Gifted Parents: The Impact of Giftedness on Parenting Cultures in the United States, 1920-1960

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Dynamis
[0211-9536] 2020; 40 (2): 325-347
http://dx.doi.org/10.30827/dynamis.v40i2.17969

Fecha de recepción: 12 de diciembre de 2018
Fecha de aceptación: 4 de abril de 2020

SUMMARY: 1.—Introduction. 2.—The limitations of intelligence and the emergence of giftedness. 3.—Translating giftedness to the public. 4.—Guidebooks. 5.—Conclusion: Race, giftedness, and inequality.

ABSTRACT: This paper explores how discourses of giftedness informed attitudes towards parenting in the United States from 1920 to 1960. Using psychologists' studies of giftedness, media coverage of the topic, and guidebooks for parents of gifted children, I argue that giftedness emerged in the 1910s, and by the 1920s addressed a newly limited definition of intelligence and problems in urban public education, coinciding with the popularity of the culture and personality school. Scholarly debates about giftedness traveled from the academy to the wider public through the media and guidebooks for parents. Media coverage brought awareness of the problem of the neglected gifted student, and guidebooks offered parents practical suggestions about how to raise gifted children. I show that the discourse contributed to racial segregation in American schools and classrooms by using merit to determine access to educational opportunity. Experts' advice about giftedness also altered expectations about childrearing and encouraged parents to become more involved in their child's educational development. This argument puts the history of psychology in conversation with histories of parenting, and it evidences how the discourse on giftedness impacted institutional inequality both through merit-based gifted and talented programs and by impacting ideologies of parenting. Thus, I provide a more comprehensive account of how and why giftedness profoundly shaped both the school and the home. This article considers the cultural work the discourse accomplished; it gave the public the impression that disparities in educational achievement between individuals and groups could be explained by the parenting a child received, putting significant pressure on all parents to make educational achievement a top priority for their child.

KEYWORDS: giftedness, intelligence, merit, inequality, parenting.

1. Introduction

On April 29, 1940, a mother wrote to *Chicago Tribune* columnist Gladys Huntington Bevans. She recalled an earlier column Bevans wrote about gifted children —who were exceptional in their intellectual abilities or showed promise in other talents —and thought this designation might apply to her son. The mother wondered, «How much encouragement should one give such a child?»[1]. The next day, Bevans devoted her column to answering this question, encouraging parents of gifted children not to worry about «tax[ing]» their minds. She noted that delinquency was «rare» among the gifted and that these children were «bigger, stronger, and healthier» than average children. Bevans encouraged parents with gifted children to read books written by psychologists about giftedness. In so doing, Bevans not only actively encouraged parents to raise gifted children, she helped bridge the gap between how psychologists and the general public understood this unique subset of the population[2].

The publication of Bevans's column did not mark the start of scholars' interest in giftedness, nor was this the first time academic research on the topic reached a wider public. This article aims to uncover that longer history, and asks: when did giftedness emerge in the United States, and why? How did psychologists' work on giftedness travel from the academy to the wider public? And what impact did this discourse have?

While the boundary between giftedness and intelligence remained fluid, I argue that after the term «gifted» emerged in the 1910s, experts in the 1920s began using the term in response to recognition that nurture also informed the results of intelligence testing. They used giftedness to signal an expansion of intelligence beyond a singular, narrow definition loosely characterized as academic ability and by acknowledging that the environment or culture in which a child was raised could impact their I.Q. scores. The discourse on giftedness traveled from the academy to the wider public through the media and later, in the 1950s, in parenting guidebooks for gifted children. These texts offered practical suggestions to parents about how to raise gifted children, and made recommendations about organizing schools and classrooms on the basis of ability. I show that the discourse not only contributed to racial segregation in American schools and classrooms by

1. Mothers slow to recognize gifted child. Chicago Daily Tribune. 29 Apr 1940: 16.
2. Is your child gifted? Here is good advice. Chicago Daily Tribune. 30 Apr 1940. 13.

using merit to determine access to educational opportunity. Experts' advice about giftedness also altered expectations about childrearing and encouraged parents to become more involved in their child's educational development.

This argument brings together literature in the history of psychology as well as histories of parenting in the 20th century. Historians of science have written excellent studies of intelligence, examining the biases and assumptions built into the tools and technologies used to measure mental ability. Their work interrogates the relationship between testing and inequality, considering how merit developed as a way to legitimate inequality in a democracy predicated on the principle of equality. Some have considered how merit and testing impacted racial discrimination and limited minorities' chances to access educational and employment opportunities[3]. But this focus on institutional inequality ignores how discourses of intelligence and giftedness affected parenting and altered ideological assumptions about the best way to raise children, encouraging parents to become (more) actively involved in their child's educational development.

Other scholars have studied parenting in the United States during the 20th century, examining how and why attitudes, ideologies, and assumptions about the role of parents have changed over this time period[4]. Many of

3. Within the broad literature on the history of mental testing, see especially Ackerman, Michael. Mental testing and the expansion of educational opportunity. History of Education Quarterly. 1995; 35 (3): 279-300; Carson, John. The measure of merit: talents, intelligence, and inequality in the French and American republics, 1750-1940. Princeton: Princeton University Press; 2007; Degler, Carl N. In search of human nature: The decline and revival of Darwinism in American social thought. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 1991; Karabel, Jerome. The chosen: The hidden history of admission and exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company; 2005; Kett, Joseph. Merit: the history of a founding ideal from the American revolution to the twenty-first century. Ithaca: Cornell University Press; 2013; Lemann, Nicholas. The big test: The secret history of the American meritocracy. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; 1999; Porter, Jim Wynter. A «precious minority»: Constructing the «gifted» and «academically talented» student in the era of Brown v. Board of Education and the National Defense Education Act. Isis. 2017; 108 (3): 581-605; Probolus, Kimberly. «Drawn from Alice in Wonderland»: Expert and public debates over merit, race, and testing in Massachusetts police officer selection, 1967-1979. Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences. 2018; 54 (4): 237-255; Sokol, Michael, ed. Psychological testing and American society, 1890-1930. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press; 1987; Zenderland, Leila. Measuring minds: Henry Herbert Goddard and the origins of American intelligence testing. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1998.
4. For a selection, see Feldstein, Ruth. Motherhood in black and white: Race and sex in American liberalism, 1930-1965. Ithaca: Cornell University Press; 2000; Grant, Julia. Raising baby by the book: The education of American mothers. New Haven: Yale University Press; 1998; Meyerowitz, Joanne. «How Common Culture Shapes the Separate Lives»: Sexuality, race, and mid-twentieth-

