

Uniting Inner Nature and Outer Nature: Gifted Adult Development and Ecotherapy

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ABSTRACT: *Gifted adults remain an understudied, and often misconstrued, population. This article addresses this gap in our understanding of gifted adults by highlighting their advanced developmental potential and demonstrating how nature (i.e., the natural world) might nurture gifted adults' personality development. The article begins by describing who gifted adults are, what they are like, and the common challenges they face. Next, Kazimierz Dąbrowski's developmental theory of positive disintegration (TPD) is used to interpret adult development. Drawing from ecopsychological and ecotherapeutic literature, the article concludes by presenting four unique ways that gifted adults' inner nature can be united with outer nature (namely, nature as inspiring developmental model, nature and relaxation, nature and self-reflection, and nature as supportive community), and how these connections can assist gifted adults on their developmental journeys.*

KEYWORDS: *gifted adults, gifted adult development, Kazimierz Dąbrowski, ecotherapy, theory of positive disintegration (TPD)*

In her 1999 book, *The Gifted Adult: A Revolutionary Guide for Liberating Everyday Genius*, clinical psychologist and giftedness expert Mary-Elaine Jacobsen asserted that while 20 million American adults can be considered gifted, many do not recognize their giftedness—nor ever realize their advanced developmental potential. Though several other books (e.g., Daniels & Piechowski, 2009c; Fiedler, 2015; Freeman, 2010; Prober, 2016; Streznewski, 1999; Webb, 2013) and articles (e.g., Lovecky, 1986; Roeper, 1995; Tolan, 1994; Willings, 1985) published over the past few decades draw attention to gifted adults' characteristics, there remains “a dearth of research on...what giftedness means or looks like during adulthood” (Rinn & Bishop, 2015, p. 213).

The purpose of this article is to help to fill the gap in our understanding of gifted adults. Specifically, this article highlights gifted adults' advanced developmental potential and draws from ecopsychological and ecotherapeutic literature to demonstrate how

nature can nurture gifted adults' personality development. The article begins by describing the stigma surrounding giftedness, then highlights who gifted adults are, what they are like, and common challenges they encounter. Next, Kazimierz Dąbrowski's (1967/2015) developmental theory of positive disintegration (TPD) is introduced. The article concludes by presenting four unique ways of uniting gifted adults' *inner* nature with *outer* nature—and how this connection can cultivate gifted adults' personality development.

Giftedness: Still Stigmatized across the Lifespan

Giftedness has always been contentious (Silverman, 2013). The notion that some people are intellectually superior often engenders widespread bitterness and resentment (J. Y. Jung, McCormick, & Gross, 2012; Silverman, 2013). Scholars suggest that the “undercurrents of...negativism” (Tannenbaum, 1983, p. 3) toward the gifted powerfully shape how gifted individuals experience the world: many gifted people go through life feeling lonely, misunderstood, and deeply unfulfilled (Jacobsen, 1999; Streznewski, 1999).

The dearth of resources geared toward the gifted reflects this underlying stigma. For example, while Western societies typically rally in support of individuals with intellectual impairments (i.e., those whose IQ is 2, 3, or 4 standard deviations below the norm), people with IQs 2, 3, or 4 standard deviations above the norm (i.e., those commonly considered gifted) are often unsupported or underserved—despite also possessing distinct developmental, educational, social, and emotional needs (Amend & Beljan, 2009; Daniels & Piechowski, 2009c; Jacobsen, 1999; Kane & Fiedler, 2011; Silverman, 2013).

A minority of gifted individuals are identified early and have their innate needs accommodated both at home and school (Silverman, 2013). A challenging new world often opens after high school graduation even for these fortunate few, however. Not only can the transition from the protective enclave of specialty educational programs and home milieu be precarious, it is often accompanied by an end to gifted support services (Fiedler, 2012; Rinn & Bishop, 2015; Streznewski, 1999). It seems like the parents, educators, and counselors who had been investing significant resources in gifted young people believe that the group's unique needs disappear when they reach adulthood (Rinn & Bishop, 2015). This assumption is inaccurate, however; gifted individuals unique needs are lifelong (Fiedler, 2012, 2015; Jacobsen, 1999, Mackintosh, 2011; Tolan, 1994).

Will the Real Gifted Adults Please Stand Up?

