off and get back on track. That was the only thing that was holding her back. I peddled her investment package to a whole bunch of investors. She got turned down everywhere and there was no logical reason as to why.

My other client was a White guy. He wasn't even American, he was British. White guy. No revenue in his business. Really, he just had the patent, so he was a little bit past the idea stage. But that's it. He was only asking for \$10 million. He got \$20 [million].

Something like only 2% of investment dollars go to Black or Latina women in the United States. It's the system set up to hold ... not just them, back—pretty much anyone ... who are not direct beneficiaries of colonizing ... The closer you are to a White Anglo-Saxon male, the way fewer hurdles [you have]. You're almost on third base.

Nth said he has “seen it time and time again, and it's been a huge passion of mine to try to figure out ways to circumvent that.” According to Nth, gifted entrepreneurs face particularly strong barriers to funding:

I hate to say this, probably the hardest to get funded ... is the gifted community. It's kind of assumed that if you're gifted, you don't need additional support ... There's plenty of research ... that's not the case at all, often you need even more support just because this world is not set up for what a gifted mind might bring to the table.

ET has been fortunate, but “it's still hard,” Nth said, “way harder than it should be, and there's still work to be done ... that's part of what I'm working on.”

The story shared by Nth highlights barriers contrasted with his intersectional identities. Intersectional barriers to investment funding arise from a disconnect between the intersectional identities of entrepreneurs and values or biases from the macrosystem

of investors and a lack of many investors that share intersectional identities with entrepreneurs (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The intersectional barriers shared by Nth are extremely harmful to ET's ability to succeed for their clients. The commitment Nth and ET have to strive to circumvent these barriers is positive and valuable to entrepreneurs, their enterprises, and the social good.

### ***Summary of Nth's Career Development Supports and Barriers***

Nth's supports for career development include his role models, beneficial intersectionality, networking, a strong team, and innovation supported by AI. Nth's barriers to career development include cost of education, gatekeepers, and intersectional barriers.

### **RQ4: Nth's Shared Social Value**

Nth's primary vehicle for sharing social value is through ET. ET aligns with eight of the United Nation's SDGs (2015): no poverty; quality education; affordable and clean energy; decent work and economic growth; industry, innovation, and infrastructure; reduced inequalities; sustainable cities and communities; and climate action.

This section describes ET, artifacts, and four themes: (1) diverse brilliant communities, (2) business supports, (3) successful funding, and (4) making the world a better place.

### ***Nth's Social Enterprise: ET***

Nth shares social value through his social enterprise, ET. Legally, the name of the social enterprise is Elysian X Incorporated, but its DBA is ET, which is how most people know and refer to the organization. Nth shared the mission of ET:

Our mission revolves around overcoming the hurdles that the gifted and neurodivergent community face, particularly those hailing from underserved communities. We extend a comprehensive range of services and strategic partnerships to cater to our members' academic, social, financial, professional, and personal needs. Our work extends far beyond traditional business incubation. We see ourselves as incubators of human potential. We nurture the entrepreneur and their startup, the artists and their art, the humanitarian and their vision, and the inventor along with their invention. In doing so, we foster a vibrant ecosystem of gifted individuals capable of inspiring change and driving progress in their communities and beyond.

Nth kept meeting brilliant and civil people and wondered, "What happens if we all got a discussion group and, you know, started hanging out together?" ET began as an alternative to a high-IQ society, accepting people at the 99.9th percentile in cognitive intelligence. ET started a subgroup called Volant on a growing social media platform and gained traction because other high-IQ organizations were slower to adapt to social media. Volant was the first subgroup all about IQ, but Nth said ET, "quickly realized there [were] so many other mental abilities, people with mental abilities that we were missing." Nth explained:

We knew [others] were brilliant, we knew they had something awesome to bring to the table, but they didn't have a high enough IQ score because we're talking three sigma, which is like 145 IQ on modern day IQ tests. That's really high. It's like one in a thousand people, so that's 999 people you're kicking out [of Volant].



ET then began to create additional sister groups to Volant around emotional intelligence, critical thinking, creative thinking, intuition, tenacity, and collective intelligence. As these communities grew, ET considered what to do next:

Then we were like, okay, what are we doing? We should actually do something more than just, you know, discussing things and putting our heads together to come up with these beautiful solutions to problems that no one else is ever going to see. We took inventory to realize most of us were working on these really cool passion projects.

These passion products included startup ideas, humanitarian causes, or personal and creative works of art such as novels and screen plays. Nth thought it would “be cool if [ET] actually helped them accomplish their goals.” He realized, however, that “one of the hugest hurdles that people ... run into when they’re on this journey is funding for their projects.” Fortuitously, ET had several members with a strong background in grant writing, including Nth, so the organization decided to offer grant writing services for members.

Grant writing grew into providing a suite of support services for startup businesses including marketing, technology support, and legal research. Nth said, “We basically became an incubator, but the incubator that’s really for the genius rather than for the genius’s project ... You could call us a genius incubator.”

Next, ET realized they needed to find people from marginalized communities who had these passion projects and brilliant minds. “They’re such an untapped resource for

their marginalized community,” Nth said. “You build them up, they can build up their community from within.”

As ET continued to serve brilliant entrepreneurs, Nth started to recognize the twice-exceptional neurodiversity of these geniuses:

We realized nearly every gifted person we met, they had some other type of cognitive quirk to come with that package. So, lots of autistic people, lots of people with ADHD. Example: I have dyslexia, among other cognitive traits, and that’s basically the case for everyone in their group. Almost everyone. So ... we wound up being this ... genius incubator ... with a focus on those who come from marginalized populations, and especially those with neurodivergences.

ET is proud, Nth said, “that we’re good at spotting the social innovators... where most people ... can’t even process what they’re doing.” He explained, “Our biggest contribution was [seeing] these diamonds in the rough that other people greatly overlooked. We invest in them and it’s paying off.” ET can see the innovative social entrepreneur, where the entrepreneur wants to go, and the target the entrepreneur is trying to hit and helps accelerate the entrepreneur’s progress. Nth described the social entrepreneurs ET supports:

They’re doing exceptionally well in comparison to those who don’t have the support that ... they have from us ... It’s frustrating ... I personally don’t understand how others couldn’t see the potential these folks had in them ... specifically between their ears or the projects they were working on that were so transformative.

Nth said he loves “seeing real life heroes get to become real life heroes once they get the support they need.”

Next goals for ET include transitioning from a business incubator to a support service for other business incubators—almost like a scholarship program that can enroll certain entrepreneurs from other business incubators, especially entrepreneurs that are marginalized or “demonstrate a special type of mental brilliance,” Nth said. Another goal is the development of an angel fund so ET can be its clients’ first investor.

Nth also said, “I would love Elysian to shrink ... I don’t think we need to be doing everything. We don’t need to be the one-stop resource for everything.” He elaborated, “Right now ... we’re exceptional at maybe three things in terms of professional services: accounting, fundraising, and marketing.” However, Nth thinks it will be better if ET partners with other organizations that specialize in some of those areas instead. Even though it may sound strange, Nth said, “the strategy is to shrink ... to hyperfocus.”

### ***Nth’s Artifact: Media Coverage***

As his artifact, Nth shared several pieces of media coverage that recognized him and the work he has done with ET: an article published in *Forbes* (Laker, 2023); an article published at *Yahoo! Finance* (Elysian Trust, 2023); an *Action and Ambition* podcast episode, originally done in partnership with *Entrepreneur* magazine (Medal, 2023); and an older interview conducted by *Exosphere* (Bierlig, 2016). This coverage about Nth, geniuses, and the incubation work at ET is important to Nth. The interview on *Forbes* (Laker, 2023) was especially meaningful to Nth:

People are only now learning about Elysian. Most people never heard of us, so it's actually through our clients. One of our clients, she was interviewed by *Forbes*, and so she mentioned they should interview us, so we wound up being interviewed by *Forbes*, and then all these other organization I never even heard of ... I didn't know they existed. They didn't know we existed [before then].

These articles made Nth feel appreciated, but he has not shared most of them on social media. "You think you would want to," Nth said, "but I just don't want to deal with ... it [bringing] out a certain demographic that wants to attack me ... I just don't want to deal with them right now." In general, however, Nth enjoys being recognized:

All of this is relatively new success in terms of being recognized [for] actually succeeding for my clients, but I'm not going to lie, it actually feels a little bit better sometimes to get that type of recognition, rather than, "Oh, cool. You got the grant. Awesome. Bye."

These articles demonstrate a growing interest in Nth's story as a gifted, neurodivergent social entrepreneur and the transformative output of ET in incubating geniuses and their projects.

### ***Theme 1: Diverse Brilliant Communities***

One of the most important ways that Nth and ET provide social value is by cultivating diverse brilliant communities of gifted neurodivergent people. Nth said his high school teacher who advocated for him "saw that talent, that giftedness, that twice-exceptional packaging, and saw the potential in [me] where no one else did." Nth said, "I have that gift and talent as well. I can recognize it in others."

Nth described how he scouted for neurodivergent talent: “Our [social media account] was relatively new and ... I’d just post something ... and if it’s thought provoking, it attracted a lot of people.” Others could share their thoughts, and Nth would agree or disagree and dialogue. Nth started to notice people who would reply with insightful comments and was especially drawn to people he disagreed with, people who voiced their disagreement “in a way where I had to give [them] kudos and props.” People like that tended to know other people who were also brilliant. “Before you know it,” Nth said, “you just get that reputation where that’s the page to go to... and after [several] conversations ... you get a great sense of how their mind works.” Nth had follow-up conversations with people and grew the community to around 250 members. After that ET became more invitational. Nth explained, “All those members started inviting other people to the group and ... their skill set ... determined which groups within Elysian they belonged to” and where they were invited to participate. Nth explained:

Elysian Trust does not limit itself solely to finding gifts in gifted and talented changemakers and social entrepreneurs through IQ. We use other cognitive constructs, but high IQ club communities were very mocking of what we were doing ... for years. We didn’t care because we weren’t looking for their approval or to impress anyone. We just knew it worked.

Volant has an IQ score requirement which Nth has “mixed feelings about nowadays”; other groups have intuition, creativity, and emotional intelligence testing cutoffs; and ET hosts a Hard Problems Club that people do not need a test score to join. All members of the subgroups have access to the main ET group too.

Nth's experience of cultivating brilliant communities through ET has led him to believe that twice-exceptionality might be "a better indicator of who is actually gifted."

Nth explained:

When you start talking about, "Oh yeah, I have these quirks," "I'm dyslexic so I had to work around that," ... where you have to share your vulnerabilities ... It's very paradoxical, but it seems to be a better indicator of who is genuinely gifted—the people who will talk about that and not in a calculated way ... They're actually just like ... "I get so much social anxiety when I have to be on camera or do interviews or stuff like that" ... The more they talk, the more you realize, "Oh, this is autism." And then you hear how they work around it ... They come up with a lifestyle or strategies to overcome those things. And that's ... actually the brilliance that we tend to see and value, because they then apply it to other aspects of their life ... including [entrepreneurship].

Nth said, "You'll hear a lot of people say, 'I finally found my tribe,' because ... basically once you factor in all the things, not just their ... set of cognitive strengths, but also their neurodivergent quirks ... you're talking to a one-in-a-million mind." Nth explained:

Where do you find other one-in-a-million minds like yours? ... It's really hard to find them out in the wild. You may be the only person in your city whose mind works like yours. But when you're in Elysian, you actually do get to meet these people from all over the planet—mostly the United States, but literally [in multiple countries] and on every continent... and then you wind up making these

awesome collaborations—sometimes they get married... You just can't really predict where things will go if you set up that environment that allows for the garden to grow how it kind of wants to grow anyway.

Gifted people typically thrive when they can spend time with like-minded and like-hearted people in communities like ET, which aligns with the development of a social environment indicating positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016). Nth has developed a robust microsystem of subgroups that form the mesosystem of ET (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). ET gathers diverse, gifted, neurodivergent people into these groups to foster conversation, collegiality, and collaboration.

ET's development of a space that fosters a diverse, brilliant community is a hugely important shared social value from Nth and ET.

### ***Theme 2: Business Supports***

ET provides several professional business supports to clients including apprenticeships, needs assessments, marketing, and providing talent to other organizations. ET also provides grant writing services, which are discussed more in the next section about successful funding.

ET helps to connect fledgling entrepreneurs with well-established entrepreneurs through apprenticeships. Nth said, "That seems to be the best way to learn." Nth explained that many people think they only need money, but ET provides an inventory and needs assessment to help entrepreneurs determine if they need marketing support, or legal support, or something more to help them build a strong business.

ET helps entrepreneurs market the projects on which they are working. Nth explained, “If you market your product or service correctly, it kind of is a grant in and of itself, because you get so many clients or consumers for your product.” With these customers, Nth said, “You really won’t necessarily need an actual grant or contract from the government to keep moving.”

ET also provides talent to other organizations and just onboarded a new human resources team to support these efforts. Nth explained:

We have a lot of brilliant, gifted folks in our group, but most of them are very similar to me in the regard that they’re not designed for a 9-to-5 job for various reasons. Maybe they’re ... stay-at-home moms, or maybe they have ADHD, or maybe they have a form of autism ... And they will absolutely point out the stupidity of the politics that they see at a job or something like that ... But again, they have this great talent.

We’ve been lately helping them find work and helping them with like job shares and structuring that. And it’s become somewhat meta because ... one of the members in our group won a grant ... but once they won, they needed to hire some talent ... [They saw] all these brilliant people at ET ... and sure enough they actually ended up hiring one of the other members in our group.

With the support of ET, Nth said, entrepreneurs “can really take off on their projects ... they get to their dreams and goals much faster than they otherwise would.”

The business incubation services are part of the career output of Nth and ET that impact other social entrepreneurs, helping them to further transform society in alignment



with the curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs. The business supports ET provides fuel the learning experiences and self-efficacy of their entrepreneurial clients and impact their performance and attainment of financial goals (Lent et al., 1994).

The services ET provide exist in other organizations, but ET's focus on gifted neurodivergent clients, particularly from marginalized communities, is a very positive shared social value for a community that greatly benefits from ET's support.

### ***Theme 3: Successful Funding***

Nth said, "Elysian's outputs are both tangible and intangible. In terms of tangibles, by far the biggest one is grants." He continued, "We get money to social entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs—well, we're actually all social entrepreneurs, whether it's on the nonprofit side or for-profit, we get them funding that they desperately need." He shared that ET has thus far earned over \$44 million for their clients and is about to receive another \$2 million. "It's really great." Nth described ET's quantitative success earning grants for its diverse clients and their organizations:

It's America, and money matters ... You can keep track of the amount of grants you're winning for clients versus how much they spent for you to win the grants, and by far, there's just no comparison that they're getting the bang for their buck for sure ... You spent \$9,000 on us to help you secure \$3 million. You've done well.

ET has a checklist to help entrepreneurs realize the demographics they fall into to access identity-bound grant opportunities. Nth said, "There's grants set aside specifically for entrepreneurs who are autistic, for example ... I don't know if they're still around, but

there was a grant a few years ago for left-handed entrepreneurs.” He described that special grants exist for all sorts of groups including BIPOC people, women, entrepreneurs from rural America, and the Small Business Administration (SBA) offers federal grants for tribal nations, women, and several racial minorities. He added:

The LGBTQIA+ community, they have the most money. It is very fascinating to me how well they can take care of our own. I’m part of that community, so I’ve been actually kind of fortunate that I can apply to funding for us from there. I mean there’s just so many [funds], I can’t even name them all, and there’s so many that they wind up being intersectional. So, there’s some that are specifically for the LGBTQIA+ community that’s part of STEM and tech, and then the other is specifically for banking or whatever.

Nth described the success ET has acquiring funding for entrepreneurs from marginalized groups:

[For] entrepreneurs who are racially marginalized and then on top of it, they’re almost always neurodivergent, it’s just slim pickings. If I remember correctly, Black women, they make up like almost 7% of the American population, but they’re barely getting 2% of the capital dollars for their businesses from investors. That’s different for us, for the entrepreneurs in that demographic who hire us, it’s closer to something like 70% [receive funding]. And it’s large grants for the most part.

Despite ET’s success, Nth shared, “When you look at our overall stats, we’re still way behind business incubators that work with, I hate to say it, but ... the usual people

we think of when we think of people who go through a tech incubator.” He adds the “usual” people are typically “White or Asian, usually male. What’s not spoken about is they normally come from money, [and] they are getting a very sizable, oversized percentage of the pie.”

Nth also mentioned that there is international funding available for entrepreneurs and that it would be great if there was a “one-stop place to find all of these [grants] so you can put in your criteria [and demographics],” but he suggests that AI can help people find some of these opportunities. Nth shared ET’s next goal:

I’d like for Elysian Trust to have its own angel fund ... If we had our own angel fund, then that would probably be the first one set aside specifically for, among other populations ... specifically for gifted, talented, twice-exceptional entrepreneurs because there’s really not a lot out there for them. And by definition they can probably do something phenomenal. You get a great return on investment (ROI) if you invest in them.

ET’s ability to help gifted entrepreneurs attain financial resources to support their performance continues to nurture the organization’s exosystem of impact (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lent et al., 1994). Helping entrepreneurs from marginalized communities access funding in the United States benefits those entrepreneurs in their communities and beyond.

ET’s track record of successfully funding entrepreneurs is one of the most important tangible ways it generates social value.

#### ***Theme 4: Making the World a Better Place***

Nth is committed to social good and helping the world be a better place. Describing his role model, Professor X (Lee & Kirby, 1963), Nth said, “[Professor X’s] role in finding all these gifted and amazing people from all over the world and empowering them and training them to do something amazing for the world—that resonated with me.”

Through ET, Nth helps clients make the world a better place. “People like me were not meant to be employees,” Nth said, “but we were meant to change the world.” Nth also described his hobby of mind sports, which he believes could “be more meaningful and useful in the real world than” they currently are. Regarding barriers to funding and opportunity, particularly for ET’s clients who are brilliant and neurodivergent entrepreneurs from marginalized backgrounds, Nth said, “Let’s [help our clients] do something amazing that makes the world better for all.”

Nth hopes his efforts with ET ripple beyond his microsystem and change the whole ecological system into a better place for all, including gifted neurodivergent people, especially those from marginalized communities (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Nth’s efforts to foster his ideals through ET align with secondary integration as part of his process of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016). Nth’s career output results in a transformed society in alignment with the curricular career spiral for social entrepreneurs.

Working hard to help entrepreneurs improve our world is one of the most meaningful types of shared social value Nth contributes through the work of ET.

### ***Summary of Nth's Shared Social Value***

Four themes were explored in connection with the social value Nth shares through his social enterprise, ET: (1) diverse brilliant communities, (2) business supports, (3) successful funding, and (4) making the world a better place.

### **Closing Vignette**

I join the web meeting for an ET board meeting that has been rescheduled. Nth tells me he always records these meetings because they never have all board members present. One board member joins. Nth checks his email and tells us to hold on for a second—a client needs an answer immediately to help them send in some documentation due today. Nth pauses and does not take long responding to the client with the emergency. Nth points out they need three for a quorum, and just then a third board member joins. The present board members include a White man and a Black woman. Nth introduces me and my research study. Everyone says hello, and Nth launches into the meeting.

Nth starts the meeting by saying, “There’s not much to do, but our charter says we have to hold a monthly board meeting.” They start with personnel updates. One new person, who is not a lawyer but has legal expertise, is joining the board, and three new people are joining the ET team: a graphic designer and two grant writers—one of whom is a registered member of a Native American tribe. This new grant member will help ET write for tribal grants, but more so the person was simply needed for their general grant writing talents. Nth also shares that ET now has money to pay its social media coordinator so she can work more with the ET social media groups. Nth expresses his

gratitude for the coordinator and for the fact that he will no longer have to manage ET's social media groups.

Nth shares that the first quarter was "lucrative," and new organizations have recently approached ET to write new grants. Revenue streams have increased. ET was recently hired by an organization that supports neurodivergent kids and another that focuses on using psychedelics for therapy and is in talks with an organization that wants to work on supporting housing in response to climate change. There might even be an option to own some equity with one of the businesses. Nth also mentions an upcoming goal to build a fund so ET can become an angel investor for their clients.

Nth takes a breath and says, "I hate talking this long, any questions?" The board members ask a few questions and discuss how helping these organizations has potential benefits for ET's neurodivergent community.

The board members care for Nth, and one says, "You sound tired. Get some rest!"

Nth responds, "I block out days so I can rest," and shares that he "would like to get to a point where we actually have Fridays off for four-day weeks."

"That's it!" Nth announces. His eyes dart around his screen, as he looks at an email that's just arrived and tells us, "[Another organization] has a work emergency now." Nth and the board members all bid farewell and leave the meeting to continue their work.

