

Research with gifted adults: Mapping the territory using a socially just process.

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Abstract

Despite decades of study with gifted children, the topic of gifted adults remains underexamined. This thesis aims to contribute to the advancement of the study of gifted adults by shedding new light on what is currently driving researchers' interests in the topic and what various stakeholders think needs to happen to build knowledge in the field. To do this, a qualitative multi-method research design was employed within a social-justice informed framework. Research consisted of a literature survey and three studies: a Delphi study, Questionnaire study and Focus Group study, each contributing the voices of specific stakeholders. Participants in the Delphi and Questionnaire studies were 76 multidisciplinary, international experts currently studying and working with gifted adults. The three-round Delphi method explored the views of the group, whereas the Questionnaire examined the individual views of those experts. Four focus groups added the voices of 15 gifted adults to the conversation. The thesis compares and integrates the findings from each study so that overall, the results reflect the combination of voices.

The results show that participants are interested in a wide range of topics about gifted adults, including factors related to achievement, and mental health and well-being. There is interest in the subjective experiences of gifted adults, but this interest is under-represented in published studies. The results reveal disciplinary influences on experts' areas of interest and the methods and concepts used, including strong influences from child-focussed fields. In contrast, the gifted adults are not so interested in achievement-related factors. Many of their views challenge popular stereotypes and historical approaches to research on the topic.

In terms of future research, the results include descriptions of key obstacles and priorities

identified by the experts and gifted adults, and six recommendations from the Delphi Panel. More generally, the results show that, while there is interest in the topic, the study of gifted adults appears to be theoretically ungrounded and methodologically muddled or both, and is dominated by Western views. The thesis proposes that this is a sign of an emerging field, and also a reflection of problems inherited from other gifted-related fields, and offers considerations for moving forward.

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Co-Authorship Forms



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Certification by Co-Authors

The undersigned hereby certify that:

- ❖ the above statement correctly reflects the nature and extent of the PhD candidate's contribution to this work, and the nature of the contribution of each of the co-authors; and
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Prologue: Uncertainty and Lockdown

It is strange to be writing up my thesis in 2020 during a global pandemic. As I write this, I am, like everyone else, separated in solitude. My context is one of physical distancing combined with the social isolation of a single woman writing a PhD thesis. I connect virtually with people around the world – my psychotherapy clients, friends and colleagues - all of whom are experiencing some level of loneliness, uncertainty and perhaps shock. Along with millions of other people, I sit in front of a computer, re-evaluating what is important, and remembering the importance of connection and community. Valuing the social.

I have now spent a week wondering if my research and thesis matter. In the face of a global pandemic and an unpredictable future, can my work contribute in a meaningful way? If so, how?

It feels right to introduce this thesis by reconnecting with and describing the experiences, values, and intentions that motivate me to do this work. I do this in Chapter One by stating my research aims and the questions that I address in this thesis, and then explaining my positionality vis-à-vis the topic (Morrow, 2005).

It also seems timely and important to explicitly acknowledge the social justice approach that scaffolds my thinking. I am, after all, writing this at a time when we are remembering that social context undeniably matters. In Chapter Two, I describe the particular social justice lens I apply in this thesis and explain how the process-oriented approach to social justice informs my design, analysis, and interpretations in this thesis.

As a qualitative researcher, I am aware that my subjectivity - what I bring to the research - plays a role in how I position the topic of gifted adults, including the questions I ask and how I interpret findings. Together, Chapters One and Two provide the opportunity to reflect on my subjectivity and the impact of my values, experiences, and ideas on the research process. By

taking a reflexive stance here and throughout the thesis, I make my biases explicit and strengthen the trustworthiness (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) of my findings.

Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis is about research with gifted adults. To date there is a large body of research into giftedness in children. Still, relatively little work has been published in the area of understanding giftedness in adulthood and within adult-oriented contexts. In a recent review of the literature, the authors call attention to this gap, noting a lack of strong studies and some important gaps in research (Rinn & Bishop, 2015).

Experts in gifted research agree that there is an urgent need to evolve the field of gifted adults (Dai et al., 2011; Rinn & Bishop, 2015; Ziegler, 2009), and currently, it appears that interest in adult giftedness is growing amongst researchers, clinicians, and gifted adults themselves. However, there is little information about why this topic is attracting attention, the scope of different stakeholders' interests and the extent to which they align, or how we can build knowledge to address key areas of concern to various interest groups.

This thesis seeks to address those gaps.

Purpose/Aims of the Research and Research Questions

My thesis explores the current state of research in the field of gifted adults, with the intention of contributing knowledge that will help move the field forward. The exploratory research uses a qualitative multi-method design informed by a social justice perspective to engage with two key stakeholder groups – those currently researching or working with gifted adults and gifted adults themselves.

The intention of the research is to understand stakeholders' interest areas and priorities, including what they believe is needed to move the field forward. The overall aim is to contribute knowledge that supports the development of a research programme with gifted adults.

This research and the thesis seek to provide some answers to two related questions:

1. What is currently driving interest in the topic of gifted adults?
2. What is needed to continue to move forward and build knowledge in ways that are meaningful to the various communities of interest?

The exploratory nature of the work is appropriate for a field that is young and devoid of widely accepted theoretical perspectives. The project aims to contribute important data without prematurely applying theories, concepts and methods from other fields such as gifted education, provide opportunities to reflect on and debate entrenched and differing views, and stimulate discussion amongst all stakeholders.

To my knowledge, the topic of how to move forward with research about gifted adults has not previously been investigated or defined as a research problem. Additionally, I have some understanding of the challenges facing researchers in other gifted-related fields including, for example, gifted education, which has been described as an “unsettled field” (Ambrose, et al., 2012, p.5) with longstanding problems defining and measuring giftedness, and “no common basis for comparing and integrating research efforts” (Dai et al., 2011, p. 127). Hence, it has been daunting to take on something that apparently no one else has considered valuable or perhaps dared to tackle. Therefore, it is particularly important to reflect on and explain why I think the topic is important and worth pursuing, despite potential challenges.

Use of the Word *Gifted* in this Thesis

It is important to acknowledge that *gifted* or *giftedness* as concepts are fuzzy at best, controversial even within the field of gifted education, and are not widely used in relation to adults. Debates and disagreements about different definitions, and disagreements about the use of the word, are longstanding and ongoing, as summarized by Sternberg (2019).

My reason for using the term *gifted adult* in this thesis is that, despite conceptual muddiness, some children are identified and labelled as being gifted, and these children grow

up. Disagreements, differences, and arguments for and against the validity of various identification methods notwithstanding (e.g., Ambrose et al., 2012; Borland, 2003; Peterson, 2012), the fact is that children have been identified as being gifted for well over half a century and, as a clinician and a researcher, I am interested in what life is like for those people beyond childhood. In my opinion, consistent use of the term *gifted* makes practical sense in terms of continuity, at least for now and in the context of this thesis.

I do not attempt to define *gifted* or *giftedness* in this thesis, nor do I use these or related terms to imply any particular construction. Instead, I use the words heuristically as a way to organize thinking and engage in conversation. This thesis' exploratory intention and the inherently iterative nature of the methods I use in my research mean that participants' own views on the meaning of words *gifted* and *giftedness* (and similar) emerge, either explicitly or implicitly.

I acknowledge that my language choice to use the term *gifted adult* may unintentionally prefigure a category and therefore shape the research by including participants who, in some way, identify with that term, and excluding those who do not (Lafrance & Wigginton, 2019). I discuss this as a limitation in Chapter Eight.

Researcher Positionality: My Relationship to the Topic of Gifted Adults

No matter how much you try you cannot divorce your research and writing from your past experiences, who you are, what you believe and what you value. (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 38)

Below, I introduce my interest in gifted adults with particular emphasis on how my clinical work as a psychotherapist, and conversations with some clients, sparked my curiosity in the topic. I describe anecdotally how the work with certain therapy clients raised red flags about how some research addresses the topic of gifted adults, and led me to ask questions about what is known and what is not known about the topic. In terms of reflexivity and situatedness

(Haraway, 1988), I remain aware of how my interest in the topic and my particular perspective may impact what I see and what I might not see.