So, who am I referring to when I use the term *gifted adult*? Silverman (2013) notes that the gifted label is most often attached to

adults who perform exceptionally and achieve eminence. Several such giftedness exemplars come quickly to mind: for example, Charles Darwin, Marie Curie, Albert Einstein, and Steve Jobs. Each of these individuals contributed significantly to societal shifts: Darwin's evolutionary theory transformed our beliefs about the origin of life, Curie's Nobel-prize-awarded radioactivity investigations advanced science significantly while concurrently helping to open the field to women, Einstein's theory of relativity revolutionized our understanding of the universe, and Jobs' tech-savviness and business prowess propelled the personal computer era permanently altering how each one of us lives, works, and plays.

Early definitions for giftedness reflect this outward achievement perspective (Fiedler, 2015). For example, the famed Marland Report (1971/1972) described the gifted and talented as individuals possessing "outstanding abilities," and being "capable of high performance" (pp. ix-x) in six separate areas. Giftedness definitions put forward in the 1980s by Abraham J. Tannenbaum (1983), François Gagné (1985), and Robert Sternberg (1985) were like Marland's: they stress gifted persons' enhanced performance and productivity.

Jacobsen (1999) argued that conceptualizing giftedness based on outstanding achievement reflects Western culture's bias of product over process: "In a society addicted to final products, we have been brainwashed with the obsolete notion that giftedness is exclusively defined by academic achievement, fame, and fortune" (p. 26). Each of the four previously mentioned—and still widely recognized—giftedness definitions (Robertson, Pfeiffer, & Taylor, 2011) overlook the unique way that "the gifted think, feel, and experience" the world (Grant & Piechowski, 1999, p. 8). This absence is noteworthy: a substantive body of literature suggests that giftedness is much more than can be outwardly demonstrated or observed (e.g., Cross & Cross, 2015; Daniels & Piechowski, 2009c; Jacobsen, 1999; Lovecky, 1986; Mendaglio, 2012; Rinn & Bishop, 2015; Shavinina, 2009; Tolan, 1994; Webb, 2013; Wellisch & Brown, 2013). Fiedler (2015) is adamant: "Our perception of giftedness needs to focus on the individuals rather than on their performance" (p. 5).

Several definitions for giftedness do attempt to capture gifted individuals' unique way of thinking, feeling, and experiencing the world. For example, Roeper (1982) described giftedness as "a greater awareness, a greater sensitivity, and a greater ability to understand and transform perceptions into intellectual and emotional experiences" (p. 21). Similarly, the Columbus Group conceptualized giftedness as follows:

Giftedness is *asynchronous development* in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony...of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires

modifications in parenting, teaching and counseling for them to develop optimally. (as cited in Silverman, 1993, p. 3)

While gifted individuals' enhanced intensities and sensitivities may propel them toward exceptional performance and even eminence, the movement from inner gifted experience to outer gifted accomplishment is not guaranteed (Jacobsen, 1999; Streznewski, 1999). For example, numerous external factors powerfully influence how giftedness manifests. Gifted individuals from several groups—for example, females, people of color, non-English speakers, and those from lower socioeconomic status—are often never presented with the opportunity to display or develop their gifts (Silverman, 2013). Moreover, it is common for gifted individuals to struggle internally with self-doubt and low self-esteem due to feeling different from others (Jacobsen, 1999; Tolan, 1994), believing that they are “too sensitive, too curious, and too deeply concerned about matters that others do not deem important” (Fiedler, 2012, p. 24). These internal and external barriers mean many gifted people become “invisible ones” (Fiedler, 2015, p. 24)—gifted individuals who never harness their full potential.

I adopt the notion in this article that gifted adults are not necessarily eminent achievers (but very well may be so)—they are individuals who experience the world differently from the norm due to their heightened sensitivities, intensities, and enhanced intellectual abilities (Columbus Group, as cited in Silverman, 1993; Roeper, 1982). I also concur with the Columbus Group when they suggest that gifted individuals' uniqueness can make them vulnerable over the lifespan. If gifted adults are to “grow optimally,” they must learn how to accommodate and manage their many exceptionalities.

