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**Activities of the Mind and Soul:
Eudaimonia, Identity, and Implicit Theories of Giftedness in Secondary
Gifted Students**

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A Dissertation Submitted to The Graduate School at the University of Missouri-St. Louis
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Education with an emphasis in Educational Practice

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experience of secondary gifted students, more specifically their implicit theories of giftedness, how they incorporate giftedness into their sense of identity, and their eudaimonic development. The following four research questions guided the study: (a) What do the narratives of secondary gifted students reveal about their eudaimonic well-being? (b) What do the narratives of secondary gifted students reveal about their implicit theories of giftedness? (c) What do the narratives of secondary gifted students reveal about the extent to which giftedness is a part of their identities? (d) What are the relationships between gifted students' implicit theories, identity, and eudaimonic well-being?

Fifteen secondary gifted students answered a series of prompts through written responses, which were the basis of a thematic analysis. Four themes about eudaimonia emerged: the effects of academic excellence; meaning and purpose in learning and extracurricular activities; meaningful relationships; and struggle and change. Four themes about students' beliefs about giftedness emerged: giftedness affects relationships; giftedness affects experience in school; gifted identification and programming; and gifted identity. Observations were made about the differences between implicit theories held by participants whose responses showed greater instances of eudaimonia and those whose responses showed fewer instances of eudaimonia, providing important implications for effectively educating gifted students and supporting their eudaimonic development.

Key words: gifted; giftedness; gifted education; implicit theories; eudaimonia; social-emotional well-being; secondary education

Dedication

For the kids—both my students and my own.

Acknowledgments

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CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW AND PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

It's a stormy spring afternoon in my classroom in the large suburban public high school where I teach. Even though the final bell has rung, my classroom is filled with gifted students, gathering for an end-of-the-school-year celebration. They are playing games and laughing, just enjoying being together and being themselves after three years of school disrupted by the pandemic. One of them even brought a homemade piñata, and pieces of tissue paper still litter the floor.

As I observe them from my desk, I am momentarily astounded by the diversity of experience they represent, despite their shared gifted identification. Some are high achievers, at the top of their class; one failed every single course this semester. Some are popular and plugged into the school community; others feel like outsiders. Even those who are thriving on the surface have their own struggles: perfectionism, anxiety, and existential crises among others. As a high school gifted resource teacher, one of my most important roles is supporting the affective needs of these high-ability students. The challenge, of course, is finding the common strands among students whose giftedness manifests itself in so many variations and who navigate their shared educational context so differently.

Most researchers and practitioners in the field of gifted education agree that giftedness affects students' social-emotional development, not just their intellectual ability. However, the implementation of effective SEL programming for gifted students is hindered by the fact that there is little agreement in the field as a whole about the nature and range of their social-emotional well-being or how to facilitate its development. Researchers and educators are challenged by a series of paradoxes and inconsistencies

that prevent the creation and adoption of universally recommended SEL practices for gifted students. These tensions are often related to inconsistency in terminology, including what giftedness actually means; disagreements over whether giftedness should be understood as an asset or a vulnerability in relation to overall adjustment and well-being; and differing social, cultural, and educational contexts surrounding giftedness.

Literature Review

Giftedness

Broadly, giftedness is understood to mean intelligence, ability, or performance that far exceeds the average for a person's age. Gifted education operates with the understanding that because of their asynchronous development, these students often need modified educational experiences. Beyond this basic understanding, though, there are many inconsistencies in how different countries, states, and even local school districts identify and address giftedness. In the United States, two of the most prominent theoretical frameworks of giftedness are those of Joseph Renzulli and Francoys Gagné (National Association for Gifted Children, n.d.). Renzulli's Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness focuses on the interaction between high ability, high motivation, and high levels of creativity (Renzulli, 2005) while Gagné's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent proposes a difference between a high level of natural and spontaneous ability (giftedness) and a high level of learned performance (talent) (Gagné, 2005). These differences are not just a matter of semantics—they suggest two different fundamental understandings of what giftedness is. For those who use Renzulli's framework, giftedness manifests itself in performance—ability *alone* is inconsequential. For those who use Gagné's framework, a student's high ability can be acknowledged, even if the student

struggles, for whatever reason, to perform. Ultimately, these two theories lead educators and researchers to approach “giftedness” as either something people *do* or something people *are*. The understanding of whether giftedness, and intelligence in general, is primarily an activity or a state of being is referred to in various ways in the literature: performance versus trait (Kerr et al., 1988; Manaster et al., 1994); incremental versus entity (Dweck & Leggett, 1988); and volitional versus intrinsic (Meadows & Neumann, 2017). In an overview of the historical and contemporary complexities in our understanding of giftedness, Dai (2008) identified eight of what he called “essential tensions” that permeate the field: aptitude versus achievement; being versus doing/becoming; domain-general versus domain specific; qualitative versus quantitative differences; expertise versus creativity; nomothetic versus idiographic; reductionism versus emergentism; and excellence versus equity. Dai argues that this lack of unity not just in terminology but in conceptualization complicates productive conversations in the field as a whole.

The Harmony and Disharmony Hypotheses

One of the largest issues in the field of gifted education in need of productive conversation is how practitioners should approach their students’ social and emotional needs: Is giftedness positively associated with physical, social, and emotional well-being—the harmony hypothesis? Or is it a risk to well-being and adjustment in need of intervention—the disharmony hypothesis? There has been a great deal of interest in the relationship between gifted students’ intellectual abilities and their emotional and social well-being since the beginning of research into intelligence. Lewis Terman’s groundbreaking longitudinal study of gifted individuals, *Genetic Studies of Genius* (1925-

1959), found that gifted individuals generally were healthier, more successful, and more popular than their same-age peers. Although highly influential, Terman's study was rife with methodological flaws, such as the majority of his participants being white, male, and from an above-average socioeconomic class (Bergold et al., 2020). More recent studies into the subjective well-being of gifted individuals support Terman's findings (Beduna & Perrone-McGovern, 2016; Bergold et al., 2020) while others have found that gifted individuals have lower subjective or psychological well-being (Casino-Garcia et al., 2019; Pollet & Schnell, 2016; Vaille et al., 2007; Wigtil and Henriques, 2015).

Giftedness and Emotional Intelligence

Some studies provide results that fall somewhere in between the harmony and disharmony hypotheses and are often paradoxical. For example, research on gifted students' emotional intelligence [EI] is contradictory. Emotional intelligence is most generally conceptualized as either ability or trait EI. Both ability and trait EI are related to beneficial educational outcomes, such as positive relationships and academic success (Zeidner & Matthews, 2017). Ability EI refers to the cooperation between emotion and intelligence and addresses an individual's capability to perceive, understand, and manage emotion as well as to integrate emotion and thought (Mayer et al., 2004). Due to the cognitive nature of ability EI, Zeidner and Matthews (2017) suggest that gifted children may have a double academic advantage: their high academic ability is coupled with a stronger ability to cope with academic stressors. This idea is supported by Zeidner et al.'s (2005) study of Israeli adolescents in which the gifted group scored significantly higher in ability EI on the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test within every subscale. However, a study of Spanish students by Casino-Garcia et al. (2021), using a

Spanish adaptation of the MSCEIT, the Trait Meta-Mood Scale, found that gifted students scored lower in two of the three subscales. Overall, a meta-analysis by Kong (2014) looked for correlations between intelligence and ability EI in 46 papers and found that ability EI was positively correlated with overall, verbal, and nonverbal intelligence.

Trait EI is more related to personality than cognitive ability and has to do with individuals' perceptions of their emotional competency (Petrides, 2011). It is generally assessed using self-report surveys instead of objective measures. Zeidner et al. (2005), using the Schutte Self-Report Inventory, found that their Israeli gifted students scored lower in trait EI than their nongifted peers, despite their superior ability EI. Lee and Olszewski-Kubilius (2006), using the BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory, found that their sample of American gifted students scored higher than the normative sample in adaptability but lower in stress management. There was no significant difference in the comparison between interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities. However, Schwean et al., (2006), using the same inventory found that a sample of Canadian gifted students scored higher in every category than nongifted students.

The discrepancies among the results of various studies on giftedness and emotional intelligence may come down to differing cultural contexts and the difference between emotional performance (measured by ability EI) and the *perception* of emotional performance (measured by trait EI). For example, Casino-Garcia et al. (2021) note that giftedness carries a significant negative social stigma in Spain and is not well supported in their education system, perhaps explaining the lower ability EI scores among Spanish gifted students. When it comes to the difference between ability and trait EI scores, one must keep in mind that measures of trait EI are often self-report questionnaires: Zeidner

et al. (2005) suggest that personality traits, such as levels of neuroticism and extraversion, can bias self-perceptions of emotional intelligence that have little to do with a student's actual performance. They also observe that a gifted child might have better insight into their own personal limitations than their peers thus leading them to lower scores on self-report instruments. To this point, it is worth noting that in Lee and Olszewski-Kublius's (2006) study, despite the gifted students' lower scores in trait EI, the researchers did not observe evidence of maladjustment in their behavior and relationships.

Giftedness and Moral Development

Similarly, research into how giftedness affects students' moral and ethical development is mixed: Gifted students show a consistently advanced ability in moral *reasoning* but have more varied results in moral *sensitivity*, which suggests that not all gifted students are able to transfer their cognitive understanding of moral problems into empathetic behavior (Tirri & Pehkonen, 1998). This may be an issue of asynchronicity; gifted children may be advanced in intellectual reasoning but still have the expected social and emotional functioning for their age (Lovecky, 1997). Asynchronous moral development can also be problematic when gifted students display an extreme awareness and interest in moral problems but lack the emotional maturity to make peace with human failings or to accept that not all problems have good solutions (Lovecky, 1997). Like with EI, in the cognitive elements of moral development, giftedness can be viewed as an asset, but the relationship between giftedness and the performance of moral activity and overall well-being is more ambiguous.

The Paradox of Giftedness

The tension between ability and performance (or the perception of performance) as well as the tension between harmony and disharmony may be, in fact, the defining characteristics of living life as a “gifted” individual. In her 15-year phenomenological case study of a young gifted woman, Jean Sunde Peterson (2012) identified the central phenomenon of the young woman’s experience as “the asset-burden paradox of giftedness.” Peterson drew largely from Kazimierz Dabrowski’s (1964) Theory of Positive Disintegration, which describes optimal personality development as occurring through conflict and disturbances, what Dabrowski termed “positive maladjustment,” that lead individuals to break down and examine previously held beliefs and behaviors (Beduna & Perrone-McGovern, 2016). For Dabrowski, moving from the lowest level of personality, Primary Integration, to the rarely achieved highest level, Secondary Integration, can only occur through experiences of what he called positive disintegration, “loosening and even fragmenting the internal psychic environment, through conflicts within the internal environment and with the external environment” (1964, p. 5).

Dabrowski coined the term “overexcitability” to describe the characteristic that most frequently leads to the conflicts of so-called positive maladjustment. The construct of “overexcitabilities”—in psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, imaginal, and emotional experiences—has become linked most commonly, although not exclusively, with gifted individuals. A meta-analysis of twelve studies exploring the relationship between giftedness and overexcitabilities reveals that there is a positive correlation between giftedness and sensual, imaginal, intellectual, and emotional overexcitabilities (Winkler and Voight, 2016). With this relationship in mind, perhaps the Theory of Positive Disintegration can help reconcile some of the tensions between the

harmony and disharmony hypotheses: Overexcitability, which Dabrowski referred to as “the tragic gift” (Tillier, 2009), can lead to positive maladjustment, and “there emerges a sense of disharmony between one’s own moral possibilities and one’s present behavior” (1964, p. 108); yet, it is only through resolving this disharmony that the true harmony of optimal development can occur. In fact, there seems to be a correlation between the presence of overexcitabilities and higher emotional intelligence and overall well-being (Beduna & Perrone-McGovern, 2016). The pressing question for gifted educators, then, is how we can aid our students in acknowledging and reconciling the tensions and disharmonies of their experiences so they can reach the levels of social-emotional development that their cognitive abilities both allow and complicate.

Implicit Theories and Beliefs About Giftedness

When discussing understandings of giftedness as well as the impact of giftedness on well-being, one must also consider the difference between explicit and implicit theories. Sternberg et al. (1981) defined explicit theories as those constructed by psychologists or other scientists in response to data. They defined implicit theories as those that already exist in the minds of individuals, both professionals and laypeople. Within the context of an educational setting, an implicit theory can be defined as a person’s understanding of their educational labels, which becomes part of their overall self-knowledge (Lo, 2014). Despite being based upon assumptions and not even fully recognized by individuals much of the time, implicit theories can be extremely powerful: Oftentimes, the *accuracy* of a person’s beliefs about giftedness are less influential in shaping their experiences than their perceptions (Kerr et al., 1988); people are more likely to act upon beliefs than explicit theories (Sternberg et al., 1981). What scholars in

the field know to be true about giftedness, based upon data and research, must be reconciled with what students, and their parents, peers, and educators, *believe* to be true about giftedness. In fact, explicit theories are often built upon implicit theories, formalizing intuitions, which can help explain why explicit theories themselves conceptualize concepts like giftedness so differently (Zhang & Sternberg, 1998). This intersection between explicit and implicit theories is essential to providing appropriate social-emotional support for gifted students but extremely complex, since each culture's and individual's implicit theories of giftedness can be unique *and* dynamic (Lo, 2014; Zhang & Sternberg, 1998). When examining students' implicit theories of giftedness, we can examine the literature from the lens of three different questions: How do gifted students attribute their giftedness, how do gifted students believe being gifted affects them, and what is the effect of the label itself?

Attributions of Giftedness

As previously noted, the literature frequently refers to students' attributions of giftedness as performance versus trait, incremental versus entity, or volitional versus intrinsic, and findings about the nature of students' attributions are split. Guskin et al. (1986) found that gifted students prefer to view their giftedness as the result of their own hard work, not wanting to perceive themselves as fundamentally different from their peers. Perceptions of giftedness as performance rather than a trait were also discovered by Kerr et al. (1988) and Feldhusen and Dai (1997). However, Manaster et al. (1994) in a partial replication of Kerr et al.'s study came to the opposite conclusion, that gifted students were more likely to see giftedness as trait-based rather than performance.

While the studies cited above made use of questionnaires, Meadows and Neumann (2017) believed questionnaires, even open-ended ones, are too limiting to provide a thorough explanation of a student's experience with their own giftedness. Their qualitative study used narrative inquiry to study the nature of the stories gifted students tell themselves about their giftedness. They found that students hold a complex and sometimes contradictory understanding of giftedness. While the participants in the study rejected notions that they were "smarter" than their peers, they did believe that being gifted means that they saw things in a different way, suggesting a more intrinsic or ontological view of giftedness. However, the language they used to describe the work in their school's gifted program implied that they also believed that giftedness was more like a club to be joined, a willingness to do hard work (Meadows & Neumann, 2017). These contradictions reflect the complex process of reconciliation with academic labels that students go through as implicit theories shift and change due to differing contexts and developmental changes (Lo, 2014).

There is some evidence that a student's adjustment and well-being could be related to whether their implicit theory is more trait- or performance-based. Students who lack supportive social cues about giftedness or who are not being appropriately challenged at school may believe that their successes or failures occur without their effort and are less capable of facing challenges, while students who experience positive social cues and who have faced academic challenges are more likely to value effort and achieve goals (Mudrack & Zabrodska, 2014).

The Effects of Giftedness

Studies also have attempted to discover how gifted students believe being gifted affects them. Gifted students often perceive themselves as different from their peers (Manaster et al., 1994; Meadows & Neumann, 2017). Many studies suggest that gifted students believe that this difference has an overall neutral or a positive effect on them (Coleman & Cross, 2014; Guskin et al., 1986; Kerr et al., 1988; Manaster et al., 1994). The common benefits of giftedness perceived by gifted students include greater personal growth (Kerr et al., 1988) and special treatment from teachers (Coleman & Cross, 2014; Manaster et al., 1994).

Even in studies in which the participants felt giftedness has positive or neutral effects *overall*, most students believed there are negative implications to giftedness as well, particularly in regard to social relationships (Kerr et al., 1988; Manaster et al., 1994; Coleman & Cross, 2014). It is worth noting that the literature indicates that negative social impacts of giftedness are largely anticipated and perceived rather than actually experienced (Coleman & Cross, 2014; Manaster et al., 1994). Gifted students are aware of negative stereotypes of giftedness, and although they often do not believe they fit the stereotype, they expect other people to see them that way, and they themselves expect other gifted students to reflect that stereotype. As Coleman and Cross light-heartedly summarize, “Notice this is the weirdo-who-isn’t-a-weirdo expecting to see weirdos-who-are-really-weirdos” (Coleman & Cross, 2014, p. 15). Regardless of whether gifted students actually experience the social stigma they might expect to result from their giftedness, the perception of negative social consequences can be more powerful in influencing students’ experience than the actuality (Kerr et al., 1988). Moving away from evaluative statements that judge the impact of giftedness as positive or negative, several

themes arise in qualitative studies about students' implicit theories of giftedness, most significantly that they feel a great deal of internal and, at least inferred, external pressure to meet high expectations (Berlin, 2009; Guthrie, 2020; Moulton et al., 1998; Mudrack & Zabrodska, 2014).

The Effects of Labeling

When considering gifted students' implicit theories and perceptions of giftedness, one must also consider the experience of being given an educational label as being potentially distinct from the actual experience of having high ability. Similarly, the experience of being given the label of "gifted" is distinct from being *treated* as gifted and given the appropriate accommodations. Research on the effects of labeling students as gifted is mixed, and it is hard to completely separate the effect of the label, the effect of the innate characteristics that led to the labeling, and the effect of receiving gifted programming.

There is evidence that receiving a gifted label can influence an individual's view of intelligence: Makel et al. (2015) concluded that students identified as gifted often distinguish *giftedness* as something different than intelligence; while they tend to hold incremental views of intelligence, they are more likely to see giftedness as categorical in nature. Receiving a label, then, could create a sense of being "other." After studying adults who had been identified gifted as children, Freeman (2006) and Holahan and Holahan (1999) both found that those who had been labeled gifted experienced the same or lower life satisfaction than adults of similar intelligence who had not been labeled as gifted, concluding that gifted identification serves no long-term benefits and may be

harmful. It is important to note, though, that neither study addressed the nature of gifted programming, if any at all, that the participants received.

Giftedness and Identity

It is difficult to separate implicit theories and beliefs about giftedness from discussions of how giftedness affects identity. One can reasonably assume that individuals' giftedness and their beliefs about giftedness impact their sense of self in some way; yet, the distinction between which implicit theories are simply ideas and which are fundamental to their sense of identity is often unclear. When considering the relationship between giftedness and identity, one must explore both how giftedness affects identity formation and how individuals may incorporate giftedness as part of their identities.

Giftedness and Identity Formation

Erik Erikson, whom many consider to be the father of psychosocial development, famously stated that forming identity is the "chief task" of adolescence (Erickson, 1968). In Erikson's fifth stage of psychosocial development, identity versus confusion, teenagers must strive to find continuity and wholeness between what they believe themselves to be and what others believe them to be (1968). Erikson himself noted that gifted adolescents can experience identity formation in more extreme ways. He stated that adolescence "is least 'stormy' in that segment of youth which is gifted and well trained in the pursuit of expanding technological trends, and thus able to identify with new roles of competency and invention" (pp. 129-130). Yet, he also acknowledged, specifically in reference to his case study of young Martin Luther, that "identity formation among extraordinary individuals can also be associated with neurotic and psychic symptoms" (p. 249). In

particular, because gifted individuals have advanced critical thinking skills and moral reasoning, they are likely to begin the process of identity formation sooner than their same-age peers (Gross, 1998), leading to a sharpened social awareness that can lead them to feel different from these peers (Luus & Watters, 2012).

Building off of Erikson's work, James Marcia (1966) conceptualized four identity statuses relating to a person's relationship with "conferred" and "constructed" identities. Individuals with the status of identity achievement are committed to a constructed identity; in other words, they have carefully considered options and have decided for themselves who they are and who they want to be. On the other end of the spectrum are people in a state of identity diffusion: They have no identity commitments, nor are they in the process of exploring them. In between these poles are individuals in identity foreclosure, those who perhaps have not experienced an identity crisis and have accepted a conferred identity; and individuals in a state of identity moratorium, who are in the process of actively working to make identity commitments.

In a study of 86 male college students that attempted to discover the behavioral consequences of each identity status, Marcia (1966) concluded that those in a state of identity achievement were able to persevere longer with stressful tasks and maintain realistic levels of achievement. They were also less likely to subscribe to authoritarian values and had less vulnerable self-esteem. People in a state of moratorium most closely resembled the achievement group with more variable commitment to stressful tasks. The foreclosure group's most significant characteristic was an adherence to authoritarian values, and they also had lower self-esteem and commitment to stressful tasks than those in the achievement and moratorium groups. Finally, those in a state of identity diffusion

had more variable results, actually performing better than those in the foreclosure group. Marcia (1966) suggested that this had to do with his subject pool: identity diffused individuals who were on the lower functioning end of the continuum would not even be attending college. The results of the study indicate that those who are able to reach the status of identity achievement are more likely to lead successful and fulfilling lives.

If, as Marcia suggests, individuals' identity status is associated with the extent to which they experience life satisfaction, examining the relationship between giftedness and identity status is of particular importance. Returning once again to Terman's classic study, in 1940, Terman followed up with his subjects in adulthood, and classified the male subjects' level of achievement and success in categories of A, B, and C, with the primary criterion being "the extent to which a subject had made use of his superior intellect" (Terman, 1947, p. 312). Men in the most successful group, the "A group" were more likely to have graduated from college, entered into professional careers, better social adjustment, higher marriage rates with lower divorce rates, and better mental health. Terman also found that men in the A group largely came from families with a stronger educational tradition with fathers in a professional class. In personality, they showed stronger integration towards goals, perseverance, self-confidence, and absence of inferior feelings (Terman & Oden, 1947). Zou and Crammond (2001) attempted to use Terman's data to draw conclusions about giftedness and identity formation within Marcia's paradigm. They found that a large majority of Terman's "A group" would be classified as identity achievers, while half of the "C group" had a diffused status. While there are certainly limitations to this study because Terman's subject pool was limited to men from largely white families and because of the age of Terman's study, there is

certainly evidence to suggest that gifted individuals' success is related to their identity status.

Giftedness as an Aspect of Identity

Beyond considerations of how giftedness might impact identity formation, one must consider to what extent people incorporate giftedness itself as part of their identities, how central giftedness is to their identities, and whether they believe the impact of their giftedness to their identities is good or bad. Marcia's distinctions between conferred and constructed identities seem especially relevant to the field of gifted education, in which the label "gifted" could be understood as conferring an identity upon students. How a student accepts, rejects, or grapples with this label may influence their pursuit of identity achievement. A sense of identity as a gifted person depends upon the negotiation between an individual's beliefs about their ability and what they believe others feel about their abilities. For example, Tapper and Abbiss (2015) found four ways gifted students embraced or struggled with giftedness as a part of their identities in their qualitative study of gifted adolescents from New Zealand. "The Conformist" attempts to be "normal," in other words change behaviors and code-switch to adapt to the perceived social norms of the dominant peer culture and hide elements of giftedness that they feel are socially undesirable. "The Rebel," on the other hand, is a selective consumer of demands both from peers and school expectations and often underperforms in school because they are more interested in pursuing personal interests. In this case, the student perhaps accepts giftedness as part of their identity but rejects the social expectations that may accompany it. "The Nerd" is a gifted student who accepts and embraces an identity as "other" within the school community, often reframing this difference as a positive. Finally, there is "The

All-Rounder,” who is able to successfully merge competencies in many different areas, including academic, athletic, cultural, and social, accepting giftedness as part, but *just* a part, of their identity. The “All-Rounder,” which clearly has connections to Marcia’s (1966) identity achievement group, was acknowledged by the students within the study, no matter how they classified themselves, to be the most desirable identity in their New Zealander context.

Regardless of culture, a theme arises in the literature regarding the complexities of giftedness as a part of students’ identities: that if gifted students believe that their abilities will not be accepted, they may feel a conflict between their desire for intimacy and their desire for achievement, which Gross (1989) called “the forced-choice dilemma.” Frequently prioritizing their need for intimacy over their need for achievement, gifted students may choose to mask their abilities, or use “self-presentation strategies” such as ingratiation, sandbagging, and self-handicapping (Luus & Watters, 2012) in order to be accepted socially, as they change behaviors, values, and attitudes they view as too different (Gross, 1998). This pressure to mask a part of their identities can lead to a loss of what Gross (1998) calls “their innermost feelings and beliefs” (p. 170), a denial of self that could contribute to identity diffusion in adulthood.

It seems worth noting that these articles seem to be grounded in assumptions that gifted students *should* incorporate giftedness into their identity and that gifted students experience *greater*, not just different, identity struggles than their nongifted peers without the empirical evidence to support these beliefs. As Dai (2008) notes in his explanation of the tensions surrounding giftedness, “Indeed, many in the field can be better described as champions of certain justifiable causes rather than disinterested bystanders” (p. 72).

Assumptions that giftedness will have a negative impact on identity may be at odds with the literature that suggests gifted individuals' cognitive abilities can be a protective factor to their well-being.

From a more practical standpoint, Mahoney (1998), in the creation of the Gifted Identity Formation Model, suggested that counselors and educators can help students integrate giftedness as part of their identity through the constructs of validation, affirmation, affiliation, and affinity within the systems of self, family, culture, vocation, environment, society, psychology, politics, physiology, and development. But more simply, students are more likely to embrace giftedness as a positive part of their identity in environments in which academic achievement is valued (Luus & Watters, 2012).

The Importance of Educational Fit

Over and over again, the literature supports the idea that the appropriateness of the educational environment is crucial to the effectiveness of gifted education, gifted students' implicit theories of giftedness, their sense of identity, and their overall well-being. Zeidner and Schleyer's (1999) study comparing the effects of gifted programming implemented within traditional mixed-ability classrooms and self-contained gifted classrooms in Israel found each model had its own trade-off of assets and burdens in influencing students' perceptions of giftedness. The authors referred to gifted programming as "a double-edged sword" (p. 701). Students within the heterogeneous classrooms had higher academic self-concepts and lower test anxiety, but those in the specialized classes had higher levels of school satisfaction, including respect for their teachers and appreciation of their classroom atmosphere. They also had slightly higher *overall* self-concepts (Zeidner & Schleyer, 1999).

A similar study of American fifth and sixth graders compared rates of loneliness, school liking and school avoidance, self-esteem, perfectionism, and math self-concept among students in a self-contained gifted class, a math gifted pull-out program, and a class in which the gifted students received no gifted services. They found that while there were few differences between the pull-out program and the students who received no services, except for the pull-out students' higher math self-concepts, the students in the self-contained class had higher rates of loneliness, maladaptive perfectionism, math self-concept, and lower self-esteem (Cash & Lin, 2021). It is possible that students in gifted programming can experience lower academic self-concepts because of what Marsh (1987) identified as "the big-fish-little-pond effect" (BFLPE). In other words, a student's academic self-concept is formed by comparison to the ability of other students: A gifted student in a class of predominantly lower-ability students will have a higher academic self-concept than a gifted student in a class of other gifted students. It is likely that gifted students learning in homogeneous ability groups will have lower academic self-concepts, but these self-concepts are also likely to be accurate, avoiding inappropriate inflation that could lead to a loss of academic effort (Cash & Lin, 2021). Cash and Lin also suggest that the greater rates of loneliness and lower levels of self-esteem experienced by the self-contained group may not be related to the delivery model of the program itself but may be a reflection of the inherent differences of the students who enrolled in each program.

In general, the literature about gifted programming suggests that the "double-edged sword" phenomenon is perceived by students as well, who sometimes feel that the specialized classes and services they receive in response to their identification as gifted can lead to negative outcomes, such as more work and even higher levels of pressure

from the adults in their lives (Eddles-Hirsch et al., 2010; Meadows & Neumann, 2017; Moulton et al., 1998). Yet, positive effects stemming from receiving the gifted services include more challenging and motivating educational experiences (Eddles-Hirsch, et al., 2010; Feldhusen & Dai, 1997; Moulton et al., 1998), as well as being able to interact with other gifted students (Eddles-Hirsch et al., 2010; Coleman & Cross, 2014; Moulton et al., 1998).

The social context of gifted programming seems to be highly influential in the impact the services have. For example, gifted programs that are highly competitive can lead students to believe giftedness is a burden with few benefits, but those that are more cooperative and focused on agency can increase students' confidence that they can be successful in the future (Mudrack & Zabrodka, 2014). Additionally, schools that provide academic programming for gifted students without social-emotional programming can lead students to believe that being academically gifted is socially stigmatizing (Eddles-Hirsch et al., 2010).

Eudaimonic Well-Being

Definitions and Frameworks

Before educators can begin to understand how to support their students' social-emotional needs, they first need to clarify their purpose in doing so. What do we want for our students? When I have been asked this question in the past, my initial response instinctively has been "happiness." But, of course, happiness is not a sufficient term for educators who are also interested in the safety, learning, and development of their students. Nor is it sufficient for those who see their role as serving both individual students *and* the public good. After all, some people can be very "happy" doing terrible

things. In my search to be more specific in my desired social-emotional outcomes for gifted students, I was led to Aristotle's concept of *eudaimonia*.

Eudaimonia has been most commonly translated from the Greek as "happiness." This is rather unfortunate because in English, "happiness" also encompasses another Greek term: "hedonia," which is the pursuit of pleasure. It is clear from the way that Aristotle writes of eudaimonia in *The Nicomachean Ethics* that this term, we have been led to understand as "happiness," means much more than pleasure; in fact, the root, *daimon*, translates to "true self" (Waterman, 1993). Aristotle writes, "Happiness, therefore, does not lie in amusement; it would, indeed, be strange if the end were amusement, and one were to take trouble and suffer hardship all one's life in order to amuse oneself" (2009, 10.6). For Aristotle, eudaimonia is closely tied to *arete*, excellence, frequently translated as "virtue": "Happiness is an activity of soul in accordance with perfect virtue" (1.13). Aristotle says that virtue "will be the state of character which makes a man good and which makes him do his own work well" (2.6). Eudaimonia, then, occurs when people are pursuing excellence within their own roles and callings in life. For Aristotle, this is the highest human good, joining virtue and an individual's realization of their full potential (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Because of this, some believe that eudaimonia would more accurately be translated as "flourishing" (Huta & Waterman, 2013).

Both hedonia and eudaimonia have been explored within the general concept of "well-being," but it is only in the last thirty years that researchers have intentionally distinguished hedonia and eudaimonia as two distinct concepts that affect well-being and life satisfaction (Huta & Waterman, 2013). Studies of hedonia, also referred to as

subjective well-being, frequently focus on subjective experience, the *feelings* associated with happiness and a pleasant life (Chen et al., 2012; Huta & Waterman, 2013). Pleasure and enjoyment are at the core of hedonia, and subjective well-being is frequently assessed in terms of positive experience, negative experience, and life satisfaction (Pollet & Schnell, 2016). A hedonic approach, then, centers on the idea of “the good life.”

Eudaimonia, however, is centered upon the concept of “a meaningful life.” Studies of eudaimonia, often referred to as psychological well-being, focus on *activity*, not feelings (Huta & Waterman, 2013) and the fulfillment of human potential (Chen et al., 2012). While pleasurable feelings might, and frequently do, arise from these pursuits, feelings are not the goal (Huta & Waterman, 2013). References to eudaimonic terminology have rapidly increased in social science publications in recent years (Huta & Waterman, 2013), perhaps as a response to growing interest in the positive psychology movement. The growth of eudaimonia research has led to several different understandings and conceptualizations of the terms.