Our approach to knowledge is situated, and the worst thing we can do is pretend that it is not ... if we fail to appreciate our potential biases, limitations, and partial view, then we give away any chance to consider, address, let alone mitigate or control for these biases and limitations. (Reiter, 2013, p. 132)

The nature and breadth of my inquiry is somewhat unique in gifted related studies. As I discuss in this thesis, most ideas about giftedness are embedded in gifted education and talent development studies, fields which have been heavily influenced by early intelligence theories. In contrast, I do not have a background in education or talent development.

My perspective on the topic of gifted adults is primarily shaped by my training as a psychotherapist and my clinical work with adults, and also by decades of interdisciplinary work on health-related projects. The multifocal lens I use therefore foregrounds *adults in adult contexts*, and includes a broad range of experiences and demands at various developmental stages. At times, my experience as a psychotherapist and psychology researcher interested in adults clashes with ideas in gifted-related fields, and with academic writing on giftedness, including gifted adults.

How I became interested in the topic of gifted adults. I first became curious about the topic of gifted adults in my early 50's, working as a psychotherapist with adults in New Zealand. Before then, my relationship to the word *gifted* was based on popular vernacular and the related stereotypes in Western countries (as described in Chapter Seven). Additionally, use of the word *gifted* is often frowned upon in New Zealand, my home for the past thirty years, at least in part because New Zealanders are known for Tall Poppy syndrome – keeping one's head down rather than standing above the crowd (Jones, 1993; Mouly & Sankaran, 2000).

My interest in the topic of gifted adults emerged slowly in response to questions in the work with certain psychotherapy clients. Over the years, I noticed that many of the adults I worked with shared a cluster of characteristics, subjective experiences, and narratives but, in contrast, had little in common in terms of age, identified gender, cultural backgrounds, occupations, and family situations.

Some of these clients had received medical diagnoses including depression, anxiety disorder, bipolar disorder and, less frequently, borderline (BPD) and other personality disorders, but none appeared to show persistent signs or symptoms of such disorders. Rather, each told stories about themselves that included intermittent ‘ups and downs’ that worried those around them (more than themselves), a sense of not fitting in, frequent boredom combined with delight in a range of experiences, interests and activities, and experiences of deep immersion in complex topics or issues. I eventually learned to ask about their learning experiences, and uncovered common experiences of finding school work easy as a child, misbehaving or being an exemplar in the classroom (and sometimes both), and thinking well beyond, and often at odds with, the requirements in school and, later, in work contexts.

It did not occur to me, my clients, or their referring physicians to consider that they might be gifted, because we all understood the concept to be contextually linked to education and academic achievement in school. Nothing in our training or personal lives led us even to consider the concept. For example, my son was identified as being gifted in primary school, and our family experiences were exclusively around identification procedures based on psychometric tests and teacher nomination, or programming decisions and pedagogy, all within the school context. In other words, gifted education. The term *gifted* was not mentioned or considered relevant outside of the education system or beyond childhood.

My perspectives and unexamined understandings of *gifted*, like that of my clients and the referring physicians, simply excluded much of what these adults shared about their personal

qualities and characteristics, and their psychosocial or subjective experiences. Consequently, I continued to wonder about, and try to make sense of, their shared experiences including their progress in therapy, without a satisfactory frame of reference.

Very much by chance, I was sent Jerald Grobman's (2009) paper describing his clinical work with gifted adults. Grobman, is one of only a few therapists to have published work that specifically examines the psychotherapeutic needs of gifted adults. In his paper, Grobman describes some of the gifted adults he works with, and his therapy approaches with those clients. To my surprise, I found that his rich descriptions of gifted adult clients matched what I was encountering in my own work, and his recommended approaches with those clients were those that I also found to be most useful. Significantly, Grobman's perspective and understanding of the topic is not influenced by gifted education, work with children, or career counselling. Rather, he applies a broad psychological and clinical lens to giftedness - one that takes into account the entire lifespan, but with a particular focus on adults of various ages. Reading his accounts of clients' presentations and experiences in therapy allowed me to identify, examine, and challenge my own assumptions and biases about the term *gifted*, and, gradually, to engage with many of my clients about the topic in what continues to be an exploration and search for understanding today.

Some experiences with my clients. Generally, my clients' questions about giftedness and their explorations are driven by personal interest. Together, we are curious about what it might mean for them to understand themselves as being gifted, and what the implications might be for careers and relationships. While the word *gifted* does not initially sit well with my clients, what they read and learn about usually validates, to some extent, subjective experiences that have previously been un-named, misperceived, and/or hidden. For example, many speak about having deep and passionate interests, and enjoying solving complex problems that others may

not find interesting. For most, their attention to detail, absorption in ideas and projects, and (often) resulting fatigue has been viewed by others as dysfunctional and therefore pathologized.

For example, several years into my exploration of gifted adults, I discovered that the physicians who referred clients to me did so because (quoting one): “We send you the ones that are difficult. They don’t really fit anywhere and are complicated. They are a mystery “. Another poignant example was when a physician referred a gifted client to me saying “He has the most challenging personality disorder I have ever seen!”. Understanding these experiences through a lens of giftedness is almost always a welcome relief for clients, and I have found that, therapeutically, it catalyses new and healthier narratives. Many report that they feel seen and understood for the first time in their lives.

Nonetheless, the adults with whom I work tell me that they also find aspects of the published literature about gifted adults disturbing. In particular, they report that the focus on IQ and achievement in both gifted education literature and much of what they read about gifted adults in academic journals is jarringly at odds with their experiences. This is not to say that intelligence and achievement are not important aspects of my clients’ experiences and lives. Rather, they tell me that the concepts are over-emphasized in the literature and misrepresent their personal values. Additionally, those who have not chosen to pursue high-status careers report that reading gifted-related research about *underachievement* confirms deeply held beliefs about failing to live up to some (assumed) potential. These and similar issues are raised in the Delphi study and the Focus Group study, as reported and discussed in Chapters Five and Seven.

Identifying the Research Problem and Questions

The contrast between my clients’ positive responses to some of what is written about gifted adults and their negative responses to others sparked my interest in what is currently known about gifted adults and, related to that, how ideas are presented in the literature. I quickly discovered that, despite decades of study and scholarly writing about gifted children, the topic of

gifted adults appears to remain underexamined. I then wondered about the current state of research related to the topic, how findings are presented and, given the apparent discrepancy between my clients' subjective experiences and some of the published literature about giftedness and gifted adults, where there are agreements and disagreements in the field.

It became apparent that there are no easy answers to any of my questions, because authors writing about gifted adults generally do not address meta-paradigmatic (Montuori, 2005) or big picture questions, nor is there evidence of critical reflection on specific ideas and approaches. I consider these to be important gaps, particularly in an area of study that is bound to be complex and potentially controversial. My questioning therefore shifted from *What does the research tell us about gifted adults?* to *What drives interest in gifted adults and what needs to happen to build knowledge?* These questions prompted the exploration that eventually led to my research and this thesis.

Chapter Two: Social Justice Approach

In this chapter, I further position myself as a researcher by explaining the social justice approach that frames the research and this thesis. I begin by sharing some of my personal history and values related to social justice. I then introduce Laretta Frederking's (2013) reconceptualization of social justice as "a process of discourse and negotiation around a set of principles, including transparency, accountability and repeated engagement" (p. 2), situate this perspective historically, and show how the approach aligns with my aims and methods.

I didn't explicitly set out to use a social justice approach when I started this project, nor had I previously applied the concept to gifted adults. However, as I examined the work of social justice-oriented scholars working on other complex and socially and culturally embedded issues, I encountered ideas that were familiar from my early work - ideas that seemed a good fit for me and my topic. Specifically, as I explain below, I found that Frederking's (2013) approach to social justice provided a way for me to engage with different and conflicting views in this complex and potentially charged area of study, while remaining vigilant about historically problematic issues. The approach also enabled me to connect with the topic in a way that matches my values. Before introducing Frederking's work on social justice, I briefly describe some key aspects of my own background and some values that drive me towards a social justice approach.

