

## Chapter 3

# Discovering Dabrowski's Theory

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I started working with Dabrowski in the winter of 1967, soon after taking a faculty position at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. I had previously heard from an Italian friend about Dabrowski's theory that psychoneurosis should be treated not as an illness but rather as a process of emotional growth. This intrigued me. At 64, Dabrowski made a strong impression with his goatee, intense eyes, animation, lively gesticulation, friendly smile, and vibrant voice. I asked for something of his to read. Besides books published in Poland, he had several chapters in English in manuscript form. They seemed garbled. I realized that whoever did the translation did not understand what Dabrowski was saying. Unlike his French, Dabrowski's English was too limited to check the translation, although it was quite adequate in conversation and his seminars.

Dabrowski suggested that we meet on Sunday afternoons to go over these fractured texts. Sentence by sentence, I asked what he meant, and he explained. Dabrowski had the tendency to write a sentence where a paragraph was needed, so I kept asking for elaboration. Bit by bit, his theory emerged. Dabrowski talked passionately about the inner psychic milieu, the processes of positive disintegration, multilevelness (often coupled in one breath with multidimensional diagnosis), and the dynamisms. The thrust of his thinking was directed toward multilevel disintegration, and it was about this time that the conception of levels IV and V began to take its final form (see Table 3.1).

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**Table 3.1: The Evolution of Dabrowski's Theory**

Dabrowski's theory took many years to evolve to its final form in 1972. There are clear beginnings in his 1938 monograph on *Psychological Bases of Self-Mutilation*. World War II interrupted his work, and the rupture was compounded by communist takeover of Poland and his imprisonment for two years. When after Stalin's death in 1953 things relented politically to some degree, Dabrowski managed to publish *On Positive Disintegration* in 1956, which was later largely incorporated into the English translation as *Personality-Shaping through Positive Disintegration* in 1967. The structure of levels was not yet fully defined, and the main emphasis was on distinguishing unilevel from multilevel growth process.

**Dynamisms of Positive Disintegration in  
Successive Versions of Dabrowski's Theory**

	1964	1967	1970	1972/74/77	
Personality Ideal	+	+	+	+	and DDC on a high level
Autonomy			+	+	V
Authenticism			+	+	
Responsibility			+	+	
Education of Oneself			+	+	
Autopsychotherapy			+	+	
Self-Control			+	+	
Self-Awareness			+	+	
Inner Psychic Transformation			+	+	IV shaping, organizing
Third Factor	+	+	+	+	
Subject-Object in Oneself	+	+	+	+	
Hierarchization			(+)		
Positive Maladjustment	—	—	+	+	
Guilt	++	+	+	+	
Shame	+	+	+	+	III spontaneous multilevel
Astonishment with Oneself	(+)	(+)	+	+	
Disquietude with Oneself	+	+	+	+	
Inferiority toward Oneself	++	+	+	+	
Dissatisfaction with Oneself	+	+	+	+	
Second Factor	—	—	+	+	
Ambivalences	+	+	+	+	II unilevel
Ambitendencies	+	+	+	+	
Creative Instinct			+	+	
Empathy			+	+	a group of dynamisms that extend through more than one level
Identification			+	+	
Inner Conflict			+	+	
Temperamental Syntony			+	+	
Disposing & Directing Center	+	+	+	+	

+ indicates inclusion and description; ++ indicates stronger emphasis on the dynamism; (+) indicates a mention without description. Dynamisms of Level IV prepare Level V.

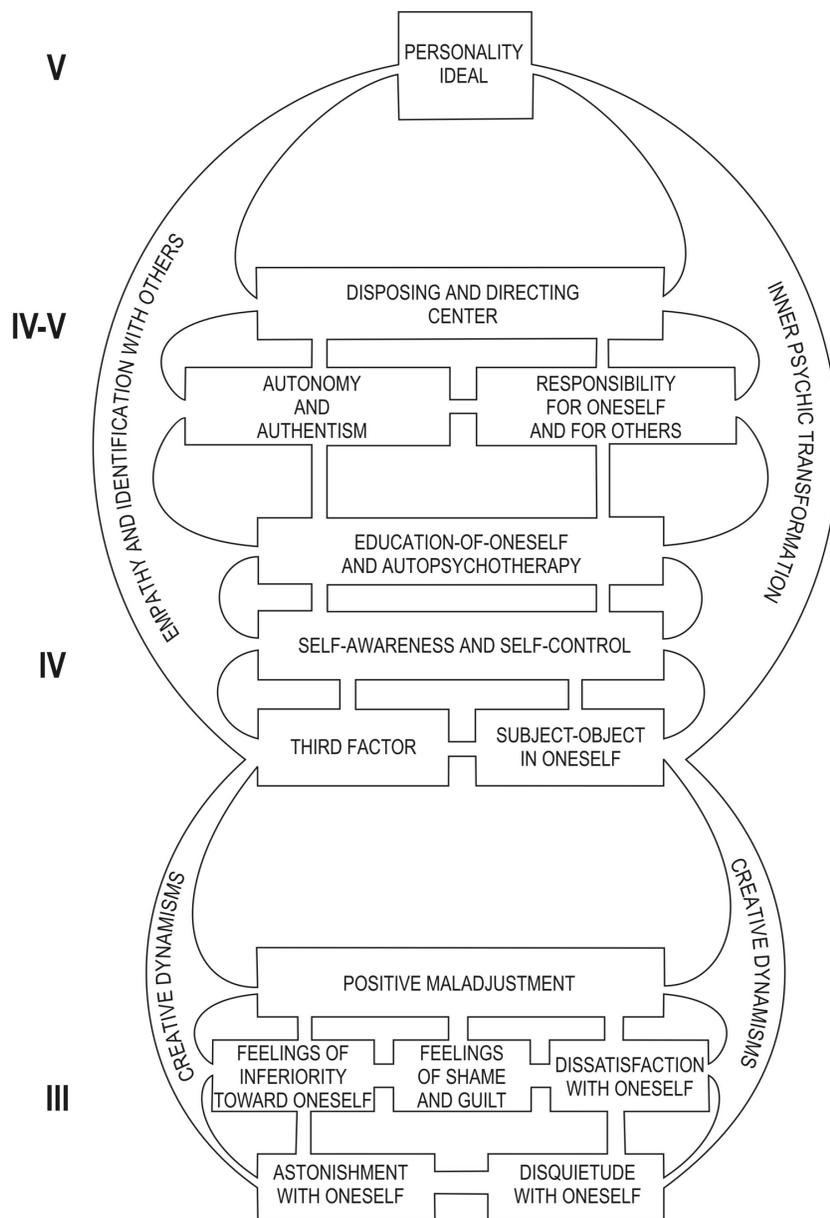
Note. In 1964, 1967, and 1970, levels were not described as I, II, III, etc. This appears for the first time in 1972.

The result of these sessions were chapters in *Mental Growth through Positive Disintegration*, a work that owes a very significant part to Andrzej Kawczak, a philosopher at Loyola University of Montreal, who worked with Dabrowski for a number of years. Prior to the book's publication in London in 1970, Dabrowski had two pieces of our collaboration translated into French and published in *Annales Médico-Psychologiques*. The first, on the inner psychic milieu, contained my initial attempt to create a visual picture of the dynamisms of the theory that would place them in the order that Dabrowski felt they tended to emerge (Dabrowski, 1968). He must have thought the drawing an adequate visual approximation to his conception of his theory (Figure 3.1, page 44). He used to say that in his mind, he saw the dynamisms as if on stage, certainly a more animated and dramatic vision than my two-dimensional imitation of Moorish arches.

The second piece was on higher emotions and values, in which Dabrowski argued for an objectively based, universal hierarchy of values (Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1969). As a neurologist, he firmly believed that as a person achieves higher levels of development, corresponding changes take place in the nervous system. He relied on a neurological exam of his own design as an initial assessment of the person's developmental level.

The first concept for me to grasp was the inner psychic milieu, defined as the totality of dynamisms emerging in Level III. Dabrowski believed that multilevel disintegration was indispensable for development. Little significant inner life exists in Levels I (primary integration) and II (unilevel disintegration). For Dabrowski, inner life begins with multilevel processes of introspection, self-examination, and self-evaluation. The varieties of inner conflict between higher and lower in oneself are represented by the dynamisms of Level III.

Figure 3.1. Dynamisms of Positive Disintegration  
(Dabrowski, Kawczak, & Piechowski, 1970)



In the summer of 1968, Dabrowski was invited to the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California to give a weeklong workshop. The invitation came through his contact with Abraham Maslow, who saw great promise in Dabrowski's theory as one that emphasized human potential (Maslow, 1968). Dabrowski asked me to come along to help him present the theory. We traveled in a large group—his wife and their two teenage daughters, and Andrzej Kawczak and his wife. Looking back, I can say that I did not fully grasp his theory at the time. My exposition was based entirely on the discussions and the writing that we labored over. Yet it went well. Being at Esalen was an unforgettable experience. The Esalen founders, Dick Price and Michael Murphy, were warmhearted hosts. The presence of Fritz Perls added color and frisson to the experience. True to type of makers of theories, Dabrowski and Perls did not have much to say to each other.