Common Characteristics of Gifted Adults

While gifted adults are a diverse group (Gross, 2009), they typically share several psychological characteristics (Silverman, 2013). For example, Fiedler (2015) described the gifted as being emotionally intense, highly sensitive, and adept at metacognition (thinking about thinking). Roeper's (1995) list of gifted adult characteristics is more comprehensive than Fiedler's. Roeper characterized gifted adults as having complex intellectual ability, childlike emotions, feelings of being fundamentally different from others, feelings of being overwhelmed by their own creativity; furthermore, having introverted personalities, a need for meaning, a preference for individualized methods of learning, an ability to see development and growth patterns (trends), a need for truth, a tendency toward perfectionism, difficulty in understanding the behaviors of others, a strong and unique sense of humor, difficulty with authority figures, and strong moral convictions.

Lovecky (1986) argued that five common gifted adult traits can lead to intrapersonal and interpersonal struggles:

- **Divergency:** a partiality toward original, unusual, and creative responses. Divergency can usurp stereotypes and lead to creative solutions, but can also make group work difficult and consensus problematic.
- **Excitability:** high energy level, emotional reactivity, and high nervous system arousal. Excitability can lead to prodigious productivity but can make it difficult for gifted persons to self-regulate.
- **Sensitivity:** a depth of feeling that results in a sense of identification with others and drives a person to often sacrifice her or his own needs to help others. Sensitivity may lead to over-feeling and projection, however.
- **Perceptivity:** an ability to view several situational aspects simultaneously, to understand several layers of self within another, and to see quickly to the core of an issue. Perceptivity can lead to problems when a gifted individual's insights are interpreted as intimidating or threatening.
- **Entelechy:** a motivation, inner strength, and vital force directing life and growth toward self-actualization. Entelechy, however, can lead to feelings of loneliness and misunderstanding when others do not share a gifted person's growth priorities.

Gifted Adult Development: The Theory of Positive Disintegration (TPD)

The idea that gifted individuals possess unique developmental potential originates in the philosophy and research of Polish psychiatrist and psychologist Kazimierz Dąbrowski (1967/2015). Dąbrowski spent much of his career working with artistically and intellectually gifted individuals and was particularly fascinated with their emotional development. Dąbrowski came to see these individuals' intensity, sensitivity, and tendency toward emotional extremes as not necessarily pathological (though these propensities can easily be interpreted as such); they could be, in fact, the raw ingredients necessary for profound personality growth (Dąbrowski, 1972, 1967/2015).

Dąbrowski (1967/2015) established his own theory of personality development based, in part, from his observations of the artistically and intellectually gifted individuals with whom he worked. He called it the *theory of positive disintegration* (TPD). The TPD posits that personality development is "powered by the tension between the higher and the lower, the good and the bad, experienced within the self" (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009b, p. 7). Dąbrowski argued that personality advances through a series of positive disintegrations, painful times when an individual experiences intense inner conflict between her or his lower more egocentric self and his or her higher more humane self:

Dąbrowski's theory describes the process of inner growth wherein the guiding principle is to be true to oneself. The search for self-knowledge entails inner struggles, doubts, and even despair about one's emotional, psychological, and spiritual shortcomings, and yet it always leads back again to the process of gaining greater understanding of others, ridding oneself of prejudices, and becoming more self-determined in achieving one's inner ideal. (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009b, p. 16)

A person's personality transforms during positive disintegration: their lower self disintegrates and their personality reforms closer to their more authentic personality ideal. Dąbrowski suggested that this personality development process has many inwardly experienced levels, so he called it *multilevel* (Dąbrowski, 1967/2015).

Unlike developmental theories that suggest human development through chronological stages—infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age (e.g., Piaget's stages of development)—Dąbrowski viewed personality growth as a process that can occur at any time across the lifespan (Silverman, 2013). Dąbrowski did break the personality development process into five distinct levels: Level I: Primary Integration, Level II: Unilevel Disintegration, Level III: Spontaneous Multilevel Disintegration, Level IV: Organized Multilevel Disintegration, and Level V: Secondary Integration. (See Mendaglio (2008) and Piechowski (2008) for a description of each of these five levels.)

Dąbrowski argued that advanced personality development requires strong developmental potential (Dąbrowski, 1967/2015; Piechowski, 2008). Developmental potential consists of three primary components: (1) talents, specific abilities, and high general intelligence; (2) overexcitabilities (OE); and (3) the third factor, “a capacity for self-directed emotional growth, self-determination, and autonomy” (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009b, p. 8).