My Background

I was raised in Canada in the 1960's and early 70's, and was strongly influenced by the women's rights and civil rights movements of North America at the time. In particular, I saw the consequences of violent confrontation around polarizing views and came to understand the value of collaboration and negotiation. This continued in my early career, which centred around advocating for the rights of people with disabilities, and in my non-work time when I campaigned for environmental sustainability in a political climate that favoured industry.

I immigrated to New Zealand just at the time of the Springbok's rugby tour, arriving in a country almost torn apart by opposing views (or so it seemed to me at the time), as advocates for indigenous (Māori) rights began to actively disrupt dominant colonial socio-political agendas and policies in New Zealand. At that time, I knew nothing about the history behind the conflict, and needed to make sense of and work effectively with polarizing views. Within that context – a very steep learning curve for me – I designed and established culturally-sensitive neurorehabilitation services nationally.

In hindsight, two things were fundamental to the success of that advocacy and service development work: i) my values around accepting difference and honouring diversity, and ii) processes and practises that build trust while still facing disparity and unfairness head on. I came to realize that these qualities and aims are familiar in discussions of social justice and are relevant to my research.

As I described in Chapter One, I first encountered the concept of giftedness as a consequence of working with certain psychotherapy clients, when I considered the possibility that the concept offered a way to understand my clients and our work. As I explored the literature, I found myself in familiar territory - trying to make sense of and work with differing and often polarizing views. I came to see that research in gifted-related fields has historically been fraught with tensions, disagreements and apparently incommensurable views. In addition, research with gifted *children* is strongly linked to education policies and the political ideology of specific countries such as the United States. In my survey of the literature (Chapter Four), I show how the legacy of child and education-focused areas of study influences some current thinking about giftedness in adults.

In this thesis I argue that we need to uncouple the study of gifted adults from historic and problematic political and policy agendas, understand and work with existing plurality and disagreements, and seek resolution and understanding by engaging with all stakeholders,

including gifted adults themselves. This is the philosophy and ethic I bring to the research and the thesis and it broadly aligns with a social justice approach.

Social Justice Concept

It is important to acknowledge that the term social justice has been defined and interpreted in many ways. Despite its current prevalence in psychology and education, there continue to be multiple meanings (Munger et al., 2016; Thrift & Sugarman, 2019), some of which are explained below.

As I explored the various interpretations, I was eventually drawn to Frederking's (2013) reconceptualization of social justice as a *process of engagement of opposing perspectives*, rather than a political outcome. This way of thinking and practising is familiar to me. According to Frederking's view, the practise of social justice is one of engagement in the face of difficulty, with an intention of strengthening social ties – to work toward resolution together. What that means to me is that a social justice process serves to connect rather than disconnect - to bring about understanding and acceptance of difference, even if you disagree.

For the purposes here, I draw attention to two key differences between Frederking's (2013) conceptualization of social justice and other definitions and interpretations. First, according to this view, social justice is an explicit social *practise*, rather than an aim or outcome. Second, the practice and imperatives of social justice are philosophically unlinked from policy outcomes. Combined, these differences turn attention away from polarizing views and impasses at political or policy levels, and focus instead on the social sphere - engagement with others - for understanding and resolution. This is particularly relevant to my topic.

This research and thesis seek to further our understanding of gifted adults, taking all views into account, with full transparency about debates and problems in gifted studies. A key theme throughout this thesis is that a social justice process such as that conceptualized by Frederking (2013) offers us a new way to frame research with gifted adults so that we can move

beyond the impasses and limitations that plague other gifted related fields. My methodology exemplifies that process, as I explain briefly here and elaborate on in Chapter Three.

Evolution of the social justice concept in the West. In order to recognize the magnitude of the changes that Frederking (2013) proposes, and the significance of those changes to my research topic, we need some understanding of the historical shifts that have happened in the concept of social justice, what motivated those shifts, and the consequences. This section is not intended to provide a complete history of social justice, but rather to situate Frederking's work and its relevance to my thesis.

I begin by briefly describing the evolution of the social justice concept in the West from the industrial revolution to the present, paying particular attention to how the concept became linked to various and often polarized political ideologies and outcomes (Forsyth, 2008). I then present a number of well-known problems with current understandings of social justice and explain how Frederking's (2013) reconceptualization of social justice bypasses problematic associations with political ideologies and outcomes. Finally, I explain and provide examples of how this understanding of social justice aligns with my thinking about my research topic and provides important scaffolding for telling the story of my research and thesis.

Industrial revolution: Equality and liberty. A view of justice as social arose as a response to historic and growing inequalities during the time of the industrial revolution of the 18th and 19th century. Society itself was redefined during that time, as massive industrialization and urbanization tore apart traditional communities. Workers laboured in factories and mines, often in poor conditions, with little compensation and without protection by law or government, while companies, industrialists, and privileged classes prospered.

At that time, social justice manifested as efforts to improve the quality of life for all people, with an initial focus on equal rights and the creation of equal opportunity. Issues of social injustice, understood as inequality, became a matter of political debate, and one of the

driving forces behind the political revolutions of the time was the right to ownership of one's achievements, including fair compensation for labour. Governments began to take an active role in ensuring equal rights in industrial societies through the creation of laws and policies. (Gaus, 2003; Lorenz, 2014). As a result, legal and public institutions, including schools, assumed growing importance in the development of industrialized nation states (Jost & Kay, 2010).

As ideas about what constitutes society changed, so too did ideas about the role of individuals within society. Liberal political philosophy at the time defined justice in terms of individual liberty and dignity, manifest as freedom from oppressive restrictions. Hence, liberal views of 'justice as freedom' emerged alongside increased state responsibility for maintaining social order and equality, creating an essential tension between the role of the state and individuals' rights to free choice.

Philosophically, early concepts of social justice therefore included imperatives for both social equality and what eventually became known as individual human rights. As I explain below, this intention to value equal opportunity for all together with the rights of the individual appears to have become lost in some views of social justice (Frederking, 2013).

Socialist social justice: Equality and fair distribution of material resources. A second thread in the evolution of the concept of social justice - the socialist approach - emerged late in the 19th century, largely in opposition to the continued material inequities of the industrial revolution. At this time, the political economic theories of Karl Marx gained popularity and traction, primarily in Europe, and strongly influenced ideas of what constituted a just society.

Whereas the liberal concept of social justice included the tension between social equality and individual rights, in the Marxist view, equality had clear and resolute primacy over individual freedom and rights. In Marxist political philosophy, justice was understood to relate to need, and manifested as fair distribution of property and resources to meet the varying needs of all members of society.

This was a distinctly ‘social’ notion of fairness and justice, where individuals’ rights were inextricably linked to the needs and resources of all members of society rather than to individual ‘due dessert’ or just reward (Lorenz, 2014). Hence, the social justice politics and programs in the Marxist tradition strongly focussed on eliminating inequities and fulfilling human needs via redistribution of material resources within society, as exemplified in Marx’s famous statement “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs” (Marx, 2008, p. 315). In practise, programs of the state were seen as the best vehicles for this redistributive work.

In the post-World War Two era, a less radical and more pragmatic version of socialist social justice emerged, particularly in the welfare states of Europe. Social justice manifested as collective (government policy) responses to individual need, and ultimately came to be understood as policies to support redistribution of resources in favour of the disadvantaged, a ‘welfare’ thread that continues in some contemporary views.

Liberalism and Rawls: Fairness and distributive justice. Meanwhile, in the United States the political philosophy of John Rawls provided the foundation for a liberal definition of social justice. For the purposes here, I will focus on Rawls’ notions of justice as fairness and the link to the redistributive role of the state.

In Rawls’ view (2001), a just society is grounded in two principles: the equal liberty principle, which provides for essential individual freedoms and entitlements, and the difference principle, which allows for social and economic inequality but only under the two conditions: 1) benefit to the ‘worst off’ and 2) equal access and opportunity for all. The latter is seen to be achieved by means of institutionalized (state) systems of redistribution. This strong shift of responsibility for fairness and equality to state institutions opened the door to a social justice program that scrutinized public programs and policy. Hence, Rawls’ theory and the principle of distributive justice are still generally regarded as providing the foundation for many current

politically charged and policy-oriented social justice movements. Cross (2013), for example, describes the political movement in the USA to create special educational programming for gifted children - a movement that challenged entrenched education policies across the country and led to the development of the field of gifted education.