Ryff, defining Aristotle’s eudaimonia as the realization of one’s true potential, developed a model of psychological well-being that focuses on self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth (Ryff, 1989). Waterman developed eudaimonic identity theory, which also focuses on self-realization as the core defining element of eudaimonia. In this theory, self-realization involves self-discovery; perceived development of one’s best potential; a sense of purpose and meaning in life; investment of effort in the pursuit of excellence; intense involvement in activities; and enjoyment of activities that are personally expressive (Huta & Waterman, 2013). In 2008 Deci and Ryan, linked their Self-

Determination Theory (1985) to the concept of eudaimonia because autonomy (one of the three fundamental and universal needs identified by SDT, along with competence and belonging) is a frequent theme in eudaimonia research. Even more recently, Seligman in his 2012 book *Flourish*, created the PERMA acronym for well-being: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. In these works, as well as in those of many other researchers, common understandings of eudaimonia emerge although the specific terminology varies: personal growth, meaningfulness, excellence, and relatedness (Waterman & Huta, 2013).

While eudaimonic well-being is often measured by quantitative instruments like Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale, Bauer et al. (2008) argue that narrative identity is also an indicator of well-being, as people make meaning of their lives through personal stories. In particular, eudaimonia involves "degrees of richness, complexity, or integration" (p. 83) that are perhaps better understood through qualitative measures. Bauer et al.'s study focused on their subjects' stories of growth in the face of difficult life events. They found that the themes most prevalent in subjects with higher levels of eudaimonic well-being were intrinsic growth, communal (instead of agentic) growth, and integrative growth, which involves coming to new understandings of one's life. Ultimately, the authors concluded that the narratives most frequently associated with eudaimonia were those that had positive conclusions while also acknowledging the negative impact of their challenges (Bauer et al., 2008). Similar to the highest level of personality development in Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration and Erikson's and Marcia's discussion of adolescent identity crises, eudaimonia may require the resolution of conflict in order to create transformed identities.

The Eudaimonic Well-Being of Children and Adolescents

When studying the phenomenon of eudaimonia in children and adolescents, it is important to do so with a developmental perspective. While hedonic experiences appear to not be directly related to development, maturity changes both the quantitative and qualitative experience of eudaimonia (Fossas, 2018). It may not be possible for a young person to fully experience the concept of eudaimonia as Aristotle described it in its entirety; after all, for Aristotle, eudaimonia is the result of an extensive process of growth (Fossas, 2018). Yet, as eudaimonia is the result of activity, it is certainly possible to discuss the eudaimonic growth, motivations, and behaviors of children and adolescents (Bauer et al., 2014; Fossas, 2018; Gentzler et al., 2021; Hallam et al., 2014; Lopez-Perez & Zuffiano, 2020).

Gentzler et al. (2021) found that high levels of eudaimonic motivations in both children and adolescents were correlated with well-being and life satisfaction. They also found that hedonic motivations led to negative outcomes when not accompanied by eudaimonic motivations. Telzer et al. (2014) noted that adolescent brains are more sensitive to rewards than those of children or adults and that rewards received from eudaimonic activities led to fewer depressive symptoms in the long term. Similarly, Hallam et al. (2014) found that an individual's eudaimonic behavior in adolescence could increase emotional competency in young adulthood, including a reduction of anxious-depressive symptoms.

While the body of research concerning the eudaimonic development of children and adolescents is still small, the existing literature provides compelling arguments regarding the importance of schools providing opportunities for students to experience

eudaimonic behaviors (Gentzler et al., 2021; Hallam et al., 2014). Schools are also at risk of impeding the development of eudaimonia when they do not grant students autonomy and rely on extrinsic motivation, which is often hedonic in nature (Lopez-Perez & Zuffiano, 2020).

The Eudaimonic Well-Being of Gifted Individuals

As with seemingly every aspect of research into the social-emotional nature and needs of gifted students, the results of studies into the eudaimonic well-being of gifted individuals are mixed. While the happiness of gifted students, in general, is not frequently studied (Zeidner, 2020), an additional challenge is that compared to hedonia (most frequently conceptualized as subjective well-being) eudaimonia (most frequently conceptualized as psychological well-being) has not received a great deal of attention from researchers (Wigtil & Henriques, 2015).

Kroesbergen et al. (2016) found that gifted children in early education, overall, did not have lower levels of psychological well-being [PWB] than their age peers, but there were some subgroups who had lower PWB, including students with high creative intelligence and gifted students who were not identified as gifted by their teachers. These lower PWB scores were likely the result of a poorer educational fit due to their teachers' perceptions of giftedness (Kroesbergen et al., 2016). In the literature, as students age, greater differences between gifted students and their age peers emerge: Wigtil and Henriques's (2015) study of incoming freshman college students revealed that students who had higher scores on the SAT scored lower than their peers on Ryff's PWB scale in all areas (the one exception was that students who scored particularly highly on the verbal section scored higher on the Autonomy subscale than other groups). Wigtil and

Henriques concluded by urging the importance of SEL interventions for gifted individuals as they navigate the life changes introduced by young adulthood.

Pollet and Schnell's (2016) study of gifted adults differentiated between a group they referred to as Intellectually Gifted, who were all members of Austrian Mensa, and High Achievers, who had all reached high levels of success within academia. They found that the High Achievers had higher PWB scores than both people of average intelligence and the Intellectually Gifted. The Intellectually Gifted had the lowest PWB scores of all the groups. Pollet and Schnell state that one of the most striking findings of their study is that the High Achievers reported much more satisfying school experiences in their youth than the Intellectually Gifted and that the meaning they found in their professional work stemmed, at least in part, from this school success. Pollet and Schnell posit that because of this correlation between gifted students' school experiences and their life satisfaction in the future, teachers may need more training in order to meet the needs of nonconforming and divergent thinkers in order to increase positive school experiences among all students (Pollet & Schnell, 2016).

The results of these studies indicate that individuals with high ability may suffer eudaimonic distress when their educational and social contexts do not give them the support needed to meet what they perceive as their full potential or purpose in life. Perhaps not incidentally, research into the effects of acceleration programs on gifted students' psychological well-being suggests that acceleration within elementary and secondary education and involvement in early college programs can increase feelings of eudaimonia (Mammadov et al., 2018; Bernstein, et al., 2021). Bernstein et al. (2021)

argue that when best practices for gifted education are followed, both academic *and* social-emotional success result.

Problem of Practice

The literature regarding what giftedness is and how giftedness affects people's well-being is rife with conflicts, tensions, paradoxes, and contradictions. Ultimately, the body of research reveals that gifted students' social-emotional needs are heterogeneous, with as many within group differences as similarities (Vialle et al, 2007), but despite this heterogeneity, it is almost certain that an individual's cognitive giftedness will influence their affective experience in some way. Perhaps the most consequential element among the diversity of experiences and outcomes of gifted individuals is the significance of their educational experience. One of the consistent refrains in the research is that a student's educational context is a significant factor, perhaps the most significant factor, in whether a student experiences "harmony" or "disharmony" because of their giftedness. For Niehart (1999) it is not giftedness itself that puts students at risk, rather the lack of appropriate educational opportunities:

The research does not support the broad conclusion that there's a level of IQ at which problems in adjustment significantly increase. Rather, it seems that there's a level of IQ at which it becomes very difficult to find appropriate educational services and it may be their lack of good educational fit that most often contributes to the difficulties some highly gifted students encounter. (p. 16)

Casino-Garcia et al. (2019, 2021) echo this idea in both of their studies that reveal lower emotional intelligence and subjective well-being among the gifted population in their studies of Spanish gifted students. As they note, gifted students in Spain learn in a social

and cultural context in which giftedness is under-identified and stigmatized. In such an environment, students struggle to find the right educational fit. Pollet and Schnell (2016) also raise questions about the significance of fit when they discuss the different educational experiences of groups of intellectually gifted adults versus high-achieving adults, suggesting that a key difference in outcomes between these two groups is the latter's ability to conform to the expectations of their educational context.

These authors' conclusions stress the urgency of creating the correct educational opportunities for gifted students' social-emotional development: Studies that evaluate the impact of giftedness on the well-being of gifted adults demonstrate that the effects of poor educational fit could lead to life-long deficits in feelings of subjective and psychological well-being (Pollet & Schnell, 2016; Wigtil & Henriques, 2015). Even Niehart's (1999) review, which ultimately concluded that gifted *children* are at least as well-adjusted as their non-identified peers, states that the literature regarding gifted adults paints a darker picture, referring to studies that indicate gifted adults, particularly creatively gifted adults, may be at greater risk for eating disorders and suicide. While Pollet and Schnell (2016) connect maladjustment of gifted adults to a lack of meaning in work stemming from dissatisfactory educational experiences, Holahan and Holahan's (1999) research into Terman study participants in late life suggests that being identified and labeled as gifted as children may cause individuals to have negative emotional consequences in adulthood because they set unrealistically high expectations for their lives as a result of their labeling.

While the literature suggests that gifted students have unique affective needs and that educational fit is vital for gifted students' well-being, *what* those needs are and *how*

to provide the correct educational fit are topics that are more ambiguous. There is a paucity of research regarding the effectiveness of direct intervention affective needs programming for gifted students (Jen, 2017). Zeidner's (2017) review of the existing research included the following conclusions: there are few emotional intelligence programs specifically developed for gifted students; gifted students have heterogeneous EI abilities and needs; and emotional problems among gifted students often result from a mismatch in family, social, and/or educational environments. Recommendations for programming include considering both risk areas (such as feelings of alienation, competitiveness, and perfectionism) and protective areas (such as high cognitive ability, excellent problem-solving abilities, and a desire for excellence) when designing programs (Zeidner, 2017).

Although there are many studies that attempt to explain the effect of giftedness on students' social-emotional well-being, the differences in terminology and contexts make universal conclusions about well-being and recommendations for gifted SEL programming difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. As previously noted, research supports the heterogeneous nature of gifted students' SEL needs. Moreover, due to differing definitions and cultures, one only can understand how giftedness affects the well-being of gifted students within the context of students' own implicit theories of giftedness, which are shaped by the interplay of various experiences, including their educational context, family support, and how they perceive giftedness to be received socially. Another complication may lie in the preponderance of gifted researchers' assumptions that giftedness *should be* an important part of a gifted student's identity and inevitably leads to heightened emphasis upon its role in identity formation without

empirical evidence supporting this idea: While the identity struggles of a gifted adolescent may be unique in the *nature* of the conflict, it may not be reasonable to assume that this particular group struggles *more* than any other group of adolescents. For practitioners in the field of gifted education, understanding how their own students' implicit theories, both as individuals and as a group, are related to their sense of identity and well-being is essential to designing programming to meet their students' SEL needs.

Educational Context

Let us return to my classroom. Because a gifted student's educational context has so much influence on their well-being, it is important to understand our community. Our school district currently serves around 7,100 students in two early childhood centers, six elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. The district offers two models of gifted education: an enrichment program and a program for highly gifted students that facilitates grade- and subject-level acceleration.

The enrichment program (EP) is designed to meet the students whose IQ and academic achievement are in the top five percent with additional pathways for traditionally underserved populations. Currently, all students are screened for gifted education in first through third grade through achievement test scores, offering IQ testing to students who score in the top five percent. Underserved populations include students with documented disabilities; English language learners; students who come from low-income families; and underrepresented racial or ethnic populations. Students in these underserved groups may score within the top 15 percent on achievement tests and then move on to IQ assessment.

In elementary school, EP students participate in a once-a-week all-day pull-out program run by gifted specialists. In middle school, identified gifted students can take an EP class as an elective in their normal school day. EP enrichment focuses on project-based learning, student choice, and design thinking.

The program for highly gifted students (HGP) is designed to meet the needs of exceptionally gifted students, those whose IQs are in the top one percent. Provisions are made for underserved populations by looking at sub-test scores if the overall score does not meet the traditional pathway requirements. After screening for IQ, students must go through an interview process conducted by an advisory committee of regional gifted educators.

HGP provides acceleration and enrichment opportunities for these students as well as the opportunity to learn among age peers with similar abilities. HGP accepts students from throughout our metropolitan region; many districts financially support their highly gifted students' education in our district through HGP. Most of the day for elementary students in HGP takes place in self-contained classrooms with gifted specialists. In middle school, students experience a combination of HGP classes with gifted specialists, general education middle school classes, and high school classes for accelerated students.

In high school, both EP and HGP students are fully integrated into the general school community. All of our high school's students, regardless of identification, have the opportunity to enroll in honors and Advanced Placement courses. The high school uses a resource model for the delivery of gifted services. As the gifted resource teacher, I offer three Gifted Learning Labs (study halls) a day; an HGP "PAC," which is our

school's model for small group character education and social-emotional learning; a student leadership opportunity called Gifted Advisory Council; and an independent study course based on design thinking. Additionally, I work one-on-one with students and families in need of additional educational support and offer workshops and seminars focused on college and career planning as well as social-emotional needs.

There are usually about 250 identified gifted students, both EP and HGP, enrolled at the high school at a time. The current enrollment at the high school is about 2,200 students. Gifted students' involvement in gifted programming at the high school is entirely a matter of choice: I frequently refer to it as "à la carte." There are some students I work with daily all four years (or more, in the case of accelerated HGP students who begin their high school coursework while they are still in middle school), and there are some students whom I never meet. In addition to my gifted specialist responsibilities, I also teach English three class periods a day.

In desiring to support my gifted students' well-being, specifically the development of the eudaimonia that I believe is so important to their own individual well-being as well as the public good, I have some significant problems to overcome: First of all, there is only one of me (really, only half of me because I teach English as well) and roughly 250 of them. Although gifted students are a heterogeneous population, I need to be able to find the common threads that together make up the comprehensive experience of gifted education in our district; while I can work with some students on an individual basis, realistically, I need to be able to design programming that can be delivered in small group settings. Secondly, because students must "opt-in" to services, I have to make sure they are tailored to their own perceived needs and interests and delivered in a student-

friendly way. An additional complication is the two models of gifted services that are provided at younger grade levels: A HGP student has experienced school very differently than an EP student up until their arrival at the high school, which is significant because educational context is so influential.

In wrestling over how to serve students most effectively and efficiently, I have come to the conclusion that before I begin designing programming, I need to know more about them. Specifically, as their gifted specialist, I need to know, first of all, what being gifted means to them: the implicit theories prevalent among our school's students. Secondly, I need to know to what extent and in which ways their implicit theories impact their sense of identity. Finally, I need to know more about their overall adjustment and well-being to determine in what ways and in which cases giftedness has manifested itself as an asset to overall well-being in need of enrichment and in which cases giftedness introduces a risk in need of intervention.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between implicit theories of giftedness, identity, and eudaimonia among a sample of gifted students at my school. It was my goal that in exploring themes within students' implicit theories, sense of identity, and eudaimonic well-being, I would find connections between certain implicit theories, factors of identity, and eudaimonic behaviors and motivations. As a researcher-practitioner, it was my intention to use the conclusions from this study to help create successful SEL small-group programming and support for students in our specific cultural and educational context in both proactive and reactive ways: to better identify students in need of intervention and to may help identify the understandings about

giftedness I should strive to instill in students in order to promote the development of eudaimonia.

While the specific focus may seem to limit the significance of the study to my own school context to some extent, this study also addresses a gap in the literature pertaining to gifted students: While there are studies that examine students' implicit theories of giftedness and the relationship between giftedness and identity, as well as studies that examine gifted students' social-emotional well-being and adjustment, to my knowledge, there are no previous studies that consider the relationship between the three, and few that examine eudaimonia specifically. It is my hope that this study will not only provide information to guide my own practice but also lead to conclusions that are helpful to other gifted educators, particularly those who teach in schools that share similar demographics and gifted services as my school. This study could also be used to provide a model for other gifted educators to replicate in their own contexts.

Research Questions

This exploration of relationships among students' implicit theories of giftedness, identity, and eudaimonic well-being has been conducted within the context of their own language and narrative structures in order to better capture the degrees of richness and complexity that Bauer et al. (2008) note in their study of eudaimonia and narrative identity. Over a period of several months, a sample of gifted students wrote narrative responses to a series of prompts focused on topics relating to implicit theories of giftedness and gifted identity and a series of prompts focused on elements of eudaimonia. Allowing students to more freely express their perceptions and observations also follows Meadows and Neumann's (2017) recommendation to explore implicit theories of

giftedness over an extended period of time and in students' own words. This study was guided by the following questions:

1. What do the narratives of secondary gifted students reveal about their development of eudaimonia?
2. What do the narratives of secondary gifted students reveal about their implicit theories of giftedness?
3. What do the narratives of secondary gifted students reveal about the extent to which giftedness is a part of their identities?
4. What are the relationships between gifted students' implicit theories, identity, and their development of eudaimonia?

CHAPTER TWO: METHODS

Research Design

Throughout the literature regarding the impact of giftedness on well-being and adjustment, the importance of educational fit and context is a resounding refrain. For this reason, this study implemented qualitative methods, which emphasize the importance of context and naturalistic settings (Hays & Singh, 2011). In particular, researchers within the fields of both gifted education and eudaimonic well-being have argued that studying subjective experience is essential to understanding the phenomenon at hand. Yet, Mudrak and Zabrodska (2015) contend that children “are, paradoxically, often absent from the current models and theories of giftedness. They are usually present only implicitly as the products of various developmental factors” (p. 57). For example, Meadows and Neumann (2016) claim that although there is a body of literature suggesting that gifted children have clearly defined implicit theories of giftedness, the fact that most of them rely solely on questionnaires to collect data oversimplifies students’ perceptions and beliefs. By examining student narratives over time, they discovered more nuance, complexity, and even contradictions within the students’ understandings of giftedness.

Similarly, in studying eudaimonic well-being, Bauer et al. (2006) collected participants’ life stories and studied their narrative identities, arguing that “happiness is ultimately a subjective appraisal of one’s life as happy. From this perspective, happiness itself should be intertwined with a person’s subjective understanding of who he or she is and what his or her life means” (p. 82). The idea behind the study of narrative identity acknowledges that humans are natural storytellers, who strive to create meaning and coherence throughout the episodes of their lives (McAdams & McLean, 2013). The way

that an individual shapes their experience into narrative can predict well-being (Adler et al, 2016). As Adler et al. (2017) state, “Narratives are subjective constructions that have objective impacts” (p. 6).

This study examined students’ written narratives in response to a series of prompts. By exploring what the narratives revealed about gifted students’ implicit theories and perceptions of giftedness as well as their eudaimonic development, inferences could be made about the relationship between beliefs about giftedness and eudaimonia. While narratives in qualitative studies are often collected orally, written narratives offer the benefit of providing possibly more coherent responses, reducing interviewer interference, and facilitating the sharing of more sensitive memories (Adler et al., 2017). Written narratives, then, provided two major benefits. First, students had more power over what they chose to share with me, a researcher-practitioner whose relationship with them may have both preceded and will extend beyond this study. Secondly, providing students with the opportunity to intentionally construct their responses allowed me to consider what the shape, not just the content, of their storytelling revealed.

Underscoring once again the importance of context in understanding the impact of giftedness on social-emotional well-being, this qualitative study was conducted within a social constructivist paradigm, which is based upon the premise that multiple contextual perspectives influence our understanding of what is true (Hays & Singh, 2011). This paradigm is particularly appropriate for this study because there are few, if any, universal truths regarding giftedness, which is a social construct itself. While there is a general understanding that the label of giftedness implies some degree of exceptional ability, how

this is identified, measured, accommodated, responded to, and valued can vary greatly depending on cultural context and individual identity. By providing students with the opportunity to share their individual experiences within the context of their own perspectives and voices, this study sought to discern whether there are particular implicit theories about giftedness and ways giftedness is incorporated into an individual's identity that lead to greater degrees of eudaimonia. Better understanding our students' thoughts about giftedness and their eudaimonic development can inform gifted programming and practices in our district. More broadly, while it is true that participants have been influenced by our specific educational context, many of the themes and relationships that arose are likely applicable to other educational settings, particularly those with similar demographics and gifted identification and services. Additionally, although the results of this study were generated from the experiences of students from one district, the process of examining the relationship between themes in students' implicit theories of giftedness and their eudaimonic development could be used as a model in other secondary gifted programs.

Data Collection

Participants

Participants for this study were drawn from the population of identified gifted students at the large public suburban high school where I teach. As discussed in the previous chapter, this school serves approximately 250 gifted students, slightly over 10 percent of our entire school population. Our school district provides a particularly interesting prospect for this study because unlike most districts it offers two very distinct models of gifted education: an enrichment program (EP) and a regional program

specifically designed to meet the needs of highly gifted students that offers self-contained classes and more opportunities for acceleration (HGP).

Students are generally screened for the EP in elementary school. While current elementary students are universally screened in grades 1-3, at the time the current high school students were identified, screening occurred in one of two ways. First, students were universally screened through scores on the TerraNova portion of their third- and fourth-grade state assessment tests. Students scoring in the 95th percentile or above were given the Weschler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence Assessment II (WASI-II) (Weschler, 2011) and those with a full-scale score of 95th percentile or above were admitted to the program. The second way that students were screened for EP was by teacher or parent request. Students as young as kindergarten age would then be given the TerraNova achievement test and the WASI-II and be admitted if they had scores in the 95th percentile or above on both assessments.

HGP is a regional program, hosted by our district, designed to meet the needs of exceptionally gifted students. HGP accepts students not just from our district but also students throughout our metropolitan area so these students with exceptionally high IQs can learn with similar ability age peers. Participants are admitted to HGP by a committee of regional gifted educators who consider students with Wechsler Intelligence scores of 138 or above, which is the 99th percentile, and these scores are accompanied by a more rigorous and individualized process of surveys, interviews, and observations.

These two models of gifted programming vary significantly in the elementary years, with HGP students in self-contained classrooms and EP students attending a one-day-a-week pull-out program. In middle school, EP students can take a gifted class as

part of their daily schedule, and HGP students have self-contained humanities and STEM classes but are incorporated into the larger student body for other courses. HGP students are often accelerated, and many attend the high school part of the day. Once both EP and HGP students begin their full-time high school careers, they are fully incorporated into the wider student body. Gifted services are provided through a resource model, with options that include a gifted “learning lab” (study hall); an independent project class focused on design-thinking; an optional HGP-only advisory period; a gifted student leadership group called the Gifted Student Advisory Council; weekly enrichment and social opportunities during lunch; and academic advising.

While it is possible, although rare, for a student to receive a gifted identification while they are in high school and possible for students who attended other districts in younger grades to transfer their gifted identification to our high school, this study will only focus on students who participated in district gifted programming before entering high school for the purpose of focusing on implicit theories and beliefs about giftedness in this particular school district. On that note, because EP and HGP students have very different experiences in elementary and middle school, it was important that this study included both EP and HGP students within the sample. For this reason, a maximum variation purposeful sampling approach was used.

Maximum variation sampling involves choosing a wide range of cases to reveal dimensions of interest; it can lead to an understanding of the diversity of the sample as well as the patterns that are common across the sample (Patton, 2015). In addition to ensuring that both EP and HGP students were represented, the sample also purposefully

included both male and female students and students who are both engaged and unengaged in gifted programming.

While I initially wanted to include students with varying levels of academic achievement, gifted students with academic achievement at or below the school average proved less inclined to volunteer for the study. Additionally, all but one of the students I recruited whose academic achievement was average or below average failed to complete enough prompts to make meaningful contributions to the study. Because these students were already struggling academically, I did not feel like it was ethical to pursue their involvement further.

For the purpose of this study, a student was considered “engaged” in gifted programming if they had chosen to participate in more than one of the following: Gifted Learning Lab, the independent study course; participate in the HGP advisory group or the Gifted Student Advisory Council; or frequently attend lunchtime programming or request academic advising with me as their gifted specialist.

A student was considered “unengaged” in gifted programming if they were identified as gifted and participated in HGP or EP programming in elementary or middle school but have chosen not to participate or participated only in one of the opportunities listed above.

Number of Participants

As noted previously, this study used maximum variation sampling. In determining how many participants are needed in variations of purposeful sampling, the concept of saturation is generally considered to be the “gold standard” (Guest et al., 2006, p. 60). Saturation may occur in a variety of ways, in the ceasing emergence of new codes,

themes, data, and other categories, but it is ultimately the conclusion that further data collection or analysis is unnecessary (Saunders et al., 2017). However, there are few practical guidelines to anticipate how many participants will be needed to reach saturation among a purposeful sample. Guest et al.'s (2006) methodological article, which is based upon the principles of consensus theory, suggests that 12 participants is likely enough if the sample if the participants are interviewed independently of one another, if the interviews are highly structured, and if the participants are relatively homogenous. While the term "relatively" is vague, all of the participants in this study will have the shared experience of being gifted teenagers from the same school.

For the purpose of this study, in order to ensure that all desired subgroups were represented for maximum variation, I intended to recruit 15 to 25 participants, and did have 21 students return signed consent forms but only 15 participants responded to enough prompts for their data to be used in the thematic analysis. I screened participants to verify that the sample includes at least three male and three female students; at least three EP and three HGP students; and at least two who are engaged in gifted programming and at least two who are unengaged in gifted programming. Demographic information relevant to this study, such as gender and the model of gifted education they have received was found within the Student Information System. The level of engagement was determined as described above by me, as our school's gifted education specialist.

Of the 15 students whose responses were included in the study, 10 were EP students, and five were HGP. Nine were male, five were female, and one was transgender/non-binary. Ten were determined to be engaged in gifted programming at the

high school and five were determined to be unengaged. Saturation was reached in the analysis of the 15 participants' responses, precluding the need to recruit any more participants.

Recruitment

The first step in recruiting students for the study was to email both identified gifted students and their parents about the study through the district's Student Information System with the permission of my administrators (see Appendix A). Information was provided about the topic, process, and desired outcomes, and questions from parents and students will be encouraged. Consent forms for students who were 18; consent forms for parents and guardians of minor students; and assent forms for minor students were attached to the recruitment email (see Appendices B, C, and D). I did not want to recruit participants in person, personally, because I did not want to create a conflict of interest, as a researcher practitioner. I did ask my gifted coordinator and two teacher colleagues to recruit small groups of students in person when I was out of the room. Consent and assent forms were returned in person or through email. Both consent forms from parents/guardians and assent forms from students had to be turned in for a student to participate in the study.

Procedure

Participants were given two series of written narratives over a span of eight weeks; one series focused on eudaimonia and the other focused on giftedness. These prompts were for research only and are outside of the routine care and activities provided as part of gifted programming at our school although they were complementary to many

of the topics and activities provided both by typical gifted programming and our school's advisory program.

The prompts were given and responses were collected through Qualtrics. Each prompt was distributed in its own Qualtrics form, and a new prompt was sent to students each week. Participants were allowed to respond to prompts at the time and in the setting of their own choosing. Although I did offer to provide space in time in my classroom to respond to prompts, no participants asked for this accommodation.

Students and parents were informed that I may reach out to students to ask follow-up questions about their narratives, particularly for the sake of clarity and depth, but I did not feel the need to do so to support my analysis.

The anticipated time commitment for a student participating in the study was about two to four hours across a span of eight weeks. Some students did not respond to each prompt the week it was given. After eight weeks had passed, I sent emails to each participant with a link to each prompt they had not responded to. I continued to accept prompts for an additional four weeks.

Eudaimonia Prompts

In the first series, students responded to prompts relating to eudaimonia. Although there are many ways to conceptualize eudaimonia, Waterman and Huta (2013) found that nearly all theories relating to eudaimonic well-being share an understanding that it involves growth/self-realization; meaningfulness/purpose; excellence; authenticity/identity; and relatedness. Bauer et al.'s (2008) study of eudaimonic well-being through the framework of narrative identity concluded that eudaimonia can be

assessed through stories of how participants faced difficult life events. Participants were therefore asked to respond in writing to the following prompts:

1. In 200-400 words, write a true story about a time you experienced a significant challenge.
2. In 200-400 words, write a true story about a time you felt proud of something.
3. In 200-400 words, write a true story about a relationship that is important to you.
4. In 200-400 words, write a true story that shows who you are.

Giftedness Prompts

In the second series, students responded to questions attempting to discover their implicit theories of giftedness and the relationship giftedness has with their sense of identity. Participants were asked to respond to the following prompts:

1. In 200-400 words, write the story of how you joined EP or HGP.
2. In 200-400 words, write a true story about EP or HGP that stands out in your memory.
3. In 200-400 words, write a true story about a time you felt being gifted made your experience at school different from other students’.
4. In 200-400 words, write a story that reflects what being gifted means to you.

Thematic Analysis

The student narratives generated by this study were examined through the method of thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) defined thematic analysis as a “method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p. 79); this method can result in rich, detailed, and complex accounts of data. Braun and Clarke designated “themes” as patterns that capture something important about the research questions, not

necessarily the most prevalent ideas in the data. Notably flexible, thematic analysis can be used across various theoretical frameworks and is particularly compatible with constructivist paradigms in which there is a focus on social and cultural contexts instead of individual motivations and psychologies: Thematic analysis can be inductive in nature rather than theoretically bound and provides the opportunity to look for the latent analyses that are particularly relevant to constructivism (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

McAllam et al. (2019) vividly use the metaphor of “scissors, string, and glue” (p. 362) as a metaphor for the different stages of thematic analysis, and their “scissors” relate to the process of separating data into meaningful units. This corresponds with Braun and Clarke’s first two phases of thematic analysis, which are familiarizing oneself with the data and generating initial codes. In this stage, each student narrative was coded with initial codes. Coding frameworks can be either deductive, using *a priori* codes, or inductive, using *in vivo* codes (Given, 2008). This study used a combination of deductive and inductive codes. Responses to the eudaimonia prompts were coded with *a priori* codes generated from Waterman and Huta’s (2013) list of common elements of eudaimonia. Because the giftedness prompts were meant to discover students’ implicit theories and personal beliefs about giftedness, inductive codes were used.

McAllam et al.’s “string” represents the process of connecting data extracts to one another while maintaining “conceptual boundaries” (p. 363). This is similar to Braun and Clarke’s phases three through five: searching for, reviewing, defining, and naming themes. During this stage of analysis, I revised and edited codes with help from peer educators’ feedback, re-coded as necessary, and then grouped codes to find candidate

themes. Separate themes were determined for eudaimonia and giftedness and were also reviewed by peer educators.

Finally McAllam et al.'s "glue" is parallel to Braun and Clarke's phase six, making meaning of the themes through writing the report. Data extracts were coupled with an analytic narrative to create an argument (Braun & Clarke, 2006) about the relationship between gifted students' eudaimonic well-being and their implicit theories of giftedness and sense of identity as gifted students. It is important to note that although thematic analysis can be separated into different stages, the process as a whole is "an iterative and reflective process that develops over time and involves a constant moving back and forward between phases" (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 4).