### The Multilevelness Research Project

Dabrowski was trying hard to get funding for an institute where he could demonstrate his clinical methods. Because of the generally held view in those days that emotions are primitive undifferentiated energizers of behavior, any attempt to distinguish levels of emotional functioning was deemed unrealistic. And because of widely held views that emotions are more primitive than cognition and that values are relative and culturally determined, the attempt to differentiate levels of valuation as levels of emotional functioning was looked upon as quixotic.

Eventually, Canada Council gave Dabrowski a three-year research grant to showcase his theory through a multifaceted analysis of case examples. The idea was to ask volunteers to write autobiographies and open-ended responses to Verbal Stimuli, take an intelligence test, and take a neurological exam. A clinical-diagnostic interview collected essential information about the person. Dabrowski's principal research assistants in this project were Marlene King (now Rankel) and Dexter R. Amend. Marlene King was in charge of the enormous task of collecting the material and keeping track of subjects, their appointments, and their testing. Dexter R. Amend worked with Dabrowski on the description and final form of the neurological exam.

As the project was getting off the ground, I left the University of Alberta in January of 1970 to become once again a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin, this time in counseling. My departure did not make Dabrowski happy. However, our close collaboration continued until

1975. The years 1970 and 1971 were spent working together on his book *Psychoneurosis Is Not an Illness* (1972). Pages with clarifications, elaborations, inclusion of new clinical examples, and successive revisions grew to a stack one foot high. As Dabrowski tended to grossly underestimate the amount of work needed, I was tempted to send my stack of pages to him as concrete evidence of the amount of labor involved. At one time, I told him that I was sure it would have been easier to be his patient than to work with him. He agreed. Still, his sense of urgency about the work made the whole atmosphere around him charged with excitement.

In the meantime, his research team screened hundreds of subjects by means of an inventory. In the end, 81 subjects completed the autobiography and open-ended Verbal Stimuli, for which the instructions were “to describe freely in relation to each word listed your emotional association and experiences.” The stimuli were: great sadness, great joy, death, uncertainty, solitude and loneliness, suicide, nervousness, inhibition, inner conflict, ideal, success, and immortality. Dabrowski and his team sifted through the accumulated material searching for cases representative of each level of development.

The initial plan was to develop measures roughly defining the level of emotional development for a given individual. But emotional development is complex. Every individual has a developmental “center of gravity” or dominant level at which he or she functions emotionally and intellectually. Leaning away from this “center”—now toward a lower level, now toward a higher one—is to be expected. In every profile, there will be residues of previous developmental levels, as well as precursors of higher levels—those toward which the individual is moving. Consequently, one cannot hope to find individuals narrowly confined to only one level. Furthermore, not all dynamisms are activated uniformly. Some advance and some lag behind, while others may never be brought into play. No cross section of development can represent only one level (unless it be Level I). A new method of analyzing autobiographical material was needed.

Dabrowski's way of reading the material was to look for key emotional events to assess the type and level of development. He used to designate the level of an identified dynamism or emotional experience as, say, II or III. But he also made intermediate designations, for instance II/III (more II and less III) or III/II (more III and less II). Now this is subtle! Not infrequently, he would give a dynamism a different name. I was beginning to see that some order must be introduced here—the theoretical terms

ought to be consistent. And this is how the final structure of the levels became fixed. In order for an analysis to be possible, the dynamisms had to be defined and their list closed to stave off any of Dabrowski's further inventions.

### Devising a Method of Analysis

The autobiographies and Verbal Stimuli so selected were sent to me for analysis. It was up to me to figure out how to analyze them for dynamisms and telling signs of developmental level. Since no single case qualified as representing Level IV, Dabrowski decided on Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, the French aviator and author of the *Little Prince*, *Night Flight*, and *Citadel*, who perished on a reconnaissance mission over the Mediterranean in 1944. He was 44 years old. His notebooks and letters had adequate material for a developmental analysis.

The question of method was simply this: how to read the text to identify all of the indicators of developmental level in a consistent way so that the qualitative process of identifying the terms of the theory could produce quantitative results for comparisons. At this point, I had no training in psychological research. I was trained first as a plant physiologist and then as a molecular biologist. I knew that scientific inquiry begins with a question and observation and that observations can be counted. I needed units of analysis. The Greeks conceived of *atomos* as something so small that it cannot be cut any further, the ultimate uncuttable unit. I decided to cut the text into the smallest swatches of text that remained coherent and could be understood if read apart from the rest of the text. I called these units "response units." They varied in size, just as analysis by paragraphs would have units of varied size. I learned later that what I did was to prepare the text for content analysis.

The task was to tie the terms of the theory to personal expressions of experience. On the first reading of each unit, I tried to decide whether, in what was being expressed, one could identify a dynamism or any other telling sign of a level. This was tedium of the first degree. I tried to determine the developmental level of the expression. Incipient and weak expressions of dynamisms were designated as "precursors." After reading all of the units for dynamisms, I then tried to discern whether any of the "functions" were represented. This was tedium of the second degree, and the more bothersome of the two. Then, I noticed that people describing their experiences were also showing overexcitability. I found it virtually impossible to rate the

units simultaneously for dynamisms and overexcitabilities. These terms are conceptually very different and require a different mental set. Consequently, they had to be rated in separate readings of the material.

Why wasn't there a second independent rater, one may ask. The answer to this is simply that I was alone with the task, 1,437 miles away from Edmonton, and I was developing the method as I went along. But even one rater can be checked for reliability, as I explain later.

In the end, six cases were completed plus Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. Because each response unit was a sampling event to fish out the theoretical terms, the number of response units, rather than the number of subjects, constituted the proper N here. The final N was 866 response units. Table 3.2 shows the age, intelligence, the number of response units, and the number of ratings for each subject (Piechowski, 1975b).

Table 3.2: Subject Data (Piechowski, 1975b)

Subject	Age & Sex	IQ	Number of response units	Number of ratings
no. 1	23, M	115+	46	53
no. 2	23, F	129	96	117
no. 3	44, F	117	112	194
no. 4	17, M	120	162	325
no. 5	20, M	108	155	294
no. 6	34, F	140	182	346
Saint-Exupéry	44, M	not known	113	261
			866	1590

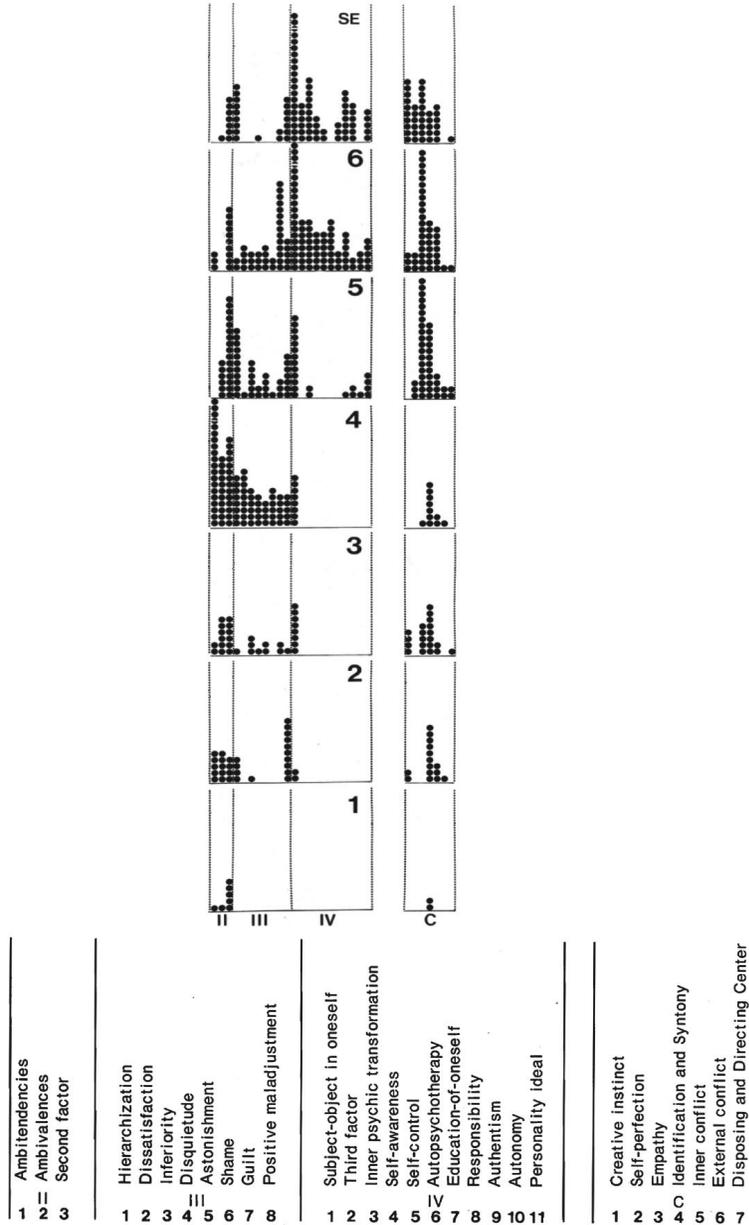
Each response unit was rated as follows. First, I attempted to establish whether the expressed content was a manifestation of one of the developmental dynamisms. Sometimes more than one dynamism was identified. If none was identified, then I tried to identify what aspect of behavior could be discerned—e.g., sadness, joy, anger, fear, etc. These expressions of behavior Dabrowski called “functions.” Next, I assigned a level to the response unit. The level rating has nine possible values: five full levels—I, II, III, IV, and V—and four midlevels—I-II, II-III, III-IV, and IV-V. When this was done, I read the material over again for the presence of forms of overexcitability.