### **Summary of Nth's Case Study**

Nth developed the social enterprise ET to nurture brilliant communities and serve as an incubator for both genius entrepreneurs and their projects to help the world become

a better place. Nth is a gifted person with high test scores who benefitted from critical teacher advocacy and self-education, and he has a thoughtful perspective on neurodivergent terminology. To describe Nth's career development and incubator program, Nth used a seahorse metaphor, and explained he could not be a typical employee. Rather, he uses trial and error and continues to learn about social entrepreneurship. Nth's supports for career development included several role models, beneficial intersectionality, networking, a strong team, and innovation supported by AI. Nth's barriers to career development included the cost of education, gatekeepers, and intersectional barriers. Nth's social value shared through ET includes recognition by media, the development of diverse brilliant communities, business supports for entrepreneurs, successful funding, and continuous efforts to make the world better.

### **Cross-Case Study: Findings about the CD of SEGA**

The focus group takes place on a warm Wednesday morning in April with five participants and me, the researcher, all meeting in an online web meeting.

We begin with our introductions.

I join from my home and have a virtual background image of my university behind me. I have light brown skin, dark brown eyes, and curly dark brown hair with an increasing number of silver strands pulled back beneath my large, black over-the-ear headphones with a mic. I am wearing a soft, light blue sweater and black metal glasses with rectangular lenses. I am Joi Lin, a doctoral candidate of curriculum and instruction. I am the dissertation researcher, specializing in gifted education leadership at DU. I welcome each participant and thank them profusely for spending time to support my

work. I am drinking mint tea in a large mug with drawings of four women with different skin tones on each side.

Kris has blue eyes, and light brown hair with white skin, slightly ruddy from time spent in Denver's nice spring weather. He wears a white t-shirt underneath a black sweater with grey and white diamond patterns. He sits in front of a blank white wall, perhaps at an office with tri-folded pieces of paper peeking into the corner of his camera and takes sips out of a large white ceramic mug with a large "K" on each side. He also sips from a maroon mug. Kristopher Tetzlaff is a doctoral candidate of curriculum and instruction at DU, also working on finishing his dissertation to graduate with me this spring. He co-founded the nonprofit YbY, Colorado's first and only nonprofit mobile preschool and teacher-led cooperative. YbY supports lower-income students at two locations in Aurora, Colorado in partnership with the Aurora Housing Authority. Kris is a White male and former high school French teacher. He teaches full-time as a visiting teaching assistant professor in the Center for World Languages and Cultures at DU. He is passionate about social justice and loves to travel.

Dr. Janiece Mackey joins the web meeting from her home in Aurora, Colorado, wearing a zipped blue hoodie, bright blue wired earbuds, and large brown glasses. She has medium brown skin, dark brown eyes, and dark brown hair that is neatly pulled back. Janiece projects a large yellow version of the YAASPA logo as her virtual background and takes a large sip from a tall black tumbler. A large bright sunbeam moves over her when she moves in her chair. Janiece Mackey earned her PhD in higher education at DU in 2020. She is the co-founder and CEO of the nonprofit YAASPA, an organization that



develops the civic activism of BIPOC students in Aurora, Colorado. She works as a research scientist. Janiece, a Black woman and race scholar activist, loves to perform karaoke and is a wife and mother of four teenagers. She tells us, “I’ve been working on grants, grants, grants! Yay, for grant writing. That’s much of my world right now.”

Dr. Chris Wells joins from their home office in Highlands Ranch, Colorado. Chris is wearing a plain olive-green shirt, black headset, and glasses. Chris has pale white skin, dark brown eyes, and reddish-brown hair. They take sips from a large clear water bottle. Chris Wells earned their PhD in psychology from Walden University and is the founder and president of the nonprofit DC, which offers a *Positive Disintegration Podcast* and Substack newsletters in partnership with their Australian co-host, Emma Nicholson. Chris is a social worker and therapist with a mission to support the mental health of as many people as possible by bringing the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016) to professionals, including educators, psychologists, and researchers. Chris lives with their husband and son in Highlands Ranch, Colorado, and identifies as a nonbinary person who is White with European ancestry.

Nth wears a t-shirt that has a light red and white texture and a thin black corded necklace. Nth has dark brown skin with varied shades, dark brown eyes, and very short dark brown hair. He sits in front of a smartly decorated living room—and tells us that it is actually a virtual background. Nth Bar-Fields, has a Bachelor of Science degree in chemical engineering and is enrolled in an MBA program focused on entrepreneurship and economics. Nth is the primary co-founder of ET, a for-profit organization that has communities of brilliant gifted and neurodivergent people and provides business

incubator services, primarily grant writing, to support genius social entrepreneurs and their projects. Nth identifies as an intersex, Black, multiethnic person and primarily lives in Houston, Texas. Nth has been working hard on grants and next week will take a staycation to catch up on sleep.

As Janiece and Nth specifically mentioned grant writing in their introductions, I ask them all, “How much time do you spend on grant writing?” Kris spends no time grant writing, because YbY has a full-time grant writer. However, after spring break, Kris will be taking that role on while the grant writer is out of town and may spend around 20 hours a week working on grants, in addition to other work he does for the organization. Janiece acknowledges the seasonality of the grant cycle, but spring is a busy season with her spending around 30 hours a week researching, writing, and reporting on grants, but she does not feel like YAASPA is doing enough. Nth chimes in that he used to work around 96 hours a week on grant writing for about 20 clients, but now he works only around 40-48 hours on that because ET now has a team of four grant writers. Chris has not applied for any grants yet but says they need to (or need someone else to write grants for the DC). Chris is actually in the midst of a campaign to hire ET for grant writing services to expand the capacity of the DC.

Shalelia arrives just a few minutes late and joins the meeting from her parked car. She just left a school that SCDEP started working with last month which is exciting, though she says it was “wild” having to experience real Denver morning traffic. Shalelia has light brown skin, dark brown eyes, and dark brown hair in microbraids. She wears a black short-sleeved sweater and bright pink earrings and sips through the straw of a large

black water bottle. Shalelia Dillard has a bachelor's degree in psychology and is enrolled in a master's program in educational psychology at the University of Northern Colorado. She is the founder and executive director of the nonprofit SCDEP and SCDEP Equity Consulting, an LLC that helps her generate additional income. SCDEP provides educational programming to public schools in Denver and Aurora, Colorado, and offers summer school programming in Denver and in Austin, Texas. SCDEP helps gifted students of color qualify for formal gifted and talented identification, learn about their race and culture, and recognize their giftedness as it is expressed through their culture with the goal of having students access advanced coursework. She is a former teacher, a wife, and a mother of two who identifies as a Black woman with mixed-race ancestry. At the end of her introduction, she smiles and adds, "Hey Janiece!" to her longtime friend.

Janiece unmutes and smiles back. "Hey girl!"

I ask Shalelia about her grant writing. Shalelia says she spends about 10 hours a week on grant writing, with support from her operations manager, and that "it's a lot."

I am excited that these five people are all finally meeting. I summarize our progress so far: Each participant previously reviewed their individual case studies, providing notes to strengthen the validity of each case; and all participants reviewed an early draft of the cross-case themes from this section prior to the focus group. I remind them they can skip questions during the focus group and that the meeting is being recorded.

During our time together I share a brief presentation on themes from the cross-case study and lead a discussion to foster CC&C and strengthen the validity of our findings.

### **Overview of Cross-Case Study**

This cross-case study opened with a focus group vignette introducing the quintain of five SEGA participants (Stake, 2006; Uhrmacher et al., 2017) and includes this overview along with a description of CC&C, an overview of SEGA participation, and an overview of researcher relationships. Subsequent sections discuss the background of SEGA and findings organized into themes for each RQs of this study: (RQ1) SEGA's self-reported characteristics of giftedness, (RQ2) SEGA's career development, (RQ3a) SEGA's supports for career development, (RQ3b) SEGA's barriers to career development, and (RQ4) SEGA's shared social value. Each theme is explored in this cross-case study using DIET (Uhrmacher et al., 2017). Finally, this case study concludes with a closing vignette and summary.

### ***Collaborative Connoisseurship and Critique***

In alignment with Eisner (2017) and Uhrmacher et al. (2017), the five SEGA participants and I are engaged in a process of CC&C. We are collaborative connoisseurs and collaborative critics of their career development and career experiences as both gifted adults and social entrepreneurs.

### ***Overview of Participation***

Each SEGA participant completed a recruitment survey and two 45-minute interviews, agreed to an observation, shared an artifact, member checked their case studies, and participated in a focus group that fostered CC&C.

### ***Overview of Researcher Relationships***

Each participant was personally known to me prior to this study. Kris and I met at DU at a mutual friend's graduation party last year. Janiece and I met at DU when she accidentally emailed me, and I have donated to fundraisers for YAASPA. Shalelia and I met when asked to co-present at a virtual summit during the pandemic. We are two of the eight co-founders for Gifted and Talented Leaders of Color and Allies. I have donated to fundraisers for SCDEP, and I am working with Shalelia and another researcher on a program evaluation of SCDEP. Chris and I met at a Dąbrowski-related training. I have donated to the DC, and I am on the conference planning team for the 2024 Dąbrowski Congress the DC is hosting. Nth and I met when I joined ET's social media groups, and I serve on the educational advisory board for ET. Chris, Nth, and I have co-presented about our experiences as highly and profoundly gifted individuals at a conference (Lin et al., 2022) and on episodes 25 and 26 of the *Positive Disintegration Podcast* (Wells & Nicholson, 2023).

These five social entrepreneurs I knew personally were the most representative cases of the quintain (Stake, 2006) of SEGA who responded to my recruitment survey, and I am immensely grateful for their participation.

## **Collaborative Focus Group**

SEGA participants fostered CC&C throughout this process through their active participation and sharing of stories; by member checking their individual case studies; and through their active participation in a focus group (Krueger & Casey, 2015). The focus group was a unique opportunity for participants to meet each other, learn about the preliminary cross-case themes and recommendations, and to actively CC&C the cross-case themes.

During the focus group, themes and recommendations were collaboratively adjusted to better represent the shared perspectives of me and the five SEGA participants. While Nth had explicitly discussed technology and AI, at the focus group I was able to ask the other participants if they also heavily used technology such as AI which they all do. Kristopher and YbY are still exploring how AI can be used to support curriculum development. For recommendations, Nth added “work around weaknesses.” Kristopher mentioned the importance of cultivating spirituality and building relational trust, which was immediately and strongly echoed by Janiece and also Shalelia and Chris.

Knowing that participants agreed with what I had seen and written about their lived experience stories was validating to me as a researcher and for this study. I also asked participants how they felt participating in this research, and they shared that it was humanizing, important, and exciting. The fact that participants felt positively about this work lends credence to it being authentic CC&C because it was collaborative and also beneficial and humanizing rather than oppressive to the quintain of SEGA.

## **SEGA's Background**

For this study, I selected five SEGA who had founded or co-founded social enterprises that aligned with two or more of the United Nation's SDGs (2015). The social enterprises have all existed for over a year and have employees or have hired contractors beyond the founders. The SEGA self-identified as gifted and had not completed a formal degree program in entrepreneurship; however, Nth is currently enrolled in an MBA program.

In the appendix, see Table F1 for participant demographics, Table F2 for SEGA organization demographics, Table F3 for SEGA organizational alignment with SDGs, Table F4 for SEGA self-identification of neurodivergence and giftedness, Table F5 for SEGA responses on KAGS (Ksiazak, 2010), and Table F6 for SEGA responses on SEOS (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018).

## ***SEGA's Artifacts***

Each SEGA shared an artifact about their giftedness or career development. Kris's artifact was the YbY website; Janiece's artifacts were a teen Bible, CME sash, and mirror; Shalelia's artifact was a one-page flyer of SCDEP initiatives; Chris's artifacts were the book *Mellow Out* by Michael M. Piechowski (2013) and their first donation from their mentor the day DC was founded; and Nth's artifacts were a copy of MAT scores and recent media coverage about the work of ET.

The artifacts shared by the SEGA participants included indications of their giftedness (Janiece, Chris, and Nth), aspects of their career development (Janiece, and Chris), and demonstration of their career outputs (Kris, Shalelia, and Nth).

### ***Theme 1: Lower Socio-Economic Start***

A theme consistent with these SEGA was that all five indicated they had experienced a lower socio-economic status, typically in childhood. Kris and Chris discussed their families having lower, working-class incomes while Janiece and Shalelia specifically mentioned being unhoused during a period of their childhoods. Nth mentioned joining the Navy because he could not pay for college and that he was a homeless student at MIT while working a full-time job.

Income status affected the background context and contextual context for each of these social entrepreneurs (Lent et al., 1994) and impacted their interests—each SEGA wanted to positively impact people and work to creatively fund their social enterprises to provide services to those who need them most but may not be able to pay.

It would be difficult to argue that a lower income background is a strength, but it is a strength that SEGA learned how to understand the lower income communities they now work with and how to connoisseur and critique our capitalist society.

The compassion SEGA participants feel for the communities they work with and the creative way they fund their social enterprises to provide services to those who need them are positive aspects of the SEGA.

### ***Theme 2: Racial Awareness and Activism***

Janiece, Shalelia, and Nth all identified as Black with African American ancestry, and all work to positively impact communities of color. Shalelia identified as having mixed-race ancestry, while Nth said he is multiethnic and has Afro-Latino and Afro-Caribbean heritage. The work of Janiece in YAASPA focuses on BIPOC students, an



expansion of the explicit initial commitment to focus on supporting African American students. Shalelia's work at SCDEP focuses on supporting gifted BIPOC students. Nth and ET primarily focus on supporting social entrepreneurs who are brilliant and neurodivergent, but ET also works hard to specifically support these entrepreneurs who are from marginalized communities, including Black and Latino/a, female, and rural entrepreneurs.

Chris identified as "White and European, so that's kind of basic." Chris said that during their social work program, "anti-oppression [and] anti-racism" resonated with them. They made no further mentions of race in their data collection or the work of the DC beyond having an international cadre of presenters for the Dąbrowski Congress.

Kris identified as White and is passionate about languages and travel, which has helped shift his worldview beyond ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. He and his co-founder, a woman of color, created YbY, which serves primarily families of color. Kris acknowledged that he does not look like the communities YbY works with and that sometimes he is viewed as a gatekeeper. He clarified that YbY is "not a White savior endeavor" and that YbY has a racially and linguistically diverse board and team of employees representing the communities YbY serves.

Racial awareness and recognition of disparities between different communities—particularly with regard to access to quality education, gifted education, and career supports—drives the work of almost all of the SEGA participants (CTERN, 2022; Greene, 2017). This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model in which SEGA are part of microsystems and hope to positively impact their microsystem

first and foremost but also hope to make a positive impact throughout their meso-, exo-, and macrosystems.

There almost seems to be an idea: If not me, then who? If a person does not positively impact their own community—who else will? The awareness and commitment to anti-racism, positive racial identity development, and supports for people from marginalized communities are strengths and positive aspects of SEGA participants.

### ***Summary of SEGA's Background***

This section detailed the background of SEGA participants including the artifacts they shared and two themes: (1) a lower socio-economic start, and (2) racial awareness and activism.

### **RQ1: SEGA's Self-Reported Characteristics of Giftedness**

The SEGA participants self-reported many characteristics of giftedness, including psychological characteristics such as a love of learning and reading, ability to make connections, creativity, and emotional sensitivity (everyone); characteristics of gifted performance and achievement at school (Janiece, Shalelia, Chris, and Nth); and a high IQ or cognitive ability score (Shalelia, Chris, and Nth).

Neurodivergent twice-exceptionality was mentioned by Chris (who is ADHD and possibly autistic) and Nth (who is dyslexic and autistic), while Kris mentioned his overwhelming anxiety and rumination. Janiece and Nth mentioned struggling to score well on standardized tests—though Nth's teacher helped him significantly improve his test-taking skills in high school.

This section discusses self-reported SEGA participants' characteristics of giftedness on KAGS (Ksiazak, 2010) and three themes: (1) varied definitions of giftedness, (2) varied use of terminology, and (3) concern for morality and justice.

### ***Ksiazak Adult Giftedness Scale***

Participants responded to the KAGS (Ksiazak, 2010) as part of the recruitment survey. KAGS has 22 items on a seven-point scale: never, almost never, rarely, sometimes, often, almost always, and always.

Table F5 shares all SEGA participant responses to all KAGS items (Ksiazak, 2010). However, for this section, two categories will be described to share the self-reported characteristics of giftedness that most resonated with social entrepreneurs: (1) items to which at least four of five SEGA participants responded, “always” and (2) notable mentions.

The 10 KAGS items to which at least four SEGA participants indicated “always” are listed below with the exceptions in parentheses:

(1) It is important for me to be able to have intellectually stimulating discussions.

(Kris: “often.”)

(7) It is important for me to be intellectually challenged at work or school. (Kris:

“almost always.”)

(8) It is easy for me to integrate information from multiple sources. (Kris:

“often.”)

(11) I think that some problems have more than one right answer. (Chris: “almost

always.”)

(14) I am a curious person. (Nth: “almost always.”)

(16) I am very concerned about world issues such as the environment, homelessness, war, or human rights.

(18) I am an avid reader. (Shalelia: “almost always.”)

(19) I am an independent thinker.

(20) I have an advanced vocabulary compared to most other people. (Kris: “often.”)

(22) Continuing to learn throughout my life is one of my most important priorities.

Two additional KAGS items warrant a notable mention even though no SEGA answered “always”:

(4) It is easy for me to learn new material the first time I am exposed to it. Janiece responded “often”; Kris: “sometimes”; and Shalelia, Chris, and Nth: “almost always.”

(13) I tend to get tired of a job after I have learned how to do everything that is required for it. Kris, Janiece, Shalelia, and Nth responded “sometimes,” and Chris responded, “almost always.”

The three items all five SEGA participants responded to with “always” indicate they are independent thinkers who prioritize continuous learning and who are very concerned about global and social issues. Independent thinking aligns with entrepreneurship: continuous learning helps entrepreneurs learn the skills they need to thrive and grow in their organizations. Meanwhile, concern about social issues explains

the moral reasoning behind the participants explicitly creating their social enterprises (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).

The two items that no SEGA responded to with “always” are also of interest. As a gifted connoisseur, I speculate that the participants hesitated to respond “always” to (4) because, as easy as it might be for them to learn new material, saying they could learn it the “first time” was too absolute and hyperbolic a statement. Also, while people may learn rapidly in their areas of strength and interest, it is unrealistic to “always” learn everything the very first time. For (13), “always” getting tired after learning everything about a job would not apply to people who enjoy working or creating with psychological flow in their areas of strengths (Csikszentmihalyi, 2007) or who enjoy hyperfocusing on areas of interest.

These self-reported responses to KAGS (Ksiazak, 2010) indicate that the selected group of SEGA participants indeed share many gifted characteristics.

### ***Theme 1: Varied Definitions of Giftedness***

Each SEGA defines giftedness and their own giftedness in unique ways (see Table F4 for more details about each participant). Here are the ways each SEGA participant defined giftedness:

Kristopher: “Very simply put, giftedness is indicative of high levels of intellectual and academic potential. It may account for effective communication, global mindedness, creativity, complex reasoning and more.”

Janiece: “I am artistic, I innovate, I am creative, I crave knowledge [and] am able to produce knowledge. ... I know how to support others to unveil their gifts.”

Shalelia: “Asynchronous learning and development (Silverman, 1997). Deeper processing and connections.” Chris: “I tend to use the Columbus Group definition of giftedness [as asynchronous development] (Silverman, 1997).” Asynchronous development is when “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” (Silverman, 1997, p. 39).

Nth: “Mentally gifted is the ability to think of things in ways the majority of people cannot think of them, but also, the thoughts lead to insights and breakthroughs.”

Janiece added that giftedness comes in “a myriad of forms” and shows up in “different modalities of sharing wisdom and knowledge” including spiritual gifts and embodied wisdom. Shalelia said her giftedness “manifests literally in everything I do.” She works to develop bodies of evidence to help students receive formal identification as gifted and talented in the educational system because she is aware that the formal label of giftedness is not automatically given to everyone who is gifted. Nth mentioned “mixed feelings” about valuing high cognitive intelligence exclusively and described how he looks for giftedness in multiple areas—IQ, emotional intelligence, creativity, intuition, and problem-solving tenacity.

SEGA participants define giftedness in a variety of ways, including asynchronous development (Silverman, 1997), high IQ, creativity, spiritual giftedness, and descriptions of gifted education identification and services.

The variety of definitions reflects the breadth of overlapping conceptualizations of giftedness in the field and result in difficulty knowing precisely what a person might mean when they say they are or are not gifted.

### ***Theme 2: Varied Use of Terminology***

Kris spoke of being unfamiliar with the concept of giftedness as a child and recently learning more. Janiece said, “I am not sure I was identified as gifted, but I skipped the second grade.” Chris said, “I don’t really worry about the labels that much, because just knowing that I’m different and neurodivergent is enough.” Nth described being “uncomfortable” with the gifted label because the focus is on the person rather than their work. Nth sometimes uses the terms of gifted, talented, and twice-exceptional but thinks the terms are better known in education, so he does not always use that terminology in interviews or when talking with people in other fields or various cultures. Kris, Shalelia, and Nth discussed recognizing giftedness in themselves and others and sharing about giftedness with others too.

Janiece’s comments imply that “gifted” is an educational label that may or may not apply to her. Shalelia and Chris asserted their giftedness has persisted throughout their lifespans, while Nth suggested that perhaps IQ and giftedness might change over time due to mental or physical challenges and that later in life “maybe you aren’t [gifted] anymore.” Nth’s comments imply that he has an achievement or talent perspective of giftedness.