these texts consider how social scientists and medical professionals became accepted authorities on parenting, how the rise of the psy-disciplines in the 1950s impacted child rearing, and how mothers turned to doctors and other experts to address questions about how to bring up their children[5]. But they largely overlook how the science of intelligence, merit, and giftedness informed parenting in America, intensifying pressures on parents of all race and class backgrounds to become experts in their child's educational development and to prioritize the child's educational opportunities and future[6]. In short, discourses of merit and intelligence shouldered parents with additional responsibilities towards a child's educational future, empowering them to claim greater authority than professional educators.

Putting these two bodies of scholarship in conversation evidences how the discourse on giftedness impacted both institutional inequality through merit-based gifted and talented programs and by informing ideologies of parenting, providing a more comprehensive account of how and why giftedness profoundly shaped both the school and the home. This article considers the cultural work the discourse accomplished; regardless of whether or not experts truly believed giftedness was more a reflection of nature or nurture, or if they trusted parents to be able to identify gifted children (most didn't), experts explicitly told parents that their action or lack thereof would profoundly

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century social constructionist thought. Journal of American History. 2010; 96 (4): 1057-1084; Plant, Rebecca Jo. Mom: The transformation of motherhood in modern America. Chicago: the University of Chicago Press; 2010; Stearns, Peter N. Anxious parents: A history of modern childrearing in America. New York: New York University Press; 2003; Vicedo, Marga. The nature and nurture of love: From imprinting to attachment in Cold War America. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press; 2013.

5. For a comprehensive account of the rise of psychology in American society, see Herman, Ellen. The romance of American psychology. Berkeley: University of California Press; 1995.
6. Historian Julia Grant, whose excellent study of advice literature on parenting has deeply informed my work, explains how she uses the terms *mother* and *parent*: «My sometimes interchangeable use of the words "mother" and "parent" reflects the uncertainty about the gender of the caregiver that has pervaded the advice literature on child rearing. In principle, the mother is not the only parent of a child, and during certain periods in Western history, the father has been regarded as the more significant parent. The emergence of our conception of the mother as the pivotal parent, however, is inextricably entangled with the changing character of parenthood that is the subject of this book». Similarly, guidebooks for gifted children addressed parents generally. And while both parents were responsible for child rearing, the form this responsibility took fell along gendered lines. The father assumed financial responsibility for the child's education (private school, paying for extracurricular activities, or specialized lessons) while the mother assumed the emotional and pedagogical labor of creating a home environment conducive to inculcating and nurturing giftedness. See Grant, n. 4, p. 3.

impact their child's education and the future of democracy. The discourse on giftedness therefore gave the wider public the impression that disparities in educational achievement between both individuals and groups could be explained by the parenting a child received, putting significant pressure on all parents to make educational achievement a top priority for their child.

My article uses experts' studies of giftedness, newspapers, and parenting guidebooks to provide a cultural history of giftedness from 1920-1960. This forty year time period allows me to trace how the origins of giftedness informed its meteoritic rise and impact on parenting cultures in the United States. The piece unfolds in three parts. First I interrogate how and why giftedness emerged in the 1910s and the distinctions between giftedness and intelligence that began to develop in the 1920s[7]. Next I explore how psychological and educational policy experts' work on giftedness traveled to the wider public through newspaper articles that introduced non-expert audiences to the individual and societal benefits of giftedness. Finally, I analyze how guidebooks for parents with gifted children in the 1950s placed increased pressures on parents to assume a more active role in maximizing their child's ability to access the best possible educational resources.

2. The Limitations of Intelligence and the Emergence of Giftedness

Giftedness emerged as a psychological category similar to yet distinct from intelligence in the 1920s. But what was intelligence? And how was giftedness different? Historian of science John Carson notes that while the definition of intelligence changed over time, four ongoing tensions existed among both psychologists and the larger public within the discourse. They were:

> «[...] how to define intelligence, whether it was one thing or many, what the relative importance of nature and nurture were in its development, and what weight it should be accorded in various decision-making situations where merit was at issue»[8].

7. Leslie Margolin examines the construction of giftedness, focusing more on how and why the category developed than the ways in which it differed from intelligence. See Margolin, Leslie. Goodness personified: The emergence of gifted children. New York: Aldine de Gruyter; 1994.
8. Carson, n. 3, p. 258.

Though these tensions remained unresolved, the introduction of the Stanford-Binet in 1916 marked a shift: intelligence and IQ became synonymous and were understood to be an «innate, quantifiable mental ability»[9]. In other words, experts defined intelligence as IQ, understood it as one thing, saw it as a reflection of nature, and believed it should be accorded significant weight in various decision making capacities. But as this definition of intelligence began to harden, another category—giftedness—emerged, taking on other meanings that intelligence did not address. Experts expressed ambivalence about whether this new thing called giftedness was the result of nature or nurture, and while they did not always agree on the best way to measure it, intelligence tests were the most frequently used method of evaluating giftedness. However, experts were sure that giftedness was many things: intelligence, character, athletic or artistic ability, and more. The emergence of giftedness responded, in part, to the newly narrow definition of intelligence and the culture-and-personality scholars who interpreted IQ tests as a reflection of nature, not nurture.