Post liberalism: Group difference, oppression and fairness. Liberal ideas of social justice further evolved in the late 1980's post-socialist conditions, particularly in the United States. In a society that placed fewer restrictions on individual actions, differences could and did assert themselves. This resulted in the formation of social (group) identities - racial, cultural, and sexual minorities, and gender - and calls for recognition. Consequently, concepts of justice expanded beyond the individual to include social groups (Fraser, 2009).

Additionally, concepts of social justice extended beyond economic inequalities to include the structural injustices of group-based oppression. Iris Young, a key influencer at the time, introduced the notion of a politics of difference wherein "social justice means the elimination of institutionalized domination and oppression" (1990, p. 15). Young argued that there are at least five distinct types or 'faces' of oppression which apply to social groups and are outside of distributive (material) justice: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural domination and violence.

Notions of social justice evolved to include these themes of group difference (collective identity) and oppression at a time when scepticism of the state's ability to uphold equality was growing. We see the continued influence of this concept of social justice in for example, campaigns to reform health and education policies to 'close the gap' (Coates, 2007; Davis & Harrison, 2013).

Neoliberal shifts: Primacy of liberty and of the individual. By the turn of the millennium, concepts of justice were further evolving, this time in a neo-liberal political climate where the rights of the individual clearly gained primacy. Institutions once set up to uphold

social equality and justice were increasingly seen to restrict individual liberty and repress personal freedoms.

Neoliberal reformulations of justice (and here I use the present tense, as these remain influential) emphasize *individual* responsibility, and privatization of social problems such as the distribution of material goods. Social justice is interpreted in individual terms (Thrift & Sugarman, 2019) thus distancing the concept from its origins in social responsibility (Brodie, 2007). In contrast, as described above, the politics of *group* difference, with its emphasis on structural inequalities, scrutinizes and holds public institutions responsible for redressing oppression.

Current climate. We see above the beginning of a bifurcation in the concept of social justice that continues today, and, as I will show, is relevant to the topic of research with gifted adults. The original link between individual rights and the social responsibility of the state has to some extent been broken. Instead, individual human rights, group oppression and the scrutiny of public institutions (including policies) became compartmentalized in specific conceptualizations and ‘projects’ of social justice, with different and potentially conflicting aims (Frederking, 2013).

A clear example of conflicting social justice agendas is found historically and today in gifted education, where the social projects and education policies aimed at providing equal education opportunities for all are supported by some, but criticized by others as repressing individual rights (Borland, 2005, 2012), or oppressing certain groups such as minorities (Bonner, 2001, 2010; Hughes & Bonner, 2006; Jolly, 2009). Similar conflicts are found in other rights-based initiatives where the rights of individuals are pitted against those of certain groups, and where public institutions are viewed with scepticism, such as ongoing conflicts around women’s legal rights to abortion, and the very current conflicts around the use of face coverings.

Such conflicts show a break with the foundational assumption of universal values of justice and fairness claimed by earlier traditions of social justice (Frederking, 2013).

Importantly, this shift in emphasis from universality to difference leads to questions about *whose* values and agendas are given priority, *why* and *for what purpose*. – questions I return to in Chapter 8. Consequently, social justice activism has become increasingly strategic - compartmentalized around ideologies, and single cause- related issues and outcomes at the micro level, and politicized at the macro or policy level (Atkinson & Scurrah, 2009).

Unfortunately, in the pursuit of cause-related outcomes, complexity is usually reduced, leading to ‘sides’, conflict and impasses. As a result, and contrary to its origins, the term social justice is often “at the nexus of a struggle among different political factions, freighted with political implications and appropriated to promote certain ideologies” (Frederking, 2013, p. 9).

As I show in this thesis, this trend is obvious in gifted-related fields. While action and rhetoric may appear to uphold imperatives to do with justice and fairness, gifted studies appear fraught with conflicting aims and polarizing ideologies, with scant ground for engagement and resolution. Therefore, I argue that a new understanding of ‘just’ research is needed to avoid such conflicts as we pursue an understanding of gifted adults.

One contemporary trend: Intersectionality, complexity and group politics. An interesting and influential contemporary approach to social justice is intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), which can be seen as an attempt to move away from the limitations of the neoliberal formulations of social justice. Intersectionality extends the concept in important ways, and future researchers in gifted studies may find it to be useful and, in fact, necessary for understanding the inherent complexities of the topic (for discussions and examples of how intersectionality and similar ‘just’ approaches are used in other complex fields of study see Fine, 2018; Hancock, 2007b; Moradi et al., 2009; Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). Nevertheless, as I explain briefly below, an intersectionality approach is usually cause - driven, outcome focussed

and highly politicized. As such, I do not believe it provides a suitable lens for my discovery-oriented research. Instead, I include it here to acknowledge its place in the evolution of social justice, and to position the approach I use as uniquely relevant to my topic.

The roots of what is known as intersectionality are found in 1980's radical work on race and gender (e.g., Anzaldúa, 1987; hooks, 1992; Hull et al., 1982). American legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) introduced the term to describe how Black women's experiences of multiply intersecting oppressions were obscured by treating race and gender discrimination as separate matters in both law and in activism (Rice et al., 2019). The concept of intersectionality travelled from these strongly activist roots into academia, where scholars challenge single identity politics using analytic approaches that consider the consequences of multiple social group membership including race, gender, class and sexuality (Cole, 2008; Hancock, 2007a; Hurtado, 1989).

An intersectionality approach is both critical and committed to disrupting "the political status quo across social structures and academic disciplines" (Rice et al., 2019, p. 415). Central to Crenshaw's understanding of intersectionality is a call for coalition politics – building or strengthening alliances across social categories to challenge structures/systems of oppression and privilege (Cole, 2008; Cole & Luna, 2010).

While I appreciate that intersectionality offers important ways of understanding the complexity that characterizes social phenomena (Hancock, 2007b), my thesis is not focussed on radical transformation. I believe it is unwise to disrupt a status quo that we know little about, plus there are good arguments *against* co-opting aspects of intersectionality theory to understand complexity while ignoring its radical intentions (see Rice et al., 2019 for further discussion on this). Hence, I believe that an intersectional approach to social justice will be relevant to the topic of gifted adults in the future, but it is not the right approach *now*.

My Approach

As I will show, gifted-related topics including gifted education and talent development are historically controversial topics, where tensions often become polarized around competing aims. While I am cognizant of the dominant ideologies and conflicts in fields that influence current thinking in gifted related fields, I am taking a fresh look at what drives emerging interest and how to build knowledge about gifted *adults*. Importantly, my research is not single issue or ideology driven, and I am not aiming for a one truth, one size fits all answer to the questions. The paradigm within which I address the topic of gifted adults, form research questions, seek answers, and interpret results is exploratory, discovery-oriented, and open to diversity.

I described earlier that my own commitment to social action includes the imperatives of fairness and equality, enacted in processes that honour and examine differences. Resolution (or outcome) is *understanding*. In that way, social justice is what I ‘do’ as a psychotherapist and a researcher, and how I engage with complex issues. For me, social justice is an attitude and practice that disentangles complex issues from political agendas, policy and bias.

These values and intentions align well with Frederking’s (2013) interpretation of ‘social justice as process’. I therefore draw on this process - oriented approach, described below, as both a philosophical perspective and a way to frame my thinking about my research methods and interpretation. Again, social justice was not an approach I set out to take, but rather one that I gradually realised was a key part of my subjectivity as a researcher, and the story I was trying to tell. The relationship between Frederking’s concept of ‘social justice as process’ and the qualitative research methods I used is self-evident in many ways as my thesis unfolds, but will be made more explicit below and in Chapter Three.