Converting Dabrowski's large conceptions of levels—rich structures made of many dynamisms—into a numerical expression raises the question: Where does a level begin and where does it end? The Roman numerals for levels needed to be converted into the range of values obtained from averaging all of the sampling events for a given subject. Therefore, values 2.0, 3.0, and 4.0 are the modal values for the three levels. The range of values for Level II would have to be from 1.6 to 2.5, for Level III from 2.6 to 3.5, for Level IV from 3.6 to 4.5. Level I is left with 1.0–1.5, and Level V with 4.6–5.0.

I made a graph of the distribution of dynamisms in the material of each subject (see Figure 3.2, page ). Each instance of a dynamism was represented by a dot, which was placed in a slot reserved for that dynamism. The vertical scale held the dynamism slots, the horizontal scale the actual number of instances a given dynamism was counted. Stacking the graphs showed that, moving from the lower- to the higher-level subjects, the appropriate dynamisms of higher level become more frequent, while those of lower levels diminish in frequency.

Figure 3.2. Dynamisms of Positive Disintegration in Six Subjects and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Each dot represents a single occurrence of a given dynamism. II, III, and IV refer to developmental levels. C is a group of dynamisms that extend through more than one level. (Piechowski, 1975b).



It occurred to me that one could compare Dabrowski's intuitive, clinical assessment of the developmental potential (DP) of each subject with the values obtained from the equation  $DP = d + oe$  (read on for an explanation of this). The subjects' DP values were then placed on an arbitrary metric scale extending from 0 to 50. Dabrowski's values were placed on the opposite side of the scale. The agreement was fairly good (Piechowski, 1975b).

Furthermore, Dabrowski's neurological examination is composed of 14 items. Each item produces one level designation. The sum divided by 14 showed close agreement with the level index obtained from autobiographies. The agreement of the neurological level index for each subject with the value obtained from Verbal Stimuli was again quite close, except for no. 6 (Table 3.3).

**Table 3.3: Level Index from Neurological Examination, Autobiography, and Verbal Stimuli (Dabrowski and Piechowski, 1977)**

Subject	Neurological Examination	Autobiography	Verbal Stimuli
no. 1	1.27	1.31	1.33
no. 2	2.18	2.29	2.28
no. 3	2.40	2.42	2.43
no. 4	2.33	2.22	2.30
no. 5	2.62	2.66	2.92
no. 6	2.79	3.21	3.41

### Post Facto Empirical Tests of the Theory

So what was finally accomplished? The detailed, atomistic content analysis of the autobiographies and Verbal Stimuli made possible three empirical tests of Dabrowski's theory. The possibility of such tests did not present itself until after the ratings were done.

The dynamism ratings from each subject did form a cluster. Each cluster corresponded to part of the overall spectrum of dynamisms from Level II to V. The material from each subject provided a developmental cross-section. These cross-sections overlapped and together reproduced the complete spectrum. This made one empirical test of the theory.

The second empirical test was provided by checking the constancy of DP. DP was calculated by adding the frequencies of dynamisms (d) and

overexcitabilities (oe):  $DP = d + oe$ . The relative frequencies varied, but the sum was expected to remain constant. When the material from a chronologically written autobiography was divided into two halves—early and later portions of life—the DP value was very close for the two halves. However, between the first and the second half, the balance of dynamisms and overexcitabilities changed dramatically.<sup>2</sup>

The third empirical test compared clinical intuitive estimates of DP for each subject made by Dabrowski with the calculated values obtained from the content analysis. These two sets of values showed reasonable agreement (Piechowski, 1975b). The close three-way agreement between the level index obtained from the neurological examination with the indices obtained from autobiography and Verbal Stimuli serves as an additional test.

No doubt, the question exists whether all of these values and comparisons are completely independent from each other. Since there was no possibility of carrying out a blind analysis, I made every effort to be meticulous about dissecting the material as consistently as possible—and the correlations for split halves showed that it was—in order to be able to arrive at a reasonable pool of quantitative data from which to reconstruct the patterns predicted by the theory and test some of its basic assumptions.

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<sup>2</sup> *Test of Internal Consistency* (from Piechowski, 1975b). There were four rating categories: dynamisms (D), dynamism precursors (P), functions (F), and overexcitabilities (OE). For a given subject, the total number of ratings was  $b = D + P + F + OE$ . A unit may have zero, one, or more ratings. The total number of units for a subject was  $a$ . The ratio  $b/a$  was called the yield (Y). The ratio Y was useful as one test of the internal consistency of the rating process of the one rater, myself. Calculated from each half of the material from each subject—thus 14 pairs—it gave the not-so-shabby .97 as the correlation for these pairs.

Another test of internal consistency was the computation of the value for developmental potential from  $DP = d + oe$  [as above], where  $d$  is the frequency of expressions of dynamisms in a subject's material and  $oe$  is the frequency of expressions of overexcitability. The material from each subject was divided into two halves. The DP was then computed from each half independently. The correlation between these 14 pairs of values was .94.

As development advances, expressions of dynamisms increase in frequency, while expressions of overexcitability decrease. One could speculate that the raw material of overexcitabilities is being transformed into specific intrapsychic agents of inner transformation. One of the autobiographies (no. 6) showed this trend, as it had a consistent chronological order. I divided it into two parts, from age 3 to 15, and from 16 to 35. In the first part, the proportion of expressions of overexcitabilities was 46% and of dynamisms 38%. In the second part, the overexcitability portion was 17% and the dynamisms portion was 61%. The sums were, respectively, 84 and 78, which is pretty close. One could conclude from this that developmental potential remains constant.

## The Good Form of Dabrowski's Theory

From this detailed effort grew my understanding of the nature of the dynamisms and of the structure of the theory. I learned that to gain the working knowledge of a theory, much labor goes into understanding it. The process of trying to recognize the expression of a dynamism, an overexcitability, or a “function” in the varied ways people described their feelings and experiences was, in a way, my field experience. I gained more respect for other theories when, years later, I taught theories of personality, because I knew that I had not lived with each theory as I did with the theory of positive disintegration.

As a proposal for my dissertation in counseling, I presented two completed papers—one on the theory, the other on the research described above, already submitted for publication as one monograph (Piechowski, 1975b). I felt that this was more than enough. I expected the counseling faculty to be duly impressed, since instead of a proposal, I was offering work already completed and with some substance. But because the theory was unfamiliar, they failed to be duly impressed. They asked me to make a comparison of Dabrowski's unknown theory with theories that were known to them, specifically Carl Rogers's client-centered therapy and Maslow's hierarchy of needs and his concept of psychological health. In due course, I carried out the comparison, not only with Rogers and Maslow, but also with 10 other theories of counseling and psychotherapy (Piechowski, 1975a). To do this, I studied the nature of scientific theories and the concepts on which they are founded. I could see that the concepts of Dabrowski's theory had good form. As a biologist, I knew that the concept of levels, with their structure defined by dynamisms, was a good concept. The overexcitabilities were not only good descriptive terms but also had a biological basis as the ways in which a person's nervous system handles experience. What made these terms good was that they described properties that were part of a person's biological makeup. Thus, the theory was constructed with terms that allowed measurement, and the measurement made possible the study of individual differences. It must be noted that the developmental theories of that time—Piaget, Kohlberg, and Loevinger—presented presumed universal patterns with no provisions for individual differences at any level.

As a former molecular biologist, I could see that Dabrowski's theory met the criteria of a scientific theory. The theory of positive disintegration had good formal structure, was empirically verifiable through research, and had

provisions for uncovering individual differences (Piechowski, 1975a). This is why it appealed to me from the beginning. Worth pointing out are the 72 hypotheses formulated by Dabrowski and Kawczak that give the theory a well-articulated, formal definition (Dabrowski et al., 1970).

As I was coming into contact with psychology, I could not understand the long-standing divorce from biology, especially the human brain. Seeing the exclusive focus on general laws of learning and general personality, I asked: Where do they address individual differences? I'll give one telling example that is still largely in force today. So much effort has gone into studying and measuring intelligence, and yet little research by mainstream psychologists has been directed to where intelligence is expressed most sharply—in highly gifted children and adults—and with an enormous range of individual differences that are far from being fully investigated.