From its inception, the boundary between giftedness and intelligence was quite fluid. According to sociologist Leslie Margolin, J.H. Van Sickle was the first to use the term gifted child in his article «Provision for Gifted Children in Public Schools» published in the journal *Elementary School Teacher*[10]. In fact, experts sometimes failed to make distinctions between these two terms[11]. But during the 1920s, giftedness emerged as a related but separate category. Guy Whipple's 1919 study *Classes for Gifted Children* provided a sustained analysis of giftedness. Whipple left his post as a Professor of Education at the University of Illinois for a position as a Professor of Applied Psychology at Carnegie Institute of Psychology, but his text was based off research he conducted at the largest elementary school in the city of Urbana, Illinois. He begins by addressing why a study of giftedness mattered: the movement for

9. Carson, n. 3, p. 183.
10. Quoted in Rawlins, Roblyn. Raising 'precocious' children: From nineteenth-century pathology to twentieth-century potential. In: Beatty, Barbara; Cahan, Emily; Grant, Julia, eds. When science encounters the child: Education, parenting, and child welfare in 20th-century America. New York: Teachers College Press; 2006, p. 77-95 (83).
11. See, for example, Burnside, Lenoir H. An experimental program in education of the intellectually gifted adolescent. The School Review. 1942; 50 (4): 274-285; Brown, Marion V. Teaching an intellectually gifted group. The Elementary School Journal. 1949; 49 (7): 380; and Santayana S., George. The intellectually gifted child: His nature and his needs. The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues, and Ideas. 1947; 21 (5): 260.

«universal public education» forced students to be grouped into grades, an arrangement poorly suited to addressing the significant mental differences among children of the same age[12]. Providing gifted students with better educational opportunities would solve that problem. The bulk of his text is devoted to discussing the various educational and mental tests used to select gifted students, and he frequently used the term *bright* interchangeably with *gifted*, choices which suggest the similarities between giftedness and intelligence. At the same time, his analysis of artistic abilities suggests that giftedness was not synonymous with intelligence, and instead the term might reflect a variety of different abilities. The elements of giftedness he identified—that it was inclusive and could refer to multiple talents but should be recognized by an objective test—would remain central to the category in the following decades.

Though Whipple may have been the first to provide a study of giftedness, Stanford psychology professor Lewis Terman's 1925 book, *Genetic Studies of Genius* (with the telling subtitle *Mental and Physical Traits of a Thousand Gifted Children*) provided a comprehensive overview[13]. The start of a longitudinal study that would trace these children over the course of their lifetime and continue after his death, the text often used terms such as genius, gifted, intellectually superior, and bright interchangeably. In fact, the only way Terman distinguished giftedness from the other terms was in studying the multiple facets of giftedness including drawing, drama, painting, and dancing.

The majority of Terman's text suggested the similarities between giftedness and intelligence. He addressed subjective ways of identifying gifted students in his text, such as the child's classroom performance or teachers' recommendations, but he ultimately used intelligence tests to decide which students to include in the study. And while he did question parents about their child rearing practices, he concluded that even though these parents tended to answer their inquisitive child's questions and supported their interests «nothing has been found to warrant the belief that the superior intellectual attainments (…) are in any considerable degree the product of artificial stimulation or forced culture»[14]. Moreover, Terman did not see providing better

12. Whipple, Guy. Classes for gifted children: An experimental study of methods of selection and instruction. Bloomington: Public School Publishing Company; 1919, p. 5.
13. Terman, Lewis. Genetic studies of genius volume 1: Mental and physical traits of a thousand gifted children. Stanford University Press; 1925.
14. Terman, n. 13, p. 287.

opportunities to the more able as problematic, and instead rationalized it as democratic. In response to a critique of intelligence testing made by Walter Lippmann, Terman found «the essential thing about a democracy is not equality of opportunity (...) but equality of mental endowment». He went on to conclude tests could «sift the schools for superior talent ... in whatever stratum of society it may be found»[15]. While these reflections did not apply to giftedness explicitly—which is unsurprising given Terman's vague distinction between giftedness and intelligence—they reveal how Terman's work was motivated by his belief in the potential of testing to solve social inequality.

Leta Hollingworth, a professor at Teachers College at Columbia University and a leading expert on giftedness, was among the first to offer a definition of giftedness and provided further structure to the flexible category. Her book, first published in 1926 as *Gifted Children: Their Nature and Nurture*, defined the gifted child as any child who «test[s] much above average on standardized scales for the measurement of intelligence, and also those who test much above average on scales for the measurement of the special talents»[16]. She found that giftedness was not limited to children who were intellectually smart. A child could also be athletically, musically, or socially gifted. The breadth of this definition challenged the more limited notion of intelligence. But at the same time, since scales of measurement for these other traits did not yet exist, scientifically determining giftedness was a challenge. Hollingworth placed great emphasis on tests as an important measure of merit. And although she described the limitations of the technology, she expressed the hope that eventually mental tests would make it «possible to select individuals who have extraordinary capacity to lead, rule, and advise mankind»[17]. Hollingworth did not question whether some students deserved better opportunities than others; she was an eugenicist, and assumed that gifted students should be given better educational opportunities[18]. Both her definition and method of evaluating giftedness reinforced it as a category that was broader than intelligence, but that simultaneously could only be evaluated by the tools used to measure intelligence.

15. Carson, n. 3, p. 250.
16. See Hollingworth, Leta S. Gifted children: Their nature and nurture. New York: The MacMillan Company; 1929, 5th ed., p. 42.
17. Hollingworth, n. 16, p. 345.
18. Kasper, Linda. Feminist and eugenicist thinking in a woman educator: The case of Leta Stetter Hollingworth [doctoral thesis]. Indiana University; 2003.

The psychologist Henry Herbert Goddard also provided a definition of giftedness in his 1928 text *School Training of Gifted Children*[19]. According to his biographer Leila Zenderland, Goddard «became world famous as the leading spokesman of a movement which introduced these new mental measuring devices into the basic institutions of American life» in the 1910s[20]. His book described classes for gifted children in Cleveland, Ohio, which was among the first places in the country to offer gifted and talented programs, and outlined the challenges in defining giftedness:

> «The problem involved here is the fundamental one of whether these so-called superior or high I.Q. children have inherited special talents and abilities, as is implied by the term "genius" or "gifted", or whether, on the other hand, they are merely possessed of a better brain and nervous system»[21].