Social justice as process. Frederking’s (2013) reconceptualization of social justice represents a deliberate and marked shift away from the concept’s historic associations with political ideologies and outcomes, and reorients toward a process of unbiased *social*

engagement. She views social justice as a process grounded in the principles of diversity, understanding and transparency, and oriented around a process of “deliberation and engagement with those who don’t share our views, our policies, and our goals” (p. 12). These principles retain the connection to the historical imperatives and values of fairness and equality, but sever the conceptual link with policy and politics.

Importantly for my topic, the uncoupling liberates the process and *ultimately any outcomes* from polarizing political or interpersonal values and opinions. I agree with Frederking (2013) that “many solutions aren’t political and shouldn’t be political” (p. 8). In this thesis, I argue that future work with gifted adults must understand and work with difference, and explicitly and intentionally avoid bias and dogma found in other gifted related fields. For that, a specific lens is needed - one that focuses on working *for* social justice in the sphere of social engagement where solutions will be at the interpersonal or social level.

As an approach, Frederking’s (2013) construction of social justice provides a coherent framework that integrates my values, my interest in the topic, and the research aims. In terms of methodology, the ‘social justice as process’ approach informs my design, analysis, interpretations, and decisions about dissemination of results. Overall, Frederking refers to this as a project of “implementing social justice” (p. 14).

Below (Table 1) are some examples of how I implement social justice as process in my research and this thesis, according to Frederking’s (2013) four key principles of social justice: diversity, transparency, understanding and engagement¹. Each of the examples are described in more detail elsewhere in the thesis. The approach is also implicit in my methods and how I tell the story of my research in this thesis.

¹ While the principles in Table 1 are separated for clarity, in practise they overlap.

Examples of social justice as process.

Table 1

Examples of Social Justice as Process

Principle	Illustrative quote from Frederking, 2013	Examples of implementation within the thesis
Diversity	“Social justice needs to be the sphere where we suspend our personal strategic self-interest, not entirely and not permanently, but considerably and consciously.” p. 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment for disciplinary diversity and geographical spread • Inclusive of communities of interest • Term <i>gifted</i> used heuristically • Engagement with differing perspectives • Not oriented toward consensus • Analytic lens: difference and commonalities • Interpretation fosters diversity
Transparency	“Through the process of social justice, individuals share their beliefs transparently, and more importantly, they perceive where their beliefs coincide and diverge with others.” p. 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delphi Method: Iterative feedback process • Semi-structured Focus Groups • Open ended questions • Thick description • Inductive analyses • Divisive rhetoric avoided
Understanding	“Social justice emphasizes deliberation and (in terms of outcomes) trusts the power of dialogue.” p. 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploratory and discovery-oriented • Delphi Method: repeated engagement and negotiation • Focus Groups: deliberation and dialogue • Dialogue and negotiation at conferences
Engagement	“Social justice is about engagement between people rather than the success of legislation, and it is about the challenge of creating solidarity among a broader collective society.” p. 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualitative research • Purposive sampling • Data from communities of interest valued • Researcher engagement with different and opposing views • Distinct and purposeful spaces for all voices (Delphi study and Focus Groups) • Responsive and emergent processes • Reiterative dialogue and debate

In summary, the concept of ‘social justice as process’ provides a framework for me to engage with different and conflicting views in this complex and potentially charged topic of gifted adults, remain vigilant about potential ethical and political problems, and understand reconcilable and unreconcilable differences. It also includes an imperative to share and continue to build understanding in the various communities of interest. I consider this approach and the underlying social justice principles of reflexivity, transparency and engagement with difference to be foundational to my methodology, which I describe in the next chapter.

As Reiter (2017) explains:

We need to, finally, include ourselves in our investigation and introduce a strong self-reflexivity into the core of the research process. For inductive and exploratory research, this means, first, to lay open, and question one's research interest. (p. 133)

Chapter 3: Methodological Approach Used in This Thesis

In the previous Chapter I introduced and discussed my philosophical approach using Frederking's (2013) process-oriented conceptualization of social justice. I showed how it frames my thinking about the topic, my aims and the research, and therefore how it is foundational to my methodology. In this chapter I discuss my methodology as qualitative exploratory research using a multi-method research design.

I begin this chapter by describing the importance of qualitative research to this thesis, focussing on its relevance to my research topic and how the research meets Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I then discuss the exploratory nature of my research and this thesis, including the kind of contributions to knowledge I am seeking to make (Booth, 2008). Finally, I describe my multi-method research design, and the different qualitative methods I used to gather, analyze, and interpret data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Overall, this multi-method research project consists of four interrelated components (herein referred to as studies), each designed to collect and analyze data from a specific participant group or source, as shown below in Table 2. A literature survey examines data from *published scholars*, the Delphi study collects and examines data from a *panel* of experts, the questionnaire specifically studies data from *individual* experts, and participants in the focus groups are *gifted adults*. In this chapter, I focus on the overall project rather than on the component studies. However, I conclude this chapter by briefly introducing the four studies to show how the different methods bring the voices of multiple stakeholders into the

larger conversation. Detailed descriptions of the methodology of the different study are provided in subsequent chapters (as shown below in in Table 2).

Table 2

Methods Used in the Multi-method Research Project

Method	Voice (data source)	Data collection	Recruitment	Analysis
Literature Survey (Chapter Four)	Published researchers	Review of published studies	Literature search	Thematic Analysis (TA)
Delphi Study (Chapter Five)	Panel of international experts	Policy Delphi method: three rounds of online questionnaires	Purposive and snowball sampling	Semantic level TA
Questionnaire (Chapter Six)	76 individual experts	Online questionnaire using open-ended questions	Purposive and snowball sampling	Latent level TA
Focus Groups (Chapter Seven)	15 gifted adults	Video online focus groups using semi-structured interviewing	Purposive sampling	TA

Qualitative Research

While there are many definitions of qualitative research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), the following description captures key aspects that are particularly relevant to the research problem and the questions I’m seeking to answer, and therefore to this thesis:

The term qualitative research is used to describe a set of approaches that analyze data in the form of natural language (i.e., words) and expressions of experiences (e.g., social interactions and artistic presentations). Researchers tend to centralize the examination of meanings within an iterative process of evolving findings - typically viewing this process as driven by induction ... and viewing subjective descriptions of experiences as legitimate data for analyses. An iterative process of inferences means that researchers tend to analyze data by identifying patterns tied to instances of a phenomenon and then

developing a sense of the whole phenomenon as informed by those patterns. (Levitt et al., 2018, p. 27)

As with other well-known descriptions or definitions of qualitative research, (e.g., Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Marshall & Rossman, 2016), the description above - created by the American Psychological Association Publications and Communications Board Working Group on Journal Article Reporting Standards for Qualitative Research (JARS–Qual Working Group) - emphasizes that qualitative research focuses on experience, understanding and meaning-making and, related to that, subjective descriptions are seen as valid knowledge. Therefore, qualitative researchers favour research practise and methods that “facilitate an inside view” (Bryman, 1984, p. 78). My research is strongly focused on the participants’ subjective experiences and ideas. Hence, it is exactly that insider view that I seek to discover, interpret and understand. For example, research question two asks what is needed to move forward with gifted adults research that is meaningful to all communities of interest. The answers to that question will arise from the ‘insider’ subjective views and experiences of the various stakeholders. The strategies that I use to collect data (described below) allow participants to voice their personal experiences in their own words, and the aim of my analysis is “to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Additionally, the JARS-Qual Working Group emphasizes that qualitative research is an inductive and emergent process whereby data are analysed, and emerging patterns iteratively inform researchers’ understanding. This is particularly relevant to my research problem because I am asking new questions about an under-researched topic, and I am building knowledge almost from scratch. The emphasis in qualitative research on *emergence* highlights that new knowledge results from an evolution that involves phases and iteration (Aspers & Corte, 2019) which, as I describe below, are central to my research design and the methods I use.