Trustworthiness

The flexibility and adaptability that makes thematic analysis so accessible and versatile also opens it to criticism regarding the trustworthiness of the results. There have been attempts made to align qualitative research methods in general with quantitative criteria. For example, Lincoln and Gruba's (1985) influential paper paralleled the qualitative values of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability with the quantitative standards of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity, respectively. However, many qualitative researchers believe that qualitative research should have its own universal standards apart from quantitative methods while others believe that because qualitative research depends so much upon context, there cannot and should not be universal standards (Hays & Singh, 2011). Angen (2000) argues that there needs to be a new understanding of validity from an interpretivist standpoint. In particular, she believes that a key criterion of qualitative research should be ethical

validation, which is centered upon a researcher's understanding of shared humanity, usefulness, generative understanding, and transformed actions. This study attempted to meet the standards of ethical validation in its discovery of a new way to understand the relationship between giftedness and eudaimonia, which will not only improve my own practice as a gifted educator but also be shared with practitioners within the field of gifted education.

Additionally, in order to produce thematic analyses that are trustworthy, researchers must be clear about both their processes and their own biases, particularly because there are multiple lenses from which to view the social world that offer different perspectives and areas of focus (McAllam et al., 2019; Nowell et al., 2017). Nowell et al. contend that reflexivity is essential in thematic analysis through every step of the process. To ensure trustworthy application of Braun and Clarke's method of thematic analysis, this study applied some of Nowell et al.'s (2017) and Hays and Singh's (2011) reflexive practices, namely reflexive journaling and peer debriefing.

Reflexive journaling was used even before the process of data collection began. Because I was a researcher-practitioner conducting a study within my own school and practice of gifted education, I knew I was likely to know, or know of, most if not all of my participants. Journaling about my knowledge and assumptions about my participants made me more aware of potential biases that could color my analysis. Reflexive journaling continued throughout every phase of the process of creating, applying, and analyzing codes and themes (Nowell et al., 2017). I also engaged in a peer debriefing process with colleagues, including educators within and outside of the field of gifted education, at multiple stages of the coding and analysis process. The purpose of peer

debriefing is for someone inside the field but outside the research project to challenge the findings and consider new perspectives (Hays & Singh, 2011). As noted above, I asked colleagues to code participant responses to compare with my own coding. I also sent colleagues themes and sub-themes to verify that they were consistent with their own observations in the data. As Braun and Clarke (2006) note, thematic analysis is a recursive process: Depending upon both peer debriefing, observations recorded in the reflexive journal, and new insights gained in the analysis process, previous phases were revisited with codes, themes, and analyses being revised for greater validity.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were treated according to the guidelines of the University of Missouri-St. Louis Institutional Review Board. Approval was obtained from the board before participants were recruited.

Risks and Benefits

Risks

There were minimal risks with this research. Students were asked to write about their personal experiences in areas related to eudaimonia and gifted identification and programming. Writing about their own experiences and self-reflection could potentially have been uncomfortable for some students, but the prompts were broad in nature, and students could choose what they feel comfortable sharing. Collecting written responses instead of conducting oral interviews is another way for participants to feel more at ease with sharing personal stories (Adler et al., 2017). In the case that students did become uncomfortable with completing the prompts, I was clear that they were allowed to leave the study at any time.

Beyond the risk of discomfort, there was a risk that students would feel embarrassed if their privacy was violated and people were able to identify them by their narrative responses. To mitigate this risk, students were assigned a random number at the beginning of the study. Students used their numbers, not their names, in their Qualtrics responses. Just in case participants shared their participant number with others, I gave each number a random letter in the analysis process. Subjects were referenced by letter in the coding and analysis process, and quoted data from the responses was, for the most part, organized by theme, not participant. Any possibly identifying material, like references to age, gender, or gifted program, was removed in the analysis. The key for subject names and assigned numbers was kept in a password-protected file that only I had access to. This key was deleted when the study was complete.

Benefits

Possible benefits of participating in this study included opportunities for students to reflect on their experiences, which could lead to personal insight and growth. Additionally, the information students provided may improve the effectiveness of gifted programming at our school and district, and an improvement in the understanding of giftedness and gifted education in general. Students were not compensated for participating through the study through monetary rewards or grades/extra credit.

Informed Consent

Students who were already 18 signed consent forms. Students who were minors completed an assent form, and the parents of students who assented completed a consent form to authorize their participation in the study. Students who assented to the study were not allowed to participate unless they also had parental consent.

To reduce the conflict of interest in my role as researcher-practitioner and to avoid any pressure on students to consent, there were statements in the recruitment letter, consent form, and assent form that assured students and parents that participants were not be compensated or shown preferment, including in the provision of services or through grades. As noted above, in-person recruitment was not conducted by me to avoid a conflict of interest.

Confidentiality

Student confidentiality was maintained throughout the study. As stated above, each student was assigned a number, then a letter, that was kept in a password-protected file. Qualtrics was used to collect student narratives, and students identified themselves only by their assigned number. Students were referred to by their letters in data analysis. All narratives, reflexive journals, and coding notes were kept in secure files. The key to student names, numbers, and letters was destroyed when the study was complete.

As a mandatory reporter, I was prepared to report any narratives that indicated a student was in danger or a danger to others to the appropriate authorities, but this did not occur. This study did not ask questions that had to do with trauma, abuse, criminal, or at-risk behaviors.

Reflexivity

I am a teacher and gifted specialist at the school where I conducted the study. As such, some participants in this study were students with whom I have formed relationships with either through gifted programming or through the English classes that I teach. Additionally, students were writing about their experiences with gifted programming and identification in the district where I am employed as a gifted educator.

Because of my potential relationships with participants and because of my involvement with gifted programming at the high school, it was essential for me to be reflexive about my assumptions and biases at every point of this study. Before beginning the study, in particular, I had to consider my own biases and implicit theories about giftedness.

Reflexive Statement, Written Before the Study

First of all, as a practitioner of gifted education, it is my belief that there are students whose exceptional cognitive abilities require unique educational considerations. Furthermore, it is my belief that students with these exceptional cognitive abilities may also have differences in the affective domain. These affective differences, which can be both protective of overall well-being and put it at risk, mean that students with exceptional cognitive ability may often benefit from specialized social-emotional learning.

Despite my belief that there are objective differences in cognitive ability that result in objective differences in affective experience and development as well, I acknowledge that the term *giftedness*, or *gifted*, is a social construct that varies by context. In fact, these terms are frequently problematic, as many people, both gifted and not, believe that having exceptional cognitive abilities is a privilege. On one hand, this can lead to elitism, prioritizing and valuing the needs of the “gifted” over those of other students; on the other, it can lead to the neglect of gifted students with the misapprehension that they do not need as much educational support as other students.

I attempt to take a middle ground in my own practice. The experience of gifted students is unique and needs special consideration, but the same is true of any subgroup of students. Gifted students deserve to have their educational needs met, but no more or

less than any other population. On a related note, it is my tendency as a practitioner to view giftedness largely as a trait or entity, rather than performance or incremental. In other words, I frequently conceptualize the experience of giftedness as something people *are* rather than something that people *do*. This is largely because I observe that there are aspects of giftedness that can at times prevent students from performing to the full extent of their abilities.

Here, I believe it is important to address the question of how my role as gifted specialist and my relationship with students may shape their responses: Will, for example, a desire to not offend me keep students from responding truthfully to a question? It is my belief that since none of the questions address the quality of gifted *programming*, particularly about that found at the high school, they will not be concerned with sparing me from any negative criticism. In truth, it has been my experience that students are willing to be very frank about their experiences to my face.

Due to my experience in this district and my conversations with and observations of students, I expect to find that the majority of gifted students here also have a trait understanding of giftedness. I believe I will find more varied responses regarding how they believe giftedness affects them: Some will likely talk very positively about the advantages being gifted and participating in gifted programming have brought them, both academically and socially; others will likely discuss disadvantages that are largely social in nature. It is my expectation to see a correlation between more positive perceptions of giftedness and higher eudaimonic well-being. To prevent myself from being influenced by these expectations and assumptions, I will keep reflexivity journals throughout the research process and take advantage of peer debriefing, as described above.

Ultimately, in my role as researcher-practitioner, I acknowledge that gifted education is complex and frequently problematic, but I do believe it is valuable overall, both to individuals we call gifted and to society, which benefits from people of all abilities reaching their full potential. As a gifted practitioner who cares about the future of gifted education but more specifically about the well-being of students, my ultimate desire in conducting this study is to take steps toward improving the design and implementation of gifted education, most immediately in my own context but also in the field as a whole.

CHAPTER THREE: RESULTS

This study explored secondary gifted students' implicit theories of giftedness and the presence of elements of eudaimonia within a series of narratives. Four questions guided this study:

1. What do the narratives of secondary gifted students reveal about their development of eudaimonia?
2. What do the narratives of secondary gifted students reveal about their implicit theories of giftedness?
3. What do the narratives of secondary gifted students reveal about the extent to which giftedness is a part of their identities?
4. What are the relationships between gifted students' implicit theories, identity, and their development of eudaimonia?

To answer these questions, 21 secondary gifted students were provided with a series of eight prompts: four were centered on elements of eudaimonia and four were centered on elements of giftedness. The eudaimonia prompts included

1. In 200-400 words, write a true story about a time you experienced a significant challenge.
2. In 200-400 words, write a true story about a time you felt proud of something.
3. In 200-400 words, write a true story about a relationship that is important to you.
4. In 200-400 words, write a true story that shows who you are.

The giftedness prompts included

1. In 200-400 words, write the story of how you joined your gifted program.

2. In 200-400 words, write a true story about your gifted program that stands out in your memory.
3. In 200-400 words, write a true story about a time you felt being gifted made your experience at school different from other students'.
4. In 200-400 words, write a story that reflects what being gifted means to you.

Out of the 21 students who agreed to participate, 12 students completed all of the prompts; one student completed seven; two students completed six; one student completed five; three students completed between two to four prompts; and three completed zero.

After the initial round of coding for all submitted responses, I decided to eliminate the responses of students who completed fewer than six of the prompts because if participants did not respond to a similar amount of eudaimonia and gifted prompts, it could potentially affect my ability to explore relationships between certain beliefs about giftedness and the development of eudaimonia. Fifteen participants responded to six or more prompts. Each response of the 15 participants was coded for themes related to eudaimonia and giftedness, regardless of whether the prompt was centered on eudaimonia or giftedness.

Eudaimonia Thematic Analysis

Eudaimonia Coding

To derive themes related to eudaimonia, a priori codes were used. Codes were taken from Huta and Waterman's 2013 paper, "Eudaimonia and Its Distinction from Hedonia: Developing a Classification and Terminology for Understanding Conceptual and Operational Definitions." In this paper, the researchers explored 11 different

conceptualizations of eudaimonia and identified elements of eudaimonia in each. Out of these 11 studies, the most consistent core elements included growth/self-realization, meaning/purpose, authenticity/identity, excellence, and relatedness. These elements served as the eudaimonia codes for the analysis of eudaimonia themes in the initial coding. In this initial round of coding, it became evident that many participants also wrote about the opposite or negative applications of each of these elements of eudaimonia. For this reason, six more codes were added to address these negative occurrences (see Table 1).

Table 1

Eudaimonia Coding Structure and Frequency

Eudaimonia Code and Definition	# of Part.	# of Resp.	Opposite or Negative Code	# of Part.	# of Resp.
Growth/self-awareness Overcoming and learning from a challenge or coming to a new understanding about oneself	10	22	Stagnation/Lack of self-awareness Failing to overcome challenges or failure to learn from them; not having a strong understanding of self	3	3
Meaning/purpose Connecting to the future, others, or a broader context; feeling like a part of something greater than themselves	14	42	Lack of meaning/purpose Not connecting to the future, others, or a broader context; not feeling like a part of something greater than themselves	6	4
Authenticity/identity Knowing and being true to oneself, values, and interests	10	17	Inauthenticity/hiding identity Not knowing or concealing one's true self; not acting in accordance with one's values or interests	9	13
Excellence	14	26	Boredom/Frustration Issues relating to excellence that lead to a lack of stimulation or fulfillment	11	16

Having high ability or performance; doing one's best; having high standards			Perfectionism/Fear of Failure Maladaptive application or understanding of excellence leading to unhealthy standards or expectations; avoiding tasks if they are not certain of meeting a high standard	4	9
Relatedness Experiencing positive relationships or social belonging	15	31	Disconnection Experiencing negative relationships; feeling excluded from social groups	13	25
<p><i>Note.</i> Positive codes and definitions are adapted from Huta and Waterman (2013). Negative codes reflect the stated absence or a negative application of the Huta and Waterman codes. # of Part. refers to the number of participants whose responses include this code at least once. # of Resp. refers to the number of responses, out of all participant responses, that include this code.</p>					

Determining Eudaimonia Themes and Sub-themes

In my initial round of coding in addition to the elements of eudaimonia listed above, I had also included codes for competence and self-acceptance. These elements were also included in the Huta and Waterman (2013) article but were slightly less frequently part of the conceptualizations of eudaimonia as the five listed in Table 1. In the initial coding, I found myself struggling to differentiate the concepts of competence and excellence in the data. I also struggled to differentiate between self-acceptance and the personal growth/realization and authenticity/identity codes. After having an educator-peer code a full set of one participant's responses using all seven codes, I observed that while we coded most of the data the same, the places where we differed had to do with similarity between excellence and competence, personal growth and self-acceptance, and authenticity and self-acceptance in the data. Based on our shared struggle, I decided to eliminate the competence and self-acceptance codes. Any material I had coded as

competence or self-acceptance was re-coded with one of the remaining codes as appropriate.

After a second round of coding with the exclusion of competence and self-acceptance and the inclusion of the negative codes (see Table 1), I consulted two more colleagues: one educator who does not work within the field of gifted education, and one colleague who is a gifted educator. They were each given a different participant's full set of prompts and asked to code the data using the eleven codes. Their identification of the primary codes in each response matched with my codes in every case although they sometimes coded smaller fragments of data differently than I did. After considering the impact of these smaller pieces of data, I determined that they would not alter the way the data would be grouped under the emerging themes and sub-themes. I then coded the data one more time according to themes and sub-themes. Because the eudaimonia codes were deductive, I determined themes by examining the circumstances and context of the coded data and looking for commonalities. I also explored the relationships between multiple codes to help determine themes (see Table 2).

The theme of the effects of academic excellence emerged by identifying the frequency of excellence being coded when students were writing within the context of academic achievement. Responses about scholastic excellence that had positive outcomes contributed to the development of the satisfaction in academic excellence theme. While excellence was obviously the primary code for this sub-theme, these responses all had material coded for meaning/purpose or identity/authenticity as well, indicating that participants did not just experience academic excellence but also that this academic excellence was perceived as intrinsically important or valuable, or a part of who they are.

Responses that contained references to academic excellence with negative outcomes and that were also coded with the perfectionism/fear of failure code led to the identification of the perfectionism or fear of failure in the school sub-theme. Negative references to academic excellence paired with the boredom/frustration code led to the emergence of the boredom or frustration in school subtheme. Codes for inauthenticity and lack of meaning/purpose were commonly associated with these negative sub-themes as well, indicating that in these situations the participants' experience with school-related excellence was not perceived as intrinsically important or valuable, or a part of who they see themselves to be.

The theme of meaning and purpose in learning and extracurricular activities was determined by looking at the situations and contexts in which students wrote about experiences with school, school-related activities, and learning that were coded most prominently with the meaning/purpose code. These situations were separated further into responses that placed the focus on meaningful activity (the sub-theme of pursuing personal interests) versus those that placed the focus on the meaningful nature of working with or serving others (the sub-theme of helping or relating to others). The responses that contributed to the pursuing personal interests sub-theme also frequently contained the authenticity code as well as meaning/purpose, while the responses that contributed to the helping or relating to others sub-theme frequently included the relatedness code. The presence of these secondary codes indicated that participants helped derive a sense of meaning and purpose from experiences by connecting with others or acting in accordance with their own values and sense of self.

The theme of meaningful relationships was established by examining the data that were primarily coded as relatedness. Unlike the helping and relating to others sub-theme of the finding meaning and purpose theme, the responses that fell under this category were focused on personal relationships as opposed to group or service activities. Two important ideas were present through the data that focused on personal relationships. First, relatedness-focused responses that also included data coded as authenticity/identity shaped the sub-theme authenticity and identity through relationships. Second, responses that included data coded as disconnection always concluded with the participants eventually finding relatedness, leading to the disconnection to belonging sub-theme.

Finally, the struggle and change theme was established by analyzing the data coded as growth/self-awareness or stagnation/lack of self-awareness. It became clear that in many of these responses, growth appeared as part of a narrative arc in which participants encountered a significant problem, acknowledged the severity of the problem, struggled with the discomfort, and then either found a way to resolve the problem or accept how grappling with the problem made them stronger or helped shape their identity. Sub-themes were determined by grouping data by the context of the struggle, leading to overcoming struggle at school and learning from struggle in personal life. A third sub-theme emerged when examining the data coded stagnation/lack of self-awareness, which did not complete the arc described above. In many of these situations, participants encountered a significant problem, acknowledged the severity of the problem, struggled with the discomfort, but were unable to resolve the problem or learn something new from it, leading to the sub-theme of failure to change.

Table 2*Eudaimonia Themes, Sub-themes, and Frequency*

Theme	Sub-themes	# of Part.	# of Resp.
The Effects of Academic Excellence	Satisfaction in Academic Excellence	6	6
	Perfectionism or Fear of Failure in School	5	8
	Boredom and Frustration in School	8	12
Theme Total		13	26
Meaning and Purpose in Learning and Extracurricular Activities	Pursuing Personal Interests	6	8
	Helping or Relating to Others	6	6
Theme Total		10	14
Meaningful Relationships	Identity and Authenticity through Relationships	6	6
	From Disconnection to Belonging	8	9
Theme Total		10	15
Struggle and Change	Overcoming Struggles at School	5	8
	Encountering Struggle in Personal Life	2	2
	Failure to Change	6	7
Theme Total		11	17
<p><i>Note.</i> # Part. refers to the number of participants, out of 15, whose response included the theme. # Resp. refers to the number of responses</p>			

Eudaimonia Theme 1: The Effects of Academic Excellence

As one might reasonably expect from a study focused on gifted students, some of the most frequently coded elements of eudaimonia in the participants' responses had to do with excellence. All 15 participants wrote about excellence in some capacity, either their feelings when achieving excellence or their expectations for excellence. Fifteen of these students wrote about excellence in a positive way, and nine of them wrote about excellence in negative terms. Only one student referred to excellence in a negative capacity without also referring to it positively as well. Perhaps it should be no surprise that gifted students engaged so frequently in topics of excellence when the most basic understanding of giftedness is intelligence, ability, or performance that far exceeds the average.

Thirteen of the participants who wrote about excellence wrote about it in the context of academic achievement and excellence in school-related activities, leading to the first theme: the effects of academic excellence. Three sub-themes related to the effects of excellence emerged. The first can be understood as an indication of the presence or development of eudaimonia: satisfaction in academic excellence. However, the other two sub-themes that emerged indicated a lack of eudaimonia or the specific lack of development of eudaimonia related to academic excellence; one might consider them to be the "dark side" of excellence: perfectionism or fear of failure and boredom and frustration in school.

Satisfaction in Academic Excellence

The responses of six participants specifically expressed how experiencing academic excellence gives or has given them feelings of satisfaction. Participants

perceived their excellence through a variety of ways, including grades, teachers' praise, earning awards or by comparing themselves to their peers. On the subject of grades,

Participant A wrote,

My school work gives me a lot of pride. I spend hours on slideshows, and every 100% or "perfect!" makes my heart soar. Recently, I did a research paper [on a] unique topic and I poured my heart into it. I got a 100%, which shocked my classmates. But I was so proud.

Participants' feelings of satisfaction towards their grades also were bolstered by being made to feel special by teachers:

I was the top score out of all my teacher's chemistry honors students on one of the arguably hardest tests and units. ... What made me even more proud was not just my contentment with myself, but my teacher also told me good job. He told me in class the next day that I had the top score out of all of his students and he was also proud of my performance. Not just was I happy with what I did, someone else communicated to me their pride in my achievements. His support and encouragement really made me feel extra proud about a thing that special.

(Participant J)

Grades and teachers' comments were not the only sources of satisfaction for students' scholastic excellence. Several participants also noted feeling proud when receiving school, regional, and national awards. Participant C reflected on earning an award in elementary school, years ago, for students who showed evidence of academic, service, and physical excellence:

“...I can’t remember exactly how many others were able to get that award, all I know is that there weren’t very many. I remember feeling elated, especially since I knew that my parents were there at the assembly watching this happen. It was truly an unforgettable moment in my life...”

Participant E said about earning the National Merit Commended Scholar award that “I don’t think I’ve ever felt prouder in my life than I did when the Counselors gave me the certificate, boldly broadcasting my name.” Participant A said about their performance in a state music competition, “I blew myself away.”

Finally, another participant noted feelings of academic satisfaction, not in grades or awards but through comparing their performance with that of other students’:

I hate math, but there’s something really satisfying about it specifically when you know how to do a problem and can do it correctly. As horrible as this sounds, it felt fantastic to succeed and do well in the class with ease while [older students] struggled through it around me. Obviously I wasn’t bragging and I would even go so far as to try to hide my test scores so that they wouldn’t see me as the weird smart kid, but deep down I felt good to be succeeding. (Participant D)

One more thing worth noting on the subject of satisfaction in academic excellence is that despite their identified giftedness, not all participants indicated an expectation that they would receive good grades or awards; feelings of satisfaction emerged out of surprise or relief toward their excellent performance. Participant E wrote,

...I’ve never liked speaking tests (who does, really?) and I was nervous that I’d freeze up or forget what I was about to say. Worried that I would chicken out, I volunteered to go first. My interview went about as well as it could have gone,

and I ended up getting 100% on the speaking grade. I was already brimming with pride at how well the assignment had gone...

Other indicators of participants being surprised by their success included phrases such as “So when my name was called, I couldn’t believe my ears”; “I remember being shocked”; and “I was astonished.”

Overall, many participants, despite their status as identified gifted students, were often surprised by their success. But this surprise might be related to them setting a very high standard of excellence for the situations they would feel proud about: for example, feeling proud about being honored publicly through receiving an award or feeling proud about grades when receiving 100 percent or being singled out by a teacher.

Perfectionism or Fear of Failure

This focus on extremely high standards leads into the next sub-theme, which is perfectionism or fear of failure. This is one of two sub-themes that can be understood as a “dark side” of students becoming accustomed to and expecting academic excellence. While definitions and dimensions of perfectionism vary, for the purpose of this study, data coded as perfectionism were responses that indicated maladaptive, negative effects resulting from the participant’s high standards and desire to achieve. Five participants reported feelings of perfectionism resulting both from others’ expectations and their own, often a combination of the two. Participant F wrote,

The joy and carelessness of my formative years were marred by an intense desire to maintain perfection. When everyone around me praised my integrity, my self-control, my work ethic, and my intelligence, it proved easy to bury myself in these expectations. If I was not the hardest worker, I was not working hard

enough. If I was not the most well-behaved student, I was not good enough. If I was not the smartest, then I was not smart enough. In my mind, if I was not perfect, then I was a failure. I sought academic perfection throughout elementary school, already equating value to a letter grade.

Participant G wrote

I don't blame my peers, my parents, or my teachers for creating this monster inside of me, but rather, I blame myself and my society for giving into the idea that the only way one can prove themselves is through their academics and the so-called "perfect" resume of activities for college and a career.

Both of these students express a belief that they have internalized the standards of an external source, either the praise of excellence by trusted adults or by society to a harmful extent.

Participants whose responses reflect this sub-theme also wrote about how their crushingly high standards for academic excellence infect other areas of their life.

Participant A wrote, "My perfectionism has stolen my music, one of my favorite things, from me. It stole my favorite sport from me too."

This same student went on to discuss how the fear of failure resulting from their perfectionism leads them to not put effort into their activities:

I thought I was the worst at everything. I wasn't, that was just in my head, but I was so afraid that someone else would think that about me that I was paralyzed. That made me too afraid to try putting in more effort. I was absolutely terrified that I would put in effort and still fail, still be the worst, never improve. And so I never put in effort. I was, and still am, too afraid of failing.

The fear of failing sometimes, but not always, actually leads to failure and the lack of resilience to overcome it. Participant H wrote, “It felt like the entire world was against me. My entire life, school was ‘the thing I was good at, the reason adults liked me so much, the reason I had any value at all. The guilt of failing at all kept me from even trying anymore.”

Finally, one other important observation Participant A made about perfectionism is that it can result from a desire to make work that is not personally meaningful more worthwhile. This student wrote,

... I just can't stand the feeling of not giving my best effort. If I don't work extremely hard at everything, if I don't put my best into everything I do, then what is the point? If I'm doing mediocre work just for the sake of retention, why am I even here? What am I learning? There is zero purpose, and that makes me extremely angry. So I give things purpose.

Overall, the responses that contained examples of the perfectionism or fear of failure sub-theme suggest that despite excellence being one of the common traits of eudaimonia, under the right, or rather, the wrong conditions, the desire for or the expectation of excellence, particularly in an academic setting can be crippling.

Boredom and Frustration

The other manifestation of a “dark side” of excellence that emerged in the data was the occurrence of boredom and frustration in school. While many students' potential for academic excellence led them to chase opportunities to reach perceived academic perfection, eight participants wrote about either the distress of frequent boredom in school when their academic work did not match their academic excellence or how

boredom can spur other problems, like lack of attention, focus, and retention. Participant H wrote,

The mix of schoolwork not being challenging enough overlapping with my general lack of interest makes the amount of effort I put into it more often than not, the bare minimum. Naturally, this results in me not being able to understand or retain the information very well, but the short term benefits far outweigh the lasting deficits that it causes to me, leading to the cycle repeating again.

Another participant reflected on how the ease of their work has led to the development of poor work habits:

Classmates were astounded when I still received an A in an honors course in which I had never been awake for the lessons. Now I am suffering because of my past decisions. I have little to no work ethic, but I am only a victim of my success. Why should I change when I continually succeed while practicing this behavior?
(Participant I)

In both of these examples, students noted an awareness that their ability to achieve good grades with minimal efforts has developed habits and cycles that will affect them negatively in the future, but the temptation for the easy payoff is too hard for them to resist. One outcome of these poor habits is reflected by Participant J who wrote about how they struggled to ask for help when they encountered a learning challenge:

Math has always been easy for me and if I maybe don't understand something just a simple question or going over my notes again helps me figure it out. Although, this time around that was not working and no matter what I just couldn't get it. To fix my problem I finally gave up and decided I have to go to academic networking

and fix this. This was very new to me because I never really have gone to a teacher during academic networking or office hours to get help. ... When I got there however, there were multiple kids and she couldn't get to me in time, so I left wasting 25 of my minutes and still as confused as before. Though, more of the blame is on me because to get the help I really just had to pipe up and ask for it because once she was done with one student she asked the rest who needed help. ... So really both the math and the fact that deep down I didn't want to have to ask for help and show that I needed it contributed to the challenge.

Another facet of this experience is frustration with school because the ease of the work that is expected of them means it is not engaging or meaningful. Participant E wrote about how their excitement for a creative writing assignment quickly led to dismay when their own expectations were much higher than their teacher's:

I was so proud of that short story, so when it turned out to be twenty pages long, I was impressed with myself more than anything. But two days before the assignment was due, my teacher casually mentioned, as if she wasn't crushing my dreams as she spoke, that our fictional stories had to be five pages long or less. I was devastated. All of that hard work I'd put into my story seemed to be all for nothing. ... I was able to get my story down to 5 pages. But so much of the heart and depth was removed from it, and I felt like it was just a shadow of what it had been before the changes. ... I'd put my heart and soul into this little story, and by cutting it down, I felt like I'd betrayed it somehow.

Participant H wrote about the ease of their academic achievement renders it meaningless and results in a lack of pride:

I can't remember a time I felt genuinely proud. I can recall several achievements throughout my life, several times others were proud of me, but looking back, any pride I may have had now appears artificial. One thing that comes to mind is an essay contest from elementary school. I don't remember how much time I put into that essay, but I know I didn't care about it very much. ... Then they called first place. Part of me wondered if I was in a dream. Maybe it was a typo of some kind; maybe they read it wrong. I walked down and they gave me my medal. But no matter how certain I was that they had given me the award, the reality was lost on me that I could have earned it. And I didn't, really. I didn't work hard on that essay. I didn't care about that essay. I didn't even want to write that essay, it was mandatory for a grade. All I did was get lucky, be born "naturally gifted". Why are they giving me a medal?

While many participants, both those who had seemingly healthy amounts of pride in their scholastic accomplishments and those who reported dealing with maladaptive perfectionism, placed a great deal of value on external indicators of academic excellence, some participants revealed that when the potential for academic excellence is not met by schools, they don't just coast by but rather suffer from the lack of appropriate channels for their abilities.

Theme Summary

Excellence was one of the most frequently coded elements of eudaimonia in the data, with codes relating to excellence occurring 51 times among all of the participants. However, participants' experiences of excellence were not always associated with what we could consider eudaimonic well-being. Students most frequently engaged with the

topic of excellence in the form of academic excellence. While the response of six out of the 15 students contained a sub-theme of satisfaction in academic excellence, 10 wrote about sub-themes related to the dark side of academic excellence. These challenges manifested themselves in the form of perfectionism, fear of failure, boredom, and frustration in school.

Eudaimonia Theme 2: Meaning and Purpose in Learning and Extracurricular Activities

Codes related to meaning and purpose appeared 48 times in the data among 14 of the 15 participants, most frequently in the context of learning or school-related activities, including extracurriculars. As discussed with the previous theme, while some of the gifted students in the study indicated that they did find meaning and value in external indicators of academic success, many did not find healthy validation in things like grades and awards. This raises the question of how the participants found meaning and purpose in places and experiences outside of external measures of scholastic achievement, leading to the theme of meaning and purpose in learning and extracurricular activities. Ten participants wrote responses in which this theme emerged. Two sub-themes became clear as well: pursuing personal interests and helping and relating to others.

Pursuing Personal Interests

Six participants wrote about meaningful learning experiences that had nothing to do with grades or awards received. In fact, some students compared the passion they felt for their personal educational pursuits with their attitudes toward assigned school work.

Participant H wrote

Whenever I'm genuinely interested in a topic, ... I have no problem spending hours upon hours studying it, but focusing on subjects I have no interest in for school sometimes feels next to impossible. While I've learned to manage my workload, I often find myself spending much more time on studying my own interests, in no less rigor, compared to my schoolwork. Admittedly everyone prefers their own interests, but for me, I really study my interests in an academic respect, and put a lot of time and effort into them, taking on online courses just because it interests me.

In a similar response, Participant K wrote,

I like to think I'm a pretty hard worker when I want to be. If it's something I'm interested in I work very hard on it. ... I love working with my peers in [my extracurricular activities] and although school isn't always the most fun thing for me, I usually manage through it.

Many of the students in the study wrote about the energy they exerted on their areas of passion. They often expressed pride in their success that was not associated with any sort of external measure of excellence. Participant I described their experience performing in a musical as exceptional because it required them to work hard at something they loved:

The performance went amazingly and as the cast came back on stage for bows we got a standing ovation. This was when I felt the warmth in my heart, the satisfaction of all the work I put in paying off. I was truly proud of myself not for only the performance but for the commitment that I had put into the role.

Typically, I am able to do things without putting much effort into them, so this was a huge accomplishment.

Beyond feelings of pride, students also expressed meaning and purpose through experiences that led them to both consider the future and treasure the past. Participant G wrote about a field trip that introduced them to a future potential career, saying, “While this field trip was truly an excuse for [gifted students] to explore and go to another part of the state, it meant so much more to me than that; if anything, it helped inspire my current career plan of being an anesthesiology assistant.” Participant F wrote about an assignment they worked hard on, not in terms of grades, but in its personal value as a memorial to a beloved pet,

This video, I remember, took many hours of tedious editing, effort, frustration, and headaches, but now, looking back, my heart swells in gratitude for this video. ... Creating this video brought me so much joy and pride, filling me with love for my puppy, and as silly as it may sound, this cheesy video still fills me with joy, pride, and love, and it is something that I will cherish forever.