Varied use of the terminology of giftedness relates to the overlapping definitions SEGA participants have of giftedness and wariness communicating about giftedness with people from various industries and cultures.

### ***Theme 3: Concern for Morality and Social Justice***

On KAGS item (16)—I am very concerned about world issues such as the environment, homelessness, war, or human rights (Ksiazak, 2010)—all five SEGA participants responded, “always,” indicating their deep awareness and sensitivity to injustice.

Kris described how he really “cared about justice, economic justice, and different areas of social justice, health justice, environmental and so on.” He described making “connections with folks who were in it for the right reasons, folks who valued justice, who value diversity, who will view diversity as a strength.” He attributed his “passion for social action and social change” to his giftedness and described himself as, “unwavering and uncompromising as far as [his] values for justice go.” Kris added:

[A commitment to social justice] supersedes any barriers, that determination, that love, that passion, that radical love for what you do and what you care about and what you value. [That] has been a driving force for [YbY and that’s] what helped us to succeed.

Janiece described a fellowship space with BIPOC peers as “sacred,” and said YAASPA has an all-BIPOC team that centers race to support racial identity development of youth. YAASPA works toward “healing-centered engagement and racial justice” for



the YAASPA community so they can “exude ... Black Finesse (Mackey, 2020) and cultural capital” rather than “allowing whiteness to take up too much space.”

While teaching, Shalelia recognized a glaring disconnect between “Black and Brown students and gifted and talented [education]” and through SCDEP, she works to develop students’ “academic and gifted identity development.” Shalelia mentioned speaking to other social entrepreneurs who expressed a sense of “isolation” or feeling they are the only one with a “deep sense of ... social justice” which are some ways Shalelia recognizes giftedness in others.

Chris said social justice messages around anti-oppression and anti-racism resonated with them and they struggled to continue working as a social worker because they felt they were “perpetuating problems” as an “agent of oppression” negatively impacting family’s lives.

Nth shared ET works with “social entrepreneurs who largely come from backgrounds that don’t get funding” including women entrepreneurs, racially marginalized entrepreneurs, and entrepreneurs who are “almost always neurodivergent.” He also said ET works to find the “untapped resource” of entrepreneurs from marginalized populations, “especially those with neurodivergences.”

During the focus group, SEGA participants shared the social issue that was most in their heads and hearts. Kris said the genocide in Gaza—he lived in the Middle East for seven years and has personal connections and Palestinian friends. Janiece said anti-Black racism and the exacerbated wealth gap are the most pressing issues in her work and experience. Shalelia echoed Janiece’s mention of anti-Blackness and is worried about a

university in Texas that is firing DEI advocates and the implications for the work SCDEP does in Texas. Shalelia told us SCDEP is still going to do the same work, but she might have to do it from jail. Chris said that ableism is the DC's biggest issue; personally however, Chris is deeply concerned with gender issues and the proliferation of legislatures trying to pass anti-transgender bills across the nation—even though many are failing. Chris added, “And of course, genocide. ... Where to choose? ... It's disheartening.” Nth described the desire by factions of power to divide and conquer us and touched on abortion rights, transgendered rights, immigration challenges, racial disparities, wealth disparities, and that many people are only “three paychecks away from homelessness.” I shared my umbrella social issue: cruelty, hate, and selfishness.

Gifted people have cognitive abilities that foster their advanced moral judgment and sensitivity (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016; Rinn, 2020). Gifted people often have a deep concern for morality resulting from their combined intensities, sensitivities, perfectionism, and overexcitabilities (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016; Silverman, 2013). Each SEGA participant talked about recognizing a need for justice and acting in response to that need. The concern SEGA participants have for morality and social justice issues is predictable from the literature (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016; Silverman, 2013; Rinn, 2020). SEGA participants have also had concerning learning experiences within our unjust world, and this concern has influenced the intended and operationalized career output of their social enterprises as part of the curricular career spiral (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016; Lent et al., 1994).

Social injustice is a pervasive negative aspect in society, but the concern gifted adults feel for social issues and the actions social entrepreneurs take to address these issues is an overwhelmingly positive aspect of the SEGA participants.

### ***Summary of SEGA's Self-Reported Characteristics of Giftedness***

SEGA participants self-reported many characteristics of giftedness with differing definitions of giftedness and differing levels of use of gifted terminology. All SEGA participants self-reported concern for morality and social justice which influenced their career paths.

### **RQ2: SEGA's Career Development**

This section describes metaphors about SEGA's career development and discusses three themes about the CD of SEGA: (1) past experiences, (2) development of business acumen, and (3) secondary integration of career ideals.

### ***SEGA's Metaphors***

The SEGA each shared a metaphor for their career development. Kris's metaphor was *two ships passing in the night*, which related to how he met his co-founder, Roya Brown. Janiece's metaphor was *blooming season*, because much work takes place underneath the soil before anyone can see the blooms of her work. Shalelia used *hitting the end of the road* as a metaphor to explain how she reached a point where she could no longer be a teacher—she had to start her nonprofit. Chris's metaphor was a *mountain*, both in the sense of psychological development and relating to the work ahead. Nth used a *seahorse* as a metaphor for ET's role as an incubator for gifted social entrepreneurs.

The metaphors shared by SEGA align with the curricular career spiral that builds on the instructional arc (Uhrmacher et al., 2017), SCCT (Lent et al., 1994), and positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016). *Two ships passing in the night* represents how the contextual influence of a colleague results in a learning experience that becomes part of the received career input arc of a social entrepreneur. *Hitting the end of the road* is a learning experience the social entrepreneur receives as part of the career input arc. This experience causes the entrepreneur to adjust outcome expectations with regard to both staying on the previous path and switching to an entrepreneurial path in alignment with the process of positive disintegration. The experience also enables the entrepreneur to recognize that the previous path no longer works, and they will have to forge their own path. A *seahorse* aligns with the social entrepreneur's intended career output arc and represents their interests, choice goals, and actions. A *mountain* indicates the journey the social entrepreneur must take, encompassing their career input arc and their intended and operationalized career output arc as part of their interests, goals, actions, and attainments. Finally, *blooming season* represents the operationalized career output of the social entrepreneur and the social value received by others as part of the social entrepreneur's career output arc. This arc also aligns with the social entrepreneur's actions, performance, and attainments, which are visible and real to others.

### ***Theme 1: Past Experiences***

All SEGA participants are college-educated, with two already having earned PhDs (Chris and Janiece), one close to finishing a PhD (Kris), and two currently enrolled in graduate degree programs (Shalelia and Nth).

All SEGA participants had previous work experience prior to starting their social enterprises. Kris, Shalelia, and Janiece all worked in education. Kris and Shalelia worked as teachers, Janiece worked in a dropout recovery program, and Kris and Janiece both worked as adjunct professors. Chris started as a social worker, and Nth worked in the Navy.

The past learning and work experiences of SEGA have melded into learning experiences that comprise their career input arcs in alignment with SCCT (Lent et al., 1994) and the curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs. These experiences helped them learn transferable skills, tasks they no longer wanted to perform, organizations they no longer wanted to work with, and areas where they wanted to make a positive impact. These experiences also inspired them to start their journeys as social entrepreneurs—all in alignment with the process of positive disintegration and SCCT (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016; Lent et al., 1994).

These past experiences, both positive and negative, must be appreciated as critical parts of each SEGA's history that helped them to get where they are now and to value what they now value.

### ***Theme 2: Development of Business Acumen***

The SEGA participants all developed their business acumen while building their social enterprises. While they all had prior real-world experience in the workplace, none of the participants had business education prior to starting their social enterprises—which was part of the selection criteria for this study. Kris and Chris have learned on-the-job business skills, with Kris referencing learning from experts from similar mission-aligned

organizations. Janiece and Shalelia both sought multiple trainings and accelerator programs to help develop their business acumen—Janiece thought her trainings were “cringey” and failed to be culturally responsive while Shalelia loved the accelerator programs that aligned with her intersectionality as a Black woman and as an educational social entrepreneur. Nth has sought continued education about social entrepreneurship through Ashoka (2024) and is enrolled in an MBA program focused on entrepreneurship and economics.

The SEGA all indicated a desire and need to learn more about business, with Kris, Chris, and Nth learning on the job, Kris and Nth learning from others, Janiece and Shalelia learning from accelerator programs, and Nth seeking additional knowledge in a current MBA program. Shalelia described this as building the plane as you fly it. The interest, goals, and actions of seeking out business acumen development is indicative of low self-efficacy regarding the business aspects of social entrepreneurship (Lent et al., 1994). Each SEGA was lacking in business-related learning experiences as part of their career input arcs and sought additional business skill development to grow their self-efficacy and help them perform better in their roles (Lent et al., 1994).

A lack of business acumen was a negative that each SEGA participant worked to overcome. SEGA participants’ tenacity in finding learning experiences to help them grow is a positive aspect of each SEGA’s commitment to learning and career development.

### ***Theme 3: Secondary Integration of a Career Ideal***

The SEGA participants all indicated aspects of secondary integration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016) regarding their career ideals through the creation of their own unique social

enterprises. These aspects included dissatisfaction about past careers, collaboration within a value-aligned social environment, a creative instinct that helped them generate new social enterprises exhibiting their highest ideals, and third factor motivation and drive to see their plans through.

All SEGA participants indicated dissatisfaction about their past careers: Kris experienced dissatisfaction with hierarchical educational systems and the lack of opportunities for students; Janiece felt her leadership skills were not respected; Shalelia hit the end of the road while teaching; Chris felt their role in social work was oppressive; and Nth wanted to work more with humans than as a chemical engineer.

All SEGA participants collaborated with a value-aligned social community: Kris worked with co-founders and other worker-led cooperatives to develop YbY as a teacher-led cooperative; Janiece hired a cadre of BIPOC employees all committed to centering race at YAASPA; Shalelia networked through business accelerators and cohort programs with equity-minded education entrepreneurs; Chris developed a podcast following and hosts study groups to further the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016); and Nth and ET founded multiple groups of brilliant neurodivergent people who can have civil conversations with one another to foster communities that work together to solve problems creatively.

All SEGA participants demonstrated creativity in the development of their social enterprises: Kris co-founded YbY and continues to create marketing materials and partnerships; Janiece co-founded YAASPA and continues to create curriculum and manuals to guide YAASPA's work; Shalelia founded SCDEP and continues to create and

refine its curriculum, professional development for educators, and MGRS to foster the gifted identification of BIPOC students; Chris founded the DC and continuously creates writings, podcasts, presentations, and courses to share the theory with others; and Nth co-founded ET and continues to create innovative ways to support genius entrepreneurs and their social enterprises.

As meaningful as these examples are, one of the most important parts of the positive disintegration of these SEGA participants is that they all demonstrated third factor drive and inner commitment and motivation to produce their ideal social enterprises—anyone can have an idea, but not everyone does it, and these SEGA all took actions to manifest their vision of ideal social enterprises.

All SEGA participants exemplified multiple aspects of the secondary integration of their career ideal in alignment with the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).

Positive disintegration, and the achievement of secondary integration regarding their career ideals, was a critical component in the career development of each SEGA participant.

### ***Summary of SEGA's Career Development***

The career development of SEGA participants can be represented by several metaphors: *two ships passing in the night*, *hitting the end of the road*, *a seahorse*, *a mountain*, and *blooming season*. Three themes were detailed: (1) past experiences, (2) development of business acumen, and (3) positive career disintegration resulting in secondary integration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016) of a career ideal.



### **RQ3a: SEGA's Supports for Career Development**

In addition to their social entrepreneurship orientation, SEGA participants shared five important themes about their supports for career development: (1) creativity, (2) use of technology, (3) self-education develops self-efficacy, (4) affirming feedback, and (5) collaboration with colleagues.

#### ***Social Entrepreneurship Orientation***

SEGA participants reported multiple aspects of social entrepreneurship orientation on SEOS (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018) as part of the recruitment survey. See Table F6 for SEGA participants' responses to SEOS. SEOS has 21 items grouped into five aspects of social entrepreneurship orientation: social mission, proactiveness, innovativeness, risk management, and effectual.

Kris responded, "strongly agree" to 19 items; Janiece to 13 items; Shalelia to 12 items; Chris to 10 items; and Nth to nine items. Nth also responded "neither" to seven items.

All five SEGA responded, "strongly agree" to three SEOS items: (S3) We are deeply committed to creating social value; (I1) We look for new ways of delivering social outcomes; and (E2) In designing new services, we see the value in partnering with clients/beneficiaries. These items align with a theme of creativity and demonstrate how SEGA are committed to creating shared social value and outcomes for their clients.

Four out of five SEGA responded, "strongly agree" to five SEOS items: (S1) Our philosophy guides everything we do in the organization (Nth: "neither"); (S4) Whatever surplus funds we generate are re-invested toward fulfillment of the mission (Shalelia:

“somewhat agree”); (P2) We consider it important to be ready for future unexpected events (Shalelia: “somewhat agree”); (I2) We look for innovative ways of marketing our services (Chris: “somewhat agree”); and (E3) We believe in shaping our destiny using whatever means at our disposal (Kris: “somewhat agree”).

There were two items where only one person responded, “strongly agree”: (P1) We engage in forecasting to avoid surprises (Nth strongly agreed) and (P3) We engage in financial modeling to prepare for the future (Kris strongly agreed). This could indicate SEGA participants do not engage enough in forecasting and financial modeling to prepare for the future of their organizations. Chris said that they are too busy trying to run their nonprofit: “I wish I could look to the future and forecast our earnings in five years, but I can’t. I’m trying to build this right now, on the ground.” Nth said that a person can never be fully prepared for the future and must sometimes rely on intuition.

Generally, the SEGA participants demonstrated strong social entrepreneurship orientations per SEOS (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018), which supported their career development in social entrepreneurship.

### ***Theme 1: Creativity***

All SEGA participants report being creative, using their creativity to develop their novel organizations, using their creativity to develop products such as programs and marketing materials, and nurturing the creativity of others. On KAGS (Ksiazak, 2010), both Janiece and Nth said that others would “always” describe them as creative, while Shalelia indicated “almost always.” Janiece detailed her giftedness by saying, “I create,”

and “I innovate.” On SEOS (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018), all five SEGA participants strongly agreed that they are deeply committed to creating social value.

Kris wanted to create an equitable and sustainable system that would formulate innovative social values incorporating humanizing and holistic approaches. YbY helps preschool students create, ideate, innovate, and imagine. Janiece created her organization YAASPA and its curriculum, which works to, among other things, develop the “creative genius” of youth. Shalelia is proud of her creativity and how she was “sneakily” creative in teaching gifted BIPOC students advanced coursework before she created her own nonprofit, SCDEP, and she appreciates her creative strategies to earn revenue for her organization. Chris worked to create their own path and an organization from scratch and creates resources about the theory as a writer and podcaster. Nth said creativity is his sport of choice, and he creates different ways of doing things. Nth also created ET, an organization that serves as a business incubator for social entrepreneurs who are creative thinkers.

The creative tendencies of SEGA participants indicate their ability for positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016). Creative ability is an important individual person input of each SEGA participant because it helps these gifted adults create something new and novel that positively contributes to society (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Csikszentmihalyi, 2007; Lent et al., 1994; Renzulli & Reis, 2020; Schneider, 2016).

Creativity was an essential support for the career development of each participant, for the creation of their social enterprises, and for their work toward their missions while nurturing the creativity of others.

### ***Theme 2: Use of Technology***

All five SEGA participants reported using technology resources and AI to help support their daily work. Kris mentioned using social media, donation websites, and that YbY is “ideating ways to leverage AI for curriculum development and planning.” Janiece, Shalelia, Chris, and Nth all use AI tools to support their work. Chris added, “How can you not? How would I do podcast transcripts without AI and tech?”

Technology supports for business development are a vastly important resource that the SEGA participants are all heavily exploring. They readily learn, try out, and refine their technology skills which helps them create and communicate with others.

Each SEGA participant described their use of technology as helpful and necessary for augmenting their individual abilities and better achieving the goals of their social enterprises.

### ***Theme 3: Self-Education Develops Self-Efficacy***

Self-efficacy is the belief that a person’s abilities can enable them to complete tasks in support of their goals (Bandura, 1997; Lent et al., 1994). SEGA participants each reported high levels of self-efficacy or the development of self-efficacy in ways that supported their ongoing career development.

Kris has a professional background that made him feel efficacious as an educator, but when co-founding YbY, he worked to “tap in and leverage that community cultural wealth” and networked with like-minded school leaders to build his business skills and confidence.

Janiece took business trainings to build her own efficacy in navigating the ecosystem of nonprofits and seeks spiritual wisdom through prayer that helps her make business decisions. Janiece is a Black race scholar activist who is confident in the ways YAASPA centers race to develop youth, though she tires of having to prove her efficacy to others as a person of color.

Shalelia is proud of herself and her geeky, gifted brain and trusts herself to create and produce social value. Shalelia lacked self-efficacy regarding being a new nonprofit business owner and sought business accelerator programs to develop her efficacy.

Chris feels efficacious as an expert in the theory and their ability to communicate about the theory and their lived experience with others. They developed their self-efficacy by researching the theory and taking a course in gifted psychology from InterGifted (2024). Learning how to run a business, however, has been challenging for Chris, and they have experienced a real learning curve while on the job.

Nth expressed self-efficacy in being able to create, ideate, collaborate, and consult to support incubating entrepreneurs. Nth has a strong belief in the value of his creative ideas, but less self-efficacy in convincing others of the value of his ideas in a timely manner.

Self-efficacy is a critical component of SCCT that is fostered by learning experiences and impacts outcome expectations, interests, goals, and actions (Bandura, 1997; Lent et al., 1994).

The self-efficacy of all five SEGA participants is a strong support for their career development and success in developing and sustaining their social enterprises.

#### ***Theme 4: Affirming Feedback***

All five SEGA discussed the importance of feedback in helping them to know they are reaching their goals or ways they can improve their operations. Kris and YbY conduct frequent community listening activities and students do daily photo voice projects on tablets to capture what they are learning. Janiece discussed talking with students to ensure YAASPA's work is operationalized with integrity and meeting with her whole team three times a year to ensure organizational mission alignment. Shalelia discussed collecting qualitative and quantitative feedback to share with partners, surveying students, and her experience amid a program evaluation. Chris does not formally solicit feedback yet but gets it in the form of audience gratitude for their work through the DC. Nth is receptive to feedback, but limits who he asks—many people share opinions they do not care much about, so ET focuses its adjustments based on need rather than opinion.

Affirming feedback is a learning experience that reinforces that the work SEGA are producing is meaningful to stakeholders and develops their self-efficacy and sustaining motivation (Lent et al., 1994) to help them maintain awareness about the outcomes their audiences experience through their organizations.

Positive feedback is an extremely important support for the CD of SEGA—without it, they might shift goals or quit altogether, but with it, they know their value is being shared with purpose and integrity.

### ***Theme 5: Collaboration with Colleagues***

Social entrepreneurs who care about the social good and making positive social impact care about and want to work with other people. The SEGA participants all discussed the importance of collaborating with colleagues, including role models, mentors, co-founders, employees, and a supportive community. These colleagues supported their career development, often by providing feedback or inspiration.

**Role Models.** Kris's role models are the teachers, parents, and students he works with; Janiece's role models are her parents; Shalelia's role models are other equity-minded educational social entrepreneurs from a cohort program; and Chris's role model is Jennifer Harvey Sallin, founder of InterGifted (2024). These role models inspired and motivated SEGA to start and continue doing their social missions. Nth had inspirational role models but did not collaborate with the fictitious Professor X from X-Men comics (Lee & Kirby, 1963), Henri Landwirth, or Marilyn vos Savant.

**Mentors.** Kris described collaborating with like-minded organization leaders, community members, and co-founders as he developed YbY's teacher-led cooperative; Janiece found mentorship in CME and has mentors that ask about the CEO activities she has completed each week; Shalelia mentioned collaborating with mentors and experts she met through accelerator programs and a cohort fellowship program; and Chris referenced two life-changing mentors, Frank Falk and Michael M. Piechowski and shared a desire to have found mentors sooner in life. Nth did not name a specific mentor. Additionally, Janiece and Shalelia develop mentors, often from students who have gone through their programs, and then work with current students.

**Co-Founders.** Shalelia and Chris are the sole founders of their organizations, while Kris, Janiece, and Nth all started social enterprises in collaboration with co-founders, though Janiece and Nth are the primary co-founders of their organizations. Nth considers the members of ET's communities to be the other co-founders of ET.

**Employees.** Kris shared how the YbY teachers inspire him and the importance of hiring mission-aligned employees; Janiece discussed the importance of being able to build capital to hire employees and mentors for students; Shalelia described growing SCDEP's capacity by hiring a mentor supervisor, education coordinator, and student mentors; Chris lamented a lack of funding preventing them from hiring a substantial employee beyond some gig social media and website design contractors; and Nth described how ET's robust and growing team of employees is trustworthy and does great work to fulfill ET's mission. Additionally, Kris, Shalelia, Janiece, Chris, and Nth remarked on their supportive boards of directors, with Kris, Janiece, and Nth also mentioning the diversity of their boards.