An important aspect of qualitative research that is implied but not made explicit in the JARS – Qual Working Group description is ‘closeness’ (D. Silverman, 2013), the idea that qualitative researchers engage deeply and closely with their material when generating and analyzing the data, and over time. According to Aspers and Corte (2019), “by getting and *staying* so close to their data – be it pictures, text or humans interacting – for a long time, as the research progressively focuses, qualitative researchers are prompted to continually test their hunches, presuppositions and hypotheses” (p. 153). This closeness and critical reflexivity can often lead to new insights and unexpected distinctions (Åkerström, 2013), both of which seem critically important when so little is known about research with gifted adults, and where we may want to move away from some entrenched ideas from other gifted-related fields.

As I show in this thesis, the qualitative methods I used (shown in Table 2 above) enabled me to ‘stay close’ in many ways. For example, I engaged with the material from a panel of experts² over three rounds of data collection and for many months afterwards, as I analysed the entire data set for the Delphi study (Chapter Five), and then conducted a latent level analysis of the initial questionnaire data (The Questionnaire study described in Chapter Six). This ‘closeness’ and the inherent reflexivity enabled me to recognize some subtle and largely implicit patterns in the data (related to, for example, disciplinary differences and methodological inconsistencies, as discussed elsewhere in the thesis) and to make important distinctions I would otherwise not have made.

How trustworthiness has been addressed in this thesis. Trustworthiness refers to the quality and rigor of qualitative research, and relates to the degree of confidence in the data and interpretation (Shenton, 2004). In this section, I describe the strategies I used to ensure the quality or trustworthiness of my research and this thesis. To do that, I use a framework proposed

² My methods include a Delphi study (Adler & Ziglio, 1996; Linstone & Turoff, 2011; Ziglio, 1996) consisting of a series of three electronically administered questionnaires. The Delphi method is an iterative process – information from each round is analysed and fed back to all participants for further comment in subsequent rounds.

by Guba (1981) and refined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), which sets out four criteria for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility. Credibility refers to how well the findings, including the researcher's portrayal of participants, match participants' experiences and interpretations (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Morrow, 2005). Credibility in my research was achieved through prolonged (and, in the case of the Delphi study, iterative) engagement with the participants, sensitive interactions that supported honest and transparent communication, the use of open-ended questions, and a 'naïve' inquiry style of interviewing in the focus groups. Periodic participant checks (via email during the Delphi process, verbally within the focus groups, and in follow-up emails to participants in all studies) helped ensure accuracy of the data and my interpretations. For example, I sent each focus group participant a summary of the theme and sub themes I identified, to check the accuracy of my interpretations prior to writing up the results. Similar checking and feedback are inherent in the iterative Delphi method (described in Chapter Five). Additionally, the time frame of the Delphi process – five to eight weeks between rounds - allowed participants time to consider the issues presented in the questionnaire for each round of data collection, and to reflect on and edit their responses as often as needed prior to submission.

Subsequent to all data collection, co-analysis and frequent meetings with my supervisors further enhanced the creditability of the analysis and interpretation. During the analysis and writing process, the data were rechecked several times, and in the case of the focus group study, two researchers cross-checked written transcripts with video data.

Importantly, credibility also relates to how researchers communicate to others that they have taken measures to accurately portray the findings (Gasson, 2004). I have addressed this directly by including thick descriptions in this thesis, the published papers, and presentations at conferences. This includes direct quotes and longer excerpts from interchanges, to clearly show

the contexts and responses. I have also taken care to provide as much information as I can about the participants while still ensuring privacy and confidentiality and, related to that, have been careful to explain recruitment and selection methods in my writing and presentations, including any limits to transferability (see below).

Transferability. Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings have applicability in other contexts (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Like most qualitative research, my research focuses on studying a very specific issue and a particular context. I addressed the specificity directly by making the scope of the study clear in this thesis, the papers and presentations. This includes describing recruitment and selection methods, and the boundaries - inclusions, exclusions and unintentional limitations - of the participant groups (e.g., in terms of cultural or disciplinary backgrounds). I also acknowledge the lack of consensus on a definition of gifted adults, and clearly state that I use the term heuristically in my research. By doing so, I hope that readers are able to assess the transferability of my findings to other research contexts and to other participant groups.

I also addressed transferability and its importance in this area of study throughout the thesis by talking about the different lenses applied to gifted-related topics, the limits of transferability, and the opportunities for comparison. I began by introducing my positionality and specific interest in the topic, with the explicit understanding that I bring with me my own disciplinary and personal views and understandings. I also identified and discussed in detail contextual factors that impact inquiry in my research (e.g., use of English as the primary language in my literature survey and studies), and in gifted-related research more generally, to allow and encourage critical reflection about comparisons and transferability (Morrow, 2005).

Dependability. Dependability refers to the quality of the data collection and analysis, and the extent to which other researchers can confirm and repeat the processes and methods used (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to ensure dependability in my research, I kept detailed

written records of all processes including the decisions I made, timeframes, actions, and modifications to my research plans. These were regularly discussed with my supervisors. All research methods are clearly described in the Participant Information Sheets (PIS) (see Appendices A and B), in presentations, and in detail in papers (Chapters Four to Seven) and this thesis. Participants in the Delphi study received emails between rounds of data collection and at the end of the final round, to reiterate the process, any work being done (e.g., analysis of data from previous rounds), and any next steps.

Dependability is addressed more generally by using well-known and well documented methods such as the Delphi method, focus groups and thematic analysis (TA), and by maintaining strict and ethically sound standards for recording and managing data. I also sought and obtained ethics approval for the research from the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (UAHPEC).

Confirmability. Confirmability is concerned with establishing that the results “are not figments of the inquirer’s imagination, but clearly derived from the data” (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 121). Qualitative researchers recognize and acknowledge that research is grounded in subjectivity, and take steps to reduce or otherwise address investigator bias. I used several strategies to reduce the effect of my own bias, including broadening my understanding by doing an extensive review of literature related to the topic and engaging with supervisors and colleagues whose backgrounds differed from mine, to broaden and challenge my views. The multi-method research design helped ensure confirmability in the thesis by combining multiple sources of data (published literature, a large number of experts and four groups of gifted adults) and, in the case of the Delphi study and the questionnaire study, different levels of analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2005; Creswell, 2014) to formulate the themes and considerations presented, as discussed in Chapter Eight.

I also acknowledged my subjectivity and bias transparently by positioning myself at the start of the thesis, and in papers and presentations. In the discussion, I call attention to my subjectivity related to my disciplinary background and the impact on findings, and I highlight the need for further research using different lenses. Furthermore, critical reflexivity and transparency are key principles of the social justice approach that frames my research and this thesis, and both are strategies for ensuring confirmability (Morrow, 2005). I therefore also addressed the issue of bias (and confirmability) in research at a ‘meta’ level in this thesis.

Finally, a multiple triangulation approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Patton, 1999) was used to address credibility, and to more generally establish that my research is trustworthy. Triangulation in research involves employing strategies to include multiple perspectives to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Patton, 1999). The research design (described below) specifically included several different data sources and data collection methods: a literature survey, a Delphi study with a panel of experts, a questionnaire study looking at individual experts’ responses, and four focus groups of gifted adults. Additionally, my supervisors and I brought our respective and different disciplinary backgrounds (psychology, education and psychotherapy) to bear on the project, adding some degree of investigator triangulation (Denzin, 2007).

Research Design

Exploratory, discovery-oriented research. Stebbins (2001), describes exploratory research as “a purposive, systematic, prearranged undertaking designed to maximize the discovery of generalizations leading to *description and understanding* [emphasis added] of an area of social or psychological life” (p. 3). Exploratory research methods are considered to be appropriate and necessary for new and emerging areas of study, such as the topic of gifted adults, that do not have well-honed research questions or refined concepts (Booth, 2008), and where little is known about the topic (Stebbins, 2001). As an exploratory endeavour, my

research is neither theory-driven nor confirmatory (Reiter, 2017). Rather, the emphasis is on discovery. The aim is to gain clarity and contribute knowledge that helps fill gaps, stimulate discourse, and open up avenues of enquiry related to the study of gifted adults.