Students’ responses indicated an important distinction between success in school and success in personally meaningful work although there is potential for both to occur simultaneously.

Helping and Relating to Others

While participants often wrote about finding purpose and meaning through their pursuit of personal interests, they just as frequently wrote about finding meaning through helping and relating to others. Five students discussed their feelings of satisfaction arising from serving others. Participant G said that the thing they are most proud of is their work promoting educational equity, writing,

...although I have had more impressive and unique awards and achievements throughout my life, instigating change still stands as my proudest as I attempted to help others receive and benefit from the resources and inherent privileges I have received during my time in the education system.

Participant I wrote about their service activities as being experiences of joy and central to their identity:

Throughout my childhood, I always enjoyed serving others, whether it was just helping out a friend or volunteering at a retirement home, it always put a smile on my face. This joy persuaded me to join the student council. This club often does service work, primarily helping out Special Olympics Missouri in its effort to provide equal opportunity. One story, in particular, is a few months ago our school was hosting a Special Olympics football game called Sunday Night Lights. My friends and I were asked to help out at it, and dress up as superheroes for it. We accepted, and I don't remember a joy better than the one I got when I would go up to one of the [participants] and their faces would light up from Superman being in their presence. We walked around, got to talk to them, and really just enjoyed the atmosphere that was filled with satisfaction. Making the kids happy was the best thing ever and that really encapsulates who I am.

Participant E recounted an opportunity they had to make a younger children feel like they belong in an activity they share:

At the first rehearsal I noticed one little girl, whom I had met before in a previous show, going up to her friend who was rather shy. She said to this friend to come over and talk to me because I was nice. This little girl went over and introduced

herself, and I did my best to affirm her statement by being kind to her. Even though she is more than ten years younger than me, I've come to consider her a good friend because I've talked with her and gotten to know her. I found that she is smart and funny, exactly the type of friend I would like to have. Recently, at one of our final rehearsals, a woman I didn't know came up to me. "I want to thank you for being kind to my daughter," she said. "Because teenagers haven't always been kind to her in the past and she can't stop talking about how nice you are." Even though I was heartbroken that other teenagers wouldn't be kind to this sweet little girl, I was also proud that I was able to make this kind of impact in her life.

Three students wrote about the sense of purpose they felt being part of group activities, perceiving themselves as being a part of something bigger than themselves. Participant L wrote about their feelings of transcendence and pride during a music performance:

As we played our final chord, I thought about my journey to this moment—the hours I had put in and the friends I had gotten out. I thought about the many emotions I had experienced along the way: fear, frustration, anger, triumph, satisfaction, jubilation. Yet, somehow (and I don't think I'll ever be able to explain this), they were not mine. No. Instead, I felt some combination of them all at once: pride. Sadness that it was ending. Satisfaction that our efforts had been rewarded. Happiness that we had done so well. An incalculable number of emotions swirling around, I didn't know whether to cry or leap into the air. That's what pride is to me.

Participant M described their experience in their music ensemble as feeling “like a part of something much larger than myself” and feeling connection to and love for the other members of the group. Finally, Participant N wrote about how their experience as being a part of a community of musicians is a way to have “a positive impact” and “[overcome] failures.”

Theme Summary

While gifted students frequently experience academic excellence, the data suggests that their most meaningful and purposeful experiences and activities are not those that are tied to a grade but those that allow them to explore their personal passions and those that facilitate ways to serve and connect with others. Ten students wrote about personally and relationally meaningful experiences, often in terms of pride and joy.

Eudaimonia Theme 3: Meaningful Relationships

In the previous section, many participants reflected upon the importance of group activities in developing a sense of meaning and purpose. Codes associated with relationships (relatedness and disconnection) were the most frequently used in the data, with 56 occurrences involving all 15 participants. Personal relationships proved essential to participants’ sense of self, which leads to the third eudaimonia theme: meaningful relationships. Ten participants’ responses included this theme. Two sub-themes emerged from the theme of meaningful relationships: The first is the importance of relationships in participants’ feelings of authenticity and validation in their identities; the second is that, despite the importance and value placed on relatedness, establishing these relationships is often a journey from disconnection to belonging.

Identity and Authenticity through Relationships

The most common way that personal relationships affected participants' sense of self was the phenomenon of participants feeling truly "seen," understood, and accepted. Six students wrote about these validating relationships, which came from many in many forms: connections with teachers and coaches, parents, and friends. Participant G wrote about a teacher,

Once again I felt appreciated and seen by this teacher, and I even began to discuss some of my discontent with things like the inequities in the school system and how she would support my endeavors towards that. Mx. X was a beacon of hope during a year that was otherwise very difficult for me emotionally and mentally. Mx. X was always kind to all of those around them, and they always made me feel like I belonged despite being a member of a generally discriminated-against community.

As noted by Participant J, school faculty and staff are in a prime position to confer feelings of validation and authenticity because they tend to see different "sides" of students, both academic and personal or extracurricular:

A relationship I value is that between me and my [coach]. This is important to me because he is able to see me from both the perspectives that make up a lot of my identity: [my sport] and school.

Adult family members also were important to students' experience of feeling seen and accepted. Participant M wrote about their mother that

I personally enjoy talking and recounting stories, and it is always wonderful when my mother humors me. She also puts up with my strange sense of humor, like

breaking into random accents or creating strange idioms for myself to fit my situations.

Participant L wrote about how their mother not only helps them feel accepted but also helps them know themselves better:

No one else had managed to make a dent in my emotional turmoil up until that point. It was as if my brain had placed a lock upon my heart, but try as it may to keep others out, my mom still held the master key. In fact, I think of her as an emotional surgeon—a person who always seems to know exactly what to think, exactly what to say, exactly how to act, regardless of how complex a situation might get. When I am most emotional, she's able to tear down my walls within a matter of minutes.

As discussed previously, many participants reported experiences with perfectionism, and meaningful relationships were one way for these students to find relief and reassurance. Participant A says of their grandmother,

...she is my biggest cheerleader, she listens to all my random theories and presentations and comes to all my concerts. But she is also the loving voice that reminds me that I don't need to be perfect, and that she will always love me anyway. At the end of the day, that's really what I need to hear.

Finally, friends were another source providing participants with feeling validated and authentic:

...we laugh with and at each other constantly, we lift each other up in times of stress or sadness, and we champion each other's successes. Most importantly, I can be my true vibrant self in all its entirety around her, and never once am I

questioned, judged, or made to feel small. In fact, when I am with her, it's as if I throw all caution to the wind, and I put down all of my walls; I laugh loudly, walk boldly, and smile freely. (Participant F)

Meaningful relationships are clearly an important part of the participants' experience of feeling known and valued as well as helping them discover themselves better. However, despite the importance of personal relationships, many students wrote about the difficulty of establishing relationships.

From Disconnection to Belonging

Eight participants frequently wrote about the alienation they felt among their peers. Participant L explained what they perceived as the paradoxical experience of a highly gifted student attempting to "fit in" to the broader school community:

It's extremely alienating—you can be getting along well with somebody, but as soon as you do something they don't like, it becomes an Us vs. Them situation. You lose the freedom to define yourself in the way you choose. You are not a human being, with thoughts, emotions, and ideas; you are a [gifted] kid. And you will never be like the rest of us. There is a fundamental juxtaposition between how gifted and non-gifted kids are treated by the people around them—and no, it's not just students. I cannot tell you how many times I've been chastised by classmates, teachers, and even friends for making simple mistakes. As a gifted kid, there is a stereotype you must fill: nerdy, perfectionistic, academic, common-senseless, a little annoying, perhaps very annoying, and most importantly, infallible. When that expectation isn't filled, you become the butt of the joke (see: "Shouldn't you know that? You got a 36 on the ACT!"), and when it is filled,

you're still the butt of the joke, you're still "the Other" (see: "Nerd!" and variants). It is one of the most cleverly laid traps I've come across, one almost every gifted kid will be likely to stumble into time and time again. And people wonder why [gifted] kids are so hesitant to accept the title.

While this student felt excluded by those outside their gifted community, Participant J wrote about feeling excluded within in it when their performance did not live up to the expectations for gifted students:

However, since [receiving a low score] was not their experience many of them could not empathize with me as well. Some of them even went as far as making fun of me for it. This made me feel even more horrible. My teachers did not think I could meet their expectations and my peers thought that was funny. This all just contributed to my feelings of alienation rather than to strive for further excellence and to do better. I

In both of these situations, the participants felt like the development of their authentic selves and true potential was limited by feelings of disconnection and alienation.

However, there were no students who wrote about this feeling of disconnection without writing about eventually finding belonging. Sometimes this journey from disconnection to belonging occurred within the disruption of old friendships and the establishment of new, more authentic ones. Participant F wrote about feeling relieved when their old peer group seemed to have "forgotten" them because it led to finding a friend with whom they could be their true self:

At the time in my life when I became a part of this friend group, I was living inside a shell that I had created; it protected me from getting too hurt, but it also

hid the real me beneath it. So, as I rediscovered myself, I became the brighter, louder, and more confident version of myself that I had so longed for. However, in that group of friends, I felt trapped in the old version of myself. I felt like I had to make myself small again in order to fit their expectations of me, and, in turn, to fit in. So when nobody made time for me over the summer, and when I saw that everyone else had been spending time together without me, it felt like a release. I had the chance to be myself and to find people with whom I could be authentic. Later that summer, I received an invitation to a birthday party for an old friend. As I walked up to the party, my old friend waved me down with the biggest and most genuine smile, and I breathed a sigh of relief. As I chatted with my old friend, I could not help but notice how incredibly genuine she was; she did not put on a face intended to fit in or to please the preferences of those around her, she was just herself. Her laughter filled the neighborhood, infecting everyone around her. The positivity and boldness just radiated off of her, and as I sat there, laughing and gasping for air, I knew that I had found the person I was looking for.

This feeling of relief at finding a true friend was also shared by Participant E, who wrote I'd been in a bit of a friendship rough spot, after being bullied in 8th grade and freshman year and being homeschooled since then. But when I met [my friend], I immediately knew that I'd met a kindred spirit. She loves books just as much as I do, and was someone who was willing to listen to me talk about them without getting annoyed or insulting me. ... [she] is such an important friend to me because she loves all the same things I do, which was a very refreshing feeling

after those same things were what caused other so-called “friends” I’d had to make fun of me.

In many of these responses, participants observed that real friendship allowed them to be themselves and that relationships that required them to be inauthentic needed to be dropped or recalibrated. As Participant C reflected,

I also realized that making a lot of friends doesn’t mean anything if you don’t feel comfortable in their presence, or if they constantly cause you a lot of grief. That led to me avoiding some friends for a while last year, but it always eventually ended up with me and the friend talking to each other again and understanding one another better.

As indicated above, some students felt like their giftedness contributed to feelings of alienation, but more wrote about how they eventually found belonging with other gifted students. In some cases, this was because other gifted students were more able to connect with them because of their shared interests and abilities: for example Participant A wrote,

My boyfriend and I are both gifted. When I was first getting to know him, we worked on an essay together, and I learned so much from him about things I usually wouldn’t research, like aerospace engineering or sports history. That was really special to me; In the dating world, and even with my friends, it’s difficult to find someone with a similar intellect who can maintain abstract discussions.

Other students reported that while they knew they didn’t always fit in with their peers in general, they could find belonging with other gifted students. Participant N said, “I think that at the end of the day, to me being ‘gifted’ just means that I’m different than other

people, but that I fit in with kids that are also ‘gifted,’ while Participant H put it succinctly that “even though all of us were sort of different, we were all different together.”

Theme Summary

Ten participants wrote about how relationships with peers, family members, and adults at school were important to developing and validating their identity. Although the path to finding belonging wasn’t always straightforward, which three clearly attributed to their giftedness, six students wrote about the satisfaction of finding belonging after experiencing disconnection.

Eudaimonia Theme 4: Struggle and Change

Within the previous themes, data from the study brought up significant challenges that many of the participants discussed in their responses. These challenges were associated with the dark side of excellence—perfectionism, fear of failure, boredom, and frustration—and developing positive and meaningful relationships. While some students just wrote about the struggle, some students also wrote about how they confronted their problems and emerged with a new understanding of themselves. Codes related to growth appeared 25 times in the data across 11 participants. Six participants wrote substantively about overcoming challenges, leading to the final theme that emerged from the data is how struggle can lead to growth. These responses can be separated into two sub-themes, struggle at school and struggle in personal life. Additionally, six students wrote about their inability to change or grow in the face of struggle, or their unawareness of how change occurred. These responses are grouped under the subtheme failure to change.

Overcoming Struggles at School

Five students wrote about the difficulties they faced at school because of encountering failure or because they were not being appropriately challenged academically. They also addressed how they learned something important about themselves because of these challenges. Participant E, for example, reflected on how being bored in school helped develop their love of imagination and writing:

It was during this time, when I was bored out of my mind, that I would begin to think about different story ideas for books I could write. I was a voracious reader, devouring books as soon as they were given to me. All of these ideas melded in my head and began to transform themselves into original stories. Times when I was bored in school, I would think back on these ideas and begin to try and structure them into my own original stories. Now, having written eight novels and am working on my ninth, I am glad for those times I was bored in class. It gave me opportunities to think, to dream, to wonder. Sometimes I didn't like being gifted. I wished I was like everybody else, able to learn and follow along. But now, I'm glad for the times my mind drifted off during class. They helped shape me into the person I am today.

While this particular student also reflected upon struggling with peer relationships within gifted programming, they presented a positive lesson learned from this situation as well, saying their “experience taught me about challenging myself even through obstacles, and showed me that, though the world might be against me, I can always overcome whatever challenges face me.”

Participant O also reflected on the challenges they encountered before finding appropriately academic accommodations for their abilities:

Beads of sweat had suddenly begun to coalesce atop my forehead. “You’re already done?” My teacher looked up from her book with a face marred with doubt. Students in the front row of the class began to whisper. Second grade was rough. I often got in trouble for talking too much, hiding chapter books in my desk, and disagreeing with my classmates. I once forged my dad’s signature on a note sent home to discuss my “disruptive nature.” Seeing my struggles, my mom asked if I could move classes to a third grade level. Sadly, the school board didn’t think that would be appropriate. . . . Through it all, I developed an ability to make friends and push through adversity that I think will serve me well in life.

For both of these students, persisting through the discomfort of their educational experience taught them resilience and to appreciate their differences.

While some students’ academic challenges came in the form of school that was too easy, some students wrote about encountering academic struggle for the first time. Participant O also wrote about trying to impress everyone at their new school by accelerating too quickly through math, saying

In my overzealous attempt to wow everyone, I had skipped a semester of necessary info. I considered trying to teach myself over the year, but chose to solidify my base and dropped the course. Although I saw this as quitting at first, my parents reminded me that I would still get to attempt the course next year; hence it was more of a “repositioning.” When fall came around, I whizzed through geometry. I still despise proofs, but my experience was overwhelmingly

positive. Today my tower climbs higher, taking Calc-3 and Diff Eq even after skipping a grade. I can proudly say I've learned the value of a strategic "retreat" and look forward to the next time I'm forced to do a double-take.

Participant H wrote about the difficulties they faced due to online learning during the pandemic, saying

During the 2020-2021 quarantine, I struggled greatly with school. I couldn't go to in-person school, and the all-virtual setting didn't work at all with the style of learning I had grown accustomed to. I used to be a straight-A student, but when I was unable to focus in a "non-learning environment", my grades plummeted to mostly Fs. This was worsened by my ADHD, which hadn't been diagnosed at the time, as I usually managed the difficulties it posed, assuming it was like that for everyone. Now, it was worse than ever, as schoolwork was the most draining task conceivable in my mind. As assignments piled up, the thought of starting became more impossible; turning on the school-issued iPad opened a floodgate of "Missing" and "0%"s that overwhelmed me to the point where my brain was too busy focusing on stress to redirect any focus to the work that needed to get done. ... As awful as that time was, I think it was necessary for me to realize I had ADHD, so I could get the help I needed. It was a learning experience, and it made me who I am today.

Finally, Participant L wrote about the embarrassment of being demoted from the most advanced band class after a poor audition:

You probably already know what happened. I didn't miraculously produce the most beautiful music ever heard. I was, tragically, not suddenly possessed by the

spirits of Clifford Brown, Miles Davis, or Louis Armstrong. No. Instead, I bombed. I left the room almost in tears, running out of the building before anyone could see me. Unsurprisingly, a few days later, I found out that my term in symphonic band had expired. Instead of crying, however, I had a different reaction. I used that sadness to motivate myself to practice even harder and earn my spot back next semester. Just because I was knocked down, doesn't mean I have to stay there forever.

In these participants' experiences, encountering failure at school, perhaps for the first time, was necessary in order for them to learn valuable lessons about learning and themselves.

Encountering Struggles in Personal Life

Two participants wrote about how issues and experiences in their non-school lives pushed them toward growth. In one situation, these events were situational and external: Participant I wrote about the effect of a family member's serious illness, saying

This is the biggest challenge I have faced in my entire life and I'm still facing the consequences of the situation, but I have grown an incomprehensible amount. I cannot predict a single event that would change someone as that did me, and although distress was immense, it was a growing experience.

Participants' responses also reflected how issues of identity and self-acceptance also prompted struggle and growth. Participant F wrote about how perfectionism led to an eating disorder:

I sought out physical perfection, forcing my mind to believe that if I was not the skinniest, then I was not skinny enough. These voices blared in my mind for the

next 4 years. The lightness in my heart vanished, the spark in my eyes dimmed to a shadow, and my smile became hollow. Some months, the voices were softer, but after a bit of uneasy quiet, they would inevitably return. Eventually, I'd had enough and desperately began clawing my way up, inch by inch, until I was free. I dug out the parts of myself that had been held hostage for so long, and from there, I discovered myself in my entirety: beauty, flaws, passion, and imperfection. While my heart may be fuller, my mind stronger, and my spirit braver, I am filled with longing for what could have been if life had turned out differently, who I could have been. Yet, I remain keenly aware that I now stand passionate, fearless, and strong in spite of it all and because of it all.

While the issues these young people face were, and still are, serious and without an easy solution, they realize that the pain they have endured has allowed them to grow and develop in ways they could not have done without the struggle.

Failure to Change

Six participants were aware of the impact of a problem they struggled with but either did not actively resolve them, or they did write about learning from them. All six wrote about experiences were related to experiences with their performance in school. Participant G wrote about their struggles with perfectionism as unresolved and uncontrollable, saying "Even currently, it still feels as though I am always seeking a new club or leadership position or volunteer opportunity to achieve some impossible standard I try to compare myself to." Participant A also wrote about their perfectionism as if it is an inescapable part of their life: "Perfectionism is something I struggle with every day, and it's honestly miserable. ... perfectionism is almost a survival mechanism. I couldn't

survive school without it, because without it everything seems so pointless that I would rather just drop out.”

Perfectionism was not the only excellence-related problem that could not be resolved. Students also wrote about how their high ability had led to poor habits that they acknowledged but had not yet overcome. Participant J wrote about how they failed to advocate for themselves when they were struggling with math because they were unused to asking for help, saying:

the blame is on me because to get the help I really just had to pipe up and ask for it... So really both the math and the fact that deep down I didn't want to have to ask for help and show that I needed it contributed to the challenge.

Similarly, Participant I described themselves as “a victim of my own success” because their ability allows them to succeed academically without good habits. They believe that this is detrimental to their well-being, but ask, “Why should I change when I continually succeed while practicing this behavior? ... I think that system in which we do so well, reinforces negative behavior.”

From a different perspective, Participant B wrote about their academic problem resolving itself but distanced themselves from the solution: “After summer break, this problem just went away. Now I am able to fully concentrate without any problems. ... There really was no solution and I am thankful that it just went away on its own.”

Although they were able to end the challenge, they did not learn or change from it.

Academic problems were not the only source of unresolved or unlearned-from issues. Participant J wrote about a social problem that they could not or would not resolve:

Not too long ago I was walking next to the guy I like on the way to lunch, shoulder to shoulder. I have liked him for over a year or so despite never having talked to him. The delusion that he might like me back keeps me infatuated with the idea of him; the eye contact in the halls, him sitting near where I sit at lunch. Although, at this time I had somewhat of a plan to actually have a real conversation with him for the first time, but during the whole long walk [to lunch] I didn't say a word; I just continued walking shoulder to shoulder. Every few seconds I would look over in my peripheral vision hoping he was looking back at me or looking ready to say something so I didn't have to, but it never happened. When we finally split paths I was so sad. I didn't give a deep thought about it until I went to my next class where in the middle of my teacher's lecture I almost started crying. The fact that I am always so afraid to say something wrong and just be perceived in any way that I don't feel I have control over makes me so anxious that I choose to say nothing at all. I was so deeply upset that I could not just step out of my comfort zone once, even when it was relatively easy, just because I didn't want to break the perfection I built out of naivety. My non confrontational self let me down again even at a time when I wanted so badly for it to go away.

There was one participant who wrote about being the midst of attempting to resolve a struggle but being unaware of their ability to do so or the outcome. Participant N said:

The most recent challenge I've faced is burnout. It's a constant drum beat in my head of I want to go home. I can't do this. What's even the point? Trying to get

over it and finding the motivation to do the things I enjoy doing is difficult. There were so many issues and problems stacking up on me, and as my burden grew along with general feelings of discontent with activities in my life, my mind gave out. Admitting this on paper feels a bit shameful, because, who wants to admit that some part of their psyche isn't strong enough? I've prided myself in being able to juggle my schedule yet keep everything important in my life close. But suddenly it felt like I was trying to balance a mountain on chopsticks and at the same time stop all of the people and things I value slowly drifting away. Even now there isn't really a clear plan formed in my mind of how I'm going to get out of this mess. But I know that I need to snap out of it. And fast. I don't know about anyone else but most of my problems can be solved with a book. So I did what I usually do when I'm struggling, I picked up a book about a crazy person doing a crazy thing (or maybe things). The one I chose was *The Impossible First* by Colin O'Brady as I randomly walked through the biography aisle in the library. There's something about O'Brady and about the story of his impossible unassisted race across Antarctica which is just so motivating and in a way gives me hope. He had to take every step at a time, every day at a time. No matter how hard each day was, he got up the very next and was ready to take on the world. ... As long as I take every step at a time, every day at a time, maybe I can make it too.

Theme Summary

The data included in the analyses for the previous themes already touched on the fact that many students wrote about encountering significant challenges, many of which they associated with their giftedness. Six participants wrote about their inability or lack of

confidence to resolve problems or the failure to learn from them. However, seven students wrote about the steps they took to overcome struggles and how they grew in skills, confidence, and self-awareness because of them. Ultimately, this process of struggle and growth is central to the development of eudaimonia. Personal growth is the most consistent core element of eudaimonia throughout its various conceptualizations (Huta & Waterman, 2013). As Bauer et al. (2006) discuss in “Narrative Identity and Eudaimonic Well-Being,” people with the highest levels of eudaimonic well-being are more apt to write about personal growth in their life stories and to discuss significant challenges as opportunities for transformation.

Eudaimonia Summary

To answer the research question, “What do the narratives of secondary gifted students reveal about their development of eudaimonia?” narratives of 15 secondary gifted students were coded and analyzed. In a series of eight prompts, four were based upon elements of eudaimonia, but all prompt responses were coded for elements of eudaimonia regardless of their intended focus. A priori codes from Huta and Waterman (2013) (see Table 1) were used to help identify four themes and nine sub-themes (see Table 2) that emerged from the data. The themes indicate that gifted students are likely to experience and develop eudaimonia through achieving excellence in academic achievement; finding meaning and purpose in the pursuit of personal interests and relationships; experiencing authenticity and belonging in the context of these meaningful relationships; and acknowledging how encountering challenges can lead to new growth and self-understanding. It is important to note, however, that two distinct sub-themes emerged that indicated that gifted students may experience the element of eudaimonia

excellence to a negative degree, specifically within a school context: many of the participants reported struggling with perfectionism and fear of failure as well as boredom and frustration connected to their potential for academic excellence.

Themes and sub-themes present in each of the participants' responses are represented in Appendix E. By looking at the difference between the number of positive eudaimonia sub-themes present and the number of negative sub-themes present in each participant's responses, one can make tentative interpretations about each participant's overall eudaimonic well-being. Yet, it is equally important to consider not just *who* experiences the highest levels of eudaimonia but also the circumstances in which eudaimonia is most likely to be developed in secondary gifted students and, conversely, the circumstances that may have detrimental effects on their experience of eudaimonia.

Giftedness Thematic Analysis

Gifted Codes, Themes, and Sub-Themes

To derive themes related to students' implicit theories about giftedness and the way they incorporate giftedness into their identities, inductive codes were generated from the responses and applied to all responses, regardless of whether the prompt was meant to target eudaimonia or giftedness. Because this study is focusing on gifted students' implicit theories of giftedness, not my own implicit theories or explicit theories of giftedness, students had to specifically connect their experience with giftedness for it to receive a gifted code. For example, if a student wrote about perfectionism but did not connect their perfectionism to giftedness, I did not code it with a gifted code even if I had already coded it as perfectionism for the eudaimonia analysis.

After initial rounds of open coding, similar codes were combined and codes that appeared in just one participant's responses were eliminated. These remaining 43 codes were then grouped into themes and subthemes (see Table 4), and the data were re-coded. I asked two educator colleagues, one within the field of gifted education and one without, to each code one participant's responses with the focused codes to verify the accuracy of my coding. Minimal variation in coding did occur, particularly in conceptually similar codes, but not for what I would consider the primary code for the responses, and variations did not affect the grouping of the data into sub-themes and themes.

Through this process of open and focused coding and categorizing the codes, four themes emerged about gifted students' implicit theories of giftedness and gifted identity: students believe giftedness affects relationships; students believe giftedness affects their school experience; student beliefs about gifted identification and programming; and student beliefs about gifted identity (see Table 4 for details). After establishing the themes and sub-themes, I asked my colleagues for feedback on the identified themes and sub-themes on the full set of two participants' responses. In instances in which they initially questioned the identified sub-theme, they agreed with my identification after more context about the analysis was provided.

Table 3

Giftedness Themes, Sub-themes, and Codes

Themes and Sub-themes	Codes	# of Part.	# of Resp.
Students Believe Giftedness Affects Relationships		14	46
Negative effect on relationships with peers who are not gifted	alienation/isolation, bullying, stereotypes	9	12

Positive effect on relationships with teachers	teachers sharing, teachers providing opportunities, belonging through programming	5	7
Negative effect on relationships with teachers	teachers not understanding, unaccommodating teachers	7	7
Finding belonging with gifted peers	kids like me, different together, shared interests or gifts	8	14
Not finding belonging with gifted peers	judgmental peers, bullying, stuck with same kids	5	7
Students Believe Giftedness Affects Their School Experience		12	28
Giftedness makes learning easier, creating a positive difference in school	pride, confidence, opportunities, helping others, free time, keeping up	7	8
Giftedness makes learning easier, creating a negative difference in school	negative outcomes of learning quickly/easily, boredom, desire for deeper understanding, poor habits, frustration	6	9
Giftedness causes perfectionism	not asking for help, perfectionism, fear of failure	4	6
School interferes with authentic learning and talents	compromising gifts, classwork versus interests, lack of system support	4	5
Students' Beliefs About Gifted Identification and Programming		14	30
The uncertainty and confusion of the identification process	problematic identification, matter of chance, initial failure, fear, confusion	6	7
Benefits of gifted programming	prepares for the future, access to experience, challenge	13	17
Challenges and drawbacks of programming	imposter syndrome, doesn't meet all needs	4	6
Students' Beliefs About Gifted Identity		13	24
Label versus experience	label separate from experience, not different, privilege	5	5
Not better, just different	not smarter but different, everyone is gifted, everyone is equal, creativity, neurodivergence	4	5
The complexity of giftedness	double-edged sword, accepting gifted identity, different kinds of giftedness, stereotypes, understanding self	7	14

Gifted Theme 1: Students Believe Giftedness Affects Relationships

Fourteen participants wrote about how they felt their giftedness impacts their relationships. The relationships that they believed to be affected were all those that occur within the context of school: other gifted peers, peers who are not gifted, and teachers. Responses also covered both positive and negative effects of giftedness on relationships. The variety of relationship types and outcomes led to the emergence of five sub-themes: 11 mentions of negative effect on relationships with peers who are not gifted; seven mentions of positive effect on relationships with teachers; seven mentions of negative effect on relationships with teachers; 14 mentions of finding belonging with other gifted students; and seven mentions of not finding belonging with other gifted students. It is important to note the absence of a potential sub-theme: No students reported feeling like their giftedness had a positive effect on relationships with peers who are not gifted although that does not mean that no students wrote about having positive relationships with peers who are not gifted—they just did not reveal a belief that giftedness was a factor.

Negative Effect on Relationships with Peers Who Are Not Gifted

Nine students throughout a total of 12 responses expressed beliefs that their giftedness had a negative effect on relationships with peers who are not gifted. Negative effects included bullying, alienation, isolation, or stereotyping. Seven of these students believed that it is giftedness itself that caused the negative effect because gifted children either behave differently than other children or are perceived as behaving differently than other children. Participant N wrote,

To me being “gifted” means that I’m a lot more socially awkward than my friends that aren’t, and it’s harder to pick up social cues. Being “gifted” means that kids that don’t understand me or how kids like me work are going to make fun of us, but it’s probably just because they’re ignorant. It’ll alienate us from the rest of our peers...

Similarly, Participant A wrote, “When I was in elementary school, I mostly resented being gifted. I felt like a weirdo and an outcast. I was bullied pretty bad, largely because of my giftedness...” Stepping aside from their own experience, Participant O wrote about gifted students in general that “Often, gifted students find themselves alienated from their peers due to a perceived status of neurodivergence” while Participant F remembered wanting to avoid a gifted label because they had heard from their older brother that students in their program “were, at the least, left behind and forgotten, and at most, bullied, alienated, and ostracized.”

While the previous students placed gifted students in the role of victims, Participant I suggested that gifted students play a part in their perceived social isolation, saying, “...oftentimes social skills are sacrificed in many gifted students, but at the same time, I think this comes from gifted children lacking empathy in a way, which leads to social isolation.” Exploring the social dynamic from a different angle, Participant C attributed some of the social difference to other students’ jealousy of gifted students saying, “other kids, especially in elementary school, do stupid things because of [gifted] kids being different, or them being jealous, et cetera.”

Two participants expressed their belief that it is gifted programming and accommodations that have a negative effect on their relationships with peers who are not gifted, rather than being caused by giftedness itself. Participant G reflects,

... thinking back on things like these, I fear they may have done some harm as well. Yes, I got to work ahead and do math at a level better suited to me, but I lost the shared connection and communication with all other individuals at lower math levels or groups. While I usually dealt with this by putting myself out there anyway and making those connections, I sometimes wonder where I would be without this distinction and separation from my peers. I'm not angry or ungrateful for the opportunities that have come my way, but I do wonder what would have happened if every math student, regardless of level, was mixed together in groups to both challenge struggling students with difficult problems and reinforce core ideas and concepts for ahead students with appropriate grade-level concepts.