Interestingly, characteristics common to gifted adults overlap significantly with the above-mentioned developmental potential components: gifted adults are often intelligent and talented, driven toward self-actualization (i.e., the third factor is evident), and highly excitable.

The concept of overexcitabilities (OEs) is central to Dąbrowski's theory of positive disintegration and deserves further discussion. Overexcitability is a translation from “nadpobudliwość,” a Polish word meaning “superstimulability”—the capacity for stronger neurological responses (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009b). A significant body of research suggests that gifted individuals possess more OEs than nongifted persons (Chang & Kuo, 2013; Falk & Miller, 2009; Jackson, Moyle, & Piechowski, 2009). Dąbrowski categorized OEs into five groups: psychomotor, sensual, imaginal, intellectual, and emotional. A short description of each OE is provided below

(adapted from Daniels & Piechowski, 2009b; Mendaglio, 2008; Silverman, 2013; Webb, 2013):

- Psychomotor OE: characterized by a remarkably strong physical response to stimulation. Individuals with psychomotor OE often love movement and have a surplus of physical energy, which can manifest as rapid speech, a love for intense physical activity, and a compulsion to act. Persons with psychomotor OE often feel restless and can have difficulty thinking clearly without moving in some manner. Psychomotor OE can be misdiagnosed as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).
- Sensual OE: marked by heightened and refined senses—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. Those with sensual OE may love—or hate—certain textures, tastes, aromas, sounds, music, etc. Sensual OE can make a person quite environmentally sensitive; things always must be just right. Sensual OE may also lead a person to sensually overindulge (e.g., overeat and overspend).
- Imaginational OE: “manifests as vivid imagery, inventiveness, dramatic perception, poetic inclinations, love of fantasy, humor, creative imagination and low tolerance for boredom” (Silverman, 2013, p. 140). Individuals with imaginational OE are often visionaries, capable of picturing a better future. Imaginational OE may also lead a person to express their emotional tension through imagery.
- Intellectual OE: Webb (2013) characterizes intellectual OE well:

Individuals with...[intellectual] overexcitability have incredibly active minds that endeavor to solve problems and to gain knowledge, and their search for understanding and truth may exceed their search for academic achievement. As youngsters, they may devour books; as adults, they continue to be avid readers. They are persistent questioners and often feel stimulated and exhilarated when they learn new ideas. (p. 45)

Individuals with intellectual OE love to analyze and theorize, are adept at metacognition, are keenly introspective, and are independent of mind.
- Emotional OE: Emotional OE is the most commonly reported OE (Falk & Miller, 2009). It is multifaceted, manifesting as intensified feelings and emotions (both positive and negative), capacity for strong attachments (e.g., to people, places, animals, and objects), bodily emotional expressions (e.g., tense stomach, blushing, flushing), strong affective expressions (e.g., from shame to inhibition to enthusiasm to ecstasy) and well-differentiated feelings toward self (e.g., ability to dialogue inwardly, self-understand, and self-judge). One hallmark of

emotional OE is profound empathy: the ability to identify with others' feelings and enter into others' lived experience.

While the TPD is not age-dependent, studies do suggest that younger individuals may live out of lower personality levels (Silverman, 2013). For example, in her study of gifted adolescents, Bailey (2011) found that 70% were at Level II (unilevel development). Put differently, while gifted individuals may possess more developmental potential (i.e., higher general intelligence, OEs, third factor), the developmental process may very well take a lifetime (Fiedler, 2015; Silverman, 2013).

Gifted Adults and Ecotherapy: Developing with Nature in Mind

The Columbus Group (as cited in Silverman, 1993) stressed that gifted individuals' asynchrony (i.e., their intensities, sensitivities, and uneven development) must be accommodated for them to develop optimally. This accommodation is not easy, however: widespread giftedness stigma combined with a dearth of gifted support services means many gifted adults struggle with their asynchrony alone (Fiedler, 2015; Silverman, 2013). Scholars suggest that the oft resulting disillusionment leads many gifted adults to question their identity, obscure their inner nature, and stunt their personality development (Fiedler, 2015; Jacobsen, 1999; Streznewski, 1999; Webb, 2013).