### *Limited DP Is Not Necessarily Limiting*

Developmental potential is a necessary concept in Dabrowski's theory to explain differences in attained level of development. Barry Grant, whose research on moral development I discuss later, pointed out that spelling out unequal endowment for development creates one of the strong objections to Dabrowski's theory in egalitarian-thinking educators and social scientists (Grant, personal communication, March 24, 2007). My counter to this is that under optimal conditions, even children with limited developmental potential can grow up to be good citizens with a strong sense of fairness.

An illustration to make this point comes from a longitudinal study of adolescent character development by Peck and Havighurst (1960). In that study, one boy, Ralph, was at age 17 self-reliant, responsible, endowed with a sense of fairness, well-liked as a team member and as a leader, unafraid of authority, and virtually free of adolescent conflict and rebellion. The secret? A family climate that fostered trust and autonomy. His developmental potential, seen through the Dabrowskian lens, was quite limited. There was little evidence of intellectual, imaginal, or emotional overexcitabilities, but under optimal family conditions, his development was unhampered. (Growing up on a farm had a lot to do with it, too, through many opportunities to develop a sense of competence.) Peck and Havighurst placed him in their highest category of maturity of character: rational-altruistic. A limited potential does not limit a child from becoming an upright, positive human being, provided the conditions of growing up are close to optimal, as they were in Ralph's case.

Arthur was a different boy. Overweight, aloof from others, bright but often hostile, imaginative but self-centered, impulsive but conflicted and guilt-ridden, he grew up with a mother who openly disliked and ridiculed him. His father, who lived elsewhere, had no interest in his son and only tolerated him. Yet the team of observers, to whom Arthur was the epitome of emotional immaturity and instability, noted that by age 17 he had become more stable and had more self-control. They said—and this is highly significant in light of repeated observations, tests, and interviews over a period of seven years—"Nothing and no one in particular has helped him of late years." In my view, without his intelligence combined with his strong imaginal and emotional overexcitabilities, he would have ended up in an institution—mental or penitentiary. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that he did grow and become more mature, because he had the capacity for intelligent emotional assessment of others and himself, despite the absence of a nurturing and modeling adult. Arthur is a striking example of strong developmental potential overcoming an extremely unfavorable environment.

### The Problem of Primary Integration

After getting my degree in counseling from the University of Wisconsin, I took a faculty position at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. My first graduate student, Margaret Lee Schmidt, chose for her Master's thesis the comparison of Kohlberg's and Dabrowski's theories (Schmidt, 1977). Her analysis led her to several conclusions, three of which are relevant here. One, that the first four stages of Kohlberg's sequence of moral reasoning are encompassed within Dabrowski's Level I (primary integration). Two, that the study of authoritarian personality (Adorno, Fraenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950) was the best description of behavior characterizing Level I. And three, that Level I is not a personality structure, but instead is the result of limited developmental potential of people trying to survive in a ruthlessly competitive and economically uncertain world. While Dabrowski, just like Adorno et al., viewed primary integration as a rigid personality structure, now it makes more sense to see it as the outcome of social conditions. If people are operating at Level I, it is because this is the condition of their world, not because they are constituted that way (Piechowski, 2003).

The growing understanding that depression in men often manifests itself by outbursts of workaholism, anger, irritability, shaming, and blaming (Real, 1997; Scelfo, 2007) should prompt increased caution about

assigning Level I to observed behavior. Furthermore, there is nothing primary about primary integration. It is not the starting point of development, and it conflicts with our evolutionary design for primary affectional attachment (Bowlby, 1969). We are born as social beings programmed for social interaction through cooing, smiling, and calming in loving arms. Asocial character develops because of emotional injuries that repeatedly break the bond of attachment. If it looks like an integration, it is due to the defensive armor to protect oneself from emotional hurt.

Levels are not real; they are abstract concepts (Piechowski, 2003). They do not have a beginning or an end in the manner of stages of development. It cannot be said that a newborn has a personality; therefore, primary integration cannot be assigned to a baby. All of these arguments force us to reconsider the concept of primary integration.

### Self-Actualizing People and Level IV

For one of the readings in my course on personality, I chose Maslow's *Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, published in 1971 after his death. His frequent reference to self-actualizing people as the measure of psychological health and as a standard of right and wrong persuaded me to read his descriptions of self-actualizing people. Reading it was an *aha!* experience; here were rich descriptions of the thoughts, feelings, and motivations of people who were like Saint-Exupéry.

Using the Saint-Exupéry's material, I set out to identify the characteristics of self-actualization. First, I compiled a list of descriptors of self-actualization from Maslow's chapter in *Motivation and Personality* (Maslow, 1970), in which he delineated 16 characteristics of self-actualizing people. Then I tried to identify these characteristics in each of the 113 units from Saint-Exupéry. The task of working out the intersection of the 16 characteristics of self-actualization with the 30 dynamisms of Dabrowski's theory was extraordinarily tedious, yet deeply satisfying. Of Level III, only two dynamisms, hierarchization and positive maladjustment, were strongly represented in Saint-Exupéry's profile, but of Level IV, all but two were present. There were no traces of Level II. This, to me, convincingly demonstrated that when Maslow described self-actualizing people, he was looking at the same kind of people on whom Dabrowski had been formulating his idea of Level IV (Piechowski, 1978).

As Saint-Exupéry was Dabrowski's choice, I submitted the paper under my name and his. I sent a copy to Dabrowski but got no response. It

took almost two years before I got the galleys. They came without Dabrowski's name on them. As it turned out, he wrote to the editor of *Genetic Psychology Monographs* asking that his name be dropped from the paper. To his credit, he did not block the publication, but it was odd that he did not inform me of his decision. So I asked him, and he explained that every paper on his theory should have his name as the first author. However, there was also another reason. He felt strongly that Maslow's belief that satisfaction of lower needs would more or less automatically move people toward self-actualization was fundamentally wrong. He didn't know that Maslow had changed his position and realized that self-actualization does not necessarily follow satisfaction of all of the needs below (Maslow, 1971). I believe he must not have read Maslow's description of self-actualizing people nor gotten through my paper (it is rather dense). His conclusion was that his theory and Maslow's could not be commensurate. He never understood that by providing a theoretical structure for Maslow's concept of self-actualization, his theory was showing its power. Here were two independently developed conceptions that had a perfect correspondence. How often does this happen?

Objections to equating self-actualization with Level IV came not only from Dabrowski but also from people who read Saint-Exupéry's biography and found that his relationship with his wife was less than ideal and that he had a mistress. This violated Dabrowski's saying that people at a high level of development have deep and loyal relationships. However, a person's profile cannot be expected to conform completely to ideal type—Maslow did list imperfections in the characteristics of self-actualizing people—and additionally, the idealism of a person expresses the level toward which they are moving. An analogous case can be seen with Leo Tolstoy who, after 10 years of happy marriage, acted on his ideals of a simple life, renouncing his wealth and, instead of writing, dedicated himself to educating peasant children (Marsh & Colangelo, 1983). With 10 children to raise, his wife objected to this radical curtailing of income, and this caused serious conflict.

The study of Saint-Exupéry paved the way for an analysis of the self-actualization profile of Eleanor Roosevelt, and of her personal growth and inner transformation (Piechowski, 1990; Piechowski & Tyska, 1982). Other case studies of self-actualizing people based on the framework of Dabrowski's theory followed (Brennan & Piechowski, 1991). Any attempt to negate the validity of Saint-Exupéry's self-actualization profile would

have to face the similarity of his and Eleanor Roosevelt's profiles, despite their vastly different personalities. There is also the striking similarity in their philosophies of life. They both stressed the necessity to be actively engaged in life, be it socially, politically, or creatively. This is what makes for living fully. They both tended to be concerned with problems that are universal and central to human existence, and to the existence having meaning, and they both wanted to awaken their fellow human beings to the utter urgency of these problems (Piechowski & Tyska, 1982).

The fit between Level IV as the structural skeleton and self-actualization as the flesh of rich description with which to cover the bones is too good not to be true. Rev. Charles Payne produced a case study of the emotional development of Paul Robeson—singer, actor, and a protest leader, a man of high moral stature—showing him to be both self-actualizing and meeting Level IV criteria (Payne, 1987).

Anna Mróz (2002a) studied seven remarkable persons, aged 30 to 63, whose level scores ranged from 3.3 to 3.8. She obtained autobiographical narratives in three sessions in a dialogue format. The first two were devoted to the life story itself and her questions, the third to checking for understanding and accuracy. She used the Miller method to find persons deeply engaged in multilevel growth (Miller, 1985; Miller & Silverman, 1987). Of the 37 initially asked to participate, 19 filled out the questionnaire, and seven stayed with her to the end.

One of her subjects was a painter, 52 years old, married. As a boy, he was very introspective and found that he could not communicate to others his inner world nor obtain from them an idea of their world. "A blocking on both sides, and nothing could be done about it," he said. But he continued to look for means of communication while safeguarding his individuality. In his early twenties, while studying art, he found a friend with whom he could communicate without speaking: "Sometimes we were saying nothing. We could sit for hours and look at each other. At times we had conversations without speaking." Later with his wife, he experienced a relationship that was "something more than a mutual understanding of souls." His personal growth continued through integrating his life as a husband, father, teacher, and artist. His overriding consideration was a growing sense of responsibility in all aspects of his life.