**Community.** Kris talked about collaborating with community leaders who aligned with social justice, partnering with community organizations, and developing community volunteers and employees. Janiece mentioned YAASPA's goal of developing students who will stay and work to improve their local communities. Shalelia talked about the community she found in accelerator and cohort programs, and her desire to support the BIPOC community in Denver and beyond. Chris talked about finding community within InterGifted and developing a growing community of followers. Nth discussed ET's original and ongoing mission to gather a community of gifted,



neurodivergent, brilliant minds who can have civil discussions and solve hard problems; the importance of networking; and how ET connects its communities with opportunities and resources.

**Summary of Collaboration with Colleagues.** Colleagues are an important aspect of SEGA participants' career development. Colleagues affected how they decided to become entrepreneurs, how they developed business skills, who they work with, who they work for, and the people who keep their work going. Colleagues exist in the micro- and mesosystems of social entrepreneurs (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). SEGA participants choose colleagues and social environments congruent with their values in alignment with advanced development (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).

Collaboration with colleagues such as role models, mentors, co-founders, employees, and community members is a very beneficial support for the career development of SEGA.

### **RQ3b: SEGA's Barriers to Career Development**

SEGA participants had three large barriers to their career development: (1) funding challenges, (2) racialized barriers, and (3) some don't get it.

#### ***Theme 1: Funding Challenges***

Funding challenges are the largest barrier for Chris, the founder of the two-year-old DC nonprofit, because they have not yet sustained success finding committed donors to allow them to hire and grow a team. Kris, Janiece, and Shalelia have reached sustained levels of funding that help them continuously pay employees and provide educational services to students and youth through grants and donations. Kris shared about barriers to

accessing state early childhood funding for YbY because of requirements that the mobile preschool cannot satisfy—for example, they need to be within 200 feet of a bathroom, but they are 300 feet away. Funding for educational programs requires ongoing grant work and marketing, and Shalelia mentioned difficulties getting nonprofit funding as a Black woman. Shalelia also has SCDEP Equity Consulting, an LLC that enables the selling of extra services to generate more revenue. Nth stands somewhat in contrast with the other SEGA participants for this theme. Nth is extremely aware that funding challenges exist and has focused ET on acquiring more funding for social enterprises, particularly for entrepreneurs from marginalized communities. However, as Nth is a Black male-presenting individual from the LGBT community, he has successfully accessed the funding available for his unique intersectional identity. Nth also shared about the strategy of having specifically White males represent ET's business meetings sometimes to help them access more funding with less friction.

Funding and revenue challenges are persistent for all enterprises, particularly new enterprises and social enterprises that focus more on the social good rather than generating profit. While each SEGA participant needs income to fund their work and their growing organizations, they also desire to provide affordable services to those who need them. Income can be subsidized with the support of gifts, grants, and donations; however, it is risky to rely solely on grants when funds and priorities can change with little warning or recourse.

Funding challenges are a significant barrier that all SEGA must continuously and creatively strive to overcome so they can maintain a sustainable enterprise that focuses on social good.

### ***Theme 2: Racialized Barriers***

Most SEGA participants reported racialized barriers that challenged their career development and required navigation. Chris, a White nonbinary person, did not discuss any racialized barriers during this research study and shared they do not think about how their race is a burden or a support to their work. Kris described that as a White male, he does not look like the populations YbY serves, so sometimes he is viewed as a gatekeeper with access to more resources than the typical YbY community. However, he pointed out that YbY is not a “White savior” endeavor and has culturally and linguistically diverse employees and board members who represent the demographic of YbY.

Unsurprisingly, as this study is set in the United States, the Black and multiracial SEGA participants—Janeice, Shalelia, and Nth—all reported racialized barriers that made their career development more challenging. Janeice discussed expanding the focus of YAASPA beyond “African Americans” to “Aspiring Americans” with a focus on BIPOC students because funders and partners acted as though what Janeice was doing “was not sufficient, essentially ragging that we aren’t worthy, supposedly, of an organization that just focuses on us.” Shalelia and Nth both talked about the disproportionate funding received by Black women entrepreneurs. Nth secured funding for Black women entrepreneurs through ET’s grant writing, but only with moderate success.

SEGA participants' reporting of racialized barriers was generally along racial lines. This barrier relates to a disconnect in historical and ongoing macrosystem values that inhibits access to career supports such as funding for Black social entrepreneurs (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; CTERN, 2022).

Racialized barriers are a negative, harmful struggle for diverse social entrepreneurs, and continued navigation of racialized barriers is a testament to the perseverance and determination of SEGA participants and their commitment to positively benefit communities of color.

### ***Theme 3: Some Don't Get It***

SEGA participants described their innovative social enterprises whose missions are not always understood by others because some don't get it. Kris described how he and his co-founder kept submitting a charter application that was repeatedly rejected by school districts who did not value YbY's teacher-led cooperative model. Janiece discussed challenges with school partners that did not value YAASPA's focus on exclusively Black students or BIPOC students and thought YAASPA students should participate in performative service rather than authentic activism. Chris talked about the daunting mountain ahead of changing the mental health field to better incorporate aspects of the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016) by educating mental health professionals. Shalelia discussed the disconnect she has with school partners and funders who must be educated about the value of supporting gifted students, BIPOC students, and specifically gifted BIPOC students—which Shalelia does through SCDEP as she makes constant efforts to garner “support for a mission that people wouldn't even

think they would need to support.” Nth described gatekeepers at grant organizations that did not value ET’s creativity in pricing and gatekeepers at philanthropic or investment firms that fail to invest in marginalized communities, particularly Black women entrepreneurs, and neurodivergent gifted entrepreneurs.

SEGA participants have created novel social enterprises that address specific social issues in their microsystems. So, it is unsurprising that some people, including potential partners and funders from the exosystem, do not fully understand the mission of SEGA or the work they do and require learning experiences to expand their perceived outcome expectations for SEGA (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lent et al., 1994).

If people do not understand the value of a SEGA’s social enterprise but are willing and able to learn more about their work and mission—that is neutral and an opportunity for SEGA. If people resist supporting social initiatives even after being informed about the need of a community and the positive impacts of a social enterprise—that potentially harms SEGA.

### ***Summary of Career Development Supports and Barriers***

SEGA participants’ supports for career development included creativity, use of technology, self-education that develops self-efficacy, affirming feedback, and collaboration with colleagues. SEGA participants’ barriers to career development included funding challenges, racialized barriers, and that some don’t get it.

### **RQ4: SEGA’s Shared Social Value**

This section summarizes the shared social value produced by SEGA participants through descriptions of their social enterprises, provides an overview of observations, and

explains three themes: (1) meaningful outcomes, (2) creating jobs doing social good, and (3) helping others to transform the world.

### ***SEGA's Social Enterprises***

SEGA participants have each founded or co-founded social enterprises with the primary mission of supporting others, and they all share an SDG (United Nations, 2015) of reducing inequalities. All five SEGA responded, “strongly agree” to the following SEOS items (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018): (S3) We are deeply committed to creating social value, and (I1) We look for new ways of delivering social outcomes.

Kris is the co-founder of YbY, a mobile preschool providing education, in partnership with the Aurora Housing Authority, for children from families who live in lower income housing communities. YbY works to accomplish seven SDGs (United Nations, 2015): no poverty; zero hunger; good health and well-being; quality education; gender equality; reduced inequalities; and peace, justice, and strong institutions.

Janiece co-founded YAASPA, a program dedicated to developing civic-minded BIPOC students through social and political activism. YAASPA works to accomplish seven SDGs (United Nations, 2015): no poverty; good health and well-being; decent work and economic growth; industry, innovation, and infrastructure; reduced inequalities; sustainable cities and communities; and peace, justice, and strong institutions.

Shalelia founded SCDEP, which provides educational programming to help gifted BIPOC students complete advanced coursework through positive racial identity development and gifted identification. SCDEP works to accomplish two SDGs (United Nations, 2015): quality education, and reduced inequalities.

Chris is the founder of the DC, an organization that fosters Dąbrowski's (1964/2016) theory of positive disintegration to support the healthy development of individuals and to expand the understanding of mental health professionals. The DC works to accomplish three SDGs (United Nations, 2015): good health and well-being; reduced inequalities; and peace, justice, and strong institutions.

Nth is the co-founder of ET, an organization that nurtures diverse communities of brilliant neurodivergent people and works as a business incubator developing the social enterprises of genius entrepreneurs, with a large focus on grant writing services to help social entrepreneurs access funding. ET works to accomplish eight SDGs (United Nations, 2015): no poverty; quality education; affordable and clean energy; decent work and economic growth; industry, innovation, and infrastructure; reduced inequalities; sustainable cities and communities; and climate action.

All SEGA participants have developed social enterprises committed to making shared social value in innovative ways and reported that their missions align with two or more SDGs (United Nations, 2015).

The commitment to creating social value is necessary and indicative of SEGA being social entrepreneurs rather than typical entrepreneurs who are primarily profit-driven.

### ***SEGA's Observations***

Observations of each SEGA participant at work were conducted to deepen understanding of their shared social value. Kris was observed working on-site at the YbY preschool program where he participated as a substitute teaching assistant and at an

online leadership meeting where the YbY team discussed curricula and goals. Janiece was observed at a meeting with a program evaluator, and they discussed their goals and the data they wanted to capture to assess the effectiveness of YAASPA. Shalelia was observed at a board meeting where she discussed the next steps for SCDEP including their expansion, hiring concerns, and funding goals. Chris was observed leading a positive disintegration study group with group members who pay to participate. Chris guided a group discussion about a reading on the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016). Nth was observed leading a board meeting where he reported on hiring updates, pending business, and innovative ideas for new social impact.

These observations helped reveal aspects of the intended, operationalized, and received (Uhrmacher et al., 2017) career outputs of the SEGA participants and their social enterprises in alignment with the curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs.

Observing social entrepreneurs in their day-to-day work allowed each entrepreneur to demonstrate how they shared social value with others.

### ***Theme 1: Meaningful Outcomes***

All five SEGA participants produce meaningful outcomes through their social enterprises for the people they serve. Kris and YbY deliver humanizing pedagogy for preschool students. Janiece and YAASPA help actualize youth into civic-minded political and social activists. Shalelia and SCDEP provide opportunities and meaningful curriculum to gifted BIPOC students. Chris and the DC help people recognize and process through their own positive disintegration and also help professionals to better work with people going through disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016). Nth and ET



foster community and support the business development of start-ups, particularly founded by marginalized entrepreneurs.

Each entrepreneur works within their microsystem to produce meaningful outcomes that transform their audience toward the better (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Producing meaningful outcomes is a very important way that SEGA create social value for others.

### ***Theme 2: Creating Jobs Doing Social Good***

All five SEGA participants create jobs that give others the opportunity to do social good. Kris has recruited volunteers from the community, and developed them into licensed early childhood professionals who are now employees in the teacher-led cooperative of YbY. Janiece's entire board and staff are BIPOC who work to center race and develop YAASPA youth. Janiece also has former students who return to seek internships or the opportunity to become mentors. Shalelia talked about the importance of hiring staff and how that staff helped expand SCDEP's capacity to offer more services to more students and schools. Shalelia also has paid mentors, often graduates from her program, who support current students. Nth has a strong, diverse board and team of people who are committed to supporting gifted neurodivergence and incubating social entrepreneurs and their enterprises. Chris, however, does not have the funding to pay employees beyond occasional contractor work, though they have a robust team of dedicated volunteers who enjoy spending their time working with and sharing the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).

People, including morally sensitive gifted people, may find more peace and satisfaction working in a place that helps, rather than harms, others (Rinn, 2020). Social enterprises that create jobs grant opportunities to others to join a microsystem of people working on accomplishing social good (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Having a good job where you do good and feel good about the work you do is elusive and meaningful to employees. However, such jobs must also provide a living—ideally thriving—wage, or the work will be unsustainable.

SEGA participants contribute an important social value to communities by creating jobs for others who can also work toward the social enterprises' missions.

### ***Theme 3: Helping Others to Transform the World***

All five SEGA have a social enterprise committed to helping others transform the world. While their work may not explicitly address the whole world, the ripple impacts of their work have the potential to transcend beyond their microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Kris and the YbY team partner with communities to provide a humanizing STEM preschool program to students and help students and educators share ownership in their communities. Janeice and YAASPA work to develop BIPOC youth into social and political activists who are civic-minded, who pursue social careers, and who will, YAASPA hopes, stay and work to further develop their mesosystem of local communities. Shalelia works to develop gifted BIPOC students to help them recognize their gifts, access advanced learning opportunities, and enroll in college to positively impact their whole lives and beyond. Chris and the DC work to share the theory of

positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016) to help the personality development of individuals and to inform mental health professionals to shift the medical model away from perceiving mental growth as illness. While Kris, Janiece, Shalelia, and Chris may support someone who later does good in the world or becomes a social entrepreneur, Nth and ET are atypical in that they explicitly help social entrepreneurs develop strong and sustainable enterprises with a variety of social missions, making the distance to positive global impacts even shorter.

Each SEGA participant works to improve the circumstances within their microsystems with the potential for positive ripples throughout their entire ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In alignment with the curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs, SEGA's career output arcs further develop their students and clients so they may continue to positively transform our society.

We all deserve a world that is ever-better with more education, support, humanity, and love. Helping others to transform the world is one of the greatest social values created by the SEGA participants and all social entrepreneurs.

### ***Summary of SEGA's Shared Social Value***

SEGA participants create and share social value in many ways including generating meaningful outcomes, creating jobs doing social good, and helping others to transform the world.

### **Closing SEGA Vignette**

The SEGA participants and I could talk all day, but I wanted to honor our time and promptly end the meeting. As the focus group drew to a close, I asked the SEGA participants a final question: “How was your experience as a participant in this study?”

Nth replied, “I’m really glad we did this. It’s a great endeavor and I’d love to see what the follow-up is.”

Janiece shared her experience in this study was “awesome” and “engaging.” She added, “Thank you for making this life-giving and a super-dope reflective space. It’s a great way to start the day. Looking forward to your defense!”

Shalelia chimed in, “Y’all are great, this is a great way to start the day off. ... It’s always great to be around social entrepreneurs who are gifted!”

Kris said, “It’s incredible to be in the presence of all of you and to hear what you all are doing. Sometimes, I feel like we work in isolation, like nobody else can empathize with our journey, so it’s really inspiring.”

Chris responded, “I’m so excited about what all of you are doing and just so honored to be here. Thank you so much. I can’t wait to call you Dr. Lin, Joi!”

I laughed, “Or Dr. Joi Lin!” I thanked each participant for their time—because I could not have accomplished this without each of the five participants. I close with, “Farewell everyone! Have a great day and continue doing great work!”

### **Summary of SEGA’s Cross-Case Study**

The five SEGA participants had several points of commonality across their individual cases. SEGA participants self-reported many characteristics of giftedness with

themes of varied definitions of giftedness, varied use of terminology, and a strong concern for morality and social justice. The career development of the SEGA participants was heavily impacted by past experiences, the development of business acumen, and secondary integration of career ideals. Supports for the career development of SEGA participants included creativity, the use of technology, self-education that developed self-efficacy, affirming feedback, and collaboration with important colleagues. Barriers to the career development of SEGA participants included funding challenges, racialized barriers (particularly for the SEGA participants who identified as Black), and the struggle to work with some who just don't get it. The most critical aspects of shared social value that SEGA participants demonstrate are making meaningful outcomes, creating jobs that do social good, and helping others to transform the world.

### **Summary of Findings**

Chapter 4 shared the findings of this dissertation, organized as a collective case study and utilizing DIET strategies (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2006; Uhrmacher et al., 2017), with an individual case study on each SEGA participant and a cross-case study of all five SEGA participants with synthesized themes.

Next, Chapter 5 concludes this dissertation with a summary of findings aligned to RQs and theoretical frameworks followed by discussion of implications and recommendations for the practice and policy of gifted adults and the fields of education, business, and psychology.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

This chapter discusses this collective case study examining the CD of SEGA using CC&C (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Eisner, 2017; Stake, 2006; Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

### **Overview of Research Study**

The purpose of this study was to produce a critique of the career development experiences, supports, and barriers of SEGA and the shared social value they create.

The overarching RQ this study explored is: How have gifted adults become social entrepreneurs? Four RQs were explored to investigate this question: (RQ1) How do social entrepreneurs self-report their characteristics of giftedness? (RQ2) How do SEGA describe their career development? (RQ3) What supports and barriers impact the career development of SEGA? (RQ4) How do SEGA create shared social value?

This study was framed with interpretive, conceptual, and methodological theoretical frameworks. There were four interpretive frameworks: centering equity in career and technical education research (CTERN, 2022); a social constructivist frame (Creswell & Poth, 2018); a transformative frame (Creswell & Poth, 2018); and GiftedCrit (Greene, 2017). There were four conceptual frameworks: the ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979); theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016); SCCT (Lent et al., 1994); and my conceptual model of the curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs, which built upon the instructional arc (Uhrmacher et al.,

2017). The primary methodological framework for this study was a collective case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2006) using methodologies from educational C&C (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017), and CC&C.

Five SEGA participants were purposefully selected (Creswell & Poth, 2018) from a recruitment survey. They each completed two 45-minute interviews, an observation, and a focus group, and each shared artifacts about their giftedness or career development. Transcripts were annotated, cleaned, and coded to generate themes.

Findings were organized as a collective case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2006) with one case study per participant and a cross-case study. Each case study had an opening and closing vignette, described the SEGA's background, and shared responses for each RQ organized into themes that incorporated the DIET process (Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

### **Organization of Discussion**

This chapter is organized into discussions of the following: research question themes, theoretical frameworks, implications and recommendations for practice and policy, the research process, and areas for future research.

### **Research Question Themes**

How have gifted adults become social entrepreneurs? To understand this question, four sub questions were explored. The case studies and cross-case study in Chapter 4 detail each participants' responses organized thematically by RQ using the DIET process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2006; Uhrmacher et al., 2017). In this section, general themes that answer each RQ are reviewed.

### **RQ1: How do social entrepreneurs self-report their characteristics of giftedness?**

This section describes themes about the self-reported characteristics of giftedness for each SEGA participant and from the cross-case study. Kristopher said he is “probably” gifted and shared themes of a growing certainty of giftedness, lifelong love of learning, intense empathy, distracting anxiety, and concern about social issues. Janiece said she is “probably” gifted and mentioned themes of a myriad of manifestations, frustration and boredom at school, and external attributions of giftedness. Shalelia said she is “absolutely” gifted with themes of nurtured gifted pride and traumatic access to educational opportunities. Chris said they are “absolutely” gifted and discussed themes of emotional intensity, mediocre experience with education, and learning about neurodivergence. Nth said he is “absolutely” gifted and shared themes of critical teacher advocacy, self-education, and use of neurodivergent terminology.

Cross-case themes included varied definitions of giftedness, varied use of terminology, and a pervasive concern for morality and social justice. On KAGS (Ksiazak, 2010), all five SEGA participants said they “always” are an independent thinker, prioritize continuous learning, and are very concerned about global and social issues. The most consistent self-reported characteristic of giftedness is that all SEGA participants are concerned with morality and social justice.

### **RQ2: How do SEGA describe their career development?**

SEGA described their career development in a variety of ways. Kris highlighted the importance of value-aligned partnerships and a process of prototyping, pivoting, and persevering. Janiece discussed juggling multiple roles for economic stability and the



burden of other-mothering. Shalelia talked about critical learning experiences and her accelerated development of business acumen. Chris shared they were a late bloomer who meandered through career crises and now apply their passions in the work they do. Nth mentioned how easy things would be if he could only be a worker bee, his process of trial and error, and continued learnings.

Across the cases, career development themes of all SEGA participants included the importance of past experiences, the development of business acumen, and secondary integration of a career ideal.

### **RQ3: What supports and barriers impact the career development of SEGA?**

SEGA participants shared several supports for and barriers to their career development.

#### ***RQ3a: Supports***

Supports positively impacted the career development of SEGA participants and are organized into themes. Kris built YbY as a collective endeavor and used critical holistic education resources. Janiece's learning experiences in service to another nascent organization developed her business acumen and she received support from the appreciation of YAASPA students. Community supports, self-efficacy fueled by giftedness, and being able to build capacity by hiring employees are critical supports for Shalelia's career development. Meaningful mentorship and hyperfocused interest on their work helped Chris support their career development. Nth's supports include beneficial intersectionality, networking, a strong team, and innovation supported by AI.

Cross-case themes regarding supports for the career development of social entrepreneurs included creativity, use of technology, self-education that develops self-efficacy, affirming feedback, and collaboration with colleagues including role models, mentors, co-founders, employees, and their communities. All five SEGA participants strongly agreed with three SEOS (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018) items indicating they have a deep commitment to making social value, they look for new ways to deliver social outcomes, and they see value in partnering with stakeholders when developing new services.