In terms of the research design, the qualitative methods employed are suitable for answering discovery-oriented questions of ‘how’ and ‘what’, as opposed to ‘why’ (Creswell, 1998). The research is designed to seek descriptive information about the study of gifted adults from different communities of interest. Hence, the exploration is a process that unfolds not only within individual studies but also across several studies, with the understanding that the findings are provisional (Reiter 2017), and that the kind of knowledge I am able to contribute is tentative and represents starting points rather than conclusions (Stebbins, 2001).

Multi-method research design.

Research methodology is significant not only because it embodies philosophical assumptions, but also because it guides the selection of research methods. (Long, 2014, p. 428)

I use a qualitative multi-method design, whereby answers to the research question emerge from the findings within and across a literature survey and three studies - a Delphi study, a questionnaire study and four focus groups (the methods used are described in detail in the relevant chapters, and key aspects are summarized in Table 2 above). All of the methods are consistent with the aims and assumptions of qualitative research described above. I refer to Yin’s (2006) understanding of using multiple methods, which deemphasizes the dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative research and, instead, focuses on an array of methods with shared research questions, and overlapping or strongly complementary data collection and analytic strategies. This combining of methods produces information – converging and otherwise – that is “presumably more compelling than might have been produced by a single method alone” (Yin, 2006, p.41). Complex designs including multiple data sources are

considered to be especially useful for research problems such as mine, where I need to take into account complexities related to, for example, multiple disciplines and priorities (Brewer & Hunter, 2006).

In this research, the literature survey and each of the component studies contributes the voices of specific stakeholders or communities of interest, as shown previously in Table 2. The literature survey contributes the voices of researchers – past and current – whose work with gifted adults has been published in scholarly journals. The Delphi study contributes the combined voices of an international panel of experts who work with gifted adults - experts whose research may or may not be published. The questionnaire study’s findings reflect the *individual* voices of those experts. The focus group study contributes the voices of 15 gifted adults. Overall, the research project is designed to integrate and compare the findings from each study, so that the combination of voices ultimately contributes the information needed to address my research questions fully.

Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase method of TA (described in detail in Chapter Five) is used to analyze and interpret the data from the literature survey and the three studies, to reflect each of the different voices and also to compare and combine finding from the different sources. This reflexive approach to TA “emphasises the importance of the researcher’s subjectivity as analytic *resource* and their reflexive engagement with theory, data and interpretation” (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p. 3), and is therefore compatible with the assumptions of qualitative research. Furthermore, this approach to TA aligns well with exploratory discovery-oriented research because it is inductive and grounded in the data, and therefore retains rather than reduces any heterogeneity in the data. As an analytic tool, TA is also flexible enough to enable me to examine and interpret data at the semantic (explicit) level or the latent (implicit) level, or both (Braun & Clarke, 2020). For example, as I explain in Chapters Five and Six, I conducted a semantic level analysis of all data from the Delphi process to understand the

views of the panel as a group. I also conducted a latent level analysis of the data from the first round of that process (the questionnaire study) to get a better understanding of individual views including within-group differences.

In summary the qualitative exploratory methodological approach, including the multi-method research design, aligns with my research questions and the problem addressed in this thesis. Furthermore, the approach, design and methods used are consistent with the principles of the social justice approach that frames my work. In the next four chapters I describe in detail each of the methods (shown above in Table 2), and the results of each study.

Chapter 4: Survey of the Literature: Published Research with Gifted Adults

In the previous chapters, I introduced the thesis by describing the research problem and questions (including my own positionality), the social justice approach that frames my thinking and the overall methodology employed. I now turn to the survey of published research. As discussed in Chapter Three, the literature survey places the thesis in context and also begins to answer my research questions by contributing the voices of those scholars whose studies with gifted adults have been published in academic literature. A slightly modified version of this chapter has been submitted for publication.

A literature review is many things, but most obviously perhaps it is a surveying of the land in which we have chosen to travel ... it is a map of the terrain not the terrain itself.

(Montuori, 2005, p. 375)

The survey of the literature presented in this chapter is aligned to the two research questions: what is currently driving interest in gifted adults and what is needed to move forward. The survey is configured to serve two purposes. First and foremost, it is purposively configured to provide information to help answer the research questions, particularly the question about what is currently driving interest in the topic of gifted adults. Second, it begins to place the research in context.

This chapter is not an exhaustive review of gifted literature. Rather, it is specific to *published research with gifted adults*. I consider it a first step in bringing together a fragmented body of literature spread across a number of disciplines.

Elsewhere in the thesis, I also integrate reviews and comments on other literature relevant to the topic of gifted adults. For example, in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, I selectively examine literature specific to each of my studies, including conceptual literature and opinion

pieces. Throughout the thesis, theories and concepts are introduced as needed to help disentangle various influences and tensions affecting research with gifted adults. Some of those are introduced in this chapter. This iterative approach to mapping and integrating the literature is consistent with an exploratory emergent methodology as described in Chapter Three.

Scoping the Territory

My survey of the research literature follows on from an extensive scoping process. As the field of gifted adult research is a sparsely investigated area of interest, it does not yet have what could be called a canon of literature. Consequently, to fully engage with my research questions and better understand the current and historical influences on research with gifted adults, I also examined a large amount of scholarly work in fields such as intelligence studies, gifted education, and talent development.

In conducting an initial scoping review, I frequently found myself puzzled. As it turned out, I needed to experience confusion and exasperation before finding a way to return to, and meaningfully reengage with, the sparse and scattered literature about research with gifted adults. I took breaks, and went off on what may seem like tangents, to study and better understand aspects of the philosophy and history of science that appeared to be influencing the various fields of study, and consequently, the field of gifted adults. I was constantly seeking clarity, looking and waiting for a clarifying ‘Aha’ moment as I attempted to separate out what appeared to me to be differing and often unclear agendas, assumptions and aims. However, almost everywhere I looked, epistemological confusion seemed embedded in gifted-related scholarly literature, and I doubted my own observations and analyses at times.

[W]e continually try to avoid the uncertainty inherent in our condition ... we continually try to get solid ground under our feet. (Chödrön, 2012, p. 54)

The socially just process described in Chapter Two, with its emphasis on engaging with diversity, helped me stay open to the full scope of views presented across the literature. As I

tried to map the territory, I discovered there is very little solid ground. Nevertheless, my two research questions provided me with some direction into gifted-related literature and were the breadcrumbs that helped me find my way out, as I refocused on my specific topic.

In conducting my scoping review, I gained insight into what I believe are fundamental problems with scholarship in gifted related areas of study, including conceptual confusion and unexamined bias, and how these problems profoundly affect efforts to extend thinking in gifted-related fields to adults and adult contexts, as discussed further below and in Chapter Six. In the current chapter I begin to show how the various ideologies, assumptions, methods, and problems in influential fields of study impact contemporary work with gifted adults. I also begin to identify where traditional distinctions are being blurred and/or challenged, and show where fresh interpretive lenses are being applied to this topic.

While my foray into literature related to giftedness was extensive and moved well beyond the topic of gifted adults, this chapter does not. Here, my frame of reference is *published research with gifted adults*. The focus is on researchers' *interests* as reflected in their agendas and projects, rather than their findings. The survey includes articles published in peer-reviewed academic journals, and also includes some studies published in books. Where it is relevant to refer to the literature in other gifted-related fields, and particularly where there is a large canon of work that others have thoroughly analysed and critiqued (e.g., in intelligence studies or gifted education), I stand on the shoulders of others and cite seminal work including key reviews and commentaries.

Structure of this Survey of the Literature

The chapter has three main sections:

In Section One, I first summarize and comment on the only review of gifted adult literature to date (Rinn & Bishop, 2015), which looked at peer-reviewed articles published up to and including 2015. I re-examine these studies to look more closely at the topics of interest

covered by the papers in the review, and identify some key problems with the review - problems which I later find to persist across the results of my studies, including the failure to make distinctions between different approaches to conceptualizing and studying gifted adults, and issues related to unexamined positionality. I then extend Rinn and Bishop's review of gifted adult literature by examining qualitative studies published between 1995 and 2015, which were not included in the review. These investigated topics such as gifted women, gifted university students, gifted workers, and mental health and well-being of gifted adults.