Participant D believes that their acceleration prevented them from making connections with the other students in their classes: "because I only had a few classes with the grade above me, I wasn't fully accepted/assimilated into that community. I think that this definitely played a large role into my decision to graduate early..."

Despite the variety of attributions, a belief that giftedness negatively impacts relationships with peers who are not gifted was the mostly widely shared belief about the effect of giftedness on relationships.

Positive Effect on Relationships with Teachers

Despite there being no evidence that the participants believe that their giftedness could have a positive effect on their relationships with peers who are not gifted, five students expressed the implicit theory that giftedness could contribute to a positive relationship with teachers. These positive relationships were viewed by the participants as either teachers sharing resources or opportunities because of their giftedness or gifted teachers providing a sense of belonging.

Three of these comments were focused on how their gifted programming allowed them to build positive relationships with their gifted teachers. In the midst of what they call a “friendship rough spot,” Participant G found a “kindred spirit” in their middle school gifted teacher, saying that, years later, they still think about this teacher, saying, “fast-forward to now, when my cousins and ‘friends’ make fun of my current obsession, I know that [she] would have supported me.” Participant O reflected being impressed with the teacher-student relationship on their first day in their new gifted program:

[He] seemed genuinely interested in the welfare of his students. I was refreshed when he asked them about their days and remembered details about their lives. A moment that I’ll always remember is when he invited me up to introduce myself and asked me several funny questions (like “Would you rather be a loud laugher or a loud sneezer?) to make me comfortable in the new environment. Through the five to ten minutes he dedicated each Friday to opening the classroom floor for discussion, he made [our class] seem much more tight knit.

Participant N’s favorite memories of their elementary gifted program included the positive relationship they had with one of their gifted teachers, saying

One particular day, in the summer, when he got to our table to talk to my group of friends someone had brought a book of riddles or jokes and we spent a lot of time testing him. He was a really funny guy and I'm really glad that he was part of my experience...

Two responses reveal a belief that giftedness is a factor both in desiring good relationships with teachers and forming these relationships with some teachers, who often provide extra resources and opportunities. Participant A says,

As a gifted student, my relationships with my teachers are very important to me. I am close to my teachers, especially my English teachers. I like to talk to them outside of class about bigger topics under their subjects, and honestly, a lot of my teachers like me too. They let me borrow books and provide any resources for me that they can. I really appreciate it and I really value those connections. ... My favorite teacher freshman year taught seniors-only classes, but gave me his class materials to look at, and explained them to me. We talked a lot about his classes, because they were my favorite subjects. He let me take home and keep bunches of textbooks that he had extra copies of, or wasn't using in class. This kind of thing happens to me a lot. My 6th grade science teacher let me and my best friend/lab partner do extra projects and take on the toughest tasks. She was really cool. I still keep in touch with my 7th and 9th grade English teachers. I loved their classes and they review my work for me if I ever need it.

These responses demonstrate that many gifted students value relationships with their teachers and believe that giftedness gives them both opportunities and attributes that could potentially help them create these relationships.

Negative Effect on Relationships with Teachers

Despite the belief that their giftedness *could* help them form positive relationships with teachers, seven participants wrote about times when they believed their giftedness had a negative effect, particularly in the form of teachers either not understanding or not accommodating their giftedness. Just like the positive relationships sub-theme, participants were split between believing it was gifted programming or giftedness itself that had an effect on relationships with teachers. Two participants attributed programming to feeling misunderstood or unaccommodated by their teachers. Participant A reflected on a teacher that they believed disliked the disrupting gifted programming caused in students' schedules:

In middle school, we went to [our gifted class] every-other day during our PE period. That meant that I would miss about ½ of my PE days, and needed extra time to catch up. But in 6th grade, the girls' PE coach had an obvious bias against the gifted students who missed her class. Kids in our class told us that she spoke negatively about us when we were gone. We were denied extra time/resources for assignments. She was really difficult to communicate to or get along with, but it seemed that she was only like that toward gifted students.

Participant M remembered a time they were chastised by a teacher in relation to their gifted programming:

When I was in second grade, I was back in my class after my first ever day of [gifted class], and a girl in my class asked what I did, and I replied "You wouldn't understand." My teacher got really upset at me and made me apologize to the girl.

I believe when I said that I meant that I couldn't explain it in five minutes since it took me a whole day to learn everything...

Five participants expressed a belief that it was giftedness itself and not programming that caused a detrimental impact on their relationships with teachers. Some of them remember teachers having a negative response related to the speed at which they finished work to be a problem. Participant F recalled,

...in class one day, we had a substitute teacher, and, like always, I finished my own work, then proceeded to stand up and go around helping anyone who had questions. The substitute teacher, not knowing that this was a part of my own everyday school experience, got mad, chastising me for getting out of my seat and disrupting my peers. I was not a kid who ever challenged authority or got into trouble, so I was shocked upon finding myself being yelled at by an adult simply because I had been helping out.

While this response was from a substitute teacher unfamiliar with the student, Participant O wrote about the frequent negative reaction of their second-grade teacher: "Beads of sweat had suddenly begun to coalesce atop my forehead. 'You're already done?' My teacher looked up from her book with a face marred with doubt."

Participant N wrote about teachers who made them feel uncomfortable because they made public comments about behavior they did not agree with:

I had two teachers that would really get on to me about being a perfectionist and trying to make everything perfect. They told me I tried too hard a lot and there were multiple instances where they made comments to me about it in front of the entire class. In their defense, I revised things and took retakes even when I had

low As on tests and projects. The main issue for me was that they would make these comments in front of the class, overall every time they would say something about it, it wouldn't be in private and it was honestly really humiliating.

On a similar note, Participant L wrote about their belief that, along with peers, teachers hold gifted students to a different standard: "There is a fundamental juxtaposition between how gifted and non-gifted kids are treated by the people around them—and no, it's not just students. I cannot tell you how many times I've been chastised by classmates, teachers, and even friends for making simple mistakes."

The responses that contributed to this sub-theme are evidence that although gifted students seem to value relationships with teachers and believe that their giftedness can contribute to positive relationships, they do not believe that this outcome is guaranteed.

Finding Belonging with Gifted Peers

While many participants believed that their giftedness has a negative effect on relationships with both peers who are not gifted and with teachers, eight participants wrote about how they were able to find positive relationships with gifted peers across a total of 14 responses. Participants found belonging with gifted peers through sharing interests and feeling united in their differences. Two participants believed that gifted programming was the factor in building these relationships. Participant K wrote that they "got to connect with kids from other schools" in their gifted program, while Participant O reflected on how their program allowed students to develop "a closely tied community."

Six students wrote about how the shared nature and experience of being gifted brought them together. Participant H recalled the relief of making a new gifted friend in early elementary school: "It was difficult for me to connect with my peers at a young age,

but with this friend, it always felt like we were on the same brainwave.” Both Participants H and N describe the experience of building relationships with other gifted students as being “different together” or “even though all of us were sort of different, we were all different together.” Participant A wrote about how being gifted affected their dating experience:

Giftedness makes it hard to date, because it’s hard to find someone who can vibe on your intellectual wavelength. But it also means that, when I did find him, we could have great conversations and enjoyed a lot of the same things!

Finally, Participant L used an extended metaphor to describe this experience of being different together:

In physics, different types of radiation travel with different frequencies. When two waves collide, depending on their frequencies, they can interact constructively (amplifying their magnitude) or destructively (canceling each other out). When destructive interference occurs, it is obvious. Productivity screeches to a halt, tensions rise, and fights break out. Conversely, constructive interference is not always as obvious. It may manifest as total silence, rudeness, or even obnoxiousness. Yet, for the people involved, it’s a beautiful environment, a place (whether physical or not) where emotions, thoughts, and ideas are not only encouraged and accepted, but instinctively understood. When you say something, you feel no fear of rejection. When you communicate a thought, even if you butcher the delivery, somehow, some way, the others still seem to get it, as if they had thought the same before and your comment simply reminded them of it.

This student's analogy of "constructive interference" captures the essence of many of the participants' thoughts about how giftedness affects their relationships: it has the potential to cause disruption, but this conflict has the potential to be resolved with a great deal of satisfaction.

Not Finding Belonging with Gifted Peers

Despite the frequent experience of gifted students being able to forge satisfying relationships with other gifted students, this was not the case for all the participants in the study. Five students wrote about poor relationships with other gifted students across a total of seven responses, half of the number of responses that showed belonging among gifted peers. The reasons for these feelings of disconnection from their gifted peers included feeling judged, being bullied, and feeling "stuck" with the same cohort of students. Participant C wrote about how the smaller community of their gifted program in middle school made it impossible for students to avoid peers with whom they did not get along:

You had to deal with the same gifted kids every day of middle school, and there wasn't really any way of getting away from them without full on quitting [the class]. While I did have some problems, I never felt like [leaving]. Others did, however. The [small classes] made it more difficult to avoid people that you didn't like, especially since there were a lot of group projects in middle school. It caused a lot of stress at times.

Participant J wrote about how peers in their gifted class did not have empathy for academic struggles, remembering a time they were upset with their teacher because they

scored below the expected standard on a project, marked by the teacher as “still developing”:

Because I was mad about this I decided to air my grievances with my peers. This was definitely a very bad decision. With [the class] being a place of academic excellence many people had a similar reaction about a still developing. However, since it was not their experience many of them could not empathize with me as well. Some of them even went as far as making fun of me for it. This made me feel even more horrible. My teachers did not think I could meet their expectations and my peers thought that was funny. This all just contributed to my feelings of alienation rather than to strive for further excellence and to do better.

Participant E wrote about their expectations that gifted kids are more critical than other students:

...at first I was skeptical about the [gifted] program. I thought it would be a lot of snobby, stuck-up “smart kids” that would all criticize me. ... I was pretty socially awkward and didn’t understand that talking about [a show I liked] was something that, apparently, made me “annoying” or “uncool”. This extended to my [gifted] class. Many of the people in this class were some of my closest friends, so naturally, I assumed I could talk about my interests with them. I didn’t notice that when I talked to them about the things I was interested in, they would be making fun of me behind my back. Eventually, I began to see the writing on the wall, realizing that people were talking to me less and less and rolling their eyes whenever I started to talk.

While Participant M did not report being bullied by their gifted peers, they did write about feeling more comfortable with their peers outside of gifted programming:

I was never bullied like other gifted kids for being gifted, and I actually preferred regular school because that was where I had friends. ... I was very lonely at [my gifted class], and often didn't really have friends to sit with or play with. It was a very isolating experience.

While some participants found the smaller community of students with similar abilities to be comforting, still others found this environment stifling at times.

Theme Summary

Fourteen out of 15 participants, in a total of 48 responses, wrote about their beliefs that giftedness affected their relationships, making this the most commonly shared theme. The relationships they addressed were all relationships within the context of school, teachers, gifted peers, and peers who are not gifted. Participants varied in beliefs about whether their giftedness had a positive or negative effect on teachers: five believed giftedness could cause a positive effect, but those same students all also believed it could cause a negative effect, as well. Two participants only expressed belief about giftedness causing a negative effect on relationships with teachers. Responses that included positive effects included references to benefits conferred upon them because of their giftedness, for example, extended learning and resources. Responses that included negative effects were focused on teachers' negative reactions to their accelerated learning or desire for excellence.

Participants' references to relationships with gifted peers was also varied, with students believing that giftedness and gifted programming helped them form positive

peer relationships with other gifted students while five believed that the peer environment of their gifted programming could be unkind and unvaried (one participant is included in both groups). Nine of the participants expressed a belief that their giftedness negatively affected their relationships with peers who are not gifted while no students expressed a belief that their giftedness had a positive impact (although some students wrote about friendships with peers who are not gifted, they did not write about their giftedness as a factor).

Gifted Theme 2: Students Believe Giftedness Affects Their School Experience

Twelve of the 15 participants wrote about how they believed their giftedness affected their school experience (outside of gifted programming). Through categorizing the nature and the effect of the perceived impacts, four sub-themes emerged: giftedness makes learning easier, creating a positive difference in a gifted student's school; giftedness makes learning easier, creating a negative difference in school; giftedness causes perfectionism; and school interferes with authentic learning and gifts.

Giftedness Makes Learning Easier, Creating a Positive Difference in School

Seven participants wrote about their belief that their giftedness made learning and academic work easier, which led to positive effects on their experience at school. These perceived benefits of giftedness included pride, confidence, opportunities, and free time. Three participants used the words "easy," "ease," or "easier" with a positive connotation. Participant N said, "many concepts may come to me a lot easier than some of my peers," Participant D said, "it felt fantastic to succeed and do well in the class with ease," and Participant M recounts "I loved math class because it was easy and it all made perfect sense." Participant B wrote about this perceived ease in terms of speed:

...I get higher scores and I finish work way faster. These are not really that great, however it's nice to have those benefits. ... Another different experience would be online learning. There were no honors classes so that was something that was similar, however, working MUCH faster helped a lot here. Pretty much once you finished the work assigned, the rest of your time was yours. There was nothing stopping you from gaming. The teachers pretty much let you as long as you finished all your work and you paid attention when they spoke. Most of the teachers just let you leave the Zoom. Working fast helped here because I had so much free time.

Participant A also mentioned, "I don't have to work as hard or as quickly to keep up," and Participant K recalls

I was usually one of the first to grasp some of the topics we learned in class, especially writing and reading. I never really needed to study for tests or quizzes, as all of the information stuck with me and I was able to get most of the homework done within minutes of starting it. All of these skills were pretty on point for the gifted kids around me, and I do think I was performing better than most others in elementary and most of middle school.

Beyond the ease and speed with which these gifted students were able to complete their work, Participant G noted moving through an elementary math program quickly "helped me work on something I was actually interested in besides long division" and that this acceleration "provided me confidence and assurance in my intellectual abilities."

Giftedness Makes Learning Easier, Creating a Negative Difference in School

Despite the obvious benefits of being able to learn and work more efficiently than the average student, six students wrote about the negative impact of schoolwork being too easy. The most common complaint was experiencing boredom in school, but other negative effects included an unmet desire to be challenged and the development of poor work habits.

Three students wrote specifically about boredom. Participant E wrote about their boredom in their general education environment and how a weekly gifted enrichment class wasn't enough to keep them engaged in school:

When I was in fifth grade, I found myself always getting bored in class. I knew all of the information already, and even though I was in the gifted program, that only took place one time per week. I found myself wishing I didn't even have to go to school, even though in the past I had loved school.

Participant N expressed similar feelings when recounting their experience in moving from a gifted magnet school to a regular elementary school, saying, "it was very clear that what we were learning wasn't engaging and that I wasn't being challenged enough." Even when they joined the gifted programming at the new school because it was only once a week, "I was stuck in the same spot as I was before, my class was boring and I wasn't being challenged at all." Participant A also wrote about the negative impact of boredom and lack of challenge: "I hated school too, because of the people and because it was boring. I had to wait for others to catch up most of the time, but wasn't really allowed to do something else with my time."

Boredom was not the only way that gifted students perceived their giftedness to have a negative impact on their school experience. Two students reported feeling a lack

of motivation and the development of poor work habits when being given material that is not challenging:

The factor of the fact that I can scrape together decent enough grades with minimal effort definitely affects this for me as well. "If I don't have to put in the effort to get a decent grade, why would I spend my time on this menial task when I could be studying something highly advanced?" The mix of schoolwork not being challenging enough overlapping with my general lack of interest makes the amount of effort I put into it more often than not, the bare minimum. Naturally, this results in me not being able to understand or retain the information very well.

(Participant H)

Participant I expressed a similar experience with motivation and work ethic, describing how they are able to achieve academic success with very little effort from a very young age into high school:

Once high school hit, I was still in the same routine, but the course load was increasing, so the things I didn't get done were pushed into my free time during school. Mid sophomore year I was sleeping through classes because assignments were, more often than not, optional. Classmates were astounded when I still received an A in an honors course in which I had never been awake for the lessons. Now I am suffering because of my past decisions. I have little to no work ethic, but I am only a victim of my success. Why should I change when I continually succeed while practicing this behavior? I believe that being a gifted student can be boiled down to either a heightened sense of information absorption

or a heightened creativity, but I think that system in which we do so well, reinforces negative behavior.

Two students wrote about the frustration that can occur when academic needs are not met. Participant A writes about the lack of challenge with an emotional response: “If I’m doing mediocre work just for the sake of retention, why am I even here? What am I learning? There is zero purpose, and that makes me extremely angry. ... I am unengaged, my time has been wasted.” Finally, Participant O remembers that a lack of challenge in early elementary school led him to be perceived as a troublemaker: “Second grade was rough. I often got in trouble for talking too much, hiding chapter books in my desk, and disagreeing with my classmates. I once forged my dad’s signature on a note sent home to discuss my ‘disruptive nature.’” While many people may assume that work that is too easy would be a boon to students, for these six students, it is negative.

Giftedness Leads to Perfectionism

Although a sub-theme about perfectionism and fear of failure was already discussed in the eudaimonia thematic analysis, under the theme of the effects of academic excellence, it is important to discuss the topic of perfectionism in this section as well, as four of the participants expressed the implicit theory that their perfectionism arose out of their giftedness. Included with the general understanding of perfectionism manifesting itself as “overperformance,” it also includes fear of failure and a reluctance to ask for help. The distinguishing factor between this sub-theme and the previous one is that participants had to reference giftedness as the source of their perfectionism to be included here whereas in the eudaimonia section, perfectionism was tied to the experience of academic excellence. It is important to keep in mind that although academic excellence

and giftedness are often closely related, they are separate concepts: for example, a student may be identified as gifted but not consistently perform to match their potential or not be identified as gifted but still experience high academic achievement.

Within the analysis of the previous sub-theme, Participant A was referred to as feeling frustrated about a lack of meaningful work. They believe that what they refer to as “absolutely crippling perfectionism” is a way to find purpose in their work:

Perfectionism is something I struggle with every day, and it’s honestly miserable. Because I know that I’m wasting my time over something that nobody cares about. But if I don’t give everything my best, and if I’m not the best at everything, then I feel useless. I have no purpose. I am unengaged, my time has been wasted. I feel like, if I weren’t to make school important, then almost everything about it would be useless, save AP classes. At this rate, even though it hurts me, perfectionism is almost a survival mechanism. I couldn’t survive school without it, because without it everything seems so pointless that I would rather just drop out.

Participant G believed the source of their giftedness-related perfectionism to be more connected to social pressure and expectations than unmet intrinsic needs. They discuss how their “gifted mindset and positive affirmations” from “peers and by adults” “created a ‘monster’ obsessed with being the so-called ‘perfect’ student with all As and top test scores.” They believe there needs to be “a broader discussion on the necessity, impacts, and organization of gifted education on a nationwide level.”

Participant J expressed a belief that gifted students are inclined towards perfectionism but wrote about attempting to resist the temptation to define their character and identity by extremely high external measures of success:

In my mind, being gifted is far more than the test scores and the academic excellence that many people associate it with. However these things I do find myself using to define my identity. Through the perceptions of others, I have found myself latching on to the normal cliches that one without my experience uses to define me and categorize me. This action has honestly led me to an overwhelming reliance on academic validation and upholding the expectations those have on me to perform in a more statistical and orderly way.

Although, as time has passed I noticed many of the people who have achieved these things cannot keep up with these standards as they get older.

While the number of participants who held this belief was smaller than many of the other sub-themes, for the students who suffer perfectionism, it was one of the most powerful experiences included in their responses.

School Interferes with Authentic Learning and Talents

Four participants wrote about their beliefs that schools and the educational system work against accommodating the needs of gifted students. The way this lack of support manifests could be a pressure felt by students to compromise their gifts and talents; the interference of their coursework on material they actually want to learn; and the lack of supportive systems for gifted students in the general education setting.

Three of these students wrote about how the assignments at school prevented them from more authentic learning and the development of their gifts. Participant E wrote

about their love of writing and their enthusiasm at being given a creative writing assignment at school only to be “devastated” when their teacher put a limit of five pages on the story after they had already written 20. When they had cut their story down to the required size, they said,

I’d put my heart and soul into this little story, and by cutting it down, I felt like I’d betrayed it somehow. This was because I was gifted, and writing was what I wanted to do. For the other kids in the class, this was just another assignment. But for me, it was part of the dream that I wanted to live.

Participant H struggles to remain focused on schoolwork when they feel like they are doing more challenging learning of their own interests independently:

Throughout my experience in school I’ve always felt a bit ostracized educationally in general, but for me one of the biggest examples is the contrast of my interests in learning vs school learning. Whenever I’m genuinely interested in a topic, in my case linguistics, I have no problem spending hours upon hours studying it, but focusing on subjects I have no interest in for school sometimes feels next to impossible. While I’ve learned to manage my workload, I often find myself spending much more time on studying my own interests, in no less rigor, compared to my schoolwork. Admittedly everyone prefers their own interests, but for me, I really study my interests in an academic respect, and put a lot of time and effort into them, taking on online courses just because it interests me.

Participant A speaks more generally about how school requires students to limit themselves, saying “Giftedness means passion. I want to learn everything and the thought of having to narrow my interests down for a college is ridiculous.”

One student wrote specifically about how their former school district acted in opposition to their academic needs. Participant O wrote,

Seeing my struggles, my mom asked if I could move classes to [the next grade level]. Sadly, the school board didn't think that would be appropriate. ... [there were] many instances where I found myself at odds with the school. My constant challenging of lesson material and class discussions, ultimately led my family to seek out gifted education programs to open avenues for my curiosity to thrive across subjects and grades.

These responses reveal students' high expectations for school to be a challenging and enriching setting: When those expectations are not met, disillusionment can follow.

Theme Summary

Twelve participants expressed a belief that their giftedness affects their school experience. As giftedness in school is largely connected to academic ability, this is no surprise. However, within this broad belief, interesting sub-themes emerged. Students were split on whether the difference they experienced was positive or negative. Seven students expressed a belief that the effect is positive, primarily of the ability of completing work faster and finding it less difficult than their peers. However, for six students, this ease of learning was perceived negatively, as it led to boredom and poor habits. A more specific perceived outcome of giftedness on school experience was the belief of four students that giftedness can lead to perfectionism. Finally, four students expressed a belief that schools and the educational system were opposing forces in their ability to truly learn and develop their gifts.

Gifted Theme 3: Beliefs About Gifted Identification and Programming

Fourteen participants wrote about their beliefs about the process of gifted identification and the effects of gifted programming and services they received and continue to receive. Students' thoughts about gifted identification and programming can be categorized under three sub-themes: the uncertainty and confusion of the process, benefits of gifted programming, challenges and drawbacks of programming. It is important that while two of the sub-themes are negative and only one is positive, the positive sub-theme of the benefits of gifted programming was more frequently shared by participants than the two negative sub-themes combined.

The Uncertainty and Confusion of the Identification Process

Six students wrote about their negative or ambiguous feelings in relation to their identification as gifted students. These feelings were in relation to their confusion about the process, initial failure to qualify for programming, and fear of being identified. Two students wrote about their fear in the testing process because they did not want to qualify for programming. Participant F remembers hearing the news that they qualified for their gifted program, saying

A few weeks or so after the interview, my parents called me downstairs from my room, and I had a sinking feeling in my gut. They told me to sit down, and they told me that I made it into [the program]. I then proceeded to cry.

Similarly Participant A recalls reacting in fear to the idea of qualifying for their gifted program:

I was actually first [tested] when I was in Kindergarten. I declined further testing because I didn't understand the program; I'm not sure what they told my parents.

If they didn't speak to them, I wish they would have. I needed that program. I was

tested again in second grade. I declined again because I still didn't understand the program, and was extremely apprehensive about leaving school. I thought I would be missing my learning opportunities, which was an absolute nightmare to me. Somehow, I missed the memo that [the program] was better, more interesting learning opportunities. ... My mom said I was afraid to join [my gifted program], which I think makes sense for me. I'm a pretty anxious person; I was nervous to try something new, with possibly no allies around to help me.

Participant A's confusion about the process was echoed by several other students who remember confusion as their primary response to gifted testing. Participant H said,

My parents knew I was different since before I even started school, so it was hardly surprising when my kindergarten teacher recommended I get tested to join the school's gifted program. It wasn't a very smooth process, though. On the initial testing day, I had a meltdown about something unrelated, so they had to reschedule it. I don't even remember that part, but I do remember what ended up being my actual test. My mom took me to a big office building and an old man showed me a bunch of pictures and questions and problems. I don't remember it too well, since it's roughly a decade ago now, but I do know that I had no clue what was going on.

Multiple students wrote about how they failed to qualify for gifted programming the first time they were tested. Participant G reflects,

I was first made aware of [the program] in the second grade, when my teacher recommended me for the test due to my high performance in math and English throughout the year. I have very few recollections of this initial test, but what I do

remember is struggling—not with the content itself but with the layout of the test. For some background, at the end of my second grade year, both my teacher and parents discovered my eyesight was frankly very bad, hindering my ability to perform in class, and the same issue afflicted me during that test. Since we were in second grade, we were instructed to stop reading and answering questions for the reading section when we saw a small stop sign in the bottom right corner of our pages, but a combination of my poor eyesight and focus on my test caused me to miss a stop sign entirely. From that point, I believe I was yelled at by my testing instructor for violating his instructions, and I believe I was disqualified and given some sort of punishment for the violation (once again, this was nearly 8 years ago, so my memory is hazy). My actual admission [to the] program came in the fourth grade, when I was recommended for it again due to my performance in all subjects; however, this time I had my glasses, and the test wasn't structured in such a way that I would mess up like I had before.

Similarly, Participant J wrote

I joined [the program] in second grade during the second semester. It took a lot of tests for me to finally get accepted into the program. I took [the test] every year since kindergarten because I had an older sister who got in when she was in second grade. All my teachers before I got in said it would be a great fit for me and that I should take the test to get in. I took the test in both kindergarten and first grade but both times I just missed the cut. One time I even got to the second round with the blocks and the patterns and I just missed getting in by one more round of block patterns that I just could not figure out. Finally my mom was on a

mission to get me in. So in second grade my mom took me to get my IQ tested because that was another option to get in other than the traditional [test]. After I took the test, I was told I had a high enough score to get into [the program]. I was really excited for my first [classes] but it was a little awkward because I joined halfway through the year at semester. Although, finally getting in made me feel so accomplished because it was something others kept telling me I should do, so I finally felt like I made people proud of my accomplishments.

Participant J was not the only student who received coaching from a parent in the hopes of qualifying for programming. Participant O said about their mother,

She began quizzing me at home, preparing me with logic puzzles so that I could do well on the upcoming test for giftedness. I didn't do well enough on the test to get into the gifted program that my parents were hoping for, but I still managed to make it into a program a few hours away. My mom, ever the sacrificer, moved the whole family to the school district so that we'd be eligible. I lived there until the end of 5th grade, when I took the test again. This time, I passed. The whole family moved to a new house, and I was forced to adapt to a new school again.

The reflections on the identification process provide an interesting contrast between common beliefs that giftedness is something inherent, affecting the way they learn and the way they relate to others, and access to services for these intrinsic qualities. In other words, a tension exists in participants' minds between the experience of being gifted and the experience of being labeled as gifted and receiving educational services. Participant G explored this idea, saying

Preliminary testing solely based on those two subjects followed by an IQ test prevents high-IQ individuals who may struggle in one area of learning from ever being able to show and utilize their talents, which is why the label has lost meaning over the years.

While the vast majority of the participants appreciated the services their identification provides them with, as seen below, some of them still feel uncomfortable about how they got there.

Benefits of Gifted Programming

Thirteen participants expressed the belief that gifted programming is beneficial. Some of these benefits have already been explored previously in the sub-theme of gifted students finding belonging with other gifted students. The benefits discussed in this sub-theme focus on learning and activities, not the social dynamic, and include beliefs that programming provides them with challenging learning, prepares them for the future, and provides access to valuable experiences.

Ten participants expressed the belief that gifted programming gives gifted students the opportunity to partake in fun, creative, and engaging activities. Participant I wrote that their gifted program in elementary school

was honestly my favorite thing because not only was the content we'd learn there enriching, but it was much different than school because it encouraged creativity. If someone were to ask me what the most impactful class I've ever taken, it would unironically probably be [my gifted program] because it taught me how to have fun while learning.

Students also believed that their gifted programming opened their eyes up to future career paths. Participant G wrote about a field trip, saying, “it meant so much more to me than [a field trip]; if anything, it helped inspire my current career plan of being an anesthesiology assistant” while Participant A discovered what may be a life-long passion:

I still love that form of agriculture and am trying to find ways to use it, or hydroponics, in my everyday life. I love seeing the agricultural exhibit at the Science Center too. I want to be a doctor, but if not that, I think I could seriously create a future for myself in sustainable agriculture.

Six participants wrote about how they appreciated the challenge that their gifted programming provided them. Participant C said programming “let me have something challenging to do in elementary school, and that allowed for me to learn about all sorts of topics, such as architecture and the biosphere; things that I’m still interested in today.” Participant M, while having mixed feelings about their programming in general, said they are “overall grateful since that was the closest thing to challenges and enrichment I had been given.”

Three participants reflected upon how encountering challenging work in their gifted programming gave them a sense of freedom and helped define their identities.

Participant O wrote

Being accepted into these programs was eye-opening; gone were the days of hiding books in my desk and being scolded for talking too much in class, replaced by relative freedom within the curriculum and a buffet of at-your-own pace personal learning.

Participant L reflected on the lessons they learned from their experiencing with an extremely challenging gifted class and teacher:

Along the way, I discovered a lot about myself, like how I cope with pressure, my preferred style of learning, and even time management. I'm still figuring a lot of those things out right now—self-discovery is an ongoing process—but he certainly provided me a jumpstart, even if I hated it at the time. I've actually spoken with a few other high-schoolers about this, and we all agree. [His] class is no longer a symbol of dread, but a beacon of growth, realization, and discovery.

Participant J expressed a belief that their gifted programming allowed them the opportunity to know and appreciate themselves better, saying it “really helped me find a more comfortable and supportive space for my identity, mindset, and beliefs and helped me in growing a subconscious knowledge that it is okay to set yourself apart from the status quo.”

Challenges and Drawbacks of Gifted Programming

Not all participants believed that their gifted programming was universally positive. Four students wrote about challenges they observed in their gifted programming, including feeling like an imposter, programming not meeting all needs, and programming not occurring frequently enough. One participant expressed the thought that the one-day-a-week enrichment program wasn't enough to combat the challenges they were facing in the general education setting: Participant N wrote, “[the program] was only one day a week and didn't fix the issues that I was having with my class.”

Two students found that being in a program designed for gifted students filled them with self-doubt about their abilities. Participant M said

Whenever I was in elementary school I always worried that they would find out I wasn't smart enough to be in [the program] and they would kick me out. I felt like I didn't belong, and often cried because I felt inadequate.

Participant M was also one of two students who wrote about missing out on their normal class's activities on the days they went to gifted programming:

We also raised butterflies in my normal class in second grade, and they released them on a [gifted program] day, and I was pretty sad I didn't get to see them go. In fourth grade my normal teacher used to read us books, and we would read along and listen. Well, whenever I had [the gifted program] I would miss parts of the book, and so I was never able to catch up. Then I would be lost and only have fragments of the story (I still only know glimpses of the first book of the *Chronicles of Narnia* and the *Island of the Blue Dolphins*). Lastly, in fifth grade I found out that I missed the Bubble Bus because of Space Camp. I was really upset because it was my last year in elementary school and I didn't get to do the Bubble Bus one last time. My teacher told me that it was only fair since I got to do so many fun things at Space Camp. They also said I didn't have to sit through the puberty video, so the Bubble Bus was the regular kids reward for watching that. I still wish I would have gotten to do the Bubble Bus one last time though.