While Goddard understood giftedness to be closely associated with IQ, he also noted that it expanded beyond IQ to include other traits and characteristics. His explanation of giftedness also raised questions about whether it was the result of nature or nurture, and felt that «special talents or abilities are not inherited but acquired»[22]. Therefore, the culture in which a child was raised—something that parents could control—impacted giftedness. And, similar to Terman, he defended the study of giftedness as an inherently democratic project. He wrote «Instead of the special class for gifted children being undemocratic, it is the only truly democratic procedure — the only plan that gives the bright child a chance»[23]. By tapping into older concerns about how to fairly allocate resources in a democracy, Goddard was able to gloss over the way giftedness legitimated inequality and instead emphasized how merit expanded opportunity.

While most experts did not clearly define the boundary between giftedness and intelligence, they did differentiate giftedness from genius and precocity. As sociologist Roblyn Rawlins has noted, «the scientific understanding and social meaning of early intellectual development in children changed from being a worrisome problem for nineteenth and early twentieth century

19. Goddard, Henry Herbert. School training of gifted children. Yonkers-on-Hudson, New York: World Book Company; 1928.
20. Zenderland, n. 3, p. 2.
21. Goddard, n. 19, p. 41.
22. Goddard, n. 19, p. 42.
23. Goddard, n. 19, p. 28-29.

parents to being an exciting challenge for parents after the 1930s»[24]. Early studies of giftedness explicitly differentiated between gifted students and the precocious child or abnormal genius. Terman addressed the question head on, writing «One reason for the general neglect of this field of pedagogy has been the widespread belief that the apparently gifted child is merely precocious, and usually pathologically so»[25]. Similarly, Leta Hollingworth anticipated concerns over the link between genius and insanity. She dismissed studies by «Lombroso and others» finding that the relationship between genius and insanity had never fully been answered[26]. Goddard raised a similar issue, noting that the «proverbially eccentric» genius could be «hard to get along with», but ultimately finding that these individuals' potential contributions to society made investing educational resources in them a valuable endeavor[27]. These texts demonstrate experts' efforts to normalize giftedness by contrasting it to genius and precocity.

Fig. 1. Comparing the height of women who scored above 140 on IQ tests.
Source: Hollingworth, Leta S. Gifted children: Their nature and nurture. New York: The MacMillan Company; 1929, 15th ed. p. 94.

24. Rawlins, n. 10, p. 77.
25. Terman, Lewis. Editor's introduction. In: Stedman, Lulu. Education of gifted children. Yonkers-on-Hudson: World Book Company; 1924, p. vii.
26. Hollingworth, n, 16, p. 14.
27. Goddard, n. 19, p. 122.

The term giftedness also began to gain traction in a moment when the culture and personality school advocated for a shift away from biological theories of difference and toward culture as an explanation for differences between individuals and groups. In the 1910s, anthropologist Franz Boas challenged the hereditarian concept of intelligence. By the 1920s, Boas's student Otto Klineberg as well as African American social scientists including W.E.B. Du Bois and Horace Mann Bond began arguing that the environment could significantly alter IQ scores[28]. As historian Joanne Meyerowitz notes, the culture and personality school weighed in on key social justice controversies of the time, including debates over intelligence testing[29]. They believed that:

> «[...] social scientists could redesign the character of a culture by modifying the child rearing of its future generations (...). This prescription for change lifted child rearing from the domain of parents and families (and pediatricians and therapists) and into the realm of group identity, national politics, and international relations (...) it involved an assessment of parenting and invited interventions that would especially monitor mothers [and] promised to enhance achievement and motivation»[30].

From the beginning, experts including Hollingworth, Terman, and Goddard all believed that investing in giftedness was good for the country[31]. Asserting the democratic underpinnings of giftedness enabled experts to use merit to legitimate offering some students better educational opportunities than others. So while discussions about democracy in the context of giftedness may have increased parents' receptivity to identifying and raising gifted children, the culture and personality school's emphasis on the environmental underpinning of different traits and characteristics suggested the important role parents could and should play in fostering this trait.

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28. Carson, n. 3, p. 261.
29. Meyerowitz, n. 4, 1062.
30. Meyerowitz, n. 4, 1084.
31. For a selection, see Albers, Mary Elizabeth; Seagoe, May V. Enrichment for superior students in algebra classes. The Journal of Educational Research. 1947; 40 (7): 481-495; Burnside, Lenoir. Psychological guidance of gifted children. Journal of Consulting Psychology. 1942; 6 (4): 223-228; Dvorak, August; Rae, J. J. A comparison of the achievement of superior children in segregated and unsegregated first-grade classes. The Elementary School Journal. 1929; 29 (5): 380-386; Peachman, Marguerite C. Attitudes: their significance in education for the gifted. Journal of Educational Psychology. 1942; 33 (3): 183-198; Pregler, Hedwig O. The gifted: Society's neglected assets: the Colfax partial segregation plan. The Clearing House (1949); 24 (3): 141-145; Santayana, n. 12.

Up through the 1960s, giftedness would remain closely intertwined with intelligence—no tool or method for identifying giftedness aside from intelligence tests ever gained widespread acceptance or use. However, the definition was broader than intelligence and could refer to many abilities, leaving open the question of whether nurture could change a person's IQ. Through the media, psychologists publicized their findings about the promises of giftedness and questions about its environmental or natural origins to non-expert actors, laying the groundwork for parents in the 1950s to accept and even desire gifted students.

3. Translating Giftedness to the Public

Journalists helped bring these academic debates and questions about giftedness into homes across the United States, making debates about ability, equality, and opportunity accessible and relevant to wider audiences. These articles meaningfully engaged the expert literature, citing psychologists including Hollingworth. They addressed the necessary institutional changes schools should make to help the gifted, and told parents how they should identify and accommodate gifted children. This advice informed social and cultural expectations about parents' obligation to their child's educational development.