***RQ3b: Barriers***

Barriers to career development for SEGA participants either prevented them from obtaining their goals or were challenges that SEGA had to navigate. Kris described systemic barriers, difficulty with value-aligned hiring, and having to navigate service beyond his racial identity. Janiece explained dealing with cringey trainings and racial battle fatigue with resilience. Shalelia commented on the difficulty of creating her own lane, acquiring funding as a Black woman entrepreneur, and having to educate deficit-based funders. Chris mentioned two large barriers—sustainable funding and need for business capacity development. Nth's barriers included the cost of education, gatekeepers, and intersectional barriers.

Though phrased as barriers, these barriers were more so obstacles or hurdles that SEGA had to navigate in order to succeed with their social enterprises. Counterfactual thinking leads me to wonder what might have happened to the career development trajectories of SEGA had any one of these barriers proven insurmountable. Though

Shalelia does not fundraise enough, if she did not fundraise at all, would SCDEP have been able to exist? If Nth had not been able to move around gatekeepers, would Elysian Trust exist or be successful?

Themes about barriers from the cross-case study were funding challenges, racialized barriers, and that some don't get the work the SEGA are doing.

#### **RQ4: How do SEGA create shared social value?**

Each SEGA participant has their own social value, but they specifically create and share social value through their social enterprises, which align with several themes. Kris creates shared value through YbY's cooperative governance, community development, and transformative preschool. Janiece creates shared value through YAASPA and has developed a space that centers race, transforms youth activists, ensures students are both seen and heard, and nurtures thriving communities. Shalelia's shared value is created through SCDEP, which focuses on nurturing gifted BIPOC students, involving the community, and sharing their impact with funders and partners. Chris described their shared social values expressed primarily through the DC of a growing community, a grateful audience, and efforts to reframe mental illness. Nth works through the ET to generate shared social value in the following ways: developing diverse, brilliant communities; providing business supports as a genius incubator; successfully acquiring funding through grant writing; and striving to make the world a better place.

Three large themes from the cross-case study are that SEGA participants produce meaningful outcomes, create jobs doing social good, and help others to transform the world.

## **How have gifted adults become social entrepreneurs?**

Several themes are synthesized to answer the overarching RQ explaining how gifted adults become social entrepreneurs:

- (1) Learning about their gifted neurodivergence positively develops self-awareness.
- (2) Self-awareness and curiosity impact self-education, which influences self-efficacy.
- (3) Frustration with work experiences spurs positive disintegration of career paths.
- (4) Intellectual knowledge and creativity help innovate a career for social good.
- (5) A strong value system and career supports help to develop a career ideal.
- (6) Business acumen and partnerships are necessary to build a sustainable enterprise.
- (7) A collaborative network provides inspiration, encouragement, and guidance.
- (8) Investments by others help form, grow, and sustain social enterprises.
- (9) Feedback helps social entrepreneurs understand their impact and refine their work.

These themes explain how SEGA, specifically the five SEGA participants from this study, have become social entrepreneurs.

## **Theoretical Frameworks Discussion**

For this study, my lens as connoisseur and critic of the CD of SEGA was influenced by several interpretative, conceptual, and methodological frames.

## **Interpretive Frameworks**

Four interpretive frameworks influenced my connoisseurship and criticism of the CD of SEGA for this study: centering equity in CTE research, social constructivism, transformative frameworks, and GiftedCrit (Creswell & Poth, 2018; CTERN, 2022; Greene, 2017).

### ***Centering Equity in Career and Technical Education Research***

This study upheld its goal to center equity in CTE research (CTERN, 2022) by describing a transparent research project process, collecting participant feedback throughout the research study per the design, recruiting a diverse sample of participants to participate in CC&C, reflecting on historical issues of inequity within vocational education, sharing the burden of participation and compensation of participation equally amongst participants, and reporting findings with a strengths-based perspective.

### ***Social Constructivism***

As a social constructivist (Creswell & Poth, 2018), I constructed knowledge about the CD of SEGA through social interactions with participants. I relied on participant perspectives and worked to develop nuanced views of participants through our process of CC&C.

### ***Transformative Frameworks***

Through a transformative interpretive framework (Creswell & Poth, 2018), I recognize that SEGA participants' experiences are not neutral and rather reflect "power and social relationships within society" (p. 25). The recommendations in this chapter are

organized to positively impact SEGA, future SEGA, and SEGA from marginalized communities with a goal of bettering society.

### ***GiftedCrit***

The lens of GiftedCrit helped me interpret career experiences to learn how a diverse group of gifted adults became social entrepreneurs amidst differences in race and gender. (This group all identified as coming from similar lower-socioeconomic classes.)

Race seems to have the largest impact on the struggles faced by SEGA participants. The Black SEGA participants are very aware of and motivated to address historical injustice and lack of access to education and career opportunity. Janiece and Shalelia both focus on supporting BIPOC students. Kris is very aware that his whiteness is not shared with most of the community YbY serves and explains YbY's intentional diversity of employees who represent the communities they serve. Chris mentioned they were "White and European," said anti-racism resonated with them, and then did not mention race again. Nth is aware of the different needs and outcomes of marginalized communities and works with people from diverse race, class, and gender backgrounds who almost all demonstrate gifted neurodiversity.

Gender differences were discussed by several SEGA participants. Beyond Kris identifying as a cis-gendered male and Chris identifying as nonbinary, neither discussed their gender further. Janiece discussed the burden of other-mothering and Shalelia and Nth mentioned difficulties obtaining funding for Black women entrepreneurs. However, Nth also shared that his intersectional identity—as a Black intersex and male-presenting person and members of the LGBT community—was of benefit in acquiring funding.

Access to gifted education varied across participants, with Kris not receiving identification or services, Janiece skipping second grade and then being detracked in middle school, Shalelia receiving gifted services, Chris receiving gifted services before being kicked out of a private high school, and Nth being placed in remedial courses until a teacher advocate changed his life in high school.

GiftedCrit provided a useful lens to understand how the intersectionality of each SEGA participant influenced their career development.

### **Conceptual Frameworks**

Four conceptual frameworks structured this study: the ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016), SCCT (Lent et al., 1994); and my curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs, which built upon Uhrmacher et al.'s (2017) instructional arc and aspects of the ecological model and SCCT.

#### ***Ecological Model of Human Development***

Each participating SEGA works within the microsystem of their social enterprise with an audience of people in their mesosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The study participants engaged in minimal discussion of the exosystem (as they are not participating there), but they made references to other people who have obtained funding or other places where they were unable to gain traction (e.g., Kris and YbY not receiving charter approval by an exosystem of school districts). Kris and Shalelia mentioned shared values in a macrosystem of similar social enterprises that were meaningful to them. Separately, Janiece, Shalelia, and Nth mentioned values embedded throughout the macrosystem of

grant funders that may not value the creative works of SEGA or the microsystems they strive to serve.

While each SEGA was motivated to develop a social enterprise to address needs of the communities within their microsystem, each social enterprise works within a microsystem of people who then have the potential to positively impact the meso-, exo-, and macrosystems of the social entrepreneurs (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The ecological model of human development was beneficial in explaining the radius of impacts that influence SEGA's career development.

### ***Theory of Positive Disintegration***

The theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016) was used to explore the CD of SEGA and aligns with the person inputs (Lent et al., 1994) and creation of shared social value demonstrated by SEGA participants as part of their curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs.

**Overexcitabilities.** This study did not explicitly examine the overexcitabilities of SEGA, but throughout the data collection process, all SEGA participants indicated having several overexcitabilities that are critical for embarking upon the process of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).

All SEGA participants demonstrated intellectual overexcitability: Kris has an “insatiable sense of curiosity;” Janiece multitasked while learning and earning multiple degrees and appreciates nuanced thinking; Shalelia goes “really deep into concepts” and has a strong curiosity; Chris takes in “enormous amounts of information” in their



hyperfocused area of interest; and Nth is, he said, “Always willing to learn. Always eager to learn.”

Three SEGA participants indicated potential emotional overexcitability and their empathetic connections with others: Kris said, “I’m an empath. I feel very deeply. I’m really sensitive to injustice.” He connects with people “through emotion” and can “feel other’s emotions;” Janiece described her “deep understanding and discernment of people” and the importance of developing a “sense of belonging” and “sense of dignity” for YAASPA youth. Chris is an “emotionally gifted person,” who connects with people “heart to heart” and who felt “too emotional” growing up.

Three SEGA participants indicated imaginal overexcitability. Kris is, he said, “constantly thinking about things, about possibilities” and he “just can’t shut [his] mind off” at night. Chris described an “extremely intense experience of imagination compared to other kids.” And Nth talked about his “imaginary world that was really enriched and wonderful,” which protected him from his childhood “because [he] wasn’t mentally there for [it] anyway.” Additionally, Chris, Janiece, Shalelia, and Nth all described having a strong vision for their social enterprises, while Kris described the guiding vision and mission of YbY.

The only mention of possible psychomotor overexcitability was Kris’s statement that he uses “exercise” to help him work around his “severe anxiety.” The closest mentions of sensual overexcitabilities were discussions of Kris’s musical interests, Janiece’s remarks on “artistic wisdom” and “embodied wisdom,” which helps her design spaces to evoke feelings, and Shalelia’s artistic interests and creativity.

**Career Disintegration.** This study did not explicitly investigate the positive disintegration of SEGA or their careers; however, several aspects of positive disintegration around previous careers were mentioned by SEGA participants.

Kris, Janiece, and Nth touched on a unilevel dynamism of feeling inferior to others, as they did not receive consistent gifted education services in childhood. Nth also alluded to experiencing this feeling before he learned business terminology and lingo to gain respect from others.

SEGA participants described several multilevel dynamisms. Chris and Shalelia discussed critical evaluations of their world—Chris felt like they were in an oppressive role as a social worker, and Shalelia expressed frustration with schools that did not appropriately identify and serve gifted BIPOC students. Kris, Janiece, and Chris mentioned their empathy with others. Janiece described emotional self-judgments and dissatisfaction when having YAASPA youth do performative service. All SEGA participants indicated an organized multilevel dynamism around self-education: Janiece, Shalelia, and Nth sought out explicit learning experiences about business education; Kris learned business skills from value-aligned colleagues; and Chris learned everything there is to know about the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016). All SEGA participants described their creative drive, which helped them develop their vision and intended and operationalized career outputs for their social enterprises.

**Secondary Integration of a Career Ideal.** All SEGA participants described creating a career ideal aligned with their values which led to the creation of their social enterprises. Now, they live their career ideals and embody creative drive to perfect their

work and empathy. None demonstrated inner conflict about the work they are currently doing.

The theory of positive disintegration, while typically applied to the understanding of personality development, explains the process of career disintegration and secondary integration of a career ideal for SEGA participants: they disintegrated their past learning experiences, wrestled to develop their career ideals, implemented their social enterprises, and now live in harmony through those enterprises.

### ***Social Cognitive Career Theory***

SEGA's career development experiences, supports, and barriers align with SCCT, which describes relationships of career development built upon social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986; Lent et al., 1994; Lent & Brown, 2019).

Each SEGA has a background context, and all the participants experienced a lower socio-economic status. Each SEGA also has a certain person input in common—all are gifted adults. A person, in relationship with their background, encounters learning experiences. Important learning experiences for SEGA participants included experiences in school, experiences in higher education (all SEGA participants have graduate school experience), experiences in a work situation prior to starting their own social enterprises, and intentional additional education to develop business acumen through accelerators, on-the-job learning, trainings, or networking experiences. These learning experiences influenced the self-efficacy of each SEGA, and learning experiences coupled with self-efficacy inform their outcome expectations—both their expectations for staying in a career and expectations for starting a new social enterprise.

Self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and contextual influences such as mentors and role models all impact the interests, choice goals, and choice actions of SEGA—the areas they are passionate about and the steps they take to develop a social enterprise. Actions, resulting from their interests and goals, influence the SEGA's performance domain and attainments—in this case, SEGA created a social enterprise to address a mission they were interested in positively impacting. The attainments they make iteratively fuel their learning experiences and social cognition of their career decision-making continues.

SCCT explains career development and provided a useful framework for understanding the impacts of varied learning experiences on the career development of SEGA.

### ***Curricular Career Spiral of Social Entrepreneurs***

This study explored the curricular career spiral of social entrepreneurs along three arcs: the career input arc based on Uhrmacher et al.'s (2017) instructional arc, which develops the social entrepreneur; the career output arc of the social entrepreneur encompassing the work of their innovative social enterprise, which transforms their audience; and the transformed society arc that impacts the future—i.e., as the social entrepreneur impacts the audience in their microsystem, the audience then transforms their meso-, exo-, and macrosystem per the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Feedback from the social entrepreneur's career output arc and the transformed society arc become additional learning experiences that loop back into the ongoing career input arc of the social entrepreneur, in alignment with SCCT (Lent et al., 1994). When the social

entrepreneur has an intended innovation, but low self-efficacy when it comes to accomplishing that innovation, they embark on self-education and find new learning experiences to further develop their career input arc so they can operationalize what they intend along their career output arc (Bandura, 1997; Dąbrowski, 1964/2016; Lent et al., 1994).

SEGA participants described their perceptions of the instructional arc (Uhrmacher et al., 2017) that formed their initial career input arc. They did not mention the intended curricula they received (an exception being Nth's statement that schools intend to train worker bees), but they did discuss operationalized experiences in school with varied access to gifted education and educational experiences beyond school. They also described what they received from their career input arcs.

Kris did not receive any gifted education and wondered why his peers were given opportunities that he would have appreciated. Kris learned about languages, other cultures, and social justice issues through, among other avenues, participation in Occupy Denver and other social justice organizations. Janiece received gifted education briefly, but then was detracked in middle school. She learned about racial disparities in school and reported feelings of boredom and frustration in the educational learning environment. Janiece became a race scholar activist and sought learning experiences to develop her business acumen. Shalelia received gifted education throughout school. As a teacher, she learned that gifted BIPOC students were underchallenged, and she grew too frustrated to remain in the profession. Chris received gifted education opportunities but did not learn about their giftedness or ways to emotionally regulate, which delayed their growth. Later,

during graduate school, Chris learned about the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016), which changed their perspective about themselves and their life. Nth did not receive meaningful educational supports until encountering a teacher advocate in high school who saw his abilities and moved him from remedial to advanced coursework. These career input experiences all influenced the development of these gifted adults into social entrepreneurs. As SEGA did not have business skills, they educated themselves to learn more—Kris learned from colleagues, Janiece sought business trainings, Shalelia joined accelerator programs, and Nth learned from textbooks, fellowship programs, and his current MBA program. Chris reported learning as they went but did not explicitly describe how they developed their business acumen—just that business skills are uninteresting.

Each SEGA participant described what they intend and operationalize through their innovative social enterprises. They also described the feedback they get from the transformed audience that receives their career outputs. Kris and YbY intended to develop a humanizing preschool in a teacher-led cooperative that they operationalized. YbY receives positive feedback from parents and community members, and Kris described the transformation of a parent volunteer into a lead teacher in the program. Janiece intended to provide a place that centers race and develops civic-minded BIPOC youth who are social and political activists. She operationalized this goal through YAASPA programs and has received positive feedback from students who understand the mission of YAASPA, are proud of who they are, ask to return as mentors and interns, and share their desires to pursue careers to benefit their communities. Shalelia intended

SCDEP to nurture gifted BIPOC students, and it does so through a variety of programming. Shalelia tracks metrics to determine the impact of SCDEP's programs and receives feedback from students and former students who wish they had experienced SCDEP sooner. Shalelia's former students stay involved with SCDEP, particularly as mentors. Chris intended the DC to be a repository for the theory (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016) to archive work related to the theory and has operationalized the DC's archive and also a podcast, newsletter, and study groups. Chris has received frequent audience gratitude which lets them know their efforts are making a positive impact on the lives of others. Nth's intentions with ET have grown over time—at first, he wanted to develop diverse communities of brilliant people—which ET did. Then, as he received feedback and learned about what those communities needed, he intended ET to become a business incubator for genius entrepreneurs and operationalized several businesses supports, particularly grant writing services. Nth has received positive feedback through entrepreneurs, and good metrics indicate how much ET is earning for their clients.

This research study examined perceptions of SEGA's career input arcs and explored their career output arcs. As the transformed society arc lays beyond the SEGA's microsystem, it is more difficult to see, especially in this study, but future research could further explore what happens to the transformed audience impacted by SEGA's social enterprises.

### **Methodological Frameworks**

Two methodological frameworks provided a scaffold for this study: (1) a collective, or multiple case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2006) and (2) CC&C,

which was built on aspects of educational C&C (Eisner, 2017) and the process of DIET (Uhrmacher et al., 2017).

### ***Collective Case Study***

The literature revealed that HEI often use case studies to help develop students' understanding about social entrepreneurship (Porter & Driver, 2012; Kickul et al., 2015); however, no case studies exist on gifted adults who have become social entrepreneurs. So, this collective case study explored the quintain of SEGA in the bounded case of the United States in 2023 (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2006) to develop our knowledge about the career development experiences, supports, and barriers of SEGA. Chapter 4 was organized into a detailed case study for each SEGA participant and included a cross-case study that synthesizes themes from the quintain (Stake, 2006). This method allowed for the development of detailed profiles for each SEGA participant to inform gifted adults and the fields of education, business, and psychology.

### ***Collaborative Connoisseurship and Criticism***

CC&C is primarily based upon educational C&C (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017). Educational C&C describes the importance of connoisseurship, where a person appreciates the phenomena of interest, in this case the career development experiences of SEGA. Then, the person develops a critique to discuss the phenomena. Uhrmacher et al. (2017) described a DIET process to support the development of a criticism: first, the critic describes a situation; then the critic interprets and evaluates that situation and generates one or more themes about it. While anyone can be a solo-connoisseur and solo-critic, I furthered Miller's (2018) concept of co-connoisseurship to formulate CC&C



where the participants are actively part of both the C&C. This was achieved through SEGA participants sharing their own stories, member checking their case studies, and participating in a collaborative focus group to further C&C themes from this dissertation.

### **Conclusion of Theoretical Frameworks Discussion**

These interpretive, conceptual, and methodological frameworks helped guide the research design and scaffold the resulting themes.

### **Implications and Recommendations for Practice and Policy**

This section discusses practice and policy implications and recommendations for gifted adults, education, business, and psychology. These recommendations are intended to positively transform the CD of SEGA.

### **Gifted Adults**

Gifted adults, and gifted children who will grow into adults, may have a desire to start their own social enterprises to address a social or environmental need. This study has implications for these gifted adults and recommendations for their practices and policies as they develop into SEGA.

### ***Implications***

The findings from the CD of SEGA participants have several implications for gifted adults. Intersectionality matters, and the self-knowledge and awareness about the unique intersectionality of each gifted adult is important.

Gifted adults are able to confidently activate their skills when they have knowledge and robust development and supports around their racial identities, gifted neurodivergence, academic talents, and social and emotional affective needs. It is

important that gifted adults develop strategies to support emotional regulation, nurture and express their creativity, and cope with additional disabilities and areas of neurodivergence.

Passions and interests help guide gifted adults toward realms where they would like to make a positive social impact. Explorations of injustice and experiences hyperfocusing on areas of interest can help gifted adults find areas they wish to impact positively.

To be a successful social entrepreneur, gifted adults need to acquire business acumen somehow, and a variety of options exist to help them develop the skills necessary to start and maintain a social enterprise.

### ***Recommendations for Practice***

There are several recommendations, developed in collaboration with SEGA participants, for gifted adults who are striving to become and thrive as social entrepreneurs: (1) access developmental supports, (2) utilize strengths and work around weaknesses, (3) cultivate spirituality and relational trust, (4) obtain business acumen, (5) research to inform a business model, (6) innovate a social enterprise model with integrity, (7) collaborate with inspirational peers, (8) reflect on progress and goals, (9) adapt to overcome obstacles, and (10) share resources within the community.

**Access Developmental Supports.** Individual SEGA are encouraged to access developmental supports for salient aspects of their intersectionality. Particularly, learning about their own gifted neurodivergence can help them activate their skills and realize how their giftedness manifests in their work and interactions with others. Learning about

giftedness, twice-exceptionality, and neurodivergence; racial identity development; and strategies to support emotional regulation and the process of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016) are helpful to developing SEGA's self-awareness and self-control.

**Utilize Strengths and Work Around Weaknesses.** SEGA must recognize and lean into their strengths—particularly around their intellectual curiosity about areas of interest, creativity, and moral sensitivity—in order to develop skills and passions to help them innovate social value in areas of interest. Nth added that SEGA must also develop strategies to work around their weaknesses—perhaps by utilizing technology supports, partners, or other strategies to support areas of neurodivergence.

**Cultivate Spirituality and Relational Trust.** SEGA should work to grow their spirituality to develop strong relationships by forming connections and trust with others. This mirrors what Janiece shared earlier about embodied wisdom and knowing how you make others feel and how to foster trusting relationships.

In the focus group, Kris suggested adding the recommendation to cultivate spirituality, and Shalelia and Janice strongly agreed. Kris explained, “Spirituality is fundamental to our practice at our nonprofit. Secular spirituality has played a huge role in cultivating the ambiance and environment we all thrive in and really helping to cultivate relational trust and community connections and solidarity.”