This idea that gifted programming came at the cost of other fun activities was also expressed by Participant C, who said

Really, what made you feel the most different [about being gifted] was missing entire days of elementary school for [the program]. Unlike the other students, you missed lessons, you missed entire days of the books that the teachers would read

for you, and you missed fun activities that other kids were able to enjoy. Not only that, but we even had to make our rockets in 5th grade separate from the other kids, and we were a lot more rushed with it than the others.

It is important to note that for those students who identified problems within their gifted programming, the nature of the problem was too much or too little of a good thing: either a desire to have more gifted programming or a desire to not miss out on the fun things that were happening in their general education setting. None of the criticisms were about the activities or instruction in their gifted programming.

Theme Summary

Participants' responses about gifted identification and programming revealed tensions related to schools' ability to deliver appropriate services to the students who need them. Thirteen of the fifteen participants wrote about the beneficial aspects of gifted programming. Yet, six students wrote about negative experiences with the identification process, including not qualifying for services the first time they tested. Fear of the process also led some students to try to avoid programming that they later found beneficial. Additionally, four students wrote about what they perceived as drawbacks or challenges students encounter in gifted programming that were related to a desire to attend programming more frequently or a reluctance to miss out on their grade-level class activities.

Gifted Theme 4: Students' Beliefs About Gifted Identity

Thirteen students wrote about their beliefs about gifted identity, in other words, what it means to be a gifted person. Three sub-themes emerged within this theme,

exploring the idea of gifted identity from different angles: label versus experience; not better, just different; and the complexity of giftedness.

Label Versus Experience

Five students wrote responses that distinguished, in some way, the experience of being gifted from having a gifted label, including the ideas that the label is distinct from the experience, the idea that gifted identification is a label that provides privilege, and the idea that gifted students aren't really different than their peers. Only two students express this belief that there is no true difference between students who have been labeled as gifted and those who have not. In other words, as Participant G said, "Giftedness is merely a label in my eyes." For this student, the label loses meaning because of what they perceive as limitations in how students are identified, saying, "the only people selected as gifted [in our school district] were those who excelled in math and reading, and while these subjects are important, it completely isolates individuals gifted in other regards such as art, complex thought, philosophy, and analysis." Participant B wrote about their perception that being gifted means they got to do fun projects in their elementary gifted program and do well on school work without much effort but that "There really is not much else about being gifted. You are still the same as everyone else." For these students, gifted is something one does or an identity conferred by others, not fully accepted.

Three students separated the label of giftedness from the experience of giftedness, not by denying giftedness but rather by explaining why a gifted person might not want to be labeled as such. After writing about the alienation and high expectations gifted students face from peers and teachers, Participant L said, "And people wonder why [gifted] kids are so hesitant to accept the title." For this student, giftedness is something

one is, but something one may be tempted to hide. Participant C distinguished the experience of being in a gifted program from the experience of being gifted, saying,

For a lot of people, especially people that aren't in [the gifted program], it is kind of seen as a group of really lucky people who get to do fun stuff in elementary and middle school. Of course, my grades reflect being 'gifted,' but that doesn't really result from being in [the gifted program].

It is interesting to note, that in this student's mind, being in the gifted program is not related to their academic achievement, and that the student puts the word gifted in quotation marks when referring to their good grades. Finally, Participant J wrote

...in my growth of a new mindset for the opportunity my gifted identity provides me, I have been trying to focus on the emphasis of other more qualitative aspects of giftedness. I have found creativity and curiosity and the desire to satisfy these fundamental needs to be far more important to my identity than the quantitative measurements that help label giftedness as something more accessible and easier to understand. Although it is a tough battle, my acceptance of this new definition of giftedness is a goal I aspire to achieve as I grow as a student and as a citizen of this world.

This student acknowledges giftedness is a label that can be quantified and also is a qualitative experience. Part of this student's identity development is discovering what giftedness means to them outside of the label.

Not Better, Just Different

Four students stated some variation of the idea that gifted students are not smarter or better than others, just different. These variations include beliefs that giftedness should

be understood as neurodivergence or creativity, that everyone is equal regardless of abilities, and that everyone is gifted in their own way. When Participant M dealt with self-doubt in their gifted program, “my mom would tell me that being gifted didn't mean being smart, but that it meant your brain works differently.” Similarly, Participant N wrote,

and unlike the name [gifted] suggests, it's not because we're special or extraordinarily smarter than other people. It's just because we're different and our brains function differently. At the end of the day, being gifted isn't a thought that's always on my mind, but it's something that explains some of the interactions I have and it gives me a way to understand why, in certain ways, I'm different or the same as other people.

Participant O wrote

I often tell people who respond with shock to my [gifted] status that giftedness can be in any aspect of one's talents, not just academics. I have friends that are incredibly skilled with their hands, with music, or artistry. Others are gifted poets, singers, and authors. I've found that life gives everyone equal footing, instead distributing a certain amount of talent among possible areas of expertise (almost like a video game point-buy character system, though you don't get to choose which statistics your ability points go). No one person is smarter than another, just as no one person is better than another. Just because someone is seen as gifted does not mean they should be held to different standards or treated differently as a result of factors outside of their control. To me, being gifted simply means that I was recognized as creative and intellectually adaptive -- but not better than my

peers. Being gifted meant I would respond better to certain methods of teaching and a more expansive, advanced curriculum that wasn't currently being offered to me.

Expressed more succinctly, Participant L said that "Giftedness is simply one of the many stations on the radio of life," but all of these students expressed the importance of distinguishing the difference of giftedness from believing in its superiority.

The Complexity of Giftedness

Seven students explained gifted identity in terms of its complexity, including how the benefits, or perceived benefits, of giftedness were often accompanied by challenges. Also reflected in this sub-theme are students who wrote about learning to accept their gifted identity and how giftedness helps them understand themselves better.

All seven students viewed giftedness as a double-edged sword in some respects. In grappling with the perceived benefits and drawbacks they believe that had experienced because of giftedness, Participant G said, "All in all, the label 'gifted' has provided more opportunities for growth on my part than it would have otherwise, but I cannot fully accept this label without consideration of the specified group that 'gifted' encompasses." In another example, Participant H wrote about their experience with failing a course because they were struggling with being able to focus. They concluded by saying, "My experience being gifted looks very polarizing and even contradictory on the surface, but only if you can't see the internal mechanics responsible for either end." Participant D reflected that

I think that while most of my personal responses to these prompts have been overall negative I would say that being gifted is a positive. It comes with added

mental baggage, social issues, and work ethic issues, but I would rather be aware of my shortcomings and able to work on myself than be oblivious to my issues.

Five of these seven students expressed a belief that although giftedness had complicated their life in some way, in the end, they appreciated who they are as a gifted person, complications and all. Participant F wrote about their journey from hiding parts of their identity to truly embracing it:

[At first] I felt like I did not belong inside [gifted] classrooms or outside of them. There were a lot of tears, and a lot of anxiety, but as time went on and on and on, I eventually adjusted and came into myself as a [gifted] student and as a whole person. ... Being in [the gifted program] had been a part of my identity since 4th grade, and I finally understood that it was not some social flaw to be hidden.

Peer conflicts in their gifted program and gifts not being developed in their regular class led Participant E to write,

My [gifted program] experience taught me about challenging myself even through obstacles, and showed me that, though the world might be against me, I can always overcome whatever challenges face me. ... Sometimes I didn't like being gifted. I wished I was like everybody else, able to learn and follow along. But now, I'm glad for the times my mind drifted off during class. They helped shape me into the person I am today.

Participant A reflects on their journey as a gifted student:

Being gifted means a lot of things to me, and it has changed over time. When I was in elementary school, I mostly resented being gifted. I felt like a weirdo and an outcast. I was bullied pretty bad, largely because of my giftedness, and for a

while it made me hate that part of myself. I tried to shut it away. I felt like I was the problem. ... Giftedness makes me very, very independent, and can make it difficult for me to express my emotions. That doesn't mean I don't have any; giftedness means that I'm full of powerful emotions that can just be too much to express. Which is why giftedness really helps with my art! I'm very creative. So right now, I like my giftedness, even though it has its ups and downs. It's part of what makes me who I am.

Theme Summary

Thirteen out of the 15 participants in the study wrote responses that explored what it means to have a gifted identity. Two students expressed ideas indicating giftedness is just an educational label that does not affect their sense of identity. The remaining 11 students acknowledged giftedness as a part of who they are, not just something they do or something someone else says they are. No gifted students expressed a belief that their giftedness made them superior to other people, and several were quick to state their belief that they weren't even "smarter" but just different and that all people have important gifts and talents. Seven participants expressed a belief that being gifted, or being labeled gifted, was complex and sometimes difficult. Five of these students believed that these challenges were important in shaping their sense of self.

Giftedness Summary

To answer the research questions "What do the narratives of secondary gifted students reveal about their implicit theories of giftedness" and "What do the narratives of secondary gifted students reveal about the extent to which giftedness is a part of their identities?" narratives of 15 secondary gifted students were coded and analyzed. In a

series of eight prompts, four asked directly about experiences and beliefs about giftedness, but all prompt responses were coded for elements of giftedness regardless of their intended focus. Inductive codes were generated through a process of open coding. Codes were then refined and focused, with similar codes being combined and codes that only appeared in one participant's responses being eliminated. The coding process led to the development of four themes and a total of 15 sub-themes about giftedness (see Table 4). Table 5 presents the giftedness themes and sub-themes present in each participant's responses.

Table 4

Presence of Giftedness Themes and Sub-Themes in Each Participant

Giftedness Themes and Sub-Themes	Participants														
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O
GIFTEDNESS AFFECTS RELATIONSHIPS	7	0	3	1	5	5	2	2	1	1	2	4	3	4	6
<i>Negative Effects on Relationships with Peers Who Aren't Gifted</i>	1		1	1		3	1		1			1		1	2
<i>Positive Effect on Relationships with Teachers</i>	2				2							1		1	1
<i>Negative Effect on Relationships with Teachers</i>	1				1	1						1	1	1	1
<i>Finding Belonging with Gifted Peers</i>	3		1				1	2			2	1		2	2
<i>Not Finding Belonging with Gifted Peers</i>			1		2	1				1			2		
GIFTEDNESS AFFECTS EXPERIENCE IN SCHOOL	6	1	0	1	2	0	4	3	1	1	1	1	0	4	3
<i>Giftedness makes learning easier, creating a positive difference in school.</i>	1	1		1			2				1	1		1	
<i>Giftedness makes learning easier, creating a negative difference in school.</i>	2				1			2	1					2	1
<i>Giftedness Causes Perfectionism</i>	2						2			1				1	

<i>School Interferes with Authentic Learning and Gifts</i>	1				1			1							2
GIFTED IDENTIFICATION AND PROGRAMMING	2	2	3	1	1	4	3	0	1	2	2	1	4	2	2
<i>The Uncertainty and Confusion of the Process</i>	1					1	2			1				1	1
<i>Benefits of Gifted Programming</i>	1	2	2	1	1	2	1		1	1	2	1	1		1
<i>Challenges and Drawbacks of Programming</i>			1			1							3	1	
GIFTED IDENTITY	1	1	1	1	3	3	4	2	0	1	0	2	2	1	2
<i>Label Versus Experience</i>		1	1				1			1		1			
<i>Not Better, Just Different</i>												1	2	1	1
<i>The Complexity of Giftedness</i>	1			1	3	3	3	2							1
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O

Implicit Theories of Giftedness

To answer the question about gifted students’ implicit theories more specifically, one must remember that they are ideas that exist in the minds of individuals. Implicit theories may or not be supported by explicit theories, which are constructed by psychologists and scientists in response to data (Sternberg et al., 1981). While implicit theories may not always be “true,” they are highly influential in shaping people’s perceptions and behavior (Kerr et al., 1988; Sternberg et al. 1981). Within the context of an educational setting, an implicit theory can be defined as a person’s understanding of their educational labels, which becomes part of their overall self-knowledge (Lo, 2014).

The sub-themes can be understood to present the following implicit theories regarding the effects of giftedness; the effects of identification, labeling, and programming; and attributions of giftedness. Note, the sub-theme of uncertainty and confusion in the gifted identification process is not reflected in the implicit theories

below because the participants commented on specifically on their own, singular experiences and did not seem to have beliefs about the process in general. In short, their responses expressed memories of the process, but did not clearly express beliefs about the process:

1. Giftedness can have a negative effect on gifted students' relationships with peers who are not gifted.
2. Giftedness can have a positive effect on gifted students' relationships with teachers.
3. Giftedness can have a negative effect on gifted students' relationships with teachers.
4. Gifted students can find belonging with other gifted students.
5. Gifted students can find it difficult to relate to other gifted students.
6. Giftedness makes learning easier, creating a positive difference in school.
7. Giftedness makes learning easier, creating a negative difference in school.
8. Giftedness can cause perfectionism.
9. Schools interfere with gifted students' ability to learn authentically and develop their gifts.
10. Gifted programming is beneficial to gifted students.
11. Gifted programming has drawbacks and challenges.
12. Being gifted just is a label or participating in a program.
13. Being gifted is something people are, separate from an educational label.
14. Being gifted is a complex experience.

While many of these implicit theories appear as binaries—for example, giftedness can have a positive effect on relationships with teachers and giftedness can have a negative effect on relationships with teachers—it is important to note that many students showed seemingly contradictory beliefs within different contexts and situations. As Lo (2014) observes, students’ implicit theories about their educational labels can be fluid and dynamic. Table 5 presents each of the implicit theories above in order of how many participants showed evidence in each theory, ranked from highest to lowest. The table also shows which participants show evidence of which theory.

Table 5*Prevalence of Implicit Theories of Giftedness*

	Total	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O
Gifted programming is beneficial to gifted students.	13	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X
Being gifted is an inherent trait, distinct from labels and programming.	11	X		X	X	X	X		X		X		X	X	X	X
Giftedness brings both benefits and challenges.	8	X			X	X	X	X	X				X			X
Giftedness can have a negative effect on relationships with peers who are not gifted.	8	X		X	X		X	X					X		X	X
Gifted students can find belonging with gifted peers.	8	X		X				X	X			X	X		X	X
Giftedness makes learning easier, creating a positive difference in school.	7	X	X		X			X				X	X		X	
Giftedness can have a negative effect on relationships with teachers.	7	X				X	X						X	X	X	X
Giftedness makes learning easier, creating a negative difference in school.	6	X				X			X	X					X	X

Giftedness can have a positive effect on relationships with teachers.	5	X				X							X		X	X	
Gifted peers can be hard to form and maintain relationships with.	5			X		X	X				X			X			
Giftedness can cause perfectionism.	4	X					X			X					X		
Schools interfere with gifted students' learning and talents.	4	X				X		X								X	
Gifted programming has challenges and drawbacks.	4			X			X							X	X		
Being gifted is just a label or activity in a program.	2		X				X										
			A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O

Giftedness and Identity

The theme student beliefs about gifted identity and its sub-themes most directly address the question about to what extent gifted giftedness is a part of gifted students' identities. While two participants revealed an implicit theory that "gifted" is just a label or activity in a program, 11 participants discussed giftedness as something inherent, separate from the label. While this distinction did not necessarily mean that giftedness was important to each participant's sense of self (for example, Participant C's belief that "being 'gifted'" meant getting good grades), for some students, giftedness was revealed to be an essential part of themselves, something that made them different than their peers and an influential factor in their experience in school and building relationships.

The most commonly shared idea about giftedness and identity among the participants is the understanding that giftedness is complex and often a kind of double-edged sword, bringing challenges as well as benefits. Yet, for some students grappling

with these challenges was perceived as an important part of their identity formation and, in a way, its own gift.

The Relationship Between Implicit Theories of Giftedness and Eudaimonia

To answer the fourth research question regarding the relationship between students' implicit theories of giftedness, identity, and the development of eudaimonia, I explored similarities in implicit theories among participants who gave evidence of having high, moderate, and low levels of eudaimonia.

In determining a relationship between implicit theories of giftedness and eudaimonia, it is important to acknowledge that there is significant overlap between data coded with eudaimonia codes and data coded with gifted codes, in a way that is impossible to disentangle. However, there is an important distinction between the nature of the two concepts. Eudaimonia addresses feelings, activities, and experiences while implicit theories address beliefs. To refer to a previous example, both the eudaimonia and gifted analyses used a code of perfectionism. The eudaimonia code traced the experience of personally experienced perfectionism in general, while the gifted code traced whether participants believed perfectionism results from giftedness. It was possible for a response to be coded with the eudaimonia perfectionism code but not the gifted perfectionism code because the participant did not attribute their perfectionism to giftedness. Conversely, a participant might not have experienced perfectionism themselves but still showed evidence of a belief that giftedness can cause perfectionism in other gifted students.

To determine levels of eudaimonic development, I subtracted the number of negative eudaimonia sub-themes present in each participant's responses from the number of positive eudaimonia sub-themes (as recorded in Table E1 in Appendix E). Table 6

shows the presence of each implicit theory of giftedness in each participant, with participants ordered from the highest difference in positive and negative sub-themes to the lowest. Both the mode and median difference between positive and negative sub-themes is one. Four of the participants had a difference greater than two and can be considered as having a high level of eudaimonic development (HL); eight of the participants had a difference of one or two and can be considered as having a moderate level of eudaimonic development (ML); and three of the participants had a difference of zero or below and can be considering has having a low level of eudaimonic development (LL).

The HL group was made up of students both engaged and unengaged in high school gifted programming and students from both of our district’s models gifted programs. All of the HL group were students in the upper grades. The ML group was made up of students who are both engaged and unengaged in high school gifted programming and students from both models of gifted education. ML students were from both upper and lower grades. The LL group was made up of students who are both engaged and unengaged in high school gifted programming. All of the LL students were from the enrichment model of gifted programming, and they were all from younger grades.

Table 6

Participants’ Implicit Theories of Giftedness and Level of Eudaimonic Development

Participants ranked in order of the difference between positive and negative eudaimonia sub-themes (as recorded in Appendix E)														
E	F	L	M	C	D	H	G	I	J	K	O	A	N	B
5	5	5	3	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	-2

Implicit Theories about Giftedness and Relationships															
Giftedness can have a negative effect on gifted students' relationships with peers who are not gifted.		X	X		X	X						X	X	X	
Gifted students can find belonging with other gifted students.			X		X		X	X			X	X	X	X	
Gifted students can be hard to form and maintain relationships with	X	X		X	X					X					
Giftedness can have a positive effect on gifted students' relationships with teachers.	X		X									X	X	X	
Giftedness can have a negative effect on gifted students' relationships with teachers.	X	X	X	X								X	X	X	
Implicit Theories about Giftedness and School															
Giftedness makes learning easier, creating a positive difference in school.			X			X		X			X		X	X	X
Giftedness makes learning easier, creating a negative difference in school.	X						X		X			X	X	X	
Giftedness can cause perfectionism.								X	X				X	X	
Schools interfere with gifted students' learning and talents.	X							X				X	X		
Implicit Theories about Gifted Programming															
Gifted programming is beneficial to gifted students.	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Gifted programming has challenges and drawbacks.			X	X	X									X	
Implicit Theories about Giftedness and Identity															
Being gifted is just a label or activity in a program.								X							X
Being gifted is an inherent trait, distinct from labels and programming.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	
Giftedness brings both benefits and challenges.	X	X	X	X		X	X	X			X	X	X	X	

In examining the differences between the implicit theories of giftedness held by participants within each level, the following observations can be made.

Implicit Theories of Giftedness among HL Participants

HL participants were less likely to show evidence of the belief that gifted students can find belonging with gifted peers, with just one out of the four HL students believing this theory. They were also more likely to believe that it can be hard to form relationships with other gifted students: three out of four HL participants believed this theory. For example, Participant M reflected that "...I actually preferred regular school because that was where I had friends. ... I was very lonely at [my gifted program], and often didn't have friends to sit with or play with. It was a very isolating experience." Compared to ML and LL participants, they appear to be less likely to find or define their peer relationships through the lens of giftedness. While two out of four HL participants believed that giftedness can have a positive effect on relationships with teachers, all four believed that giftedness can have a negative effect on relationships with teachers—this is a much higher prevalence of this theory than in the other two groups: More than half of the participants who believed this theory were in the HL group even though this group includes only four out of the 15 total participants. HL participants used phrases like "my teacher got really upset," "got mad, chastising me," and "crushing my dreams" to describe misunderstandings between them and their teachers. It appears that, contrary to what one might expect, gifted students with a high level of eudaimonic development are more inclined to believe that giftedness has more of a negative effect on their relationships, particularly within a school context, than a positive one.

HL participants were less likely to believe that giftedness determines their experience with learning and schoolwork. There are four implicit theories under the category of implicit theories and school, and there are just three instances of belief of these theories across all four HL participants. This is a much lower rate of frequency of these beliefs than the other two eudaimonia categories. Notably, no HL participants believed that giftedness causes perfectionism. This suggests that students with a high level of eudaimonic development are less inclined to attribute their academic successes and failures to their giftedness.

HL participants all believed that gifted programming is beneficial to gifted students; however, they were also more inclined to believe that programming has challenges and drawbacks as well: two of the four instances of this belief across all participants were held by the HL group. This perhaps indicates that students with a high level of eudaimonia are more willing to engage with the complexities of their experiences. This willingness to engage with complexity is borne out by the fact that the HL participants are the only group who all believe that giftedness itself brings both benefits and challenges, such as Participant F who said, that being in their gifted program brought “a lot of tears, and a lot of anxiety” in the beginning but also was a place where their “wildest aspirations were not doubted, but emboldened.” They also all believe that being gifted is an inherent trait, distinct from labels and gifted programming: while only three out of the 15 participants did not share this belief, the HL group was the only group in which all participants believed this to be true. No HL participants believed that being gifted is just a label or activity in a program. These results suggest that gifted students

with a high level of eudaimonic development are more likely to accept giftedness as part of their identities.

Across the 14 implicit theories of giftedness believed by participants in the study and the four participants that made up the HL group, about 45% were negative theories, about 28% were positive theories, and about 28% were neutral theories. While this is not a quantitative study, these percentages show that it is possible for students to have negative feelings about giftedness but still experience eudaimonia.

Implicit Theories of Giftedness among ML Participants

Participants in the ML group were less likely to believe negative theories about giftedness and relationships than the other two groups: While 50% of HL participants and 100% of LL participants believed that giftedness has a negative effect on relationships with peers who are not gifted, less than half of the ML students believed this to be true. Similarly, more than half of ML students reported the belief that gifted students can find belonging with gifted peers, while only one out of four HL students held this belief. While 75 percent of HL participants believed that it can be hard to form relationships with gifted peers, only 25 percent of ML participants believed this to be true. Many of the ML group would be likely to agree with Participant H's statement that, in their gifted program, "even though all of us were sort of different, we were different together." ML participants were the least likely to show evidence of a theory about how their giftedness affects their relationships with teachers: Only one ML student had theories about relationships with teachers, and they believed that giftedness could have both a negative and positive effect. Overall, negative theories about how giftedness affects relationships were the least frequent among ML participants, indicating that gifted students with a

moderate level of eudaimonic development are likely to have strong peer relationships, especially with other gifted students, and less likely to think that giftedness is a factor in their relationships with teachers.

ML participants were much more likely than HL participants to believe that giftedness is a factor in their school experience. Three out of the eight ML participants believe that a gifted student's ease of learning contributes positively to their school experience, such as Participant D, who wrote about how "it felt fantastic to succeed and do well in the class with ease" while others struggled with the material. Yet, three out of eight believe that this ease brings negative effects, such as Participant H, who described their effort at school as "the bare minimum" and believes this is causing "lasting deficits." Twenty-five percent of the ML participants believed that giftedness causes perfectionism, and 25 percent believed that schools interfere with gifted students' learning and talents. While ML participants more frequently held theories about how giftedness affects their school experience than their HL peers, they were less likely to hold such theories than their LL peers.

All but one ML participant showed evidence of the belief that gifted programming is beneficial to gifted students, and only one participant showed evidence of believing that programming has challenges and drawbacks. One of the two participants who believed giftedness is just a label or activity in a program is in the ML group, while one additional ML participant did not indicate a theory about how to attribute giftedness either way. ML participants were less likely to believe giftedness brings both benefits and challenges than the other two groups, describing their gifted programming with adjectives such as "fun," "awesome," and "impactful." Taking all of the ML group's theories of

giftedness into account, it appears that a gifted student with a moderate level of eudaimonic development may feel more positively about peer relationships and believe in fewer complexities about the nature of gifted identity and programming; they seem much more likely to predominantly consider giftedness as a factor in their school experience and academic performance.

Across the 14 implicit theories and the eight participants in the ML group, about 33 percent of theories held by these participants were negative, about 38 percent were positive, and about 29 percent were neutral. Despite having a more moderate experience with elements of eudaimonia, this group was more likely to have positive implicit theories of giftedness and less likely to have negative implicit theories than the HL group.

Implicit Theories of Giftedness among LL Participants

There were three participants in the LL group. One of these participants did not show evidence of having any theories about giftedness and relationships. The other two LL participants held every theory about relationships except the belief that it can be hard to form and maintain relationships with gifted peers. This may indicate that gifted students with a low level of eudaimonic development may either think less critically about how giftedness affects relationships or may tend to be drawn primarily to relationships with other gifted peers, like Participant N, who said that being gifted “means that I’m different than other people, but that I fit in with kids that are also gifted.”

All of the LL participants believed that the ease of learning they experience as a result of giftedness can have a positive effect at school, but two out of the three also believe it can have a negative effect, like Participant A, who wrote about turning to perfectionism to make work that is not challenging more meaningful, saying “So I give

things purpose. I give them beauty and effort and a reason to exist.” Half of the four participants who believe giftedness can cause perfectionism were LL participants, despite this group being only 20 percent of all participants. This could indicate that perfectionism is a key component of lack of eudaimonia among gifted students.

The LL group was the only one that included a participant who seemed to hold only negative theories about gifted programming: showing no evidence of a theory that gifted programming is beneficial but exhibiting a belief in the challenges and drawbacks of gifted programming. While Participant N enjoyed making gifted friends, the actual gifted programming was not, in their mind, enough to meet their needs: “So I was stuck in the same spot as I was before.” Finally, one out of the three LL participants, Participant B, seemed to believe the theory that giftedness is just a label or activity with no acknowledgment that giftedness is complex, saying “there really is not much” about being gifted beyond getting good grades without much work.

Across the 14 implicit theories and the three participants in the HL group, about 41 percent of the theories believed were negative, about 41 percent were positive, and 18 percent were neutral. The LL group had the highest prevalence of positive implicit theories and the lowest prevalence of neutral theories. The prevalence of positive implicit theories in the LL group underscores the observation made about the prevalence of negative theories in the HL group: beliefs about giftedness do not have to be all positive, and likely will not be all positive, in students with a high level of eudaimonia.

Summary of Differences Across Levels of Eudaimonic Development

To synthesize the observations about the relationship between eudaimonic development and implicit theories of giftedness across all levels, the following distinctions can be noted:

1. HL participants are more likely to believe that it can be challenging to form relationships with their gifted peers and less likely to find a sense of belonging with them than the other two groups.
2. HL participants are more likely to believe that giftedness influences relationships with teachers than other groups. Belief that this effect will be negative is more prominent than the belief that it will be positive.
3. HL participants are less likely to believe that giftedness affects their school experience, positively or negatively, than other groups.
4. HL participants do not show evidence of the theory that giftedness causes perfectionism.
5. HL participants were more likely to believe that gifted programming has challenges and drawbacks than the other two groups.
6. No HL participants believe that giftedness is just a label or activity in a program. One participant in each of the other groups believed this to be true.
7. All HL participants believe giftedness brings both benefits and challenges. About two-thirds of the other two groups believed this to be true.
8. ML participants are less likely to believe that giftedness has any influence on relationships with teachers than the other two groups.
9. LL participants were more likely to believe that the ease of learning created by giftedness has a positive effect on school experience than the other two groups.

10. LL participants were more likely to believe that giftedness causes perfectionism than the other two groups.

Composite Case Studies

To further illustrate the difference in implicit theories of giftedness between levels of eudaimonic development, it is worthwhile to examine composite case studies of HL and LL participants in order to better understand different ways that a student could experience elements of eudaimonia or the lack of them. This can be especially illuminating as a way of exploring how students' feelings and beliefs about their identities as gifted individuals vary in complexity and degree at either end of the spectrum of eudaimonic development. The composite case study for the HL group will consist of the responses of Participants E, F, and L, and the case study for the LL group will consist of the responses of Participants A, N, and B.

Four themes about eudaimonia emerged in the eudaimonia thematic analysis, each with two to three sub-themes. The first is the theme of the effects of academic excellence, which had the positive sub-theme of satisfaction in academic excellence and the negative sub-themes, indicating a lack of eudaimonia, of perfectionism or fear of failure in school and boredom and frustration in school. The second theme is meaning and purpose in learning and extracurricular activities with the positive sub-themes of pursuing personal interests or helping or relating to others. The third theme is meaningful relationships with the positive sub-themes of identity and authenticity through relationships and from disconnection to belonging. The fourth theme is struggle and change with the positive sub-themes of overcoming struggle at school and encountering struggle in personal life as well as the negative sub-theme of failure to change.

HL Composite Case Study

Referring to the categories used in the purposeful sampling to recruit participants for this study, Participants E, F, and L represent different genders, different programming models in the younger grades, and have different levels of engagement with gifted programming at the high school. Because eudaimonia is developmental in nature (Fossas, 2018), it is important to note that these three students are all in the oldest grade levels at the school.

These participants all wrote about relationships that weren't just positive but also deeply meaningful to them. Participants E and F both wrote about finding close friends after feeling bullied or left behind by former friends. Participant E referred to this as "a friendship rough spot" and indicated that they had been bullied to the point of being partially homeschooled. This bullying included insults from gifted peers. Participant F wrote about feeling "as though I had been left behind" and "forgotten" by inauthentic friends. In finding new friends, who may or may not have been gifted, they felt like they had found a "kindred spirit" (Participant E) and someone "incredibly genuine" (Participant F). After overcoming their struggles with peer relationships, Participant E said they plan to attend college with their friend. Participant F, when writing about a proud moment, wrote not about their own achievement, but their friend's, saying "[They] deserved the world, and [they] would get it—in that moment, I felt so much joy and pride." Participant L did not write about being abandoned or betrayed by former friends but did write about their gifted friends as "the most crazy, exhilarating, and relatable people I have ever met."

Participants E and L also wrote about important relationships outside of their close friends. Participant E used the phrase “kindred spirit” once again to describe their former middle school gifted teacher. Participant E also talked about their feeling of satisfaction in taking a younger, shy student under their wing, saying “I was proud that I was able to make this kind of impact in [their] life.” On the other hand, Participant L wrote about the importance of their relationship with their mother. In describing this relationship, they say, “That comfort. That consolation. That solace.” As a group, these participants seem to understand that meaningful relationships can take many forms and that they can give support as well as receive support in their relationships.

As referenced above, it is significant that all of the HL group believes that giftedness can have a negative effect on their relationships with teachers. Participant L wrote generally about their frustration with teachers who have unrealistic standards for gifted students. On the other hand, Participant E wrote about being frustrated because teachers have perhaps had standards that weren’t high enough for what they wanted to achieve in their writing. Similarly, Participant F wrote about a time when a substitute teacher was angry with them for finishing their work early and helping other students. In these students’ experiences with teachers, it is important to note that while they all believed that a teacher *could* react to them negatively because of their giftedness, they did not seem to believe that all of their relationships with teachers would suffer.