Tracing the number of articles provides evidence of the increased interest in and spread of the discourse from its inception through the institutionalization of gifted and talented programs, showing how ordinary parents were introduced to ideas about giftedness. *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, and *The Chicago Tribune* all covered giftedness in the 1920s and 1930s, often running articles that drew attention to the «neglected» gifted student[32]. These same periodicals published over twenty articles on the topic in the 1940s. In the 1950s, many major newspapers covered giftedness. *The New York Times* published at least twelve articles, *The Chicago Tribune* published nearly twenty articles, *The Los Angeles Times* ran twenty-three articles, and

32. See, for example, Contends gifted children suffer school neglect: Lack chance to develop, psychologist says. Chicago Tribune. 25 Apr 1936; Education pays little heed to gifted child: Normal youngsters get more attention. Schools study normal child, but gifted one goes neglected. Chicago Tribune. 14 Jun 1931.

The Boston Globe had ten pieces on the topic. Associations including the American Association of Gifted Children[33] and the National Association of Gifted Children[34] helped promote giftedness beyond the academy. These organizations publicized experts' research and helped convince the public that the «neglected» gifted student was a problem worthy of their attention.

Some of the articles on giftedness simply reported on the issue, and were not aimed at parents specifically. As early as 1910, *The Boston Globe* covered research on giftedness, and quoted mathematician Robert J. Aley who stated «It is a fact that every child born into the world has the right to be understood and to realize his greatest possibility. This truth applies to the gifted child as well as the child lowest in the scale. It is high time that our schools were giving to these extraordinary children the attention that their work merits»[35]. During the 1920s and 1930s, *The New York Times* reported on local efforts to educate the gifted[36]. One article shared scientific research dispelling stereotypes about precocious children, emphasizing linkages between health and giftedness[37]. Another grouped gifted and precocious children together to make a larger argument about the dangers of neglecting these students[38]. These articles drew attention to both the research on giftedness as well as practical efforts to accommodate this unique subset of the school age population.

Other articles were directed at parents. Gladys Huntington Bevans, who frequently wrote about giftedness for *The Chicago Tribune*, told the story of a man who found a scholarship to a private school for his gifted son. Another Bevans column offered firsthand advice from a mother with a gifted child, urging parents of the gifted to «turn his attention on to some branch of natural science», make sure he doesn´t strain his eyes with too

33. Duke University American Association for Gifted Children at the Social Science Research Institute. Increasing opportunities for the underserved in gifted programs. [cited 30 March 2020]. Available from https://aagc.ssri.duke.edu
34. National Association for Gifted Children. A brief history of gifted and talented education. [cited 27 March 2020]. Available from http://dev.nagc.org/resources-publications/resources/gifted-education-us/brief-history-gifted-and-talented-education
35. Fruitful day for teachers. Boston Globe. 5 Jul 1910.
36. Aids «gifted» students. New York Times. 20 Nov 1928. Would diversify college training. New York Times. 30 May 1931. Flexner urges a school for gifted pupils; finds intellect «poured into gutter» here. New York Times. 19 Mar 1933. City will open schools of art and music in fall to encourage gifted students. New York Times. 29 May 1935.
37. Beauty and brains akin, teacher says. Boston Globe. 11 Mar 1932.
38. Contends gifted children suffer school neglect. Chicago Tribune. 25 Apr 1936.

much reading, and to pay great attention to «his diet, rest, [and] outdoor exercise»[39]. Other articles took a more critical tone towards parents who failed to adequately address the needs of gifted children. One article quoted Hollingworth and found «Parents are usually poor judges of the intellectual gifts of their children»[40]. Headlines such as «Mothers Slow to Recognize Gifted Child» provided further evidence of how parents, and specifically mothers, failed the gifted[41]. These texts strongly implied that if a child failed to reach her full potential, it was the parents' fault. While few of the articles addressed the nature/nurture debate explicitly, the advice they provided to parents suggested that parents could and should play an important role in cultivating giftedness—blaming parents who failed to do so.

Just as the culture and personality school drew parallels between childrearing and a nation's «character», these articles promoted giftedness and its capacity to increase the nation's wellbeing. Frances Ilg and Louise Ames's widely syndicated «Child Behavior» column rhetorically asked «Is competitive evaluation of the relative ability and the relative academic performance of different schoolchildren undemocratic?» and found, «Our answer (...) is a strong "No"»[42]. Articles assuaged any concerns parents might have about whether it was fair to give more resources to the brightest students, and suggested instead that good citizens should do all they could to raise gifted children[43]. In the late 1950s, the launch of *Sputnik* enabled journalists to frame giftedness as democratic in the midst of the Cold War[44]. These articles helped parents understand that raising a gifted child was not a selfish act; rather, it was necessary for the overall good of democracy, especially in the midst of the Cold War. Thus, Just as the emergence of the discourse on precocity that English literature scholar Sally Shuttleworth dates to the mid-nineteenth century responded to «the new competitiveness of the industrial economy», so too did giftedness respond to and reflect larger concerns about the rise of universal public education[45].

39. Here is what to expect of gifted child. Chicago Tribune. 6 Oct 1940.
40. Beauty and brains akin, teacher says. Boston Globe. 11 Mar 1932: 38.
41. Mothers slow to recognize gifted child. Chicago Daily Tribune. 29 Apr 1940: 16.
42. Is competition bad? Boston Globe. 28 Oct 1960.
43. For a similar example, see Minority rights. Boston Globe. 2 Dec 1951.
44. Porter, n. 3, p. 598.
45. Shuttleworth, Sally. The mind of the child: Child development in literature, science, and medicine, 1840-1900. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2010, p. 131.

4. Guidebooks

The media undoubtedly helped educate the public on giftedness, and published multiple articles that advised parents on the best way to educate gifted children. Similarly, guidebooks encouraged parents to become actively involved in cultivating giftedness in their homes. Most guidebooks were published in the 1950s, so parents had prior exposure to giftedness from the media. Guidebooks not only provided more detailed instructions on how parents should support gifted children outside of school, they instructed parents on how to implement gifted and talented programs and how to negotiate with their school system to ensure their gifted child's access to the best possible educational opportunities. In the professional literature, psychologists worried that parents might misinterpret experts' advice, and that their bias towards their own children would prohibit them from judging their child's true giftedness[46]. In contrast, guidebooks encouraged parents to identify their gifted children, adding that parents should have their children tested professionally to confirm their suspicions[47]. But regardless of whether psychologists actually thought parents could identify gifted children, their guidebooks empowered parents to do so, and to take active steps towards ensuring their child's access to the best educational resources. Thus, they put increased responsibility on parents to ensure their child's educational success and development.