**Obtain Business Acumen.** SEGA must develop business skills through self-education—such as videos and textbooks, accelerator or fellowship programs, or HEI programs—so they can develop and sustain a sound business model or develop skills on

the job. Business acumen also includes soft skills and psychosocial skills for business success (Ballesteros-Sola & Magomedova, 2023; Greene & Cooper, 2016; Olszewski-Kubilius & Cross, 2020).

Developing business acumen helps SEGA learn vocabulary that will earn them respect in the field and idealistic content that will guide their thinking; it also enables them to foster collaboration by introducing them to networks of entrepreneurs and other experts. SEGA require the critical learning experience of business education to succeed.

If a SEGA is uninterested in learning about business or running the day-to-day operations of a business, they must partner with other business-minded colleagues to ensure the development and sustainability of a sound social enterprise.

**Research to Inform a Business Model.** SEGA are encouraged to research different business models, but they should also research systems of inequality to identify barriers to further innovation. Researching different models helps SEGA structure a job for themselves in a new, innovative way. Research is critical to knowing what already exists and to discovering the supports, barriers, failures, and successes of similar organizations. This knowledge helps SEGA determine exactly what social or environmental issues they will address with their business models.

**Innovate a Social Enterprise Model with Integrity.** SEGA should utilize their creativity to innovate social enterprise models that address their social missions and create innovative methods of funding their work. SEGA should also innovate with integrity—ensuring that while adapting, they stay true to their mission and values focused on creating social or environmental good.

**Collaborate with Inspirational Peers.** SEGA should collaborate with inspirational peers such as mentors, like-minded colleagues, employees, and community partners. Inspirational peers may be found in the field, in HEIs offering business education opportunities, through community partners, in organizations that support intersectional identities, and in accelerator, fellowship, and apprenticeship programs. Because SEGA are addressing areas of social and environmental good, it is important for them to find inspirational peers who share solidarity with their commitment to social justice.

**Reflect on Progress and Goals.** SEGA should have a regular practice of reflecting on their progress and goals. Participant suggestions included SEGA having an executive director journal, checking in with mentors, and having weekly debrief meetings with themselves. It is also important to both celebrate successes and to learn from and adjust to mistakes.

**Adapt to Overcome Obstacles.** SEGA must recognize, then strive to overcome, challenges and barriers with persistence, grit, determination, and adaptability. Continued rejection should not dissuade a SEGA; rather, rejection suggests the need to adapt to the situation and shift strategies or goals to attain success in innovative ways.

**Share Resources Within the Community.** SEGA should strive to identify community partners with whom they can share resources to network strong communities. Nth explained:

There're so many resources outside of money, inside of our communities, that if we really worked together and could find that healthy network, we could get a lot

of things done. We could circumvent [roadblocks] from capitalism that are there for a reason.

These recommendations can support future or developing SEGA and all social entrepreneurs who are working to create an organization that will make the world a better place.

### ***Recommendations for Policy***

Gifted adults should adopt the following policies or principles to guide their work in becoming SEGA: maintain mission integrity and learn from mistakes and feedback.

**Maintain Mission Integrity.** Compared to entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurs are committed to formulating a social enterprise focused on creating social or environmental good. As such, a social entrepreneur must maintain the integrity of the social enterprise's mission, even as goals and tactics shift.

**Learn from Mistakes and Feedback.** SEGA may experience or struggle with perfectionism (Silverman, 2013), but mistakes will be made along the way. SEGA must learn from these mistakes, and not dismiss them, in order to improve themselves and their social enterprises. SEGA must also be open to and solicit feedback from others and use that feedback to continuously improve their intended and operationalized career output.

### **Education**

For this section, the field of education encompasses gifted education and career development educational experiences in preschool through 12th grade and in postsecondary HEI or other organizations.

### ***Implications***

Two main implications of this research apply to the field of education. First, underidentified and underserved gifted students can experience stunted or delayed confidence, growth (academic, social, or emotional), and achievement. Secondly, this study suggests that from preschool through 12th grade, and in higher education programs not explicitly focused on business and entrepreneurship, the curricula lacks opportunities to develop business, entrepreneurial, and social entrepreneurship skills. This deficiency leads to a huge opportunity to embed SEE throughout educational experiences for all students, including gifted learners. Perhaps if students learn about social entrepreneurship sooner, they will waste less time pursuing less-fulfilling careers and generate more positive social value.

### ***Recommendations for Practice***

Recommendations for educators' practice include equitable gifted education, supporting positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016) and moral development; and embedding SEE throughout the curricula.

Schools must equitably identify and serve all gifted students and nurture their academic, creative, and affective development, including specific instruction for students about the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).

Teacher and professors must nurture the passions, interests, and moral development of gifted people to help them find areas where they wish to create social innovations or social enterprises. This does not mean telling gifted people what they should be morally concerned about; rather, educators should allow gifted people to

develop their own moral values by exploring and investigating areas as they positively disintegrate (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).

Educators should embed SEE throughout the curricula so that more people can access learning about social entrepreneurship sooner. Perhaps more people would become social entrepreneurs if only they knew it was a viable career path. For instance, teaching social workers about SEE might help them sooner and better formulate a social enterprise to address needs they see in their microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This embedding of SEE should occur across elementary and secondary school and also in HEI and postsecondary programs beyond and including business programs.

### ***Recommendations for Policy***

Several recommendations for educational policy emerged from the findings of this study including requiring affective development about giftedness, mandating professional learning about giftedness for all teachers and professors, and developing policies to embed SEE throughout the educational system.

Educational leaders should require effective development of gifted students through teaching emotional regulation strategies and introducing the concepts of overexcitabilities and the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016) to help students optimally develop.

Educational leaders must require professional learning about giftedness, culturally responsive gifted education, the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016), and differentiation and acceleration strategies, for all educators, in elementary, secondary, higher education, and postsecondary institutions, so educators



may better serve all students, particularly gifted students, by reducing gifted students' boredom and frustration and enhancing their academic, social, and emotional development.

Educational leaders should require social entrepreneurship curricula to be embedded throughout elementary and secondary school and in HEI degree areas beyond business schools so people, particularly gifted people, can realize social entrepreneurship is an option and develop business skills to succeed in such endeavors.

### **Business**

For this section, the category of business includes existing businesses, philanthropic and investment funders, and accelerator and cohort programs that develop social entrepreneurs and government entities that support economic development.

### ***Implications***

This study indicates a need for businesses to develop their understanding about giftedness and ways to equitably support social entrepreneurs who are gifted.

Organizations that are unable to recognize the creative, intuitive, empathetic genius of SEGA may not recognize the innovative social value they hope to create—for example, Nth's funding strategies were shunned, and Kris's teacher-led cooperative charter application was denied.

This study also implies that SEGA's social enterprises do not receive enough equitable investment and funding to do their social good. SEGA participants Shalelia and Nth reported difficulty accessing funding, particularly for Black women entrepreneurs, and Chris reported difficulty securing donors for the newer DC nonprofit. Kris and

Janiece discussed dependency on gifts, grants, and donations to help fund their programs. Kris, Janiece, and Shalelia are all leading educational enterprises. Public education is generally underfunded in the United States, and Janiece and Shalelia reported racialized barriers to funding their work serving BIPOC students.

### ***Recommendations for Practice***

Several recommendations for business practices are shared including increased knowledge about giftedness, intentional efforts to overcome funding disparities, and the development of a support group for gifted adult entrepreneurs.

Businesses need to increase their knowledge about giftedness, neurodivergence, and creative thinking in order to recognize strengths in the unique talents and moral alignment of SEGA and to encourage and support their own gifted employees.

Businesses must take intentional steps to understand and address funding disparities for social entrepreneurs, including Black women entrepreneurs and gifted and neurodivergent entrepreneurs by investing and funding in social enterprises created by and serving diverse populations.

Shalelia wished there were a “hub” or “national gifted entrepreneur adult support group,” whereas Nth has inadvertently nearly created such a thing with ET. However, ET focuses on gathering gifted adults in communities and merely began to help incubate and acquire funding for social entrepreneurs from those communities. Perhaps ET or other businesses will create an explicit hub for gifted adults who are entrepreneurs, or specifically SEGA.

### ***Recommendations for Policy***

Three recommendations for business policy include equitable identification and support of gifted adults, partnering with SEGA, and manifested commitments to equitable funding of social enterprises with diverse founders and diverse social missions.

Business leaders should carefully implement equitable policies to identify and support gifted adults and their talents. Nth recommends government entities “treat gifted and talented the way that governments are treating other types ... [of] special populations or marginalized populations” and use “a straightforward test like the ASVAB” to “identify a special population that, if supported, can do wonders for their community,” but frets that here are “many ways that [process] can be corrupted.”

Businesses should adopt policies to nurture social intrapreneurs within existing organizations and to partner with and support social entrepreneurs, including SEGA, who have created innovative organizations that address social problems while fostering job creation.

Business organizations must develop policies to ensure the equitable investment of funds into social enterprises that are founded by diverse entrepreneurs or that are committed to supporting diverse communities.

### **Psychology**

In this section, the field of psychology broadly applies to practicing clinical, school, and industrial and organizational psychologists, academics who research psychology, and psychometricians that assess psychological constructs.

### ***Implications***

Critical implications for psychology resulting from this study are that SEGA are harmed by culturally biased psychological assessments, a lack of knowledge about giftedness, and a lack of knowledge about the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).

### ***Recommendations for Practice***

Implications for psychologists lead to the following recommendations for their practice: develop and norm culturally responsive psychological assessments, complete professional development about giftedness, and complete professional development about the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).

Psychometricians and psychologists must continue working to develop and norm culturally responsive psychological assessments to identify giftedness, vocational talents, and critical aspects aligned with the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).

Clinical, school, and industrial and organizational psychologists must learn about varied cultural manifestations of giftedness, twice-exceptionality, and neurodivergence to better identify and support all gifted people in schools and in workspaces.

Clinical, school, and industrial and organizational psychologists must learn about the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016) so they can better recognize the unilevel and multilevel disintegration of individuals, better support people experiencing personality or career disintegration, and broaden their perspective on human development beyond the medical model.

### ***Recommendations for Policy***

Policy recommendations for psychologists include ensuring the development and use of culturally-grounded assessments and mandating professional learning about giftedness and the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).

Psychometricians must adopt policies to ensure the creation and norming of culture-fair, or more likely culturally-grounded, psychological assessments to recognize giftedness, vocational talents, and aspects of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016) within diverse populations and require the use of these assessments throughout schools and businesses to ensure gifted people are more equitably identified and served across cultures. Additionally, industrial and organizational psychologists should institute policies to limit adverse impact for people from diverse populations by adopting a comprehensive suite of culturally-responsive assessments to identify talents and support gifted neurodivergence in workspaces.

Psychologist and career counselor training programs should require adequate, if not exemplary, professional learning about giftedness, twice-exceptionality, and other types of neurodivergence that manifest across cultures. This professional learning should rival the already required training on learning disabilities and should include the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016).

### **Research Process Discussion**

The research process of CC&C built trustworthiness in terms of validity and reliability, was conducted ethically, and had a variety of strengths and limitations. The findings of this study are unique to this specific quintain and are not to be generalized for

all SEGA, though some themes may be useful and applicable in supporting the development of other SEGA.

### **Validity of Findings**

This study earned qualitative validity—trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility—through the use of several strategies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018): member checking, which involved refining case studies and themes through CC&C with each participant and a focus group; rich, thick descriptions incorporating educational C&C, the DIET process, and vignettes (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017); a discussion of researcher bias; presentation of discrepant information in the discussion of each theme in the cross-case study section; prolonged time in the field with interviews and an observation; and peer debriefing with an editor. These strategies all enhanced the qualitative validity of this research.

### **Reliability of Findings**

This collective case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2006) examined a unique quintain of five SEGA in the bounded case of the United States in 2023. While the same collection of responses and themes may differ in a replicated study, I did have an inquiry audit trail with raw data, annotations and vignettes, themes, and notes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Uhrmacher et al., 2017), so another researcher should be able to use the protocols to examine a similar group of SEGA. I cleaned transcripts to support reliability but did not cross-check codes with another researcher (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

## **Ethical Considerations**

This study was conducted ethically as required by the Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). Respect for persons was met through comprehensive informed consent, respectful interactions with participants that developed trust, and the opportunity given to participants to skip questions or adjust responses. Beneficence was met by helping participants reflect on their career development and the shared social value they create, by creating detailed case studies that profiled participants and their social enterprises with a strengths-base lens, and, hopefully, by positively impacting the career development of gifted adults who will one day become social entrepreneurs. Justice was met by treating participants well throughout all interactions and sharing the burden of data collection and compensation equally among participants. Finally, IRB approval was obtained prior to data collection.

## **Strengths and Limitations of the Research**

Strengths of this research included: obtaining an intense, purposeful sample of SEGA that represented a diverse quintain of study; ensuring all participants completed data collection; using comprehensive theoretical frameworks to guide the research and analysis; and the ability to use online data collection to foster understanding.

Limitations of this research included: online-only interactions with participants which limited the sensory data collected, the limited diversity of participants resulting from challenges with recruitment, and the exclusion of international perspectives.

All interactions and observations were conducted virtually except for one observation of Kris conducted in person. This is a limitation because of my desire to use methodologies from educational C&C (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017), which demand full-sensory observations of participants and their environments. As I only interacted online with participants, with the exception of Kris's observation, I was limited to gathering only auditory and visual data. However, the use of online data collection was ultimately a strength of this research, allowing me to gather stories from busy SEGA wherever they were.

Participants had gender diversity and were both White and Black (Shalelia is mixed-race and Nth is multiracial), but diversity was limited because the participants all identified with a lower socio-economic status and only represented White and Black racial groups. Additionally, everyone was highly educated with at least a bachelor's degree and some graduate school. Furthermore, everyone was personally known to the researcher prior to this study (which was also a strength of the study).

Recruitment challenges were a limitation for this research. While people responded to my recruitment survey, most were not quality representations of the quintain of SEGA sought for this research. Of those who were, several never responded to follow-up invitations to participate in this study. In the end, participation was limited to a highly representative of the quintain of SEGA that I already knew.

### **Conclusion of Research Process Discussion**

This study is valid, reliable, and was ethically conducted with several strengths and limitations to the research.



## **Questions for Future Research**

As research into social entrepreneurship is new and minimal, there are many areas for interesting, promising, and impactful future research around SEE, SEGA, social enterprises, gatekeepers and windowmakers, and collaborative connoisseurship and criticism. This section highlights potential questions that could be explored by future researchers to positively impact the CD of SEGA and positive social and environmental transformation for our world and beyond.

### **Career Development and Wellbeing of the Gifted**

What is the career development like for SEGA across types and intensities of giftedness?

Who makes the most impact in the career development of the gifted?

How do SEGA describe their ikigai or reason and purpose for being (Wilkes et al., 2022)?

What is the wellbeing (Ryff, 2019) of SEGA?

### ***Professionals Who Support the Gifted***

What do professionals including educators, administrators, counselors, psychologists, therapists, managers, lawyers, coaches, etc., know and need to know about giftedness?

What interventions successfully educate professionals who support the gifted?

What knowledge do professionals have and need about the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016)?

## **Social Entrepreneurship Education**

How do aspects of SEE impact the SCCT (Lent et al., 1994) or positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016) of social entrepreneurs?

### ***Preschool – 12th Grade***

What aspects of SEE are already taught in elementary and secondary school?

What would ideal SEE curriculum look like in elementary and secondary school?

How can SEE be embedded successfully amidst other school requirements?

How can SEE be differentiated to meet the needs and curiosities of gifted and neurodivergent students?

What professional learning is needed to help elementary and secondary teachers integrate SEE in their curricula to the benefit of students, gifted students, and our world?

### ***Higher Education***

What knowledge do professors of SEE in HEIs have or need about SCCT (Lent et al., 1994), the theory of positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016), and gifted neurodivergence?

How do HEIs expose non-business majors to SEE in order to help them start sustainable social businesses?

### ***Business Accelerators and Incubators***

What are the instructional arcs (Uhrmacher et al., 2017) of business accelerator and incubator programs?

How can business accelerators and incubator programs develop their cultural responsiveness?

How can business accelerators and incubator programs develop their responsiveness to giftedness and neurodivergence?

### **Social Entrepreneurs Who Are Gifted Adults**

What distinguishes gifted adults who pursue traditional entrepreneurship from those who pursue social entrepreneurship?

What areas of social entrepreneurship are of greatest interest to gifted adults?

### ***Characteristics***

What are the traits and characteristics of SEGA, particularly their interests (Holland, 1973/1997), strengths, personalities, and overexcitabilities (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016)?

How do characteristics and social enterprises differ between SEGA of different races, classes, genders, cultures, and types of neurodivergence?

**Mediating Anxiety.** How do SEGA experience and mediate anxiety? How do gifted adults or SEGA use marijuana to mediate anxiety?

### ***Inspiration***

What inspires SEGA to pursue social entrepreneurship compared to traditional entrepreneurship or people who do not become entrepreneurs?

What bibliotherapy or cinematherapy could be used to inspire and develop SEGA?

### ***Soft Skills***

What is the attainment process and use of soft skills by SEGA (Ballesteros-Sola & Magomedova, 2023; Greene & Cooper, 2016)?

Which psychosocial skills are crucial for the talent development SEGA (Olszewski-Kubilius & Cross, 2020).

### ***Process of Positive Disintegration***

What does the full process of disintegration look like for SEGA including overexcitabilities, dynamisms, and types of unilevel and multilevel disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016)?

What if any relationship exists between SEGA who have secondary integration of a career ideal and their individual levels of advanced personality development (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016)?

### ***Curricular Career Spiral of Social Entrepreneurs***

What is the actual, not just perceived, career input arc of SEGA?

How do transformed audiences perceive the career output arcs of SEGA?

What is the transformed society arc of SEGA?

How does the transformed audience arc impact future arcs?

What feedback to SEGA receive about their impact beyond their mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)?

How has the career output of past social entrepreneurs impacted the career inputs of current SEGA?

How does the career output of social entrepreneurs impact the career inputs of future SEGA?

**Curricular Career Spiral: Beyond Social Entrepreneurs.** How does the concept of the curricular career spiral and its impact on future society apply to

professions beyond social entrepreneurship (e.g., transformative leaders, law enforcement officers, teachers, academics, farmers, nurses, physicists, etc.)?

### **Social Enterprises**

What are the outcomes of social enterprises?

How do social enterprises identify, recruit, and retain value-aligned employees and partners?

### ***Triangulated Experiences***

How do social enterprises operate and deliver social value from the triangulated perspective of the social entrepreneur, the audience, and external partners?

### ***Comparative Experiences***

How do social enterprises compare to other enterprises in formation, intended and operationalized curriculum (Uhrmacher et al., 2017), and career outputs?

How do social enterprises with varied social missions differ in terms of acquiring support and affective positive change?

What differences exist between social enterprises that succeed and social enterprises that fail?

### ***Longitudinal Experiences***

How do social enterprises develop, grow, change, and end over time?

What is the impact of social enterprises over time?

### ***Ecological Experiences***

What distinguishes social enterprises that impact the ecological system at different levels (e.g., microsystem impacts vs. exosystem impacts) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)?

### **Gatekeepers and Windowmakers**

Who and what inhibits or enables the growth and sustainability of social enterprises (e.g., grant funders, investors, philanthropists)?

### **Collaborative Connoisseurship and Criticism**

How can SEE be described using educational C&C (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017) or CC&C?

How can career outputs be explored using educational C&C (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017) or CC&C?

How can CC&C be applied beyond educational curriculum to areas such as health care, public policy, or the legal system?

This sampling of questions for areas of future research is intended to become part of the career input arc for gifted adults and future researchers and practitioners from the fields of education, business, and psychology to inspire future transformative work to support the CD of SEGA and positive impacts for our world.

### **Summary of Discussion**

This chapter discussed an overview of the research study; research question themes; the alignment of findings with theoretical frameworks; implications and

recommendation for the policy and practice of gifted adults and the fields of education, business, and psychology; the research process; and areas of future research.

## **Conclusion**

### **Overview of Dissertation**

Chapter 1 introduced the need for more social entrepreneurs to improve our world; Chapter 2 explored literature related to SEE and revealed a gap about the CD of SEGA; Chapter 3 detailed the methodology of this collective case study which incorporated CC&C and utilized a variety of theoretical frameworks to further understanding of the quintain of five SEGA participants; Chapter 4 provided comprehensive case studies for each SEGA participant and a cross-case study about all SEGA participants, with findings organized thematically for each RQ; and Chapter 5 shared areas of future research as well as discussion about the study and its alignment, implications, and recommendations for the practice and policy of gifted adults, education, business, and psychology.

### **Importance of Findings**

The findings of this study illuminate the collaborative cases about the career development of five SEGA participants who have demonstrated creativity, tenacity, and perseverance to develop meaningful social enterprises that positively impact their microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and our world. This study reveals the need for increased education about giftedness, positive disintegration (Dąbrowski, 1964/2016), and social entrepreneurship to foster the ongoing CD of SEGA to the benefit of world and beyond.

## **Call to Action**

The findings, implications, and recommendations of this study must be used to further the career development of the gifted to help them explore and become social entrepreneurs who create and share innovative social and environmental value.