Where these participants seemed to vary the most was in their initial feelings about their gifted identification and programming. For Participant E, the gifted curriculum “stretched and challenged” them. While they encountered unfriendly gifted peers, they also found relief and understanding in their gifted teacher. On the other hand,

Participant F was reluctant to be given their gifted identification, afraid of being “bullied, alienated, and ostracized.” Yet, they eventually grew to appreciate their gifted program as “a community that challenged its members, drove them to pursue their passions, and encouraged curiosity.” Participant L seems to have no negative feelings about their gifted identification and programming beyond what they perceive as false stereotypes and unfair standards by those outside of the programming. When remembering their decision to join their gifted program, they said, “To this day, I think it’s one of the best decisions I’ve ever made.”

All of these participants faced and overcame challenges in varying degrees of severity. Participant L wrote about being demoted from the highest ability band at our school after a poor audition. While one poor audition may not seem highly significant to an outsider, for many young musicians at our school, band is one of their most important activities and a community where they form important peer relationships. They said,

...I bombed. I left the room almost in tears, running out of the building before anyone could see me. Unsurprisingly, a few days later, I found out that my term in symphonic band had expired. Instead of crying, however, I had a different reaction. I used that sadness to motivate myself to practice even harder and earn my spot back next semester. Just because I was knocked down, doesn’t mean I have to stay there forever.

As observed above, Participant E dealt with bullying to the point of being partially homeschooled. Yet, they said, “My [experience] taught me about challenging myself even through obstacles, and showed me that, though the world might be against me, I can always overcome whatever challenges face me.” Finally, Participant F reflected upon

their significant problem with perfectionism (which they did not attribute directly to their giftedness) and lack of self-worth, which ultimately led to an eating disorder:

Looking back, I wish that someone would have told me to be free, to be young, and to have fun. Instead, by 6th Grade, my entire worth depended upon the validation of a red pen—every red slash chipping away at my confidence. With everything spiraling, I grasped onto one thing that I could control: my body. I sought out physical perfection, forcing my mind to believe that if I was not the skinniest, then I was not skinny enough. These voices blared in my mind for the next 4 years. ... Eventually, I'd had enough and desperately began clawing my way up, inch by inch, until I was free. I dug out the parts of myself that had been held hostage for so long, and from there, I discovered myself in my entirety: beauty, flaws, passion, and imperfection. While my heart may be fuller, my mind stronger, and my spirit braver, I am filled with longing for what could have been if life had turned out differently, who I could have been. Yet, I remain keenly aware that I now stand passionate, fearless, and strong in spite of it all and because of it all.

In each of these three accounts, the participants were determined to not let their struggles overcome them and now possess confidence in their own resilience.

These participants have all grappled with what it means to them to be gifted. In each case they acknowledged the complexities: Participant L's frustration with stereotypes and unrealistic expectations; Participant E's disappointment with other gifted students and the struggle to meet their own standards in the traditional school setting; Participant F's fear of alienation arising from their gifted label. Yet, ultimately, they

accepted giftedness as a part of their identities. It is important to note that this acceptance has to do with what they believe to be inherent traits of giftedness, not just an educational label. Participant F said, “I eventually adjusted and came into myself as a [gifted] student and as a whole person. Similarly, Participant E reflected,

Sometimes I didn't like being gifted. I wished I was like everybody else, able to learn and follow along. But now, I'm glad for the times my mind drifted off during class. They helped shape me into the person I am today.

Finally, Participant L used their analogy of constructive interference to describe their experience as a gifted learner in a community with other gifted learners, saying “Luckily, we are able to tune our own receiver; we get to control our surroundings and our peers. Giftedness is simply one of the many stations on the radio of life...” For all of these students, a balance is struck between recognizing the effect giftedness has had on their experiences without believing it's the only station on “the radio of life.”

In summary, the HL group consistently manifested eudaimonia in their meaningful relationships with others, their ability to find meaning and purpose in their learning and extracurricular activities, and their experience of personal growth through overcoming struggle. The eudaimonia theme of the effects of academic excellence revealed the most varied experience with eudaimonia with this group: Participant E's responses contained evidence of both the satisfaction in academic excellence sub-theme as well as the one of the sub-themes that indicates lack of eudaimonia: boredom and frustration in school sub-theme; Participant F's responses only showed evidence of the perfectionism or fear of failure in school negative sub-theme; and Participant L not showing any evidence of the theme. The group's focus on meaningful relationships and

non-academic activities as shown through the eudaimonia thematic analysis is complementary to their implicit theories of giftedness, which reveal a belief that giftedness primarily affects their relationships and sense of self more than their experience with their academic work. Altogether, this reflects an understanding of their giftedness as a trait, not an activity. Importantly, they do not believe that this trait of giftedness is without drawbacks and complications, but it is a trait that they have accepted as a part, but not the whole, of themselves.

LL Composite Case Study

The three participants who comprise the LL group manifest their lack of eudaimonic growth differently. Participants A and N both showed evidence of three positive eudaimonia sub-themes, but they also showed evidence of all three negative eudaimonia sub-themes. Participant B, on the other hand, showed no positive sub-themes and two negative sub-themes. It is worth noting that this LL group includes both male and female students and students with different levels of engagement with high school gifted programming. All of these students were part of the enrichment model of gifted programming in the younger grades, which is likely not significant because 11 of the participants in the study were from the enrichment program, and all of the participants in the LL group were from the two lower grade levels in the school. This last point is important to keep in mind because of the developmental aspect of eudaimonia. Just because these students might be at lower levels of development *now* does not mean that they will necessarily remain so: all of the HL group were in the upper grades.

In terms of relationships, Participant B did not ascribe much personal meaning to their relationships. For example, in response to the eudaimonia prompt about a close

relationship, they struggled to explain the importance of their relationship with their best friend, ultimately saying

I am unable to get to 200 words on this prompt. I am not sure what else to write.

All we really do is spend time together and the reason we are close is because we have known each other for a long time. It is mainly because we both help each other a lot. Whether it be for schoolwork or just in general.

On the other hand, Participant A wrote sincerely about the significance of their relationship with their boyfriend and their grandmother. They connected these relationships to their giftedness, first indicating that their shared giftedness is part of what drew them to a relationship with their boyfriend: “My boyfriend and I are both gifted... I learned so much from him... That was really special to me.” Participant A’s grandmother is not gifted but provides a sense of relief to their perfectionism, which they tie to their giftedness: “But she is also the loving voice that reminds me that I don’t need to be perfect, and that she will always love me anyway.” Participant A also attributes their relationships with teachers to giftedness, saying “As a gifted student, my relationships with my teachers are very important to me...,” and they strongly believe that their giftedness has had both a negative and positive effect on these teacher-student relationships. Like Participant A, Participant N believes their giftedness can affect their relationships with teachers, expressing their distress that teachers criticize them publicly for perfectionism, saying, “honestly, it was really humiliating.” Participant N also wrote about a meaningful family relationship, saying about their brother, “I’ve enjoyed seeing him change and grow as a person and learn more about himself.” Ultimately, aside from

Participant B's inability to fully respond to a prompt about meaningful relationships, the LL group does not vary greatly from the HL group in this area.

Where there are much larger distinctions between the two groups are in the theories the LL group holds about how giftedness affects their experience at school. Once again, there is a significant difference between Participant B and Participants A and N. Participant B largely equates their giftedness to getting good grades without expending much effort. They say,

Being gifted really does not make me feel different. I pretty much take the exact same classes except they are honors. I do the same things they do and there really aren't many differences. However, the only thing that is a difference is that I get higher scores and I finish work way faster. These are not really that great however it's nice to have those benefits. This pretty much causes me to have the exact same experiences.

Participant B believes being gifted doesn't lead to essentially different experiences, just the ability to do schoolwork quickly and well. While they also indicate that they "get bored very quickly," this did not seem like a significant problem to them. However, the other two members of the LL group wrote about very different kinds of experiences at school. Participant N believes that their school experience is essentially different than that of their peers who are not gifted, saying, "I also approach learning differently, and in some cases, many concepts may come to me a lot easier than some of my peers. And to grow my brain has to be challenged a lot harder than many other people have to be challenged." This desire for challenge has led to criticisms from Participant N's teachers about being a perfectionist, but Participant N disagrees with their criticism:

They would tell me it was not worth my time and I should enjoy the “high school experience,” but I’m happy with how I did and what my habits are for school and learning. It’s also not about the grades, it’s about understanding something really well. For a lot of my friends, if a teacher taught a concept but didn’t fully explain, they don’t care, especially if we don’t need to know it for a test or project, but for me, I need to understand it. If a teacher tells us, we’ll learn it more in depth or why in the next grade or other classes, sometimes it can be very frustrating and I spend time fully understanding the concept because it doesn’t feel fair to just tell us to memorize something without explaining why something is the way it is. It’s kind of like a story, it feels wrong to leave the story incomplete.

Participant A also attributes their perfectionism to a desire to make their schoolwork meaningful:

It doesn’t matter how short or insignificant an assignment is; I will work for hours to take it above and beyond. I spend hours every night on simple assignments meant to take minutes, because I just can’t stand the feeling of not giving my best effort. If I don’t work extremely hard at everything, if I don’t put my best into everything I do, then what is the point? If I’m doing mediocre work just for the sake of retention, why am I even here? What am I learning? There is zero purpose, and that makes me extremely angry.

While Participants A and N could likely experience the ease of learning reported by Participant B, they push themselves to go above and beyond on work that is essentially not challenging to them because they desire their learning to be meaningful, leading them to “make” meaning of their schoolwork when it might not otherwise exist. This is in

contrast to the HL group, whose responses did not have many references to how their giftedness affected their schoolwork.

This leads to another significant difference between the HL and the LL groups: their response to problems. While members of the HL group encountered significant challenges in their school or personal lives, they were able to overcome them and reported growing from the experience. However, all three of the LL participants identified a significant problem in their responses but either failed to overcome it or failed to see their involvement in the resolution of the problem. The latter is reflected by Participant B, whose problem with focusing on schoolwork, in their eyes, had “no solution” and is “thankful that it just went away on its own.” Without engaging in questions of how the problem went away or how they were changed by the experience, Participant B cannot experience eudaimonic growth through the struggle.

Once again, Participant B’s responses vary quite a bit from those of Participants A and N. Participant A wrote, “A significant challenge I face because of my giftedness is the inability to let anything go.” This means perfectionism to Participant A, but even though they believe “perfectionism has stolen my music [and it] stole my favorite sport from me too,” they either do not think they can overcome their perfectionism or do not want to because perfectionism is their “survival mechanism” for making meaning out of schoolwork. However, this perceived survival mechanism is harmful and remains unresolved:

I hate expectations. I hate being told I’m perfect. I am not perfect, but I hold myself to astronomical standards. I feel a crushing weight from other people’s

expectations, feel the constant pressure to be perfect. But that's impossible. I tear up any time that someone tells me I'm good enough. (Participant A)

Similarly, while Participant N disagrees with their teachers' criticisms about their perfectionism, they say they are currently facing "burnout," calling it "a constant drum beat in my head" and struggling to find "motivation to do the things I enjoy" because managing their commitments is like "trying to balance a mountain of chopsticks."

However, although Participant N's problem is currently unresolved, they are taking initial steps to confront it. They wrote,

But I know that I need to snap out of it. And fast. I don't know about anyone else but most of my problems can be solved with a book. So I did what I usually do when I'm struggling, I picked up a book about a crazy person doing a crazy thing (or maybe things). The one I chose was *The Impossible First* by Colin O'Brady as I randomly walked through the biography aisle in the library. There's something about O'Brady and about the story of his impossible unassisted race across Antarctica which is just so motivating and in a way gives me hope. He had to take every step at a time, every day at a time. No matter how hard each day was, he got up the very next and was ready to take on the world. At the very least, I can fill out this questionnaire about my challenges, even if it takes more than 5 days to finally finish (unfortunately, expressing feelings is hard). As long as I take every step at a time, every day at a time, maybe I can make it too.

Participant N is not yet confident that their struggle can or will be overcome, but they acknowledge the need for change.

Altogether, the LL group showed more variation in their lack of eudaimonia than the HL group did in their experience of eudaimonia. While Participants A and N experienced elements of eudaimonia to some degree, they experienced the opposite of eudaimonia in their struggle with boredom and perfectionism in school as well as their inability to resolve their struggles with these problems. Participant B's responses included fewer instances of negative eudaimonia sub-themes but no positive ones. In direct contrast to the HL group, the responses of the LL group contained many instances of beliefs that their giftedness affected their learning experience at school, both positively and negatively. While two out of the three LL participants believe giftedness to be an inherent trait, not just an academic label, they seem to focus on giftedness as it relates to academic performance much more than the HL group. Their understanding of giftedness as a part of themselves but also something so closely tied to external markers of academic performance, like grades, may help explain why they struggle to experience eudaimonia more fully: If we follow their logic, equating giftedness to an essential part of themselves and also equating giftedness to superior academic performance, we must wonder how frequently their sense of identity and worth is based upon external markers of success, like grades, which could impede eudaimonic growth (Lopez-Perez & Zuffiano, 2020). Similarly, focusing on these external factors can make it harder for students to experience internal change.

Eudaimonia, Implicit Theories, and Identity Status

Another lens by which to view the relationship between implicit theories of giftedness and eudaimonia is identity formation, particularly as conceptualized in Marcia's theory of identity status (1966). Ultimately, the LL group is the one that seems

most uncertain or least reflective about their identity, including how giftedness is incorporated into it. For example, Participant B, when attempting to tell a story that shows who they are, wrote about getting lost in a store when they were young and concluded with, “This really doesn't show who I am, it shows more about that woman. I really don't have a better story.” As already noted, Participant B does not believe giftedness means more than achieving good grades without as much effort. It is not something essential to their sense of identity: “You are still the same as everyone else.” In Marcia's paradigm, Participant B's failure to claim either a conferred or constructed identity places them within the realm of identity diffusion.

While Participant B is not reflective about their identity, Participant N is very thoughtful about it but believes they are still figuring out who they are:

I don't know who I am yet, and I'm always finding flaws and faults and things I want to improve. ... The issue is, since I'm so willing and open to trying new things, I'm constantly falling in love with new aesthetics and new themes. The style of clothes I like to wear is constantly changing, my hobbies range from reading, playing sports, and making art, to playing video games. I watch documentaries and consume news quickly, I'm hungry to engage myself and learn more about the world around me. And even though I change quickly and am sometimes indecisive, I like who I am at that moment, I'm content with the choices I've made. I am the kind of person that seeks out beautiful things, tries to fall in love with the world every day, and someone who tries to make the best of whatever I have.

Participant N perhaps shows some wisdom in believing that they are too young to have their identity fully figured out: it appears that they may be in the process of identity moratorium, working to make an identity commitment. On that note, like the HL participants, Participant N accepts giftedness is an important part of themselves but does not fully define them. They say, “At the end of the day, being gifted isn’t a thought that’s always on my mind, but it’s something that explains some of the interactions I have, and it gives me a way to understand why, in certain ways, I’m different or the same as other people.” While Participant N has rejected a conferred identity of giftedness, they are still in the process of constructing who they are.

Participant A is also thoughtful about their identity, but unlike Participant N, they attribute most aspects of their identity to giftedness, believing that giftedness explains their former poor relationships with peers who are not gifted, their boredom in school as a younger student, their friendships (with other gifted students), their academic success, their perfectionism, their romantic relationship (with another gifted student), their passion, their strong opinions, their “powerful sense of justice,” their independence, their strong emotions, and their creativity. Participant A wrote, “So right now, I like my giftedness, even though it has its ups and downs. It’s part of what makes me who I am.” But Participant A does not ever write about parts of them not related to giftedness—in response to all eight prompts, even the eudaimonia prompts, they wrote about giftedness. Participant A’s willingness to fully accept the conferred identity of “gifted” would place them within the status of identity foreclosure and may shed some light on why it is difficult for them to make positive changes about their perfectionism problem: Perhaps

they believe that this perfectionism, which they believe is caused by giftedness, is an essential part of who they are.

These three students' different approaches to understanding their identities, including how giftedness is incorporated into their sense of identity, reflects an essential difference from the HL group, who all accepted giftedness as a part of their identities but not the whole, reflecting identity achievement. This can be seen in Participant E's statement that their experiences as a gifted student "helped shape me into the person I am today" and in Participant F's reflection that they have "come into myself as a [gifted] student as a whole person." Their greater degree of eudaimonia echoes Marcia's belief that people with the status of identity achievement are more likely to experience satisfaction in life (1966).

Perhaps being younger than the HL group is a contributing factor to this difference: In particular, there are echoes of Participants E and F in the stories of Participants A and N. While these students have not yet resolved problems interfering with a more fully developed sense of eudaimonia, the potential for them to do so is there. While the composite case studies highlight differences at either end of the eudaimonia spectrum, with a developmental perspective in mind, it is important to note that participants in the moderate level of eudaimonia were from both lower and higher grade levels. The highest levels of eudaimonia can perhaps only come with greater maturity, but these experiences are not a matter of course.

Summary

There is evidence of a relationship between eudaimonia and gifted students' implicit theories of giftedness. Perhaps surprisingly, the relationship is not as simple as

more positive feelings of giftedness equating to a greater development of eudaimonia. For example, participants with a high level of eudaimonic development were more likely to struggle to form relationships with their gifted peers; less likely to believe that their ease of learning made a positive difference in their school experience (although no more inclined to believe it made a negative difference); and slightly more likely to perceive the challenges and drawbacks of gifted programming along with its benefits. However, they were less likely to attribute perfectionism to giftedness. All in all, the HL participants were less likely to show beliefs about giftedness shaping their academic experience at all, rather their beliefs were most consistently about the effect of giftedness on their identity, growth, and relationships with others.

In synthesizing these beliefs, it may be most accurate to say that for the participants with greater evidence of eudaimonic development, the complexity of giftedness introduces challenges and benefits they perceive as internal, not external, and more integrated into their sense of self. Giftedness, then, is not a discrete entity that can be credited for their perfectionism, their boredom, their good grades, or their friendships, etc. A student lower or moderate in eudaimonic development might say “I’m gifted, so...” or “I’m gifted, but...” However, a student with higher levels of eudaimonic development would more likely say, “I’m gifted, and...” Yet, an especially pertinent consideration for educators is that as the participants with the highest level of eudaimonia were all in the upper grades of school and the participants with the lowest level of eudaimonia were all in the lower grades of school, one could certainly argue with more life experience and appropriate support in navigating these experiences, the majority of

secondary gifted students could further develop eudaimonia, that “activity of soul in accordance with perfect virtue” (Aristotle, 2009, 1.13).

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

Aristotle described eudaimonia as “the state of character which makes a man good and which makes him do his own work well” (2009, 2.6). Eudaimonia is often translated from the Greek as “happiness” but is perhaps better understood as “flourishing.” Literature from the field of gifted education is often split between whether giftedness is an asset or a burden in a person’s ability to flourish.

This qualitative study was designed to explore the beliefs about giftedness and the manifestation of elements of eudaimonia among secondary gifted students. Specifically, it asked the following questions:

1. What do the narratives of secondary gifted students reveal about their development of eudaimonia?
2. What do the narratives of secondary gifted students reveal about their implicit theories of giftedness?
3. What do the narratives of secondary gifted students reveal about the extent to which giftedness is a part of their identities?
4. What are the relationships between gifted students’ implicit theories, identity, and their development of eudaimonia?

To answer these questions, the written responses of 15 secondary gifted students at a large suburban high school were analyzed for themes and sub-themes related to both eudaimonia and implicit theories of giftedness. The findings of this analysis, presented in Chapter Three, are placed within the context of existing literature in this chapter, which also discusses their implications, particularly for educators. Limitations of the study and the need for further research are also addressed.

Summary of the Study

The study was conducted with a social constructivist paradigm, with the understanding that “giftedness” is a social construct in and of itself, and how it is conceptualized varies by context. By focusing on students’ implicit theories of giftedness, a better understanding of students’ own lived experience can emerge. As implicit theories are extremely influential in shaping an individual’s perceptions and experiences (Kerr et al., 1988; Sternberg et al., 1981), one could argue that these socially constructed views are more “true” than explicit theories, at least for that individual. Furthermore, the literature suggests that qualitative studies of both implicit theories of giftedness and eudaimonia are essential to understanding the nuance and complexity of these subjective concepts, which can be oversimplified by quantitative and objective measures (Bauer et al., 2006; Meadows & Neumann, 2016).

The personal experiences of 15 secondary gifted students were collected through written responses to a series of eight prompts about elements of eudaimonia and giftedness. Deductive codes, drawn from the most universal elements of eudaimonia throughout various conceptualizations (Huta & Waterman, 2013) (see Table 1), were used to identify and analyze themes and sub-themes related to eudaimonia (see Table 2); inductive codes were used to identify and analyze themes and sub-themes related to giftedness (see Table 3), ultimately leading to the identification of 14 implicit theories of giftedness among the participants (see Table 5). Throughout the coding and analysis process, peer debriefing with educator colleagues within and outside of the field of gifted education helped refine and clarify codes, themes, and sub-themes. Finally, by comparing the implicit theories held by participants whose responses reflected high, moderate, and

low levels of eudaimonic development, inferences about the relationship between implicit theories and eudaimonia could be made (see Table 6).

Participants with the highest recorded instances of eudaimonia were more likely to believe that it can be hard to form relationships with other gifted students; less likely to believe that their ease of learning has a positive effect on their school experience; less likely to believe that giftedness causes perfectionism; less likely to believe that giftedness has either a positive or negative effect on their academic experience in general; and slightly more likely to believe that gifted programming has challenges and drawbacks while also believing it is beneficial to gifted students. Taken as a whole, the participants with more significant evidence of eudaimonic development were more likely to view their giftedness with complexity and nuance. While they all accepted giftedness as an important part of their identity, they did not consider it the whole of their identity, nor did they often attribute their relationships, successes, and failures to giftedness itself; rather, giftedness was recognized as having shaped and colored their experiences but was not perceived as defining them.

Findings in Context

Research Question 1: Eudaimonia

Four themes about secondary gifted students' experience with eudaimonia emerged from the study: the effects of academic excellence; meaning and purpose in learning and extracurricular activities; meaningful relationships; and struggle and change. While seven out of the total 10 sub-themes reflected the presence of elements of eudaimonia, three sub-themes reflect the opposite of a eudaimonic experience. These include the sub-themes perfectionism or fear of failure in school; boredom and frustration

in school; and failure to change. Participants who demonstrated the highest levels of eudaimonia in total were those whose responses included either or both of the two positive sub-themes under the struggle and change theme: overcoming struggles at school and encountering struggle in personal life.

These results are consistent with the conclusions made by Bauer et al. (2008), who determined that narratives most frequently associated with eudaimonia were those that had positive conclusions while also acknowledging the negative impact of challenges faced. This raises the important distinction between eudaimonia, living a meaningful life, and hedonia, which is living a pleasurable life. People do not have to find the majority of their experiences pleasant or fun in order to live life well. In fact, encountering conflict seems an important part of eudaimonic development.

The developmental perspective is important to keep in mind when considering the presence of eudaimonia in adolescents. For Aristotle, eudaimonia is the result of an extensive process of growth; so while it is possible to talk about eudaimonic development or the presence of eudaimonic elements in adolescents, it is not reasonable to expect the experience of eudaimonia in its entirety (Fossas, 2018). For example, participants in this study whose responses did not reflect either of the two positive struggle and change sub-themes may simply not have yet had the opportunity to experience conflict and distress to the degree that is required to develop this aspect of eudaimonia, or they may not yet have the psychological maturity needed to make meaning of such struggles. This point is important to consider when comparing the results of the higher-level group, who were all students in the upper grades, with the lower-level group, who were all students in the lower grades. In fact, there were strong similarities in the responses between some of the

high-level and low-level participants, indicating that some of the LL participants are on the path to a greater experience with eudaimonia as they mature.

Another important point to consider regarding eudaimonic development is the prevalence of the theme of academic excellence in the students' responses. While some students reported experiencing pride and satisfaction through their superior academic achievement, the possibility of grades and praise being used as extrinsic motivations for striving for excellence can be problematic. These external rewards are more closely tied to hedonic motivations, which can lead to depressive symptoms in sensitive adolescent brains (Telzer et al., 2014), and schools that rely on extrinsic motivators are at risk of impeding the development of eudaimonia (Lopez-Perez & Zuffiano, 2020). This is supported by the negative sub-themes present in the participants' responses: Students who achieved good grades and received teacher praise without accompanying intrinsic motivation could be subject to the distress of maladaptive perfectionism or constant boredom in school without the ability to make a positive change, as reflected by the narratives of the students with a low level of eudaimonia development. The participants' complex experiences with academic excellence are in accordance with studies that suggest appropriately meeting gifted students' academic needs can promote eudaimonic development (Mammadov et al., 2018; Bernstein et al., 2021).

Research Questions 2: Implicit Theories of Giftedness

Implicit Theories about Peer Relationships

Analyzing the participants' responses led to the discovery of the following implicit theories about peer relationships: Giftedness can have a negative effect on gifted students' relationships with peers who are not gifted; gifted students can find belonging

with other gifted students; and other gifted students can be hard to form and maintain relationships with. There was no evidence of a belief that giftedness could improve relationships with peers who are not gifted—this does not mean that participants did not have any positive relationships with peers who are not gifted, but rather, they did not attribute their relationships with these students to giftedness.

The perceived implications of giftedness on peer relationships have been frequently observed in the literature, with a common belief among gifted students that they are different from peers who are not gifted (Manaster et al., 1994; Meadows & Neumann, 2017) and that there is a social stigma to giftedness. Even students who do not believe that they, personally, are “weird” may believe that other gifted students are (Coleman & Cross, 2014). Regardless of beliefs about the social implications of giftedness, the literature indicates that gifted students *expect* to experience negative social impacts more frequently than they actually do experience them (Coleman & Cross, 2014; Manaster et al., 1994). This serves as an excellent example of a clash between an implicit theory and an explicit theory; and it is true that while multiple participants in this study noted feeling excluded by peers because of their giftedness, few provided specific examples of this exclusion occurring. In fact, the only student who provided specific details about being bullied was bullied by other gifted students. Research also supports the idea that it is possible for gifted students to have very positive beliefs about their social competence (Lee et al., 2012), so the fact that eight out of the 15 participants believed their giftedness has a negative impact on their relationships with peers who are not gifted indicates that this is a theory that could be arising out of our district’s educational and social context, a theory that could be disproven and changed if educators

work to change either the situations in which gifted students feel isolated by peers or if they work with gifted students to have different views about their peer interactions.

This study also confirms ideas present in the existing literature that gifted students appreciate relationships formed with other gifted students (Coleman & Cross, 2014; Eddles-Hirsch et al., 2010; Moulton et al., 1998). Yet, a new idea emerged in this study, that some gifted students struggle with relationships with their gifted peers. Surprisingly, four out of the five participants who shared this belief were those with higher levels of elements of eudaimonia; in fact, three of the four HL participants shared this theory. Perhaps an explanation of this phenomenon is that those students who encountered peer conflict when they expected to find acceptance were provided with an opportunity for eudaimonia-developing personal growth. Another explanation could be that students who struggled with relationships with other gifted students were less likely to accept a conferred identity of giftedness, which put them on the pathway toward the identity status most strongly associated with life satisfaction, identity achievement (Marcia, 1966).

Implicit Theories about Relationships with Teachers

Participants in the study held implicit theories that giftedness can have both positive and negative effects on their relationships with teachers. Five students believed both theories, and no participants believed that giftedness can positively affect relationships with teachers without also believing it can have a negative effect. There is not a great deal of existing literature about gifted students' perceptions of their relationships with teachers although some studies show that gifted students believe special treatment from teachers is a positive outcome of giftedness (Coleman & Cross, 2014; Manaster et al., 1994).

While previous studies do not address gifted students' beliefs about the negative effects giftedness can have on relationships with teachers, there are studies to suggest that tensions can arise between gifted students and teachers because of classroom management issues related to giftedness (Kaya, 2022); teachers' doubts that they can teach gifted students effectively (Matheis et al., 2018); and teachers' negative stereotypes of gifted students (Weyns et al., 2021). There is research to suggest that teachers tend to believe that giftedness has a negative impact on students' social-emotional skills and well-being, despite their own experience with well-adjusted gifted students and explicit theories about the protective factors of giftedness on well-being and pro-social behavior (Baudsen & Preckel, 2013; Baudsen & Preckel, 2016).

These studies may shed light on why participants in the study held both oppositional beliefs about their relationships with teachers: It may be that giftedness *itself* is not the issue but rather teachers' own implicit theories about giftedness may create fruitful or hostile environments for gifted students. It is also possible that gifted students can become dissatisfied with their teachers because they have high expectations for their teachers' performance and for their relationship with their teachers, as a recent study has indicated that teachers perceive their relationships to be better with gifted students than their relationships with the student body as a whole, but gifted students do not perceive their relationships differently than their peers who are not gifted (Sanchez & Blanc, 2023). In either case, the results of the study suggest a need for teachers to have more training about gifted students, particularly in our own district context in which the belief that giftedness will have a negative effect on relationships with teachers is slightly more prominent than the belief it will have a positive effect.

Implicit Theories about School

The study revealed the following four implicit theories about how giftedness affects gifted students' experience at school (outside of gifted programming): Giftedness makes learning easier, creating a positive difference in school; giftedness makes learning easier, creating a negative difference in school; giftedness can cause perfectionism; and schools interfere with gifted students' learning and talents. It is no shock that seven out of the 15 participants wrote about the positive effects of the ease of learning their giftedness provides. Beyond common sense assumptions that students would prefer for their academic achievement to come without much struggle, previous studies suggest that gifted students perceive their academic achievement to be one of the biggest benefits of giftedness (Kerr et al., 1988; Manaster et al., 1994).

What may be more surprising is that six students wrote about the negative effects of their ease of learning. These negative effects include the development of poor work habits, frustration, and boredom. Previous studies have explored the lack of academic challenge in the general education setting and the damage of persistent boredom to gifted students (Gallagher et al., 1997; Stambaugh, 2017). However, while underachievement in gifted students is a frequent topic in the literature (Dai et al., 2011), few, if any, studies approach the lack of development of good learning habits among gifted students *before* their grades demonstrate their underachievement. In this study, a small group of participants acknowledged the damage their ease of learning was doing to their work habits and expressed concern about future consequences. But as their grades had not yet suffered, they had not been identified as underachievers, and they did not have the motivation to change their behavior. This is a valuable insight when discussing the

dangers of lack of academic challenge among gifted students and a compelling argument that interventions and guidance in this area, specifically focused on gifted students, would benefit their well-being.

The belief that giftedness causes maladaptive perfectionism at school was expressed by only four of the participants, but for those who experienced this phenomenon firsthand, it was one of the most powerful implicit theories. Many educators and experts in the field of gifted education also believe that gifted students are more likely to experience perfectionism than their peers, and there is a plethora of studies focused on the experience of perfectionism in gifted individuals (Grugan et al., 2021; Orgurlu, 2020; Stricker et al., 2019). Yet despite the abundance of literature on the subject, many of these studies and papers do not use an experimental or cross-sectional design, frequently relying on anecdotal evidence (Grugan et al., 2021). Recent meta-analyses and systematic reviews of the literature comparing experiences of perfectionism in gifted students and students who are not gifted support the conclusion that gifted individuals do not experience perfectionism, in general, at higher rates than their peers (Orgurlu, 2020; Stricker et al., 2019).