Outer nature (i.e., plants, animals, mountains, forests, streams, landscapes, etc.) is an easily overlooked—though usually readily accessible—gifted adult development resource. Ecopsychologists (individuals who study the relationship between humans and nature through ecological and psychological principles) maintain that an intimate human-nature connection is vital to psychic and planetary well-being (Kahn & Hasbach, 2012, 2013; Roszak, Gomes, & Kanner, 1995). Ecotherapists (mental health professionals who incorporate nature into their therapeutic practices) draw on ecopsychological and psychotherapeutic ideas to highlight nature's mental health-promoting potential in particular (Buzzell & Chalquist, 2009; Jordan, 2016). Ecotherapists argue that connecting with nature is vital to psychic healing and personal growth. They suggest, in fact, that there is little distinction between outer nature and humans' inner nature; the outer landscape mirrors our inner world(s) (Hasbach, 2012).

Drawing from ecopsychological and ecotherapeutic literature, the following subsections present four ways that outer nature might be harnessed in service of gifted adults' advanced development: (1) nature as inspiring developmental model, (2) nature and relaxation, (3) nature and self-reflection, and (4) nature as supportive community.

Nature as Inspiring Developmental Model

“Genius can be bounded in a nutshell and yet embrace the whole fullness of life” (Mann, as cited in Heilbut, 2012, p. 176).

Archetypal ecopsychologist James Hillman drew on nature as a metaphor to understand human development. In his *acorn theory*, Hillman suggested that like a mighty oak’s destiny, which is written in the tiny acorn, each person has a unique inborn calling or vocation (i.e., soul image or soul code) that they can uncover and realize in their life (Hillman, 1996). Hillman’s acorn theory resonates with Dąbrowski’s TPD. The TPD suggests that personality development is a movement toward self-actualization—developing all of one’s potentials, becoming one’s truest self (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009a; Maslow, 1999; Mendaglio, 2008).

The acorn theory, like the TPD, also recognizes that the growth process is fraught with difficulty. For example, a small acorn has to overcome many obstacles to become a mighty oak: it must break out of its shell and send roots into the soil in search of nourishment; it must regularly compete with other plants for sunlight, water, and nutrients; it must cope with unpredictable environmental stressors such as disease, drought, and fire; it must go through many seasonal cycles of death and renewal—and all of this before it is even capable of fulfilling its destiny: to produce next generation acorns.

Gifted adults can look to outer nature for inspiration in personality development. For example, recognizing that it takes a tiny acorn many years and much difficulty to become a mighty oak can provide much solace to the gifted adult struggling to grow amidst inner doubts and anxieties and outer difficulties and stressors. Further, for the gifted adult in throes of disintegrating, knowing that their destiny is planted firmly within may provide the perspective shift and resilience needed to keep forging ahead—even when things feel like they are falling apart.

Nature and Relaxation

“Natural life is the nourishing soil of the soul” (C. G. Jung, 2002, p. 120).

OEs (i.e., psychomotor, sensual, imaginal, emotional, intellectual) are vital components of gifted adults’ developmental potential (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009c). OEs, however, can also be overwhelming and difficult to cope with (Fiedler, 2015). For example, although emotional OE endows gifted adults with profound depth and empathetic ability, the continuous emotional turmoil can lead to stress and anxiety. Further, while intellectual OE fosters profound problem-solving ability and metacognitive insight, it can be

difficult to turn off the rapid processing—leading to exhaustion and, eventually, even burnout (Webb, 2013).

Natural places can serve as ideal settings to relax and de-stress (e.g., Hartig, Mitchell, de Vries, & Frumkin, 2014). The relationship between nature and psychological restoration is often conceptualized using Rachel and Stephen Kaplan’s *Attention Restoration Theory* (ART, Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; S. Kaplan, 1995). ART suggests that four factors provide natural places with their restorative potential. Natural settings: (1) elicit a sense of *being away* from daily routines and stressors, (2) contain elements that promote *soft fascination* (aspects of the environment that capture attention effortlessly), (3) provide a feeling of *extent* (the scope to feel immersed in an environment), and (4) usually offer a high degree of *compatibility* (what a person wants to do in a natural place usually matches well with what the environment allows for and requires) (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; van den Berg, Hartig, & Staats, 2007).