Educators: Develop and deliver education to develop social entrepreneurs, including gifted social entrepreneurs.

Psychologists: Create and enforce policies to develop the knowledge of professionals about giftedness to support their gifted students and clients.

Businesses: Invest in the development of diverse SEGA, potential SEGA, and their diverse social enterprises.

Gifted adults: Become a social entrepreneur and create innovative social value to benefit our communities and environment.

Together, let us all help social entrepreneurs positively impact our world.

## **Collaborative Connoisseurship and Critique of the CD of SEGA**

The five SEGA participants and I collaboratively connoisseured and critiqued their career development experiences, supports, and barriers and the social value they create and share with the world. Our greatest hopes are that this research will inspire the development, nurturance, and success of future SEGA.

I will conclude this dissertation with a few quotes of inspiration for SEGA by SEGA.



Kris: “If social entrepreneurs are intrinsically motivated by their passion for DEI—that belonging and that social justice ... it’s going to take them where they want to go.”

Janiece: “Their career efficacy matters, their story matters, and their wisdom matters.”

Shalelia: “Find your people, find your group. Find other gifted folks so that y’all [can] talk about the intricacies of being gifted ... how it impacts our community, our relationships. How it impacts how we navigate.”

Chris: “Help [SEGA] find the resources to do the things that they want to do, guide them... a lot of it is staying out of their way.”

Nth: “Let’s get these hurdles and obstacles out of [their] lives so that they can go do something amazing that makes the world better for all of us.”

Finally, I will leave you with a charge given to me by Dr. Marty Nemko: “Help the best and brightest to help the world” (personal communication, April 20, 2020).

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## **Appendix A**

### **Recruitment Process Protocols**

This appendix details recruitment resources for this dissertation including: a recruitment email outline, social media post outline, flyer outline, consent form for the recruitment survey outline, and consent form for collective case study participation outline.

#### **Recruitment Email Outline**

The recruitment email:

- included an optional personalized introduction;
- shared a minimal amount about the study;
- contained a link to a .pdf of a printable flyer;
- asked the recipient to take the recruitment survey; and
- requested for the recipient to forward to others who may have been eligible to participate.

#### **Social Media Post Outline**

The social media post:

- shared a minimal amount about the study; and
- contained both a QR code and short URL link to the recruitment survey.

#### **Flyer Outline**

The flyer:

- shared a minimal amount about the study;
- shared details about me, faculty advisor, and IRB details; and

- contained both a QR code and short URL link to the recruitment survey.

### **Consent Form for the Recruitment Survey Outline**

The consent form for the recruitment survey:

- asserted that the participant is age 18 or older and living in the United States;
- detailed the research design process and participant commitment;
- optionally collected email addresses for further research communications and recruitment for this study, and to enter participants into a raffle for compensation;
- asserted that all data shared will be deidentified prior to data analysis and may be permanently and publicly published; and
- reminded participants that they may skip questions or stop the survey at any time.

### **Consent for Collective Case Study Participants**

The consent form:

- detailed the research design process and participant commitment;
- asked for permission to record interviews and the focus group and archive transcripts and video footage;
- asked for permission to record observations;
- asked for permission to permanently publish identifiable information (if that was declined, it asked, for a pseudonym to use for the participant's name and the name of their social enterprise); and
- reminded participants they could refuse to answer any questions, withdraw from the study at any time, and request the removal of any data submitted until the dissertation was defended and permanently published.

## Appendix B

### Recruitment Survey Questions

#	Survey	Topic	Question	Responses	Type	Analysis
1	Consent	Captcha Bot Detection	I'm not a robot	Checkbox	Single Multiple Choice	N/A – Consent Screener
2	Consent	Consent	(below)	I agree to participate I decline	Single Multiple Choice	N/A – Consent Screener

Research Study Recruitment Survey of Entrepreneurs in the USA  
Implied Consent for Online Recruitment Survey

You are invited to participate in a recruitment survey for a research study about the career development of entrepreneurs who are adults in the USA. The purpose of this study is to develop a collective case study about the career development of entrepreneurs. Thank you for choosing to take this recruitment survey.

This study is seeking:

Adult entrepreneurs in the USA

who have formed a for-profit or non-profit business at least one year ago

If you decide to participate, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The alternative is not to participate. If you decide to participate, complete the following survey. Your completion of this survey indicates your consent to participate in this research study.

The survey is designed to identify diverse and intense cases of entrepreneurs. It will take about 10 – 20 minutes to complete this study. You will be asked to answer questions about your business, educational experiences, personal experiences, and demographics to help the researcher identify eligible, diverse, and intense cases of entrepreneurs. No benefits accrue to you for answering the survey, but your responses will be used to help the researcher identify approximately five entrepreneurs for the detailed case study to support the career development of entrepreneurs.

Any discomfort or inconvenience to you will be minimal, but they are not expected to be any greater than anything you encounter in everyday life. Data will be collected using the Internet; no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third party. Confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relationships with the researcher, Joi Lin, or her institution of the University of Denver. If you decide to participate, you are free to stop at any time. You may also skip questions if you don't want to answer them or you may choose not to complete the survey.

Please feel free to ask questions regarding this study. You may contact me if you have additional questions to Joi Lin, Morgridge College of Education, University of Denver at [joi.lin@du.edu](mailto:joi.lin@du.edu) (Faculty Advisor, Dr. Norma Hafenstein, [norma.hafenstein@du.edu](mailto:norma.hafenstein@du.edu)).

If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the University of Denver (DU) Institutional Review Board to speak to someone independent of the research team at (303) 871-2121, or email at [IRBAdmin@du.edu](mailto:IRBAdmin@du.edu).

De-identified data from this study may be shared with the research community at large at the Open Science Foundation (<https://osf.io/>) to advance science and health. We will remove or code any personal information that could identify you before files are shared with other researchers to ensure that, by current scientific standards and known methods, no one will be able to identify you from the information we share. Despite these measures, we cannot guarantee anonymity of your personal data.

Thank you for your time.  
Sincerely,

Joi Lin, PhD Candidate  
Curriculum and Instruction, Teaching and Learning Sciences, Morgridge College of Education  
University of Denver  
Joi.Lin@du.edu

Faculty Advisor  
Dr. Norma Hafenstein  
Clinical Professor and Daniel L. Ritchie Endowed Chair in Gifted Education  
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By clicking the link below, I confirm that I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement, and possible risks and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can discontinue participation at any time. My consent also indicates that I am at least 18 years of age. [Please feel free to print a copy of this consent form.]

3	Consent	Adult	How old are you?	Under the age of 18 Age 18 or older	Single Multiple Choice	N/A - Consent Screener
4	Consent	USA	Do you live and work in the USA or its territories?	Yes No	Single Multiple Choice	N/A - Consent Screener
5	Consent Screener	Employment Status	Please describe your work situation, are you...	Unemployed, not looking Unemployed, and looking Caretaker Student Employee Employer/Management Entrepreneur Retired Other:	Open Single Multiple Choice	Descriptive Statistics; Table
6	<b>BRANCH</b>		If not an entrepreneur, specifically ask—  Are you working toward entrepreneurship? Or Were you an entrepreneur? (For this study, an entrepreneur is someone who has started and owns/owned their own business, either alone or with other co-founders.)  If no, Branch Survey Exit to item #8.	Yes No	Single Multiple Choice	N/A - Recruitment



7	Contact	Email for Future Research & Compensation  (Display if email has not been shared yet)	<p>This recruitment survey is a screener to identify individuals for further research studies, including longitudinal studies.</p> <p>May the researcher, Joi Lin, contact you with opportunities to participate in future research studies to strive toward positive impacts for humanity and send you a copy of the final dissertation and executive summary of this research study in 2024?</p> <p>If so, please share your email address.</p> <p>You may unsubscribe at any time by contacting the researcher, Joi Lin (joi.lin@du.edu or joilin@outlook.com).</p> <p>Participants who share their emails will be entered into a random drawing for 30, \$20.00 USD gift cards to Simple Switch (<a href="https://simpleswitch.org">https://simpleswitch.org</a>), upon valid and eligible completion of this recruitment survey that consists of employment questions, two psychological scales, and demographic questions.</p>	Email (Short Answer)	Short-Answer (Request, but don't force response)	Used to invite participants
8	Contact	Ineligible Exit Question	<p>Email Address</p> <p>Thank you for your time, but unfortunately you are ineligible for this specific study focusing on social entrepreneur adults in the USA.</p> <p>This survey is recruiting for a dissertation study about the career development experiences, supports, and barriers, of social entrepreneurs who are gifted adults and the shared social value they create.</p> <p>Please share your email address to allow the</p>	Email (Short Answer)	Short-Answer (Request, but don't force response)	Used to disseminate findings and recruit for future research studies

			<p>researcher, Joi Lin, to contact you about future research opportunities and send you a copy of the final dissertation and executive summary in 2024.</p> <p>You may unsubscribe at any time by contacting the researcher, Joi Lin (joi.lin@du.edu or joilin@outlook.com).</p> <p>Email Address</p>			
9	Entrepreneur	Entrepreneur?	Have you ever founded and formed a business entity? (for-profit or non-profit)?	Yes Working on it No	Single Multiple Choice	Descriptive Statistics; Table
			If no, Branch Survey Exit to item #8.			
10	Entrepreneur	Co-Founders?	Are you a sole-founder, or co-founder of your enterprise? Please consider this enterprise throughout this survey.	Sole Founder Co-Founder Other: (Open-ended note)	Open Single Multiple Choice	Descriptive Statistics; Table
11	Entrepreneur	Business Structure	What business structure is the enterprise you formed?	Sole Proprietorship Non-Profit LLC Limited Liability Corporation B-Corp C- Corporation S-Corporation Other: (Open-ended note)	Open Single Multiple Choice	Descriptive Statistics; Table
12	Entrepreneur	Industry	What is your enterprise's primary industry?	(Open-ended)	Open-ended	DIET
13	Entrepreneur	Length	How long has your enterprise been in business?	Not yet formed Less than 1 year 1-4 Years 5-9 Years 10-19 Years 20-29 Years 30+ Years	Single Multiple Choice	Descriptive Statistics; Table

14	Entrepreneur	Employees	Number of employees at your enterprise, other than yourself?	0 1 2-5 6-9 10-19 20-49 50-99 100-500 500+	Single Multiple Choice	Descriptive Statistics; Table
15	Entrepreneur	Enterprise Revenue	What is the annual revenue in USD of your organization / enterprise?	\$0 \$1-\$10,000 \$11,000 - \$50,000 \$50,000 - \$100,000 \$100,000 - \$250,000 \$250,000 - \$500,000 \$500,000 - \$999,999 \$1 Million - \$5 Million \$5 Million - \$49 Million \$50 Million - \$99 Million \$100 Million - \$500 Million \$500 Million + Other:	Open Single Multiple Choice	Descriptive Statistics; Table
16	Entrepreneur	Personal Income	What is your personal annual income as the entrepreneur of your business in USD?	\$0 \$1-\$10,000 \$11,000 - \$50,000 \$50,000 - \$100,000 \$100,000 - \$250,000 \$250,000 - \$500,000 \$500,000 - \$999,999 \$1 Million - \$5 Million \$5 Million - \$49 Million \$50 Million - \$99 Million \$100 Million - \$500 Million \$500 Million + Other:	Open Single Multiple Choice	Descriptive Statistics; Table

17	Entrepreneur - Social	Social entrepreneur?	Do you identify as being a social entrepreneur?	Yes Maybe No What's a social entrepreneur?	Single Multiple Choice	Descriptive Statistics; Table
18	Entrepreneur – Social	Social entrepreneur?	A social entrepreneur creates a social enterprise that prioritizes social and/or environmental impact.  Do you identify as being a social entrepreneur?	Yes No	Single Multiple Choice	Descriptive Statistics; Table
19	Entrepreneur - Social	Social entrepreneur?	Why do you identify as a social entrepreneur? Or why do you not identify as a social entrepreneur?	(Open-ended)	Single Multiple Choice	DIET
20	Entrepreneur - Social	B Corp?	Is your organization a B Corp?	Yes Not yet, but striving toward B Corp status No What is a B Corp?	Single Multiple Choice	Descriptive Statistics; Table
21	Entrepreneur – Social	B Corp Definition	<p>“B Corp Certification is a designation that a business is meeting high standards of verified performance, accountability, and transparency on factors from employee benefits and charitable giving to supply chain practices and input materials. In order to achieve certification, a company must:</p> <p>Demonstrate high social and environmental performance by achieving a B Impact Assessment score of 80 or above and passing our risk review.</p> <p>Multinational corporations must also meet baseline requirement standards.</p> <p>Make a legal commitment by changing their corporate governance structure to be accountable to all stakeholders, not just shareholders, and achieve benefit corporation status if available in their jurisdiction.</p> <p>Exhibit transparency by allowing information about their performance measured against B Lab’s standards to be publicly available on their</p>			


<p>B Corp profile on B Lab's website."  <a href="https://www.bcorporation.net/en-us/certification">https://www.bcorporation.net/en-us/certification</a></p>						
22	Entrepreneur - Social	SDGs?	<p>Which of the following United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, if any, align with the primary mission(s) of your enterprise?  Please select all that apply.</p>	<p>1) No poverty; 2) Zero hunger; 3) Good health and well-being; 4) Quality education; 5) Gender equality; 6) Clean water and sanitation; 7) Affordable and clean energy; 8) Decent work and economic growth; 9) Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure; 10) Reduced inequalities; 11) Sustainable cities and communities; 12) Responsible consumption and production; 13) Climate action; 14) Life below water; 15) Life on land; 16) Peace, justice, and strong institutions; 17) Partnership for the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals; 18) All of the above; 19) None of the above</p>	Multiple Multiple Choice	Descriptive Statistics; Table; DIET

23	KAGS	KAGS	1. It is important for me to be able to have intellectually stimulating discussions.	7-item scale	Single item scale	Descriptive
			2. When I am interested in something, I take the time to learn everything I can about it			
			3. I think about existential issues often (e.g., the meaning of life, freedom and responsibility, etc.).			
			4. It is easy for me to learn new material the first time I am exposed to it.			
			5. I solve problems intuitively.			
			6. I ponder the meaning of my life.			
			7. It is important for me to be intellectually challenged at work or school.			
			8. It is easy for me to integrate information from multiple sources.			
			9. I use metaphors in my speech.			
			10. I love to talk about ideas.			
			11. I think that some problems have more than one right answer.			
			12. Other people would describe me as a creative person.			
			13. I tend to get tired of a job after I have learned how to do everything that is required for it.			
			14. I am a curious person.			
			15. I am able to remember more things than other people.			
			16. I am very concerned about world issues such as the environment, homelessness, war, or human rights.			
			17. I come up with original ideas.			
			18. I am an avid reader.			
			19. I am an independent thinker.			
			20. I have an advanced vocabulary compared to most other people.			
			21. I learn new material with few repetitions.			

			22. Continuing to learn throughout my life is one of my most important priorities.			
24	Bot Check		I am an attentive human taking this survey and will select [number two] for this question.	7-item scale	Single item scale	Descriptive
25	SEOS	SEOS - 1) Social Mission	Our philosophy guides everything we do in the organization.	5-item scale	Single item scale	Descriptive
		SEOS - 1) Social Mission	We often ask ourselves, "How is this activity achieving the purpose of the organization?"			
		SEOS - 1) Social Mission	We are deeply committed to creating social value.			
		SEOS - 1) Social Mission	Whatever surplus funds we generate are re-invested toward fulfillment of the mission.			
		SEOS - 2) Proactiveness	We engage in forecasting to avoid surprises.			
		SEOS - 2) Proactiveness	We consider it important to be ready for future unexpected events.			
		SEOS - 2) Proactiveness	We engage in financial modeling to prepare for the future.			
		SEOS - 2) Proactiveness	We actively monitor external forces affecting us.			
		SEOS - 3) Innovativeness	We look for new ways of delivering social outcomes.			
		SEOS - 3) Innovativeness	We look for innovative ways of marketing our services.			
		SEOS - 3) Innovativeness	We look for new ways of working with outside agencies like government agencies, businesses, or other non-profits.			
		SEOS - 3) Innovativeness	We seek novel ways of fundraising.			
		SEOS - 4) Risk Management	We always engage in managing risks associated with our projects.			
		SEOS - 4) Risk Management	We will not undertake a project without considering associated costs and benefits.			
		SEOS - 4) Risk Management	We will commit resources to a project only when assured of funding to cover the cost.			
		SEOS - 4) Risk Management	We have a cautious approach to making resource commitments.			

		SEOS - 5) Effectual	On high social impact projects, we take steps so potential losses are affordable.			
		SEOS - 5) Effectual	In designing new services, we see the value in partnering with clients/beneficiaries.			
		SEOS - 5) Effectual	We believe in shaping our destiny using whatever means at our disposal.			
		SEOS - 5) Effectual	We believe it is important to get funding pre-commitments from our donors when undertaking new projects			
		SEOS - 5) Effectual	We believe in undertaking pilot projects before fully implementing new programs.			
26	Demographic-Education	Educational Attainment	What is your educational attainment? Please select all that apply.	High School Diploma GED Career Certificate Associate's Degree Bachelor's Degree Master's Degree Doctoral Degree None of the above		Descriptive Statistics; Table
27	Demographic-Education	Formal Educational Attainment of Entrepreneurship	Have you completed any, or are you currently enrolled in any of the following? Please select all that apply.	MBA MBA in entrepreneurship MBA in social entrepreneurship BA in entrepreneurship BA in social entrepreneurship Certificate in entrepreneurship Certificate in social entrepreneurship Other program or coursework in entrepreneurship	Open Multiple Choice	Descriptive Statistics; Table



				hip Other program or coursework in social entrepreneurs hip None of these Other: (Open- ended note)		
28	Demographic	Location	Which United States state or territory do you primarily live and work in?	All United States Countries and 6 Territories	Drop Down	Descriptive Statistics; Table
29	Demographic	Age Range	What age are you?	18-19 20-29 30-39 40-49 50-59 60-69 70-79 80-89 90-99 100+	Single Multiple Choice	Descriptive Statistics; Table
30	Demographic	Skin Shade	Please click on this graphic to select your average skin tone.	(Akash et al., 2016) 	Heat Map with 18 regions	Descriptive Statistics; Table
31	Demographic	Race / Ethnicity / Culture	Please describe your race / ethnicity / culture.	(Open-ended)	Open- ended	DIET
32	Demographic	Gender	Please identify your gender.	(Open-ended)	Open- ended	DIET
33	Demographic	Political Spectrum	Please describe how you lean politically.	(Open-ended)	Open- ended	DIET
34	Demographic	Divergences	Please describe if you identify as having any physical disabilities, learning disabilities, or other types of neurodivergence.  Neurodivergences include, but are not limited to ADHD, ASD, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, dyslexia, executive functioning, giftedness, sensory processing, etc.  If you feel “normal” and not divergent from others, please describe what that means to you.	(Open-ended)	Open- ended	Descriptive Statistics; Table

35	Demographic - Giftedness	Gifted Self-ID	Are you gifted (and/or twice+ exceptional)?	Absolutely Yes Probably Yes No Idea Probably Not Absolutely Not	Single Multiple Choice	Descriptive Statistics
36	Demographic - Giftedness	Gifted Definition	How do you define gifted / giftedness? Please share from your personal perspective. If you have absolutely no idea what 'gifted' means, please state that instead.	(Open-ended)	Open-ended	DIET
37	Demographic - Giftedness	Gifted Ways of Knowing	Have you experienced, or do you resonate, with any of the following? Please select all that apply.	Formal identification as gifted in one or more areas High IQ or cognitive ability score Received gifted and talented education services Received talent pool education services Resonate with qualitative characteristics of being gifted Resonate with twice-exceptionality (characteristics of giftedness AND other neurodivergence/physical divergence) Someone told me I might be gifted Accepted into a High IQ organization (Mensa, Intertel, Triple Nine Society, IPSE, etc.) Other (please describe):	Open Multiple Multiple Choice	Descriptive Statistics; Table

				(Open-ended note)		
38	Recruitment-Entrepreneur Branch	Gifted IQ	Please share any details about your IQ/cognitive ability scores, the name of the assessments, and standard deviations, if known. If you have never taken an IQ assessment, or would not like to share, please state that.	(Open-ended)	Open-ended	DIET
39	Recruitment-Entrepreneur Branch	Gifted IQ Documentation	If requested, could you/would you provide a copy of your psychological assessment data?	Yes Maybe, if I could find it No		
40	<b>BRANCH - If self-id both social entrepreneur &amp; G &amp; No Specialized Degree ...and 1+ years; and 1+ employees</b>	HARD ASK	<p>You might be eligible to participate in the collective case study!</p> <p>Would you be willing to participate in a collective case study dissertation research project to collaboratively critique the career development experiences, supports, and barriers of gifted adults who have become social entrepreneurs, and the shared social value they create?</p> <p>The hopes of this study are to positively impact the career development of social entrepreneurs and of gifted learners and to fulfill my PhD dissertation requirement.</p> <p>Up to five participants will be invited to maximize diversity of this qualitative research sample. Participants commit to: timely responses to communications with the researcher, two 45-60-minute interviews, collection of artifacts (related websites, videos, photos, art, etc.), 60-90 minutes of virtual or in-person observation, and participation at a 90-120-minute virtual focus group.</p>	Yes No	Single Multiple Choice	N/A - Recruitment