For a 30-year old actor in Mróz's study, his time in nature until the age of six—he referred to himself as a "child raised in the woods"—was a source of such ecstatic experiences that it literally took his breath away. At

such moments, he felt he wasn't breathing. Starting school was a shock for this free-roaming, beautiful spirit. In his early teens in order to adapt, he assumed a mask of tough masculinity. But inside himself, he cried in his loneliness and sought to regain his childhood experiences and to find communion with others. In his later teens, he devoted more time to being alone, to getting rid of the mask and facing himself. During his years of studying art, he found that "people can be beautiful" and that "individualism within a group" is preferred. He developed a deep relationship with a woman who soon became ill. The imminent threat of losing her brought pain and anxiety ("I was very much afraid I won't see her the next day"). As a young adult, he rebelled against God's indifference to human pain, but now realized that the experience of oneness with God includes the experience of pain as part of life: "I saw her suffering, but then I saw suffering through her, all of it, how much there is." He began work with youth: "Now is the time when everything that grew in me, and continues to grow, be given to others."

Another of Mróz's subjects, a nun, was very much frightened in her childhood by the war (WWII) and the threat to her father's safety. Yet she remembered herself as a happy child and very religious. Even as a child, she was aware that she had to work on herself—that more was needed than piety. She realized that she could place herself in God's presence and pray without words. In fact, verbal prayers became a hindrance. In religious ceremonies, she liked to stand with the banner, using it to conceal herself from people. The immediacy of God's presence, she said, was a gift of the ease of making contact, given to her freely. She underwent many tests, as every spiritual person must. Her empathy grew deeper and stronger, and her inner life was growing in depth. Her guiding motive was "to not betray the God who dwells in me" and to progressively purify her intent. She experienced God as outside space and outside time. She worked with children and married couples. To her, God was acting like a "marvelous educator." She felt herself to be God's temple. The last phase of her life at age 63 bespeaks the realization of the personality ideal, the principal dynamism of Level V—in sum, a profound inner transformation.

People whose developmental "center of gravity" is at an advanced level can be found; one only needs to know how to look and where to look. I have described Ashley, 44 years old, a university professor from whom I had three consecutive annual responses to measures of developmental level and overexcitability. She devoted her life to teaching—she is perhaps the

most hardworking teacher I have met—while her vacations have been spent in highly concentrated study. Ashley's reports were scored at level 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3, respectively, by the Miller method (see Miller's chapter, this volume). Scores for Level IV extend from 3.6 to 4.5; consequently, Ashley's scores reflect a very advanced multilevel growth, approaching Level V. The scores themselves cannot reflect the profound changes that took place. Characteristically, and in agreement with Dabrowski's theory, the first report had a number of responses that were scored at Level III. The last full report had none. Nancy Miller and Frank Falk, who did the scoring, remarked that of the 270 protocols they scored, this is the highest level material they have seen (Piechowski, 1992b).

Tom Brennan found these types of people by strategic nomination (Brennan, 1987). Janneke Frank (2006) identified an inspirational teacher of gifted students and carried out an in-depth case study of his advanced multilevel development. Janice Witzel (1991) found them serendipitously among never-married women who turned out to be gifted, happy, self-actualizing, and invisible. Thanks to the single qualification—"well thought of"—the women nominated for Witzel's study were outstanding in their achievement, often despite lack of support in their environment, making their achievement even more amazing. They had a high level of energy, had drive for autonomy and development of their own powers, responded to opportunities and help offered, had high self-esteem, lived a deeply satisfying way of life, and were able to let go of experiences without devaluing. They were actively altruistic by being engaged in heavy-duty volunteer work. And despite such high qualities, as single women, they were unnoticed. They fit Maslow's criteria of self-actualization, which makes them good candidates for advanced multilevel growth (Witzel, 1991; Piechowski, 1998).

Perhaps the question to decide is this: Do all self-actualizing people meet the criteria of Dabrowski's Level IV? The reverse, all people who meet the criteria of Level IV are self-actualizing, can be safely assumed to be true. If this is to be studied, then the criteria for identifying them should come from Maslow's description of self-actualizing people and not by the means of the Personal Orientation Inventory (Shostrom, 1963). As I have argued elsewhere, that inventory is basically limited to the Rogerian concept of openness to experience and does not include the much more telling characteristics in Maslow's description (Piechowski & Tyska, 1982).

## The Problem of Level V

If Level IV is not easy to grasp, particularly if one has an unrealistically idealized notion of it, Level V presents an even greater problem. Who can say they know personally someone so advanced as to qualify for this lofty plane of the most advanced development? How perfect can one expect such a person to be? Is such a person possible at all in our midst who would be like Jesus Christ, Saint Francis of Assisi, Gautama Buddha, Paramahansa Yogananda, or the Dalai Lama? Would Mother Teresa be a good example, her detractors notwithstanding? Shall we look among the saints? Religion, if followed with conviction, imposes a demanding personal discipline. Consequently, one could argue that a person without a religion would have no chance of attaining the most advanced level. However, there are secular people who do attain Level V—some might say without the outside help of a religious discipline. In view of this, I always felt that the most convincing examples of high levels of development are secular.

My first candidate for Level V was Dag Hammarskjöld, the great Secretary General of the United Nations (1953-1961), awarded posthumously the Nobel Peace Prize. My intention was to analyze his *Markings*, but the task seemed daunting, because some of his reflections are cryptic and also not always an immediate record of his own feelings. Dag Hammarskjöld chose to serve all nations, but especially the small emerging nations of the world. It was not an easy choice; he knew the stranglehold of loneliness. Because he made the United Nations operate according to the ideals of its charter, he has been called Servant of Peace. The inner transformation that he forged in his life opened to him transcendental realms:

*Now you know, when the worries over your work loosen their grip, then this experience of light, warmth, and power. From without—a sustaining element, like air to a glider, or water to a swimmer... through me there flashes this vision of a magnetic field in the soul, created in a timeless present by unknown multitudes, living in holy obedience, whose words and actions are a timeless prayer. (Hammarskjöld, 1964, p. 84)*

The metaphor of a magnetic field in the soul offers a glimpse into the inner source of inspiration and energy that is not powered by egoistic desire, but by the willing surrender to an inner ideal, what Dabrowski called personality ideal (Piechowski, 2003).

At some point, I received a copy of *Peace Pilgrim: Her Life and Work in Her Own Words*. Here was an extensive account of an authentic life that convinced me of true representation of Level V (Peace Pilgrim, 1982; Piechowski, 1992b; 2008). She was born Mildred Norman in 1908 on a farm in New Jersey. Her family wasn't churchgoing. Even as a child, she had a bearing that made other children listen to what she had to say. She did not find her mission in life, to work for peace, until after her marriage and divorce and 15 years of work with emotionally disturbed adolescents and adults. She described those 15 years as a struggle between the lower and the higher self—a determined effort to start living what she believed. Then, at a certain point “in the midst of the struggle came a wonderful mountain-top experience, and for the first time I knew what inner peace was like. I felt oneness—oneness with all my fellow human beings, oneness with all of creation. I have never felt really separate since.”

The way she described the phases of her inner growth and spiritual maturing reads like a textbook case of multilevel growth. She drew a jagged line of the inevitable ups and downs of the higher self combating the lower self, followed by a high plateau with only occasional dips out of higher consciousness, and finally the steady smooth upward incline after inner peace was hers for good. She stressed that even though the battle had been won and inner peace had been achieved, inner growth continued (Peace Pilgrim, 1982; Piechowski, 1992b).

Dabrowski was well aware that secondary integration was not a final plateau. However we may try to conceive of the highest state, we can be certain that it grows in depth and intensity. This is how Peace Pilgrim described her inner state after having attained inner peace for good; it is her version of Hammar skjöld's “magnetic field in the soul” and Dabrowski's personality ideal:

*There is a feeling of always being surrounded by all of the good things, like love and peace and joy. It seems like a protective surrounding, and there is an unshakableness within which takes you through any situation you may need to face.... (p. 22)*

*What I walk on is not the energy of youth, it is a better energy. I walk on the endless energy of inner peace that never runs out! When you become a channel through which God works there are no more limitations, because God does the work through you: you are merely the instrument—and what God can do is unlimited. When you are working for God, you do not find yourself*

*striving and straining. You find yourself calm, serene, and unhurried.* (p. 26)

Her mission was to work for “peace among nations, peace among groups, peace within our environment, peace among individuals, and the very, very important inner peace...because that is where peace begins” (Peace Pilgrim, 1982, p. 25). Peace Pilgrim started her pilgrimage of 25,000 miles on foot for peace in 1953, the dark period of the Korean War and rampant McCarthyism. Although there were then small peace groups, the peace movement was not yet born (Peace Pilgrim, 1982; Rush & Rush, 1992). Some years into her pilgrimage, she undertook a 45-day fast in order to stay concentrated on her prayer for peace. Her prayer consciousness became an unbroken continuous state of being: “I learned to pray without ceasing. I made the contact so thoroughly that into my prayer consciousness I put any condition or person I am concerned about and the rest takes place automatically” (p. 73).