To better understand the relationship between giftedness and perfectionism, it is helpful to be more specific about dimensions of perfectionism, particularly perfectionist strivings and perfectionist concerns: Perfectionist strivings can be understood as high standards and a pursuit of excellence while perfectionist concerns are fears about making mistakes and social evaluation as well as negative reactions to imperfection (Grugan et al., 2021). While perfectionist concerns have negative effects on personality, motivation, and emotional well-being, perfectionist strivings have a mixed effect on individuals

(Grugan et al., 2021). The literature comparing gifted and non-gifted populations suggests gifted students are less likely to have perfectionist concerns than their peers and more likely to have perfectionist strivings (Orgurlu, 2020; Stricker et al., 2019).

This explicit theory about perfectionism and giftedness stands in opposition to the belief of some participants in the study. This conflict between explicit and implicit theories may provide an opportunity to consider how our school district's specific educational and social context is contributing to students' experience with maladaptive perfectionism, as it is likely that it is not an inherent aspect of giftedness. Believing that perfectionism arises from giftedness is also not a theory held by students with a high level of eudaimonic development, underscoring the importance of altering this theory. The small body of literature about the use of affective programs to address unhealthy perfectionism in gifted individuals suggests that these interventions can be successful (Grugan et al., 2021).

Despite 10 of the participants in the study expressing at least one negative implicit theory about their school environment or relationships with teachers, the literature suggests gifted students, in general, are more likely to feel favorably about school and their academic performance than their peers who are not gifted (Sanchez & Blanc, 2023). While the participants in the study may have experienced scholastic dissatisfaction and disappointment that they attributed to their giftedness, some degree of academic frustration is perhaps part of the school experience for all students.

Implicit Theories about Gifted Programming

Thirteen out of the 15 participants in the study believed that gifted programming is beneficial to gifted students, and only four expressed the belief that gifted

programming has challenges and drawbacks (though, as noted above, three of those four were students who showed higher instances of elements of eudaimonia in their responses). Only one student expressed the belief that gifted programming has challenges and drawbacks without also believing it to be beneficial. This result appears to be more positive in nature than the existing literature about gifted students' perceptions of gifted programming, which indicates many gifted students experience loneliness, perfectionism, lower self-esteem, lower academic self-concept, and higher levels of perceived pressure from adults as a result of programming (Cash & Lin, 2021, Eddles-Hirsch et al., 2010; Meadows & Neumann, 2017; Moulton et al., 1998).

A possible explanation for the more positive response to programming in this study is that our district is executing gifted programming extremely effectively. Another explanation could be that as our gifted programming moves to a resource model in high school instead of specialized classes, the secondary students who participated in the study felt more solidly integrated into the general school community than they would have expressed feeling in younger grades when they experienced daily or weekly gifted programming that removed them from the general education environment.

The perceived benefits of gifted programming by the participants are consistent with the existing literature: more challenging and meaningful work and the ability to interact with other gifted students (Coleman & Cross, 2014; Eddles-Hirsch et al., 2010; Feldhusen & Dai, 1997; Moulton et al., 1998). One additional benefit for some participants in this study was caring and understanding gifted education teachers—references to negative interactions with teachers did not involve gifted education teachers in any instance.

Exploring the benefits of gifted programming from the perspective of gifted students is important in light of recent national criticism of gifted programming. The disproportionate representation of white and Asian students and those from higher-income families has long been a topic of concern among researchers and educators (Peters & Engerrand, 2016). In the past few years, large public school districts, such as New York City and Boston, have discussed whether to end gifted programming altogether because of these inequities in identification (Grissom & Redding, 2021). Jill Barshay from *The Hechinger Report* recently pushed the argument against gifted programming further, claiming that gifted programs do not provide significant academic benefits to any students (Barshay, 2021). The study that Barshay uses as the basis for her argument does, in fact, find that academic boosts from elementary gifted programming, as determined by standardized tests, are small but also acknowledges that the research did not address the level or quality of gifted programming experienced by students in the study (Grissom & Redding, 2021). Grissom and Redding also acknowledge that the benefits of programming may be largely attitudinal or social-emotional, and these outcomes were not measured (2021).

The suggestion that gifted programming may provide more significant social-emotional outcomes than academic outcomes is consistent with the findings of my study, in which participants with the highest levels of eudaimonia appeared to be the group least likely to be concerned with how giftedness affects their academic performance in terms of external measures like grades and test scores. While inequities within gifted education remain an urgent concern and must be addressed, the voices of students who perceive benefits from programming, not just in the form of grades and test results but also in

feeling motivated, challenged, and understood, should not be ignored. Education equity and meeting the needs of gifted students can and should be complementary, not oppositional, ideals.

Research Question 3: Giftedness and Identity

Twelve of the participants expressed a belief that being gifted is an inherent trait, one that is distinct from the educational label of giftedness and the programming they received as a result of identification. In other words, giftedness is an essential part of their identities. The prominence of this implicit theory is at odds with some of the literature about how gifted students attribute giftedness, with several studies showing that they tend to believe that giftedness is incremental or performance in nature, a result of hard work and effort and not a part of their sense of self (Feldhusen & Dai, 1997; Guskin et al., 1986; Kerr et al., 1988). Yet, qualitative analysis has revealed a more complex understanding of students' beliefs about giftedness. Similar to the results of this study, Meadows and Neumann (2017) found that although students sometimes held contradictory views about their giftedness and did not believe they were smarter or better than their peers, they possessed an intrinsic view of their giftedness. The significance of how participants incorporated giftedness into their identities is further explored below in the discussion of the relationship between implicit theories, identity, and eudaimonia.

Research Question 4: The Relationship Between Implicit Theories, Identity, and Eudaimonia

Gifted Identity and Eudaimonia

With the widely held theory that giftedness is an inherent part of themselves, the participants in this study seem to consider giftedness as part of their identities. Yet, the

extent to which giftedness is accepted as a part of their identities varies. Students with the highest levels of eudaimonia development were those who accepted their giftedness but were less likely than those in the other groups to use giftedness as an excuse or explanation for their behaviors and performance in school and as the means of forming peer relationships.

This difference appears to be in accordance with Marcia's theory of identity status (1966). HL participants all seemed to fit Marcia's category of identity achievement, in which individuals have constructed their identities, choosing who they want to be. For these students, giftedness is certainly a part of themselves, but not the whole. On the other hand, the LL group was split between participants who reflected Marcia's categories of moratorium, foreclosure, and diffusion. While accepting giftedness as part of a constructed identity seems to be an important part of eudaimonia for gifted students, accepting a wholly conferred identity of giftedness, not having a sense of identity at all, or struggling through the process of constructing identity can lead to a distinct lack of eudaimonia among gifted students. These findings about identity status and giftedness complement previous research that found higher levels of life satisfaction and success among gifted identity achievers compared to those with other identity statuses (Zou & Crammond, 2001). However, it remains important to keep this developmental perspective in mind. The participants in this study are adolescents, and many are still undergoing age-appropriate identity formation. The identity achievers in the HL group, all older students, had to go through their own process of moratorium, and in many ways, this process is related to the struggle they overcame in order to grow. For the LL group, all is not

necessarily lost if they are given the help they need to accept the challenge and push through the struggle.

Implicit Theories of Giftedness and Eudaimonia

The exploration between implicit theories of giftedness and eudaimonia revealed that participants with a high level of eudaimonic development were more likely to believe it can be challenging to form relationships with gifted peers and less likely to find a sense of belonging with them than the other two groups. The HL group was also more likely to perceive their giftedness as affecting their relationships with teachers, and slightly more likely to believe this effect would be negative than the other groups. Yet, they were less likely to express beliefs in theories regarding how giftedness affected their academic work: they especially did not believe giftedness causes perfectionism. While the HL group believed that gifted programming is beneficial, they were also more likely to observe challenges and drawbacks in programming than the other two groups. The group with a moderate level of eudaimonic development was less likely to express belief in a theory that giftedness affected their relationships with teachers than the other two groups. Students with a low level of eudaimonic development were more likely to believe that the ease of learning created by giftedness has a positive effect on their school experience, yet they were also more likely to believe that giftedness causes perfectionism.

While, to my knowledge, this is the first study to examine the relationship between implicit theories of giftedness and eudaimonia, it is possible to make connections between research done on eudaimonia in children and adolescents and eudaimonia in gifted individuals. As noted above, eudaimonia is an experience that comes with growth and maturation. While children and younger adolescents can

experience eudaimonia elements and growth, true flourishing comes with time (Fossass, 2018). It is no surprise, then, that the HL group was composed of students from the upper grades while the LL group was composed of students from the lower grades. Yet, it is too simple to say that HL group showed a greater degree of eudaimonia simply because they were older, as the ML group included students from both upper and lower grades. Just getting older isn't enough to achieve eudaimonia.

One of the biggest differences in the HL group is that they did not write as much about their giftedness in terms of how it affected their schoolwork as the other two groups. They were less likely to hold implicit theories about giftedness leading to negative effects like boredom, frustration, or perfectionism at school. They were also less likely to write about positive effects of giftedness on schoolwork, such as good grades and teacher praise. This observation seems in line with research that indicates extrinsic motivation (like grades or praise) is more associated with hedonia and can impede the development of eudaimonia (Lopez-Perez & Zuffiano, 2020).

Considering that eudaimonic motivations in adolescents are correlated with life satisfaction (Gentzler et al., 2021) and that increasing eudaimonic motivations and behaviors among adolescents can improve mental health in young adults (Hallam et al., 2014; Telzer et al., 2014), exploring the differences between students with high and low levels of eudaimonic development is critical. This is especially true for gifted students, as it seems that well-being among gifted individuals may decrease as they develop into adults (Witgil & Henriques, 2015). In particular, the educational support a gifted student receives could be a major factor in their future life satisfaction (Pollet & Schnell, 2016).

The Complexity of Giftedness

The origins of this study began with a desire to resolve, in at least a small way, some of the conflicts and tensions that exist in our understanding of giftedness. The results of the study do not so much resolve this complexity as it does confirm it. Beyond their sometimes oppositional theories about the way that giftedness affects relationships and their experience at school, 11 of the participants expressed a belief that giftedness brings both benefits and challenges to their lives. This theory echoes Jean Sunde Peterson's "asset-burden paradox" (2012).

Another way to view the complexity uncovered by this study is by considering how the participants with the most evidence of eudaimonic development were those who also experienced personal growth through facing and overcoming a significant challenge. This tension between experiencing great distress and growing through the struggle is aligned with Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration (1964), which states that the highest levels of personality development cannot be reached without internal and external conflict. It is an especially fitting comparison since the "overexcitabilities" Dabrowski believed to contribute to positive disintegration are most commonly associated with gifted individuals.

Implications and Recommendations

The results of this study offer valuable insight into the lived experience of secondary gifted students, particularly within their school context. Although the design of the study was not experimental, it begins to offer a better understanding of how students' implicit theories of giftedness and the way they incorporate giftedness into their sense of identity are related to their eudaimonic development and overall well-being.

The Importance of Gifted Services

Despite recent national criticism about the fairness and effectiveness of gifted education, one of the most widely held beliefs of the participants is that gifted programming is beneficial to gifted students. These benefits include challenging and engaging learning opportunities, the chance to interact with other gifted students, and the opportunity to form relationships with their gifted education teachers. While a small number of participants also acknowledged that gifted programming is not entirely without its challenges, this does not negate the value of these services in students' eyes.

The Need for Transparency About Giftedness and Gifted Programming

Students clearly believed that gifted programming is valuable. However, although students' recollections of their path to receiving the gifted label were too specific and discrete to be called an implicit theory rather than just a memory, the sub-theme that emerged about the uncertainty and confusion of the identification process indicates that parents and educators may want to more thoughtfully consider how they talk about assessment and identification with students. Participants who talked about fear of receiving the label or those who discussed not being identified the first time they were assessed in terms of failure indicate that students were then, and perhaps still may be, unclear about the reasons behind gifted programming and the way the label and services are conferred. Discussing gifted programming in terms of meeting needs that may otherwise remain unfulfilled in a general education setting may also provide students with the awareness and language needed to communicate problems associated with their giftedness. If students perceive giftedness solely as a trait that should benefit them or

gifted programming as primarily as a privilege or a social opportunity, they may not feel comfortable advocating for themselves when they encounter academic problems.

Helping Students Navigate Giftedness

The differences in implicit theories between students at the two ends of the eudaimonia spectrum provide suggestions for how adults can help students navigate the experience of being gifted. Although claims about causation cannot be made, the study indicates that participants with a high level of eudaimonic development are those who are less likely to rely on giftedness as the means of forming peer relationships and the lens through which they view their performance in school. This includes beliefs that easy academic achievement resulting from giftedness have both positive and negative effects on their school experience. Believing that giftedness causes maladaptive perfectionism seems to negatively correlate with eudaimonic development.

This result suggests that many gifted students could benefit from being more specifically taught about the neuroscience of cognition as well as how the phenomena of boredom, frustration, and perfectionism develop and affect the learning process. Accordingly, students would benefit from being taught strategies to help them develop good work habits, combat unrealistic expectations, and to advocate for themselves and their educational needs. By demystifying the learning process and giving students more agency, they may be less likely to use the label of giftedness as a general excuse or explanation for both their academic triumphs and struggles.

Valuing the Process of Learning over the Product of Grades

A small number of participants in the study explained their belief that their giftedness led to poor work and study habits that were preventing them from reaching

their potential. In their perception, their high ability masked deficits that will one day have serious negative consequences. However, although they have identified themselves as underachieving, their grades are not below average compared to the whole school population, so they have not received interventions to help them improve their poor habits. These observations suggest that educators may need to use different methods of identifying gifted underachievers than by examining their grades. Attention needs to be paid not just to the product of the assessed work but also to the student's process in completing the work.

Similarly, those students who reported struggling with perfectionism would also benefit from moving academic conversations away from letter grades and test results. For these students, measuring success through these external, discrete markers can contribute to a sense of fear that can lead them to either overcommit or avoid activities that may lead to perceived failure. For students who incorporate giftedness as part of their identities and associate giftedness with achieving high grades, not earning the desired grade can affect their sense of self.

Facilitating Opportunities for Peer Relationship Building

The thematic analyses for both eudaimonia and implicit theories of giftedness revealed the importance of positive, meaningful relationships. Yet, many participants wrote about their negative relationships with peers, both those who are and who are not gifted. While in some cases, conflicts in relationships helped lead students to eudaimonia-developing personal growth, the tension between the desire for strong relationships and the struggles many of them experienced indicate students' needs for strategies and opportunities for relationship building. Gifted students who struggle to form relationships

with peers who are not gifted may also struggle to understand their giftedness within the context of other people's experiences. For example, if one's closest friends are all gifted, it may be tempting to attribute both trials and triumphs to giftedness because they are unfamiliar with how others succeed or struggle in similar ways. On the other hand, a gifted student who struggles to maintain relationships with other gifted students may not feel comfortable enough in programming to reap all of its benefits; and they, too, may struggle to put their experiences within the appropriate context if they are not sharing them with gifted peers. Educators need to ensure that gifted students are fully integrated as part of the community in both their general education setting and in their gifted programming.

The Need for Educator Training

Participants in the study believed that giftedness affects their relationships with teachers both positively and negatively. The negative relationships seem to have been caused, at least in the students' eyes, by their teachers' lack of understanding about both gifted programming and giftedness itself. This perception is confirmed by research that many educators do not believe they have been adequately trained about giftedness (Matheis et al., 2018) and expect gifted students to have less developed social skills and social-emotional well-being than their peers despite evidence to the contrary (Baudsen & Preckel, 2013; Baudsen & Preckel, 2016).

To give educators more confidence and understanding, school districts should prioritize professional development opportunities for all educators to receive training in gifted education. In addition to improving relationships between gifted students and their teachers, more professional development in the area of giftedness could aid in

implementing all of the recommendations listed previously: affecting the way that both gifted and general education teachers and administrators talk about giftedness, identity underachievement, communicate values about learning, and help build healthy school relationships.

Limitations

This qualitative study was designed to uncover secondary gifted students' implicit theories of giftedness and their eudaimonic development; additionally, it sought to explore a relationship between these concepts. I designed this study as a researcher-practitioner with the primary goal of improving my own practice as a secondary gifted specialist in my specific school context, which is a large, public, suburban high school in a district with robust gifted programming. Participants in the study were 15 students at the high school where I teach. Purposeful sampling was used to ensure that participants included variation in gender, level of engagement in high school gifted programming, and type of gifted programming received in younger grades. It is worth noting that gifted students with academic achievement below our school's average were less likely to assent to participate in the study and complete the prompts. The lack of voices of underachieving students may have affected the results.

A further limitation is that because the study was exploratory and not experimental in design, one cannot conclude causation between implicit theories of giftedness and eudaimonic development, and vice versa. Additionally, because participants all came from the same local and school context, one cannot assume that all results are generalizable, particularly because one of the complications of gifted research is that giftedness is a social construct without a universally standard conceptualization. In

determining the transferability of the findings, one should compare the descriptions of our school and gifted programming, found in Chapters 1 and 2.

Another limitation is that this study focused solely on participants' written accounts of their experiences. There is no way to assess whether their perceptions and memories were accurate and comprehensive or whether their responses were truthful. Although, one could argue that their choice in how to respond to the prompts is perhaps as important in determining their implicit theories as whether their responses are true. Additionally, because I collected written responses rather than conducting in-person interviews, participants' responses may have been influenced or limited by their interest in writing or their writing skills, or by the lack of sufficient detail and introspection in an initial response without follow-up questioning.

Finally, this study does not account for the variation of experience within different types of gifted students. There are wide bodies of research on how gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and disability interact with giftedness. Although I did use a sampling method to ensure the views of different genders were represented, I did not compare results between genders. Nor did I include race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or disability in my purposeful sampling although I did have participants with some diversity in these areas. The reasons for these limitations were two-fold: First, to my knowledge, this is the first study attempting to make connections between implicit theories of giftedness and eudaimonia, and I knew that this would be just the beginning of understanding this topic. Secondly, I was limited to volunteers within the population of identified gifted students at my own school and could not reasonably ensure that I would be able to recruit participants to accurately represent all of these sub-groups. Being more

intentional about analyzing the relationship between implicit theories, eudaimonia, and factors such as race and gender would be fruitful grounds for a future study.

Future Research

As noted above, to my knowledge this is the first study that attempts to explore the relationship between gifted students' implicit theories of giftedness and eudaimonia. This initial foray provides many opportunities for future research. First, this study would need to be replicated within different school contexts to get an idea about the transferability of the results. Secondly, as I previously observed, examining how gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or disability impacts students' implicit theories and eudaimonic development would be a valuable undertaking. Similarly, although I made sure to include representatives of both of our district's models of gifted programming in my sample, I did not compare them. Comparing the results of students who receive varying kinds of gifted services would be beneficial in distinguishing which programming models are most effective in helping gifted students live meaningful lives. As noted in the limitations section, academically underachieving gifted students were underrepresented among my participants—comparing the results of gifted students whose grade point averages are lower than the school average with those who are achieving as expected may also provide valuable insights.

Data for this study were drawn solely from students' written responses about their experiences. Conducting a mixed-methods study that paired this qualitative data with a quantitative instrument to measure eudaimonia would also provide rich insights. Comparing students' beliefs about giftedness or their eudaimonic development with their parents' or teachers' observations would also be useful. Similarly, it would also be

valuable to compare gifted students' development of eudaimonia and their implicit theories of giftedness with those of their peers who are not gifted or with their teachers. It would be interesting to know if the difference gifted students feel is actually observed by others in an academic setting.

More generally, as an educator, I believe that being intentional about understanding what students, gifted or not, believe to be true about themselves and their educational experiences is important work. As Mudrak and Zabrodska (2015) noted, gifted students "are, paradoxically, often absent from the current models and theories of giftedness" (p. 57). This observation of the absence of student voices in making determinations about student experiences is likely true for children and adolescents in general, not just gifted students. It is my hope that this study could be used as a model for educators to use in their own contexts.

Conclusion

Individuals', researchers', and educators' understandings of giftedness are uniquely and historically complex (Dai 2008). There is no universal understanding of what giftedness is. As such, there can be no universal agreement on how giftedness affects individuals, nor about how to best meet gifted students' needs. While educators may operate under viable explicit and implicit theories of giftedness, these understandings and conceptualizations can vary by context and complicate the way we perceive and communicate information about giftedness. One of the biggest questions in the field is whether giftedness is positively or negatively associated with overall well-being. The differing conclusions about this question indicate the importance of

considering gifted students' context as well as being clear about the desired social-emotional outcomes.

This study contributes to the current body of literature on gifted students by providing a new way to evaluate and consider gifted students' well-being: through exploring their implicit theories about giftedness, the extent to which they incorporate giftedness as part of their identities, and their development of eudaimonia, which Aristotle described as "an activity of the soul in accordance with perfect virtue" (1.13). This study not only identified themes in participants' experience of elements of eudaimonia and their implicit theories of giftedness, including their beliefs about giftedness and identity, but began to explore the relationship between these concepts. The results of the study indicate the importance of gifted students' positive experiences with academic achievement, meaningful relationships, the pursuit of personal interests, and the ability to overcome academic and personal challenges. They also indicated that gifted students have complex and sometimes contradictory beliefs about their giftedness and how it affects their school experience and their relationships. The results of the study affirm the benefits of gifted programming, suggest the need for gifted students to be taught good learning skills and self-advocacy strategies, and reveal a need for all educators to receive professional development about the nature and needs of gifted students.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Email

Dear Students and Parents,

As some of you may already know, for the past two years I've been working on earning my Doctor of Education degree at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. It is finally time for me to begin my dissertation research study, and I would like to invite students to join me in this adventure and be a participant in my study.

My research involves exploring gifted students' thoughts and beliefs about giftedness.

You are receiving this email because you are, or your child is, an identified gifted student at [REDACTED].

Participation in this study involves responding to a series of brief narrative prompts over the course of eight weeks (one prompt per week). Participants may respond to prompts at home or at school. If students wish to complete the prompts at school, we can work together to find a mutually agreeable time. Refreshments will be provided for students completing prompts at school.

If you would like to participate in this study, or believe that your child would, please fill out the appropriate attached form. Consent forms are for parents and guardians (or students already over the age of 18). Assent forms are for students under the age of 18. I will need both signed consent and assent forms for each participant.

Please understand that participation is entirely a matter of choice. There will be no compensation or preference given to students who express interest in participating, and

there will be no penalties or consequences for students who do not. This includes grades and access to educational services that I provide.

Please reach out to me at any time with your questions about the study. You can email me at mroegner@[REDACTED] or call me at [REDACTED], extension 1139.

Thank you for your consideration,

Megan Roegner

Appendix B

Consent Form for 18-Year-Old Students

UMSL**College of Education**

One University Boulevard
 St. Louis, Missouri 63121-4499
 Telephone: 314-516-4970
 E-mail: merr5b@umsystem.edu

Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

Gifted Students' Thoughts and Beliefs about Giftedness

Participant

HSC Approval Number

Principal Investigator: Megan Roegner

Phone Number: [REDACTED]

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Megan Roegner and Dr. Marvin Berkowitz. The purpose of this research is to better understand high school gifted students' thoughts and beliefs about giftedness.

Your participation will involve writing brief personal narratives in response to a total of eight prompts using the program Qualtrics. You will be given one prompt a week, for eight weeks, and you may complete the narrative responses at home or at school. Megan Roegner may reach out to individual participants to ask follow-up questions about their narratives for the sake of clarity and depth. In this case, participants will be given the opportunity to edit or expand their responses to most accurately reflect their experiences. The amount of time involved in your participation will be about 15-30 minutes a week for eight weeks. Approximately 20 students may be involved in this research at [REDACTED].

There are minimal risks associated with this research. One of these risks is that people may feel uncomfortable writing about their own life experiences. To mitigate this risk, prompts are broad in scope, and participants are in control of the information and personal stories they choose to share in their responses. Another risk in a study of this nature is that participants could experience a loss of confidentiality if the information they share is identifiable. To protect participants from a loss of confidentiality, each participant will be assigned a random number to use on their Qualtrics forms instead of their names. The key with participant names and numbers will only be known by Megan Roegner and kept in a password-protected file.

There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or withdraw your consent at any time. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or withdraw. A student's choice to participate or not participate in the study will have no effect on their grades or their access to the services Megan Roegner provides as the gifted resource teacher at [REDACTED]

We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication that may result from this study. In rare instances, a researcher's study must undergo an audit or program evaluation by an oversight agency (such as the Office for Human Research Protection) that would lead to disclosure of your data as well as any other information collected by the researcher.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Megan Roegner at [REDACTED], or the Faculty Advisor, Marvin Berkowitz at 314-516-7521. You may also ask questions or state concerns regarding your rights as a research participant to the Office of Research, at 314-516-5897.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I hereby consent to my participation in the research described above.

 Participant's Signature

 Date

 Signature of Investigator or Designee

 Date

Appendix C

Consent Form for the Parents of Minor Students

UMSL**College of Education**

One University Boulevard
 St. Louis, Missouri 63121-4499
 Telephone: 314-516-4970
 E-mail: merr5b@umsystem.edu

Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

Gifted Students' Thoughts and Beliefs about Giftedness

Participant _____ HSC Approval Number _____

Principal Investigator: Megan Roegner

Phone Number: [REDACTED]

Your child is invited to participate in a research study conducted by Megan Roegner and Dr. Marvin Berkowitz. The purpose of this research is to better understand high school gifted students' thoughts and beliefs about giftedness.

Your child's participation will involve writing brief personal narratives in response to a total of eight prompts using the program Qualtrics. Your child will be given one prompt a week, for eight weeks, and they may complete the narrative responses at home or at school. Megan Roegner may reach out to individual participants to ask follow-up questions about their narratives for the sake of clarity and depth. In this case, participants will be given the opportunity to edit or expand their responses to most accurately reflect their experiences. The amount of time involved in your child's participation will be about 15-30 minutes a week for eight weeks. Approximately 20 students may be involved in this research at [REDACTED].

There are minimal risks associated with this research. One of these risks is that people may feel uncomfortable writing about their own life experiences. To mitigate this risk, prompts are broad

in scope, and participants are in control of the information and personal stories they choose to share in their responses. Another risk in a study of this nature is that participants could experience a loss of confidentiality if the information they share is identifiable. To protect participants from a loss of confidentiality, each participant will be assigned a random number to use on their Qualtrics forms instead of their names. The key with participant names and numbers will only be known by Megan Roegner and kept in a password-protected file.

There are no direct benefits for your child participating in this study. Your child's participation is voluntary and you may choose for them not to participate in this research study or withdraw your consent at any time. Your child will NOT be penalized in any way should they choose not to participate or withdraw. A student's choice to participate or not participate in the study will have no effect on their grades or their access to the services Megan Roegner provides as the gifted resource teacher at [REDACTED].

We will do everything we can to protect your child's privacy. As part of this effort, your child's identity will not be revealed in any publication that may result from this study. In rare instances, a researcher's study must undergo an audit or program evaluation by an oversight agency (such as the Office for Human Research Protection) that would lead to disclosure of your child's data as well as any other information collected by the researcher.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Megan Roegner at [REDACTED], or the Faculty Advisor, Marvin Berkowitz at 314-516-7521. You may also ask questions or state concerns regarding your rights as a research participant to the Office of Research, at 314-516-5897.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I hereby consent to my participation in the research described above.

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

Signature of Investigator or Designee

Date

Appendix D

Assent Form for Minor Students

UMSL**College of Education**

One University Boulevard
St. Louis, Missouri 63121-4499
Telephone: 314-516-5937
E-mail: merr5b@umsl.edu

Assent to Participate in Research Activities (Minors)

Gifted Students' Thoughts and Beliefs about Giftedness

My name is Mrs. Roegner. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Missouri-St. Louis and a teacher at [REDACTED]. I am asking you to take part in a research study because I am trying to learn more about gifted students' thoughts and beliefs about giftedness.

If you agree to be in this study you will respond to a total of eight prompts, each asking you to write a brief personal narrative. You will be given one prompt per week for a total of eight weeks. Each narrative prompt will take approximately 15-30 minutes to complete, and you may respond to prompts at school during a mutually agreeable time or at home. I may need to follow up with you regarding your narratives for the sake of clarity and depth. In this case, you will be able to edit your responses to most accurately reflect your thoughts and experiences.

There are minimal risks associated to this research. One risk is the possibility of feeling uncomfortable when writing about yourself and your experiences. However, the prompts are broad in nature, and you only need to share what you feel comfortable sharing. Another risk in a study of this nature is that participants could experience a loss of confidentiality if the information they share is identifiable. To protect participants from a loss of confidentiality, each participant will be assigned a random number to use on their narrative responses instead of their names. The key with participant names and numbers will only be known by me and kept in a password-protected file.

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. If you don't want to be in this study, you don't have to participate. Remember, being in this study is up to you, and no one will be upset if you don't want to participate or if you change your mind later and want to stop. There will be no compensation or preference given to students who express interest in participating, and there will be no penalties or consequences for students who do not. This includes grades and access to educational services that I provide.

Please talk this over with your parents before you decide whether to participate. I also will ask your parents to give their permission for you to take part in this study. Even if your parents say "yes," you still can decide not to do this.

You can ask any questions that you have about the study. If you have a question later that you didn't think of now, you can email me at mroegner@[REDACTED] or come talk to me in room 139.

Signing your name at the bottom means that you agree to be in this study. You and your parents will be given a copy of this form after you have signed it.

 Participant's Signature

Date

Participant's Printed Name

 Parent or Guardian's Signature

Date

Parent or Guardian's Printed Name

 Participant's Age

 Grade in School

Appendix E

Presence of Eudaimonia Themes and Sub-Themes in Each Participant

Eudaimonia Themes and Sub-themes	Participants														
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O
THE EFFECTS OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE	5	1	1	1	2	1	3	4	1	2			1	2	1
<i>Satisfaction in Academic Excellence</i>	1		1	1	1					1			1		
<i>Perfectionism or Fear of Failure in School*</i>	2					1	3	1						1	
<i>Boredom and Frustration in School*</i>	2	1			1			3	1	1				2	1
MEANING AND PURPOSE IN LEARNING AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES					2	2	2	1	2		1	1	1	1	1
<i>Pursuing Personal Interests</i>					1	1	2	1	2		1				
<i>Helping or Relating to Others</i>					1	1						1	1	1	1
MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS	2		1		1	2	1	2		2		2	1	1	
<i>Identity and Authenticity through Relationships</i>	1					1	1			1		1	1		
<i>From Disconnection to Belonging</i>	1		1		1	1		2		1		1		1	
STRUGGLE AND CHANGE	1	1			2	2	1	1	2	2		2		1	2
<i>Overcoming Struggle at School</i>					2	1		1				2			2
<i>Encountering Struggle in Personal Life</i>						1			1						
<i>Failure to Change*</i>	1	1					1		1	2				1	
Total Positive Sub-themes <i>(excludes sub-themes marked *)</i>	3	0	2	1	6	6	3	4	3	3	1	5	3	2	2
Total Negative Sub-themes <i>(includes sub-themes marked*)</i>	3	2	0	0	1	1	2	2	2	2	0	0	0	2	1
Difference between Positive and Negative Sub-Themes	0	-2	2	1	5	5	1	2	1	1	1	5	3	0	1
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O