Gifted adults can greatly benefit from nature’s restorative potential. For example, when feeling overwhelmed or depleted, one can seek out a favorite natural place (Korpela, Ylén, Tyrväinen, & Silvennoinen, 2010) in which to relax and recuperate. The goal of such excursions is not for a person to permanently abate their OEs or inner vertical tension—it is an opportunity for them to take a time-out, step back from everyday routines, and restore their inner resources. Such nourishing moments will serve future personality growth very well.

Nature and Self-Reflection

“The aim of life is self-development. To realize one’s nature perfectly—that is what each of us is here for.” (Wilde, 2005, p. 25)

‘Being true to oneself’ is a guiding principle underlying gifted adults’ personality development according to the TPD. The idea is that as a person advances in their personality development, they realize more aspects of their higher, or truer, self. This arduous process of “reaching for ‘what ought to be’ or ‘what could be’ (the higher in oneself) and away from ‘what is’ (the lower in oneself)” (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009a, p. 24) comes to the fore during Level III of the TPD (spontaneous multilevel disintegration—multilevel development).

Natural settings can be ideal places for self-reflection (e.g., Mayer, Frantz, Bruehlman-Senecal, & Dolliver, 2008). According to ART founders Rachel and Stephen Kaplan (1989), a “restorative [nature] experience is likely to include reflections on one’s life, on one’s priorities, and possibilities, on one’s actions and one’s goals” (p. 197). Ecotherapist Patricia Hasbach (2012) digs deeper,

suggesting that experiences of outer nature connect a person with their true, inner nature:

Part of our ‘deep knowing’ can be accessed if we are willing to move out into nature and experience it mindfully, with awareness and presence. Direct experience [of nature] affords heightened sensations and perceptions that connect our inner world with the outer landscape. (p. 128)

Gifted adults can use nature as a tool for reflection of their ‘true self.’ Nature excursions may be especially helpful for Level III gifted adults who are just starting to unearth their soul code (Hillman, 1996). In addition to serving as a mirror for true self, nature also provides a gifted adult with a setting to separate from their everyday social roles and responsibilities (Plotkin, 2008). Through such separation and self-reflection, one may begin, perhaps for the first time, to hear a new voice—a voice they will recognize as their own (Oliver, 1986).

Nature as Supportive Community

“We are part of everything that is beneath us, above us and around us” (Haudenosaunee teaching as cited in LaDuke, 2013, p. 86).

Dąbrowski (1967/2015) believed that multilevel personality development requires that a person possess outstanding abilities, overexcitabilities, and a strong drive toward autonomous growth. Others argue that advanced personality development also requires a supportive community [i.e., family, friends, and mentors (e.g., Bouchet, 2004; Fiedler, 2015; Miller, Silverman, & Falk, 1994)]. Given widespread giftedness stigma and a lack of gifted support services, many gifted adults struggle alone without external support—a lack likely hindering their personality development process.

The natural world can serve as a supportive environment. Indigenous communities the world over teach that humans are intimately tied to—and physically, psychologically, and spiritually supported by—the wider ecological world (Kinsley, 1995; Vaughn-Lee, 2013). Ecopsychologists argue that while many Westernized peoples experience nature as collection of objects, they can (re)learn to experience nature as a communion of subjects (Berry, 1999). Much strength can be drawn from such a psychic shift: “From the wider web in which we take life, inner resources—courage, endurance, ingenuity—flow through us if we let them. They come like an unexpected blessing” (Macy, 2013, p. 155).

While gifted adults can surely seek out like-minded human others to support their development, the natural world can act as a supplementary supportive community. Interestingly, gifted adults often report having spiritually connective nature experiences (Gatto-

Walden, 2009). For example, 60-year-old Charles credits expansive nature experiences for his profound posttraumatic personality growth: “Simply being outside, embraced by nature, he said he was no longer alone” (Gatto-Walden, 2009, p. 214).

Conclusion

This article sheds light on the characteristics and needs of gifted adults, and provided strategies to support gifted adults’ development. Gifted adults can face many challenges on their developmental journeys. Not only do they outwardly encounter giftedness stigma and a shortage of support services, they also often struggle inwardly with self-doubt and low self-esteem due to their asynchrony. Drawing on ecopsychological and ecotherapeutic ideas, this article proposes that gifted adults’ development can be supported by uniting their inner natures with outer nature. Although the four nature-based approaches this paper presents do not address every gifted adult need—nor solve every gifted adult developmental dilemma—each strategy can assist many gifted adults in their developmental quests.

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