A great many people got to know her as she walked from coast to coast in the years between 1953 and 1981. A documentary, *The Spirit of Peace*, brings impressive evidence of the impact of her mission on, for instance, prison programs that drastically reduce recidivism, and on arbitration with the same goal as Gandhi's, that both sides be winners in resolving a conflict. Lawyers involved in arbitration using her *Steps Toward Inner Peace* said that, after 20,000 cases, they have had a steady 80% success rate, *independent* of who is the arbitrator. In the compilation of her talks and in the testimony of those who knew her intimately, there is ample material revealing her consistently high level of energy, kindness, unshakable inner peace, and dedication to her mission to raise people's consciousness for peace (Peace Pilgrim, 1982). This material gives insight into the inner and outer life at Level V of one of our contemporaries (Piechowski, 1992b).

Peace Pilgrim's upbringing was not religious; her search for God was prompted entirely from within, and so was Dag Hammarskjöld's. Etty Hillesum was raised conventionally in the Jewish tradition, but she searched for that essential part of herself that she felt was locked away. It brought her to a life of prayer and an intimate communion with God (Piechowski, 1992a; Spaltro, 1991). She reached deep inside herself and conquered hatred. Amid Nazi horror, she achieved inner peace. She spoke from first-hand knowledge when she affirmed that “everything we need is within us”—everything to give our life meaning, to secure inner peace, to

solve the problems of our time. Like Peace Pilgrim, she affirmed repeatedly that inner peace is the necessary foundation of world peace (Piechowski, 1992a). ETTY HILLESUM'S (1985) diary is perhaps the most detailed record of multilevel development yet.

Abraham Lincoln, raised in his mother's Baptist creed, as a young man rejected religious dogma (Wilson, 1998). In his personal growth, he experienced periods of inner conflict and depression resulting in profound inner transformation. Elizabeth Robinson (2002) and Andrew Kawczak (2002) offer a brief analysis of the phases of positive disintegration in Lincoln's life and conclude that he reached secondary integration.

### The Roominess of Dabrowski's Theory: Levels as Larger Universes

The complexity of Dabrowski's theory should not be underestimated (see Table 3.4). Personal growth is much like scaling a mountain rather than a sequential unfolding of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Imagining personal growth as ascent of a mountain, with all of the peril, tests of courage, and perseverance, suggests that not everyone has the strength, endurance, and determination to go far; few manage to reach the summit. Also, not everyone is interested in climbing and may prefer to remain in the valley. Some may not even be aware of the mountain. The endowment for how far in scaling the figurative mountain an individual can go constitutes developmental potential. An endowment for multilevel development signifies that a person starts already a significant distance up the slope. A person with limited potential starts in the valley and does not reach far.

**Table 3.4: Levels of Emotional Development According to Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration (Piechowski, 2003)**

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**Level I: Primary Integration**

*Dog-eat-dog mentality*

Dominant concern with self-protection and survival; self-serving egocentrism; instrumental view of others

**Level II: Unilevel Disintegration**

*A reed shaken in the wind—Matthew, XI, 7*

Lack of inner direction; inner fragmentation—many selves; submission to the values of the group; relativism of values and beliefs

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	<b>UNILEVEL DYNAMISMS</b>
Ambivalences	Fluctuations between opposite feelings; mood shifts
Ambitendencies	Changeable and conflicting courses of action
Second Factor	Susceptibility to social opinion; feelings of inferiority toward others

**Level III: Spontaneous Multilevel Disintegration**

*Video meliora proboque deteriora sequor.\** —Marcus Tullius Cicero

Sense of the ideal but not reaching it; moral concerns; higher versus lower in oneself

**MULTILEVEL DYNAMISMS**

Multilevel dynamisms are ways of critically perceiving and evaluating the world, others, and oneself, leading to the work of inner transformation

Hierarchy of Values and Social Conscience

Hierarchization and Empathy	<i>What is</i> contrasted with <i>what ought to be</i> : Individual values Universal values lead to authenticity
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Positive Maladjustment and Empathy	Protest against violation of ethical principles
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Emotionally Charged Self-Reactions and Self-Judgments

Dissatisfaction with Oneself	Anger at what is undesirable in oneself; self-loathing
Inferiority toward Oneself	Anger at what is lacking in oneself, of not realizing one's potential

Disquietude with Oneself	Disharmony in one's inner state of being
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Astonishment with Oneself	Surprise in regard to what is undesirable in oneself
Shame	Shame over deficiencies and others' view of one's moral standard

Guilt	Guilt over moral failure; a need to repay and expiate
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**Level IV: Organized Multilevel Disintegration**

*Behind tranquility lies conquered unhappiness.*—Eleanor Roosevelt

Self-actualization; ideals and actions agree; strong sense of responsibility on behalf of others' well-being and inner growth

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	<b>DYNAMISMS OF INNER RESTRUCTURING</b>
Subject-Object in Oneself	The process of critical examination of one's motives and aims; an instrument of self-knowledge
Third Factor	The executive power of choice and decision in one's inner life; active will in self-regulation and self-determination

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\*I regard the better but follow the worse.

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Responsibility	Taking on tasks for the sake of one's own and others' development; empathic responsiveness to social needs
Inner Psychic Transformation	Inner restructuring at a deep level, with lasting consequences beyond return to lower-level functioning
Education of Oneself	A program of change
Autopsychotherapy	Self-designed psychotherapy and preventive measures
Self-Control	Regulating development and keeping in check interfering processes; leads to autonomy
Self-Awareness	Knowledge of one's uniqueness, developmental needs, and existential responsibility
Autonomy	Confidence in one's development; freedom from lower-level drives and motivations

**Level V: Secondary Integration**

*A magnetic field in the soul*—Dag Hammarskjöld

Life inspired by a powerful ideal, such as equal rights, world peace, universal love and compassion, sovereignty of all nations

Personality Ideal	The ultimate goal of development—the essence of one's being
	DYNAMISMS CONTINUING ACROSS LEVELS
Creative Instinct	Becomes the dynamism of perfecting oneself
Empathy	Connectedness; caring; helpfulness
Inner Conflict	In the beginning, a clash of drives; then inner conflict becomes emotional (unilevel) and conscious (multilevel)
Identification	Identification with higher levels and personality ideal
Dis-Identification	Distancing from lower levels and drives
Disposing and Directing Center	Status of will: I: Identified with the main motive (drive) II: Multiple, fragmented, or shifting in direction III: Ascending and descending as a consequence of which level it is attached to (=identified with) IV: Unified V: Personality ideal

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One could say that the theory is spacious; each level is a large universe with much room for many individual developmental paths. Any level can hide widely contrasting types of development, just as under the same IQ there is a wide range of individual intelligence profiles.

Each level has room for many possible patterns and alternative pathways. Barry Grant studied cases of advanced moral development, to which he applied four theories of development: Kohlberg, Gilligan, Dabrowski, and Blasi (Grant, 1988; 1990; 1996). He sought to introduce a dialogue between individual lives and theories, to use the theories to illuminate lives and the lives to check the theories. With four theories in the game, which case was going to have the best fit with any of the four? The development of one of his subjects ("Hendricks") had striking parallels with Kohlberg's own. "Both men were influenced by moral questions raised by *The Brothers Karamazov*; both believed in democratic values." And further, "both men grappled with moral relativism and sought a rational foundation for a universal morality as an alternative to it." Kohlberg found his solution in universal principles in the form of moral reasoning he called "stage 6 justice reasoning" (Grant, 1990, p. 86). Hendricks's solution was to take "rationality as an attitude toward finding and debating truth—tolerance, open-mindedness, awareness of merit in competing views" (p. 87). His rational approach is a morality in the making, rather than a morality that is based on universal principles. Hendricks presents a challenge to Dabrowski's scheme. Grant says Hendricks would be at Level III or IV, because "he has developed a hierarchy of values and, with a strong sense of responsibility, seeks to live out his ideals." However, Grant's exhaustive case study (162 pages) came up with no evidence of inner transformation in the life of this man committed to peace but not to inner growth.

Another of Grant's cases, "Hope Weiss," demonstrates the possibility of multilevel growth being compatible with relativism. Having been raised on Dabrowski's theory, I always believed that relativism of values, and hence moral relativism, belong in the unilevel universe. But Barry Grant explains that there are three kinds of relativism: *descriptive relativism*, which holds that the basic moral tenets of peoples and societies are different and in conflict—this would fit my earlier narrow conception; *normative relativism*, the view that what is right for one society or person is not necessarily right for another in a similar situation; and *meta-ethical relativism*, which says that basic ethical judgments cannot be justified one against another in an objectively valid way. Hope Weiss's morality combines normative and

meta-ethical relativism. Her moral stance was rooted in a sense of a changeless self, which she felt she always had: "My essence has always been the same. I don't know if that's true for everybody....As far as I can remember, from before kindergarten days, I'm really the same inside" (Grant, 1996, p. 121). She believed that there is more than one right response to many situations; consequently, she rejected the idea of universal principles of moral judgment. Her morality was grounded, above all, in compassion. Seeing a person in need, she felt compelled to help.