But what explains the explosion of giftedness guidebooks in the 1950s? As historian Jim Wynter Porter notes, «*Sputnik* had much to do with the sudden amplification of calls for gifted education in the final years of the 1950s»[48]. One guidebook author even addressed Sputnik and the role it played in motivating interest in giftedness[49]. But even before Sputnik, experts had been

46. As one book on giftedness said, «While parents are likely to be biased in estimating the intelligence of their children, their reports are often of considerable value in identifying gifted children. (...)The factors which lead parents astray in judging their children's intelligence are (…) bias, inaccurate observation, and failure to keep in mind the total child population». See Bristow, Craig, Hallock, and Laycock. Identifying gifted children. In: Witty, Paul ed. The gifted child. Westport: Greenwood Press; 1951, p. 15-16.
47. Brumbaugh, Florence N.; Roshco, Bernard. Your gifted child: a guide for parents. New York: Henry Holt and Company; 1959, p. 42-44; Cutts, Norma E.; Moseley, Nicholas. Bright children: a guide for parents. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons; 1953, p. 7-18.
48. Porter, n. 3, p. 598.
49. Abraham, Willard. Common sense about gifted children. New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers; 1958, p. xi.

writing books aimed at helping parents recognize and raise gifted children. In 1951, Paul Witty, a Professor of Education at Northwestern University, explained that giftedness was now entering «the stage of rapid dissemination of knowledge about gifted children»[50].

Three reasons explain the broader public dissemination of interest in giftedness in the 1950s. First, the larger Cold War climate increased receptivity to arguments about the democratic and competitive nature of gifted education. Second, parents were primed to accept the advice of psychological experts because of the rise of the psy-disciplines. Finally, opportunities to attend college expanded after World War Two. Raising a gifted child increased the likelihood that she could not only attend college, but also receive scholarships.

Since its inception, experts drew on the larger discourse of merit and couched their arguments for giftedness in the language of democracy and equality. But giftedness also reflected and responded to Cold War concerns about the viability of democracy in the face of communism. In the words of one guidebook, «The theme of a better life for all of us and a fulfillment of the potentialities of these wonderful youngsters is subdued in a shadow of fear—fear of Russia, fear of our not being world dominant»[51]. Communism promised equality, while democracy promoted individualism, competition, and capitalism. Giftedness rejected the (seemingly socialist) assumption that all students should be given the same education. Instead, giftedness created a competition among school age children for resources, where merit awarded the best resources to the best students. Moreover, the social values ascribed to giftedness also aligned with Cold War ideologies. Historian Jamie Cohen-Cole notes in his examination of creativity, «What we see in the way postwar Americans consistently marginalized genius is how very important it was to them that positive mental traits be adaptable to society»[52]. Positive mental traits were one of the hallmarks of a gifted individual, distinguishing them from the maladapted genius or precocious child. The combination of promoting positive mental traits and the associations between giftedness and democracy meant that parents (mothers) raising gifted children were playing an important role in the Cold War.

50. Witty, n. 46, p. 5.
51. Abraham, n. 49, p. 9.
52. Cohen-Cole, Jamie. The open mind: Cold War politics and the sciences of human nature. Chicago: Chicago University Press; 2014, p. 55.

Equally important, parents were poised to receive advice on giftedness from psychological experts, and saw benefits in educating their gifted children given the increased likelihood that a gifted child could attend, and afford, college. Historian Julia Grant has documented «the pervasive culture of the baby book in the post-World War II era» and the way in which scientific discourses of childrearing were accepted—and rejected—by mothers[53]. Giftedness guidebooks are a significant yet overlooked subset of that literature.

In addition to the popularity of psychology generally, the fact that colleges and universities were not only accepting an unprecedented number of students —thanks, in no small part, to the GI Bill—but also funding these students through programs like the National Merit Scholarship helped to demonstrate the practical benefits of raising a gifted child. And just as the parenting guidebooks made links between fighting communism and giftedness, they also acknowledged how giftedness aligned with mothers' willingness to embrace «Dr. Spock» and the expansion of opportunities in higher education[54].

The very definition of giftedness in these guidebooks did important cultural work because the breadth of the definition suggested any child might be gifted. For example, Witty's guidebook quoted a «group of educators» and defined giftedness as any child «whose performance in a potentially valuable line of human activity is *consistently* remarkable»[55]. This was an extremely broad and all-encompassing explanation; Ruth Strang, also a Professor of Education, used Witty's definition in her book for parents. Willard Abraham, another Professor of Education, addressed the breadth of the definition in his text, finding «Define the gifted child almost as you wish and you will find some authority to support your point of view»[56]. Experts created these broad definitions because they did not want to miss out on any potentially gifted student[57]. In the process, these definitions told parents that any student might be gifted. Parents who were unsure about whether or not they had

53. See Grant, n. 4, p. 12.
54. Abraham, n. 49, p. 43.
55. Witty, Paul. Helping the gifted child. Chicago: Science Research Associates, Inc.; 1952, p. 5.
56. Abraham, n. 49, p. 21.
57. According to giftedness experts DeHaan and Havighurst, «The broader definition, however, is certainly worth the slight risk of wasted effort involved, because the gains to be obtained by giving special educational opportunities to a large number of gifted children far outweigh the possible wasted efforts spent on the few children who turn out to be not gifted after all.» DeHaan, Robert; Havighurst, Robert. Educating gifted children. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press; 1957, p. 3.

a gifted child should take active steps towards cultivating an environment conducive to inculcating giftedness.