			<p>Additional consent will be obtained for any recordings. Virtual or in-person observations may or may not be recorded based upon participant preference.</p> <p>Participants also agree to review their final case study description and conclusions of the study and to actively participate in the focus group to provide collaborative feedback for clarity and validity of findings.</p> <p>Invited participants who complete all components of the data collection will receive a \$200 gift card to Simple Switch or a \$200 donation to their organization as compensation.</p>			
41	Branch, If-Yes to interest ed in particip ating...	HARD ASK	Please share the URL to your social enterprises' website, or the name of your social enterprise.	(Open-ended)	Open-ended	Descriptive Table
42	Branch, If-No email shared earlier ...	HARD ASK	Please share your email address for future communication about this study.	(Open-ended)	Open-ended	N/A - Recruitment
43		HARD ASK	<p>Request for Additional Permissions</p> <p>Do you grant additional permissions for the permanent and public publication of your name, organization, and publicly available headshot photos accessed from your enterprises' internet site, or that you email to the researcher at joi.lin@du.edu. This may be published as part of the permanent data collected and archived for this research study?</p>	<p>Yes - I would allow the dissertation collective case study to publish identifiable information about me, my business, and audiovisual of my image and voice (photos, recordings, etc.)</p> <p>Not now, but Maybe-Ask me again if I am selected to participate</p> <p>No-I would want to use a</p>	Single Multiple Choice	N/A - Recruitment

				pseudonym for me and my organization		
44	Branch, If-Yes to additional permissions...	HARD ASK	Please share your first and last name.	Short-Answer	Short-Answer	N/A - Recruitment
45			This recruitment survey is to select participants to study the career development experiences of social entrepreneurs who are gifted adults and the social value they create.			
46	Optional	Suggestions	Do you have any advice or recommendations to share to support gifted people who would like to become social entrepreneurs?	(Open-ended)	Open-ended	DIET
47	Optional	Suggestions	Optional: Do you know other social entrepreneurs that might be eligible for this study? Please describe, and/or share names, business organizations, or other contact information. Or Is there anything else you'd like to share?	(Open-ended)	Open-ended	
48	<b>Branch : (If email was not already shared: )</b>		Would you like to receive a copy of the final dissertation and executive summary in 2024?  If so, please share your email address to allow the researcher, Joi Lin, to contact you about future research, and also be entered into the compensation raffle of 30 \$20 gift cards to Simple Switch ( <a href="https://simpleswitch.org">https://simpleswitch.org</a> ) for completing this survey.  You may unsubscribe at any time by contacting the researcher, Joi Lin ( <a href="mailto:joi.lin@du.edu">joi.lin@du.edu</a> or <a href="mailto:joilin@outlook.com">joilin@outlook.com</a> ).  Email Address	Short-Answer	Short-Answer	N/A - Recruitment

End of Survey	<p>Thank you so much for completing this survey and for sharing a piece of your story with me.</p> <p>I appreciate all you have done and will do to make our world a better place!</p> <p>If you have any additional questions or comments about this survey, please contact the researcher at <a href="mailto:joi.lin@du.edu">joi.lin@du.edu</a>.</p>	Text	Text	N/A
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## Appendix C

### 22-Item Ksiazak Adult Giftedness Scale

The Ksiazak Adult Giftedness Scale (KAGS) was printed in Ksiazak to assess gifted characteristics (2010, pp. 80-81). Each item has seven possible ordinal responses, ranging from *never*, *almost never*, *rarely*, *sometimes*, *often*, *almost always*, and *always*.

1. It is important for me to be able to have intellectually stimulating discussions.
2. When I am interested in something, I take the time to learn everything I can about it
3. I think about existential issues often (e.g. the meaning of life, freedom and responsibility, etc.).
4. It is easy for me to learn new material the first time I am exposed to it.
5. I solve problems intuitively.
6. I ponder the meaning of my life.
7. It is important for me to be intellectually challenged at work or school.
8. It is easy for me to integrate information from multiple sources.
9. I use metaphors in my speech.
10. I love to talk about ideas.
11. I think that some problems have more than one right answer.
12. Other people would describe me as a creative person.
13. I tend to get tired of a job after I have learned how to do everything that is required for it.
14. I am a curious person.
15. I am able to remember more things than other people.
16. I am very concerned about world issues such as the environment, homelessness, war, or human rights.
17. I come up with original ideas.
18. I am an avid reader.
19. I am an independent thinker.
20. I have an advanced vocabulary compared to most other people.
21. I learn new material with few repetitions.
22. Continuing to learn throughout my life is one of my most important priorities.

## Appendix D

### Social Entrepreneurship Orientation Scale Items

Item	Social Entrepreneurship Orientation Scale (SEOS)
Social Mission (S)	
S1	Our philosophy guides everything we do in the organization.
S2	We often ask ourselves, “How is this activity achieving the purpose of the organization?”
S3	We are deeply committed to creating social value.
S4	Whatever surplus funds we generate are re-invested toward fulfillment of the mission.
Proactiveness (P)	
P1	We engage in forecasting to avoid surprises.
P2	We consider it important to be ready for future unexpected events.
P3	We engage in financial modeling to prepare for the future.
P4	We actively monitor external forces affecting us.
Innovativeness (I)	
I1	We look for new ways of delivering social outcomes.
I2	We look for innovative ways of marketing our services.
I3	We look for new ways of working with outside agencies like government agencies, businesses, or other non-profits.
I4	We seek novel ways of fundraising.
Risk Management (R)	
R1	We always engage in managing risks associated with our projects.
R2	We will not undertake a project without considering associated costs and benefits.
R3	We will commit resources to a project only when assured of funding to cover the cost.
R4	We have a cautious approach to making resource commitments.
Effectual (E)	
E1	On high social impact projects, we take steps so potential losses are affordable.
E2	In designing new services, we see the value in partnering with clients/beneficiaries.
E3	We believe in shaping our destiny using whatever means at our disposal.
E4	We believe it is important to get funding pre-commitments from our donors when undertaking new projects
E5	We believe in undertaking pilot projects before fully implementing new programs.

*Note.* The Social Entrepreneurship Orientation Scale (SEOS) was retrieved from PsycTests (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018). I modified the order of the categories and the numbering of the items.

Each of the 21 items has five possible ordinal responses on a Likert scale, ranging from *strongly agree* (5) to *strongly disagree* (1). The categories of the SEOS scale (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018) are: 1) social mission orientation (S), 2) proactiveness (P), 3) innovativeness (I), 4) risk management (R); and 5) effectual orientation (E) (SPIRE, 2018).



## Appendix E

### Protocols

This appendix features the semi-structured protocols for Interview 1 (Table E1), Interview 2 (Table E2), and the Focus Group (Table E3) to explore the CD of SEGA.

**Table E1**

#### *Interview 1 Protocol*

#	Interview 1 Protocol Questions	Citation
1	How are you feeling today?	Build a relationship (Uhrmacher et al., 2017)
2	Where are you right now? Can you describe your setting?	(Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher et al., 2017)
3	Tell me about your Self and your background. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nudge: intersectionality, personal history, parents' jobs, where they grew up, aspects related to their race, class, and gender, etc.</li> </ul>	(Greene, 2017)
4	How do you know that you are gifted? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nudge: Identification, experiences, what others have told them, etc.</li> </ul>	Characteristics (Ksiazak, 2010)
5	Please describe any gifted education you've received. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nudge: Opinions, feelings, supports and barriers, etc.</li> </ul>	(Olszewski-Kubilius & Cross, 2020)
6	Please share a metaphor for how you became a social entrepreneur.	(Ksiazak, 2010; Uhrmacher et al., 2017)
7	Describe your career development path and how you've become a social entrepreneur. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nudge: experiences, supports, barriers, giftedness, experiential learning</li> </ul>	(Lent et al., 1994; Kickul et al., 2010; Ksiazak, 2010; Mueller et al., 2015 Otten et al., 2022)
8	Please describe how your giftedness has manifested in your career, as a social entrepreneur.	(Ksiazak, 2010; Lent et al., 1994)
9	Please describe how salient aspects of your identity have interacted with your career development. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nudge: race, ethnicity, class, gender, culture, neurodivergences, etc.</li> </ul>	(Greene, 2017)
10	Please describe the artifact you've brought today...	(Uhrmacher et al., 2017)
11	Is there anything else you'd like to share today about your career development as a gifted social entrepreneur?	

**Table E2***Interview 2 Protocol*

#	Interview 2 Protocol Questions	Citation
1	How are you doing?	(Uhrmacher et al., 2017)
2	Have you had any thoughts or questions you'd like to share since the last time we spoke?	
3	I'd like to ask about a prior vignette from the first interview or observation...	(Uhrmacher et al., 2017)
4	Please describe your intentions with your social enterprise.  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your mission and why?</li> <li>• What innovative social value do you create and how?</li> </ul>	(Uhrmacher et al., 2017)
5	Please describe the day-to-day operations of your social enterprise.  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nudge: What do you output into the world?</li> </ul>	(Uhrmacher et al., 2017)
6	How well does your social enterprise do, and how do you know?  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nudge: How do you assess success? How do other's measure your success? What is most meaningful measure to you?</li> </ul>	(Dees, 1998/2001)
7	What are the next goals for you and your organization?	(Lent et al., 1994)
8	Please describe an inspirational role model for you and your social enterprise. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nudge: Media (book, tv, film) or real-life examples? Why are you inspired? How have you modeled decisions off them?</li> </ul>	(Ksiazak, 2010; Uhrmacher et al., 2017)
9	What recommendations would you make to support the future career development of social entrepreneurs who are gifted adults of all ages?	
10	Additional clarifying questions and wonderings from prior interviews, observation, and data collection	(Uhrmacher et al., 2017)
11	Is there anything else you'd like to share today about your career as a gifted social entrepreneur?	

**Table E3***Focus Group Protocol*

#	Semi-Structured Focus Group Prompts	Notes
1	What resonated with the presented themes?	CC&C
2	What did not resonate with the presented themes?	CC&C
3	Elaboration of Themes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you all feel about...</li> <li>• What do you think about...</li> <li>• Why did some of you...</li> <li>• Why did no one...</li> <li>• Etc.</li> </ul>	This prompt was used, as needed, to explore themes or relevant ideas after data analysis and the development of themes.
4	What further recommendations do you have for the career development of SEGA?	CC&C
5	How was your experience as a participant in this study?	CC&C
6	What recommendations do you have for future research?	
7	Is there anything else you'd like to share?	CC&C

## Appendix F

### SEGA Recruitment Survey Responses

**Table F1**

#### *SEGA Demographics*

SEGA	Gender	Race / Ethnicity / Culture	Skin Tone Region	Age	Highest Degree	Political Leanings	State
Kristopher	Cis-male	White U.S. American	18	40-49	MA (Working on PhD)	Marxist/Socialist-Humanism	CO
Janiece	Female cisgendered	Black, African American <sup>a</sup>	7	30-39	PhD	People's Party / Moderate Democrat <sup>b</sup>	CO
Shalelia	Female	Black/African American <sup>c</sup>	15	30-39	BA (Working on MA)	Moderate	CO
Chris	Nonbinary	White	17	50-59	PhD	Very liberal	CO
Nth	Intersex Male	African-American (Afro-Latino, Afro-Caribbean)	9	40-49	BA (Working on MBA) <sup>d</sup>	Left, progressive	TX

*Note.* These are self-reported open-ended responses by SEGA about their demographics. SEGA clicked a region on a heat map of a spectrum of skin tone colors from Akash et al. (2016).

<sup>a</sup> Janiece's full response to race / ethnicity / culture, "Black, African American, culture informed by race, gender, class, family traditions, geography, hobbies, music, talents, gifts."

<sup>b</sup> Janiece's full response to how political leanings, "People's Party though I don't feel it is politically viable in this sociopolitical context with the overwhelming 2 party system, so moderate dem rooted in racial justice though I feel the party is not aligned that way."

<sup>c</sup> In the interview, Shalelia said she identifies as a "Black woman with mixed race ancestry."

<sup>d</sup> Nth also completed a certificate in social intrapreneurship.

**Table F2***SEGA Organization Demographics*

SEGA and Enterprise	Type of Founder	Formation	Age of Business in Years	Number of Employees	Annual Revenue in USD	SEGA Annual Salary
Kristopher, YbY	Co-Founder	Non-profit	1-4	6-9	\$100,000 - \$250,000	\$0
Janiece, YAASPA	Co-Founder	Non-profit	10-19	20-49	\$1 Million - \$5 Million	\$100,000 - \$250,000
Shalelia, SCDEP	Founder	Non-profit and LLC	1-4	2-5	\$250,000 - \$500,000	\$50,000 - \$100,000
Chris, DC	Founder	Non-profit	1-4	1	\$1-\$10,000	\$1-\$10,000
Nth, ET	Co-Founder	Non-profit and C Corp, working toward B Corp status	5-9	2-5	\$1 Million - \$5 Million	\$100,000 - \$250,000

**Table F3***SEGA Organizational Alignment with SDGs*

SEGA and Enterprise	Alignment with SDGs (United Nations, 2015)
Kristopher, YbY	1) No poverty, 2) Zero hunger, 3) Good health and well-being, 4) Quality education, 5) Gender equality, 10) Reduced inequalities, 16) Peace, justice, and strong institutions
Janiece, YAASPA	1) No poverty, 3) Good health and well-being, 8) Decent work and economic growth, 9) Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure, 10) Reduced inequalities, 11) Sustainable cities and communities, 16) Peace, justice, and strong institutions
Shalelia, SCDEP	4) Quality education, 10) Reduced inequalities
Chris, DC	3) Good health and well-being, 10) Reduced inequalities, 16) Peace, justice, and strong institutions
Nth, ET	1) No poverty, 4) Quality education, 7) Affordable and clean energy, 8) Decent work and economic growth, 9) Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure, 10) Reduced inequalities, 11) Sustainable cities and communities, 13) Climate action

**Table F4***SEGA Self-Identification of Neurodivergence and Giftedness*

Questions	Kristopher	Janiece	Shalelia	Chris	Nth
Neurodivergence or other disabilities?	I am living with severe anxiety. As an empath, I am highly sensitive to crowds, noises, and artificial lighting. I feel the emotions of others deeply, to the extent that it adversely affects my mood and cognition for inordinate periods of time.	I am not sure I was identified as gifted, but I skipped the 2nd grade	Gifted!	I am neurodivergent: profoundly gifted + ADHD + maybe autistic...	Autism, dyslexia, giftedness, sometimes ADHD (or maybe just need people to get to the point)
Do you identify as gifted?	Probably Yes	Probably Yes	Absolutely Yes	Absolutely Yes	Absolutely Yes
How do you define giftedness?	Very simply put, giftedness is indicative of high levels of intellectual and academic potential. It may account for effective communication, global mindedness, creativity, complex reasoning, and more.	I am artistic, I innovate, I am creative, I crave knowledge, am able to produce knowledge, I am an innovator, I know how to support others to unveil their gifts	Asynchronous learning and development. Deeper processing and connections.	I tend to use the Columbus Group definition of giftedness [as asynchronous development] (Silverman, 1997).	Mentally gifted is the ability to think of things in ways the majority of people cannot think of them, but also, the thoughts lead to insights and breakthroughs .

Questions	Kristopher	Janiece	Shalelia	Chris	Nth
Types of gifted identification?	Someone told me I might be gifted	Resonate with qualitative characteristics of being gifted, Someone told me I might be gifted, Skipped 2nd grade	Formal identification as gifted in one or more areas, High IQ or cognitive ability score, Received gifted and talented education services, Resonate with qualitative characteristics of being gifted	Formal identification as gifted in one or more areas, High IQ or cognitive ability score, Received gifted and talented education services, Resonate with qualitative characteristics of being gifted, Resonate with twice-exceptionality (characteristics of giftedness AND other neurodivergence/physical divergence)	Formal identification as gifted in one or more areas, High IQ or cognitive ability score, Received gifted and talented education services, Resonate with qualitative characteristics of being gifted, Resonate with twice-exceptionality (characteristics of giftedness AND other neurodivergence/physical divergence), Someone told me I might be gifted, Accepted into a High IQ organization (Mensa, Intertel, Triple Nine Society, IPSE, etc.)
IQ / cognitive ability scores?	I have never taken an IQ assessment.	I never tested well on standardized tests	I was very young and do not remember!	When I was a teenager, I was told that I was 4+ SD from the norm at age 10. I think it was probably the WISC-R, but I can't say for sure.	I've maxed out most IQ tests administered to me (Wonderlic, WAIS-IV, RAPM-II, CFIT-III...) and came close to maxing out the Miller Analogies Test (525/600)

**Table F5**

*SEGA Responses on KAGS*

KAGS (Ksiazak, 2010)	Kristopher	Janiece	Shalelia	Chris	Nth
1. It is important for me to be able to have intellectually stimulating discussions.	Often	Always	Always	Always	Always
2. When I am interested in something, I take the time to learn everything I can about it	Often	Always	Always	Always	Almost Always
3. I think about existential issues often (e.g. the meaning of life, freedom and responsibility, etc.).	Often	Always	Always	Almost Always	Sometimes
4. It is easy for me to learn new material the first time I am exposed to it.	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always	Almost Always	Almost Always
5. I solve problems intuitively.	Sometimes	Often	Always	Almost Always	Always
6. I ponder the meaning of my life.	Often	Often	Always	Always	Sometimes
7. It is important for me to be intellectually challenged at work or school.	Almost Always	Always	Always	Always	Always
8. It is easy for me to integrate information from multiple sources.	Often	Always	Always	Always	Always
9. I use metaphors in my speech.	Sometimes	Always	Always	Often	Almost Always
10. I love to talk about ideas.	Often	Always	Always	Almost Always	Always
11. I think that some problems have more than one right answer.	Always	Always	Always	Almost Always	Always
12. Other people would describe me as a creative person.	Often	Always	Almost Always	Sometimes	Always
13. I tend to get tired of a job after I have learned how to do everything that is required for it.	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes	Almost Always	Sometimes
14. I am a curious person.	Always	Always	Always	Always	Almost Always
15. I am able to remember more things than other people.	Sometimes	Always	Always	Always	Almost Always
16. I am very concerned about world issues such as the environment, homelessness, war, or human rights.	Always	Always	Always	Always	Always
17. I come up with original ideas.	Often	Always	Always	Sometimes	Always
18. I am an avid reader.	Always	Always	Almost Always	Always	Always
19. I am an independent thinker.	Always	Always	Always	Always	Always
20. I have an advanced vocabulary compared to most other people.	Often	Always	Always	Always	Always
21. I learn new material with few repetitions.	Sometimes	Often	Always	Always	Always
22. Continuing to learn throughout my life is one of my most important priorities.	Always	Always	Always	Always	Always

*Note.* Seven-point scale: *never, almost never, rarely, sometimes, often, almost always, always.*



**Table F6**

*SEGA Responses on SEOS*

SEOS (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018)	Kristopher	Janiece	Shalelia	Chris	Nth
<b>Social Mission (S)</b>					
S1 Our philosophy guides everything we do in the organization.	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Neither
S2 We often ask, "How is this activity achieving the purpose of the organization?"	Strongly agree	Strongly disagree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Neither
S3 We are deeply committed to creating social value.	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree
S4 Whatever surplus funds we generate are re-invested toward fulfillment of the mission.	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree
<b>Proactiveness (P)</b>					
P1 We engage in forecasting to avoid surprises.	Somewhat agree	Somewhat agree	Neither	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
P2 We consider it important to be ready for future unexpected events.	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree
P3 We engage in financial modeling to prepare for the future.	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree
P4 We actively monitor external forces affecting us.	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree
<b>Innovativeness (I)</b>					
I1 We look for new ways of delivering social outcomes.	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree
I2 We look for innovative ways of marketing our services.	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I3 We look for new ways of working with outside agencies like government agencies, businesses, or other non-profits.	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Neither	Somewhat agree
I4 We seek novel ways of fundraising.	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Neither	Strongly agree
<b>Risk Management (R)</b>					
R1 We always engage in managing risks associated with our projects.	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat agree	Neither
R2 We will not undertake a project without considering associated costs and benefits.	Strongly agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree
R3 We only commit resources to a project when assured of funding to cover the cost.	Strongly agree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Neither
R4 We have a cautious approach to making resource commitments.	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat agree	Neither
<b>Effectual (E)</b>					
E1 On high social impact projects, we take steps so potential losses are affordable.	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat agree
E2 In designing new services, we see the value in partnering with clients/beneficiaries.	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree
E3 We believe in shaping our destiny using whatever means at our disposal.	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree
E4 We believe it is important to get funding pre-commitments from our donors when undertaking new projects	Strongly agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither
E5 We believe in undertaking pilot projects before fully implementing new programs.	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither

*Note. Scale: strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neither, somewhat agree, strongly agree.*