Hope Weiss's behavior is characteristic of a multilevel way of functioning, and yet she does not feel that she arrived there through a process of positive disintegration; rather, she felt that she had always been that kind of a person. This suggests that it should be possible to find more persons who are born with an unusually strong empathy and an unchanging sense of self. Ann Colby and William Damon (1992) interviewed Suzie Valdez who for years has been "feeding, clothing, and providing medical care for thousands of poor Mexicans living in the surrounds of the huge Ciudad Juarez garbage dump." She said that she always had love: "I love everybody; I mean love. The Lord has given me a love for these people that I myself don't understand" (p. 47). Charleszetta Waddles, another deeply committed person in Colby's and Damon's study, recalled her mother saying to her, "I wish I had a heart like you," and about herself, she said, "I had compassion, I was forgiving, but at that time I didn't call it by that name. I said, 'Well, I just can't help it, I'm free-hearted'" (p. 212).

Two British studies reported people who had, since childhood, a life-long continuous awareness of "this never failing flow of Life—Love—Power...the central spark of life in us" (Maxwell & Tschudin, 1990, p. 195) and being always essentially the same: "I don't feel that *essentially* I have changed much.... I think I always had the idea that the essential 'me' was timeless and free and only for the present suffering all the inhibitions of being encased in a body" (Robinson, 1978, p.141).

Perhaps those who are aware of their essence from a very young age do not need to undergo positive disintegration, while others do, because finding their essence is their life's task that impels seeking, questioning, doubting, scrutinizing, evaluating through positive disintegration, and inner transformation.

Grant's study demonstrated that no single theory, not even the four theories together, could account in full for the developmental pathways of each of the four morally advanced cases. Individual lives are incomparably

richer than any theory, or even a combination of theories. As Goethe said, "Gray is all theory, green is the tree of life."

## The Pearls of Level II

Coming into contact with Dabrowski's theory, one tends to focus on the higher levels, III and IV, and be disdainful of Level II; yet this level deserves understanding and a huge amount of empathy. This did not become clear to me until I read *Women's Ways of Knowing*, by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986).

Level II is not easy to grasp in all its multiple possibilities. I remember once saying to Dabrowski that unilevel disintegration was eluding my understanding. He jokingly answered, "I don't understand it either." Level II is not always characterized by disintegration, because it carries the possibility of partial integration, or adaptive integration, that follows the conventions and dictates of society and one's immediate environment. Level II may carry inner instability that we would see in oscillations of mood, inconsistent ways of acting, or shifting from one extreme to the other. But it is also possible to have a fairly integrated worldview of conventional values or a sort of intellectual rationalism. Fulfilling the expectations of others, family, or society ("second factor") in extreme cases may lead to anorexia and bulimia in gifted women (Gatto-Walden, 1999). Inner fragmentation ("I feel split into a thousand pieces") and unpredictable shifts among many "selves" are often experienced. In adolescence, a failed attempt at identity, which Elkind (1984) called "the patchwork self," is another example of the inner disorganization. At this level, personal growth becomes a struggle toward achieving an individual sense of self.

When a sense of self is undeveloped, personal growth moves toward gaining a sense of one's individuality, coming into one's own as a person. When people trust external authority, depend on it for defining who they are, they derive a sense of self from their role: "I've never had a personality. I've always been someone's daughter, someone's wife, someone's mother" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 82). As long as this does not change, there is no inner development—a Level I (and not yet II) condition remains. A crisis erupts when the authority is exposed as wrong, misleading or exploitative, and abusive. This can happen in a family, in a church, or in the whole nation as it did during the Vietnam War. Feeling betrayed, people reject authority because it failed them. They begin to look for self-knowledge and self-definition in people like themselves, and eventually in themselves.

The first step is liberation from passive acceptance of external authority and replacing it with trust in subjective knowing. The second step is the quest for self. In a radical shift, a person moves away from dependence on external authority to listening to her own inner voice. But the voice is undeveloped, and whatever comes from the “gut” is taken uncritically. The voice does not yet represent the true self. If emotional growth leads no further than the person’s “gut feeling,” it will be swayed by moods, opinions, and chance experiences—what Dabrowski called “ambivalences” and “ambitendencies.” It is then locked in the unilevel range and remains there. But continued growth is definitely possible, moving toward a sense of self.

One of the women in *Women's Ways of Knowing* described how she ceased to obey the whims of external authorities dictating matters of right and wrong. She stopped thinking of herself as dumb and ignorant:

*I can only know with my gut. I've got it tuned to a point where I think and feel all at the same time and I know what is right. My gut is my best friend, the one thing in the world that won't let me down or lie to me or back away from me. (Belenky et al. 1986, p. 53)*

Other women expressed similar change in themselves, the first stirrings of their own inner knowing: “It’s like a certain feeling that you have inside you. It’s like someone could say something to you and you have a feeling. I don’t know if it’s like a jerk or something inside you. It’s hard to explain” (p. 69).

It is possible that the feeling of an inside jerk suggests what Gestalt psychologists and Gendlin (1981) have described as the internal shift of things falling into place when a problem is solved.

*There's a part of me that I didn't even realize I had until recently—instinct, intuition, whatever. It helps me and protects me. It's perceptive and astute. I just listen to the inside of me, and I know what to do. (p. 69)*

Another woman described how she had to leave her past and start anew:

*Being married to him was like having another kid. I was his emotional support system. After I had my son, my maternal instincts were coming out of my ears. They were filled up to here! I remember the first thing I did was to let all my plants die, I couldn't take*

*care of another damned thing. I didn't want to water them; I didn't want to feed anybody. Then I got rid of my dog. (p. 78)*

This woman divorced her husband, moved to a different town with her son, and began exploring alternative lifestyles.

Following the rules—isn't that what school and church, the principal agents of socialization and trimming individuality, are about? To break away from the trust in rules is particularly difficult if there is no guidance from anyone. The quest for self is arduous:

*I always thought there were rules and that if you followed the rules, you'd be happy. And I never understood why I wasn't. I'd get to thinking, gee, I'm good, I follow the rules. I do everything they tell me to, and things don't go right for me. My life was a mess. I wrote to a priest that I was very fond of and I asked him, "What do I do to make things right?" He had no answers. This time it dawned on me that I was not going to get the answers from anybody. I would have to find them myself. (p. 61)*

Fluctuations in the sense of self, but also exhilaration and optimism in the process of change, are expressed by three different women:

*I'm a different person each day. It's the day, I guess, depending on how it is outside or how my body feels.... (p.83)*

*I'm only the person that I am at this moment. Tomorrow I'm somebody different, and the day after that I'm somebody different....I'm always changing. Everything is always changing.... (p.83)*

*It's hard to say who I am because I don't really think about more than tomorrow. In the future, I'll probably have a better understanding, because now I simply don't know. I think it will really be a fun thing to find out. Just do everything until I find out. (p. 83)*

Opening to novelty and change, several women expressed in imagery of birth, rebirth, and childhood—a significant step in personal growth, even though it is far from multilevel:

*Right now I'm so busy being born, discovering who I am, that I don't know who I am. And I don't know where I'm going. And everything is going to be fine.... (p. 82)*

*The person I see myself as now is just like an infant. I see myself as beginning. Whoever I can become, that's a wide-open possibility....* (p.82)

*I actually think that the person I am now is only about three to four years old with all these new experiences. I always was kind of led, told what to do. Never really thought much about myself. Now I feel like I'm learning all over again.* (p. 82)

I feel very strongly that emotional growth within the unilevel universe of Level II should not be underestimated but respected and explored further. This raises the question as to whether it is possible to facilitate a transition to multilevel emotional growth if a person's developmental potential is limited. And is it possible to imagine a harmonious society without a multilevel majority? I feel it is possible—to imagine. Recall the example of Ralph, that showed how optimal families raise children who are responsible, who have a strong sense of fairness and justice, and who care for others even when their DP is short on the critical overexcitabilities, emotional and intellectual. Child development research has indeed established that the optimal conditions for growing up are like those that Ralph's parents created (Bowlby, 1969; Sroufe, 1995).

The above examples show that not all material has to be generated from the framework of Dabrowski's theory. Research literature can be explored to flesh out some of his concepts in living color.

### Measurement: There Must Be a Better Way

Research depends on instruments specific to its purpose. Assessing developmental level from autobiographical material is an extremely time-consuming process. Furthermore, Levels I and II are difficult to assess, because most of the dynamisms are at higher levels. In addition, Level I is defined by a total absence of any developmental dynamisms, and the absence of something is difficult to quantify.

David Gage decided to explore new avenues. Multilevel dynamisms, he concluded, could be viewed as themes that are expressed at every level of development: moments of feeling inadequate and unworthy, moments of frustration and anger toward oneself, dealing with questions that cause conflict and doubt within oneself, and so on. Of Gage's three new methods, their validities thoroughly investigated, Definition Response Instrument (DRI) was used in subsequent studies. It consists of six questions corresponding to

themes represented by six multilevel dynamisms (Gage, Morse, & Piechowski, 1981).