Guidebooks frequently engaged the nature and nurture debate, and told parents that the environment they created for their gifted child mattered. Strang concluded, «The gifted child is a product of nature and nurture in intricate combination»[58]. Other guidebooks came to similar conclusions[59]. The advice experts tended to give parents about the type of environment they should cultivate fell into two categories. Experts either emphasized the affective resources a parent should provide or described the material resources necessary to help a gifted child succeed.

Strang addressed the question about the emotional environment parents should cultivate in a section of her book entitled «Parental Attitudes». She warned against parents who were overprotective, possessive, or exploitative[60]. Other guidebooks also made recommendations to parents about how to best cultivate a supportive emotional environment for their gifted child[61]. Florence Brumbaugh, the Principal of New York City's Hunter College Elementary School, and her co-author Bernard Roshco, went so far as to find «More important to the gifted child than educational toys, cultural opportunities, special schooling, music lessons, or anything else devoted parents may lavish on the gifted child, is the proper emotional environment»[62]. The emotional environment was just as important as material resources, but this placed additional pressures on parents to perform the necessary affects to maximize giftedness.

Even though guidebooks stressed the importance of the affective environment, they also provided advice on the different ways parents could and should provide for the material environment necessary for raising gifted children. For example, Strang informed parents that «The child must have opportunity and encouragement, instruction and guidance, association with others of similar interests, and the stimulus of success»[63]. She, and others, suggested that children should have access to materials and equipment, nursery school, television, summer camp, field trips, formal lessons, preschool, and

58. Strang, Ruth. Helping your gifted child. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co.; 1960, p. 35.
59. Cutts; Moseley, n. 47, p. 21-22.
60. Strang, n. 58, p. 38-39.
61. Witty, n. 54, p. 35; Abraham, n. 49, p. 44-45.
62. Brumbaugh; Roshco, n. 47, p. 57-58.
63. Strang, n. 58, p. 46-47.

sports[64]. Brumbaugh and Roshco's «Are You a Gifted Parent?» checklist posed questions such as «Do you provide your child with hobby materials and books of his own?» and inquired about whether parents gave children opportunities to work at hobbies or take advantage of lessons[65]. Most texts said that even families without significant financial means could find ways to stimulate and encourage the gifted, contradicting many of the practical suggestions they offered.

Guidebooks also provided detailed instructions on how parents should negotiate with the school and advocate for their gifted child, ensuring them access to the best materials and resources. The authors empowered parents to become experts on their own children, leveraging that expertise to ensure their child's access to the community's best educational resources. According to Abraham,

> «You *do* have a place in the school environment of your child; you're one of the experts who can contribute to a well-rounded education for that youngster. And if he is gifted, your opportunities and obligations take on added importance in several directions»[66].

Guidebooks often suggested that parents become involved in the governance of the school or community. Their advocacy would not only improve their own individual child's educational development. It would also have a lasting impact on their community[67].

These texts contributed to the expectation that parents should become actively involved in their child's educational development by emphasizing how important giftedness was to the child's future: specifically, attending college. As Abraham noted, «For [the gifted] the question is more "which" and "when" rather than "whether"»[68]. These authors projected that a higher percentage of *gifted* youth would be aiming toward and benefitting from college[69]. Even if the child could attain professional success without a college degree, authors warned the child was likely to suffer from an «inferiority complex» later in life[70]. Guidebooks

64. See Cutts; Moseley, n. 47, p. 120 and Witty, n. 55, p. 35-38.
65. Brumbaugh; Roshco, n. 47, p. 81-82.
66. Abraham, n. 49, p. 58.
67. Abraham, n. 49, p. 63; Cutts; Moseley, n. 47, p. 146; Strang, n. 58, p. 218.
68. Abraham, n. 49, p. 215.
69. As Abraham reflected, «Many of us have worked ourselves into a frantic state of insisting that 'everyone' should go to college». Abraham, n. 49, p. 215.
70. Cutts; Moseley, n. 47, p. 208.

for the gifted directed parents of all backgrounds, not only the most privileged, to start planning early and deliberately for their child's college education.

At the same time, parenting guidebooks also warned against the psychological dangers of putting too much pressure on a gifted child. Abraham warned parents against becoming «pushers», which he defined as «the parent who also was dissatisfied with his own lack of attainment and seeks fulfillment through his offspring». He went on to describe how these parents were never satisfied with their child's accomplishments, and expressed concern over parents being able to recognize this behavior in themselves[71]. Ruth Strang also addressed fears about how «forced cultivation of his mental ability» could lead a child to become maladjusted[72]. Brumbaugh and Roshco raised a similar issue, noting that some parents grossly overestimated a child's abilities[73]. Norma E. Cutts, a Professor and Supervisor of Atypical Children at New Haven State Teachers College, and her coauthor Nicholas Moseley also weighed in, telling parents directly, «You don't help a child when you try to force him beyond his capacity. It is a psychological fact that forcing a child into some activity for which he is not ready (...) tends, in the long run, to handicap him in that activity»[74]. Clementine Beauvais, an expert on education, has studied how, in the 1980s and 1990s, discourses of the «pushy parent» reinforced «structural inequalities in educational opportunities and outcomes»[75]. Parenting guidebooks from the 1950s suggest the longer history of concerns over parents who would overestimate a child's abilities. So while these guidebooks clearly encouraged parents to raise gifted children, they also condemned excessive emphasis on giftedness.