Katherine Ziegler Lysy was the first to use David Gage's instrument to assess developmental level (Lysy & Piechowski, 1983). She set out to compare measures of personal growth derived from Jung's and Dabrowski's theories. Jung's concept of psychological type identifies three continuous personality dimensions: from extroversion to introversion (E-I), from sensation to intuition (S-N), and from thinking to feeling (T-F). One would expect the last two dimensions to correspond to the overexcitabilities—for instance, thinking to intellectual and feeling to emotional. However, there is very little correlation between overexcitabilities and these dimensions, suggesting that they are different constructs. The Jungian dimensions refer to preferred and *habitual* modes of processing experience; the overexcitabilities refer to the *heightened* capacities for enlarging experience (Lysy & Piechowski, 1983).

Kathy Lysy gave her 42 subjects measures of overexcitability and developmental level. She then correlated the data on overexcitabilities with the data on developmental level. Emotional and intellectual overexcitabilities had a highly significant correlation with developmental level (.57 and .59), while for imaginal, the correlation was .38. (See Miller's chapter in this volume for a discussion of this and more recent findings.)

Dabrowski emphasized that emotional, intellectual, and imaginal overexcitabilities were essential for multilevel growth. He also believed that strong psychomotor and sensual overexcitabilities would hamper development. This is not exactly what was found. Psychomotor and sensual overexcitabilities did not have a lowering effect on developmental level; on the contrary, they were mildly correlated with it. However, the Jungian function of intuition showed a highly significant correlation (.44) with developmental level, suggesting that intuition is an essential component of multilevel potential.

Emotional and intellectual overexcitabilities are the strongest factors in potential for multilevel growth. The strength of these overexcitabilities is critical, because inner psychic transformation cannot be forged without them. While psychomotor and sensual overexcitabilities by themselves cannot enable multilevel growth, they are not an obstacle to it. Clearly, multilevel growth is principally the function of the strength of emotional and intellectual overexcitabilities in concert with intuition. Although Dabrowski discussed intuition as a strong factor in multilevel development,

he did not include it among the dynamisms. Lysy's results suggest that it should be included. As intuition operates differently at each level of development, it would be best to place it with the continuing dynamisms, like identification and empathy that extend across levels (see Table 3.4).

A brief word about the continuing dynamisms. They operate at more than one level; some diminish in strength; others grow stronger. Empathy grows stronger and deeper. In the gifted, empathy may operate as a way of knowing—that is, of understanding the world and others through an ability to get out of one's skin to see and feel from the perspective of others (Jackson, Moyle, & Piechowski, in press). Dabrowski stressed the key role of empathy in working out inner transformation toward kindness and taking responsibility for one's own and others' unique development. His conception of empathy resonates well with such traits of self-actualization as acceptance of self and others, democratic character structure, and kinship with others (Gemeinschaftsgefühl).

### Conserving versus Transforming Inner Growth

A few of Lysy's subjects showed evidence of inner psychic transformation. Speculating about different strengths and different kinds of developmental potential, we came up with two terms: *conserving* and *transforming*. Potential for conserving growth would allow it to continue through Level II close to Level III, but not any further. Transforming growth, however, would continue. The subjects who were deemed transforming had level scores of 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 3.0, and 3.1. Of the subjects who were deemed conserving, the highest level scores were 2.4, and 2.6, and 2.8. Recall that Level III scores go from 2.6 to 3.5. A similar, or even identical, score can hide vastly different types of development. Thus, conserving subjects can be found in the lower region of multilevel growth (scores of 2.6 and 2.8), and transforming subjects' scores can be found below the numerical threshold for multilevel growth (scores of 2.3 and 2.4). Yet in their material, there were distinct expressions of a multilevel character. This is probably the closest that we can see in Level II the presence of what Dabrowski called "multilevel nuclei."

Judith Ann Robert (1984; Robert & Piechowski, 1981) took up the task of exploring the distinction between conserving and transforming personal growth. Examining the content of responses to open-ended questionnaires, she found telling differences:

*The concepts of a hierarchy of values can be found in both subjects, but the conserving subjects lacked inner psychic transformation which enabled them to put their ideals into action.... This concept of inner psychic transformation, which was associated with transforming subjects, is the process by which specific tasks of inner restructuring are carried out. This requires an inward problem solving approach, focusing on one's personal growth and development. And finally, an additional distinction between the subjects was the transforming subjects' sense of responsibility toward others and their own development.* (Robert, 1984, p. 103)

Robert noted that the transforming subjects did not dwell excessively on their inner conflict—the split between higher and lower in themselves—but instead were active in solving the problems presented by their multilevel growth process.

I feel that Dabrowski extolled the virtues of inner conflict perhaps too much, as he believed in the ennobling value of suffering but failed to mention that the ennobling is possible only if one accepts the suffering as something to grow through. Acceptance is essential. It is one of the lessons from the lives of Peace Pilgrim, Etty Hillesum, and Ashley. Rather than condemning, accepting one's inner "what is" as the starting point is a vital step in emotional growth toward realizing "what ought to be" (Piechowski, 2003).

### Dabrowski's Theory and Gifted Education

Two persons played a key role in introducing Dabrowski's theory to the field of gifted education: Nick Colangelo and Linda K. Silverman. Nick was my officemate when we were graduate students in counseling at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and graduate assistants at the Research and Guidance Laboratory for Superior Students. I decided to create an overexcitability questionnaire to give to the gifted middle and high school students attending the Laboratory. This was the first OEQ. It had 46 open-ended questions formulated from the 433 expressions of overexcitability that I had collected from autobiographies and Verbal Stimuli I had just finished analyzing. In this way, I obtained the initial material that I put years later in *"Mellow Out," They Say. If I Only Could* (Piechowski, 2006). Nick became interested in the theory and in my project, as did Kay Ogburn (later Colangelo), with whom we shared our office. After we all graduated, Nick and another of our officemates, Ron T. Zaffrann, conceived

the idea of putting together a book under the title *New Voices in Counseling the Gifted* (Colangelo & Zaffrann, 1979). It was the first book of its kind and was graced by a general chapter on developmental potential and one on a clinical example of multilevel potential (Ogburn-Colangelo, 1979; Piechowski, 1979a).

Linda Kreger Silverman became an ardent champion of Dabrowski's theory, organizing training sessions and pulling in R. Frank Falk. Linda spoke about the theory at meetings, workshops, wherever she was invited to speak. The concept of overexcitabilities found ready acceptance, because they are so apparent in gifted children and adults. And then there were those who resonated strongly to the concepts of multilevel growth and inner transformation. Linda Silverman launched *Advanced Development* as a forum to stimulate thinking and research on adult giftedness and Dabrowski's theory. (See the chapters by R. Frank Falk, Nancy B. Miller, and Linda K. Silverman in this book.)

## Conclusions and Challenges

1. Dabrowski's theory evolved over many years. The multilevelness research project helped establish the structure of levels, definition of dynamisms, and developmental potential.
2. Dabrowski's theory has good form. Its concepts have been operationalized, which enabled the design of research instruments and methods of measurement.
3. Four empirical tests of the theory became possible: (1) reconstitution of the overall structure of levels from individual profiles, (2) constancy of developmental potential, (3) agreement between clinical and quantitative assessment of level, and (4) three-way agreement in deriving a quantitative index of level between neurological exam, autobiography, and Verbal Stimuli.
4. Intuition makes a significant contribution to an advanced level of development. Although Dabrowski did not include it among multilevel dynamisms, he often spoke of its importance.
5. The concept of primary integration (Level I) needs to be reconsidered, as it is neither primary nor a personality structure but the outcome of the way society is.

6. It is possible to grow into a positive human being, even with limited developmental potential, provided the conditions of growing up are close to optimal.
7. In order to avoid thinking of levels as rigid structures, it is essential to remember that Dabrowski emphasized looking at the person's inner psychic milieu to see whether it was unilevel, unilevel with multilevel nuclei, or essentially multilevel.
8. Unilevel growth process should not be underestimated. The search for one's own voice and sense of self commands respect and empathic understanding.
9. Each level is a large universe with many possible developmental patterns.
10. Conserving and transforming growth overlap at the borderline of Levels II and III. Similar or identical level scores may hide contrasting types of inner growth.
11. Taking Maslow's full description of self-actualizing people, individuals in advanced multilevel growth (Level IV) are self-actualizing. Whether self-actualizing people are also engaged in advanced multilevel process has yet to be examined.
12. Rare persons aware of their own essence, of their self remaining essentially the same throughout their life, do not appear to have gone through positive disintegration. Their lives give evidence of an advanced multilevel functioning. If one views the process of positive disintegration as the search for one's essence—one's true or higher self—then persons who have always had awareness of their timeless essence appear to be exempt from the crushing grind of positive disintegration.
13. Cases of persons approaching Level V, realizing fully their personality ideal, can be found among our contemporaries.
14. Of all psychological theories, Dabrowski's theory offers the most insight into the emotional development of gifted and creative children and adults.