Just as guidebooks encouraged parents of all backgrounds to plan for their gifted child's college education, they similarly proclaimed giftedness was accessible to everyone. They explicitly rejected the notion that any one racial or ethnic group was more or less gifted than others. «No race, religion, or socioeconomic group has a monopoly on either intelligence or stupidity», wrote Abraham[76]. Appealing to parents directly in the second-person, he

71. Abraham, n. 49, p. 48.
72. Strang, Ruth. Mental hygiene of gifted children. In: Witty, Paul, ed. The gifted child. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press; 1951, p. 150.
73. Brumbaugh; Roshco, n. 47, p. 53.
74. Cutts; Moseley, n. 47, p. 7
75. Beauvais, Clementine. An exploration of the 'pushy parent' label in educational discourse. Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education. 2017; 38 (2): 159-171 (159).
76. See Abraham, n. 49, 36.

stated, «No matter what the color of your skin, where you live, in what church you worship, where *your* parents came from, or how much (or little) money you have, there may be a gifted child in your home»[77]. While this colorblind and inclusive vision seemed less discriminatory than older notions of intelligence—where science alleged the mental superiority of white Anglo-Saxons over other ethnic groups and especially those of African descent—merit grouped students along racial lines[78]. If giftedness was truly accessible to all students regardless of race, class, or gender, the logical conclusion for why some groups (whites) tended to do better than others (Blacks) could be explained by parenting. In other words, white parents worked hard and dutifully raised gifted children while Black parents neglected the needs of their gifted children. As historian Bethany Moreton notes in her analysis of the charter school movement in the United States, «the worst enemies of black and brown children are rendered, again, as black and brown mothers»[79]. In an earlier moment, the same might be said of gifted and talented programs.

5. Conclusion: Race, Giftedness, and Inequality

By the end of the 1950s, after the passage of the National Defense Education Act (which provided funds for gifted and talented programs), schools across the country successfully implemented special classrooms for the most gifted members of their communities[80]. Even before these measures were taken, some critics predicted these programs would have a disparate impact on Black and Brown children. Bruno Bettelheim, a psychology and psychiatry professor at the University of Chicago, wrote,

> «First there was Little Rock. Then came Sputnik. First there was excitement about equal schooling for all children regardless of race. Then came anxious demands for special schooling for gifted children»[81].

77. See Abraham, n. 49, 37.
78. Carson, n. 3, p. 75-110.
79. Moreton, Bethany. S'More inequality: The neoliberal marshmallow and the corporate reform of education. Social Text. 2014; 32 (3): 29-48 (43).
80. Porter, n. 3, p. 605.
81. Bettelheim, Bruno. Segregation: New style. The School Review. 1958; 66 (3): 251.

He identified the intersections between segregation by race and segregation by talent, and the ways these two different forms of inequality informed each other. Similarly, in his best-seller *The American High School Today*, former President of Harvard University James B. Conant advised schools to separate students on the basis of ability, ensuring that all students learned together so as not to undermine democracy[82]. The comprehensive high school could achieve that goal; segregating gifted students in their own schools would not. These comments suggest resistance to the belief that giftedness would increase democracy, but largely ignored how parents' attitudes would increase competition for the best educational resources.

The hope guidebooks and the media invested in giftedness for increasing democracy and providing opportunity to the most disadvantaged has yet to be realized. Instead, the landscape of public education looks quite similar to what Bettelheim predicted. Academic studies reveal that gifted and talented programs and elite schools have reinforced racial inequality[83]. However, evidence abounds of how effectively the discourse on giftedness informed perceptions of parenting, with parents wholly empowered to advocate for their own child's educational future and to take dramatic measures to ensure their access to the best possible educational opportunities.

To this end, publishers continue to put out guidebooks on giftedness for parents[84]. Media outlets regularly print articles about the increased

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82. Conant, James. The American high school today: A first report to interested citizens. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc; 1959.
83. For a selection of key works on academic tracking, see Ford, Donna; Webb, Karen. Desegregation of gifted educational programs: the impact of Brown on underachieving children of color. Journal of Negro Education. 1994; 63 (3): 358-375; Hammack, Floyd M. Paths to legislation or litigation for educational privilege: New York and San Francisco compared. American Journal of Education. 2010; 116 (6): 371-395; Oakes, Jeannie. Keeping track: How schools structure inequality. New Haven: Yale University Press; 1986; Orfield, Gary; Frankenberg, Erica. Educational delusions? Why choice can deepen inequality and how to make schools fair. Berkeley: University of California Press; 2013; Roda, Allison. Inequality in gifted and talented programs: Parental choices about status, school opportunity, and second-generation segregation. New York: Palgrave Macmillan; 2015; Tyson, Karolyn. Integration interrupted: Tracking, black students, and acting white after Brown. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2011.
84. For a selection, see Delisle, James; Parenting gifted kids: Tips for raising happy and successful gifted children. Waco, Texas: Prufrock Press; 2006; Fonseca, Christine; Emotional intensity in gifted students: Helping kids cope with explosive feelings. Waco, Texas: Prufrock Press; 2015; Schroth, Stephen T.; Helfer, Jason A. Parenting gifted children to support optimal development. Washington, DC: National Association for Gifted Children; 2015; Treffinger, Donald; Inman, Tracy; Jolly, Jennifer; et. al. Parenting gifted children: the authoritative guide from the National Association for Gifted Children. Waco, Texas: Prufrock Press; 2010.

pressures parents are under to ensure their child's educational opportunity. For example, the term «helicopter parent» has been abandoned in favor of the «snowplow parent»[85]. The discourse on giftedness has informed changing expectations about parental involvement in a child's 21st century education. The choices parents make about how, when, and where to educate their gifted children has a direct impact on the racial segregation in American schools. But contemporary discussions of giftedness, and the need for more lasting, sustainable solutions to the problem of educational inequality, rarely link heightened expectations for parents with gifted and talented programs. Unless we address both the causes of structural inequality in gifted and talented programs and the ideological assumptions about parenting undergirding demands for these programs, there is little hope for a more equitable future.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for their excellent feedback on the manuscript, as well as the editors for their thoughtful engagement with this piece. Questions and suggestions at the 2019 ESHHS conference strengthened an earlier version of this paper and contributed greatly to the final product. Conversations with colleagues —especially Jamie Cohen-Cole, Alana Staiti, Peggy Kidwell, Dan Horowitz, Chloe Ahmann, Jenna Gibson, and Jen Nash— helped me at various stages of the paper. Finally, thanks to the librarians at the George Washington University and the archivists at Harvard University Archives. ▮

85. For a selection, see How parents are robbing their children of adulthood. New York Times. 16 Mar 2019. 'Intensive' parenting is now the norm in America. The Atlantic. 16 Jan 2019.