Section Two is a survey of gifted adult research published since the Rinn and Bishop (2015) review. I include published qualitative and quantitative studies, highlighting researchers' interests and approaches to the topic.

In Section Three I discuss some aspects of the research literature that, from a social justice perspective, appear to be under-examined and problematic. In relation to my research questions, such blind spots need to be brought to light to fully understand the current state of research with gifted adults and find paths forward.

Throughout the chapter, I draw attention to and discuss important contributions and influences, and identify trends, tensions, and gaps.

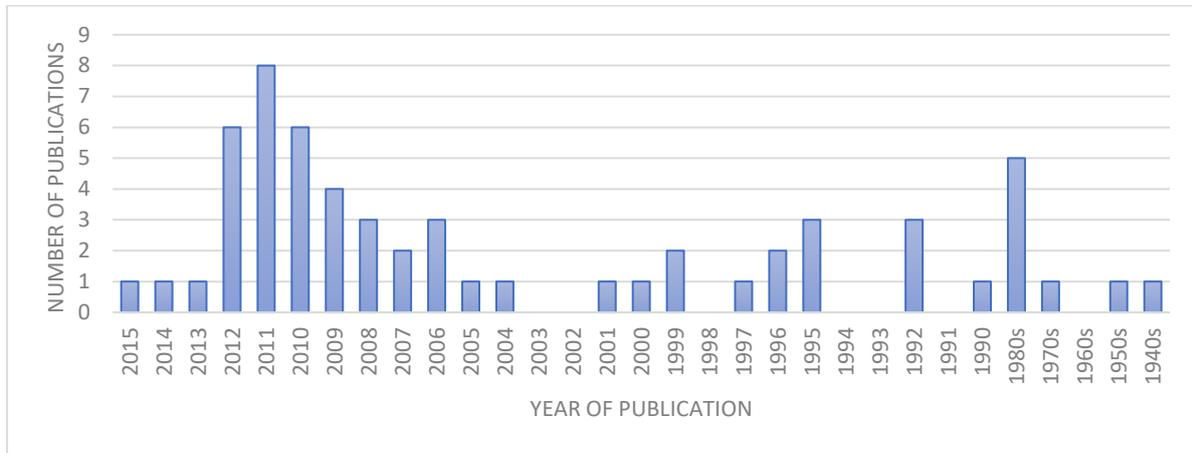
Section 1: Gifted Adult Research Published Prior to 2016

Rinn and Bishop 2015 review. In their review of the gifted adult literature, Rinn and Bishop (2015) synthesized and analysed 59³ studies published in peer-reviewed academic journals. Dates of publications ranged from 1942 to 2015, and the bulk of the papers were published after 2004 (see Figure 1).

³ While the authors of the review indicate that they reviewed 60 studies, the actual number included in the published article (Rinn & Bishop, 2015) is 59.

Figure 1

Publication Dates of Studies Reviewed by Rinn & Bishop (2015)



The overall aim of Rinn and Bishop’s (2015) review was “to begin a conversation regarding the characteristics, experiences and needs of gifted adults” (p. 241). While they did not specifically set out to discuss what was driving researchers’ interest in the topic, the authors reported their results using nine themes, each reflecting an article’s primary focus or research interest (see Table 3). This deductive approach to categorizing the studies is logical considering that the reviewers were interested in synthesizing information. However, the focus on a primary interest means that each researchers’ interest was reduced to a single area, and broad scopes of interest, which might include multiple research questions, were lost.

Table 3*Themes and Sub themes Identified by Rinn & Bishop (2015)*

Description of thematic area	Sub themes (if any)
1 Whether or not gifted children become gifted adults	
2 Family of origin	
3 Effects of early educational experiences	Acceleration and advanced coursework Enrichment
4 Characteristics of gifted adults	Emotional sensitivity and intensity Perceptions of giftedness
5 Career	Educational and occupational success Satisfaction in chosen career
6 Family of procreation	Choice of partner Marital status and number of children
7 Career and family interaction	Unique experiences of women
8 Life goals, satisfaction and well-being	
9 Counselling	

Keeping in mind my research question “What is currently driving interest in the topic of gifted adults?”, I re-examined the abstracts of all 59 publications, and in some cases entire articles where it was not clear, and found that most of the researchers were interested in more than one of the nine thematic areas. The results of this closer look at the researchers’ areas of study, where multiple interests are taken into account, reveals strong interest in Theme Five: Career, and Theme Eight: Life goals, satisfaction and well-being. Relatively little interest was shown in Theme Six: Family of procreation and Theme Nine: Counselling.

Influential longitudinal studies in the Rinn and Bishop (2015) review. A sizeable proportion of the articles included in the Rinn and Bishop (2015) review are directly related to three longitudinal studies: the Terman Study of the Gifted (Terman, 1925; Terman et al., 1925) the Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth (SMPY) (Keating & Stanley, 1972; Stanley,

1996), and the 1988 Midwestern Study (Perrone et al., 2004). Additionally, the review included papers reporting results of three other well-known longitudinal studies:

- i. Presidential Scholars (Kaufmann, 1981)
- ii. Warsaw Studies (Firkowska-Mankiewicz & Zaborowski, 1999)
- iii. Marburg Giftedness Study (Rost, 2000)

Overall, of the 59 articles reviewed, 36 (61%) reported results from one of these longitudinal studies. Publications from the Terman Study and SMPY together accounted for a third of the review.

According to the Rinn and Bishop (2015), the prevalence of papers from these longitudinal or retrospective studies reflects how the methods and approaches, rooted in the psychology of intelligence, dominated empirical research related to gifted adults over many years. Indeed, scholars generally agree that these intelligence studies have strongly influenced ideas about giftedness, to the extent that it seems impossible to conceptualize giftedness without reference to intelligence (Dai, 2018). This is apparent in most early studies, including the longitudinal studies, where childhood scores on normed intelligence tests were used as criteria for participation – a practise that continues today (see Dai, 2018 and Borland, 2003 for comprehensive discussions about how early intelligence research and related psychometric tests formed the basis of the study and practice of gifted education).

It is important to note that cohorts from these seminal longitudinal studies were selected decades ago, when notions of giftedness, influenced by intelligence theories and related psychometric approaches to research, were heavily biased toward cognitive ability and academic achievement. Participants in the Terman studies, for example, were selected in 1921, and the first SMPY cohort was selected nearly a half-century ago, using methods that reflected these and other biases of the time. For example, the cohort of participants in the Terman Study was imbalanced for gender, with 856 boy and 672 girls, and included only eight children who were

not Caucasian. Additionally, most of the cohort came from middle to upper class socioeconomic backgrounds (Vialle, 1994). Implications are discussed in more detail in Section Three below.

Talent development approach. The authors of 46 of the studies reviewed by Rinn and Bishop (2015) aimed to identify factors that influence or predict high achievement or eminence in adulthood, and primarily examined early developmental experiences such as enriched education, and formative experiences such as early loss or deprivation, including those of childhood. These interests and methods, together with the conceptual understanding of giftedness as performance, are consistent with the talent development approach, as the following quote from one of the articles suggests:

[G]iftedness is the manifestation of performance that is clearly at the upper end of the distribution in a talent domain even relative to other high-functioning individuals in that domain. Further, giftedness can be viewed as developmental in that in the beginning stages, potential is the key variable; in later stages, achievement is the measure of giftedness; and in fully developed talents, eminence is the basis on which this label is granted. (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2011, p. 7)

What Rinn and Bishop (2015) did not clearly address in this review, however, are researcher interests and approaches to the topic of gifted adults that fall outside of a talent development framework. This raises a number of concerns directly relevant to my research questions - concerns that I engage with here and throughout the thesis.

Concern 1. Failure to make distinctions between different approaches. First and fundamentally, the authors fail to acknowledge and make critical distinctions between the different perspectives used by the authors of the articles reviewed, an omission that I have noticed in most gifted adult literature. As I will show in this thesis, there are significant conceptual, methodological, and interpretive differences between approaches to research with

gifted adults, and these are important to highlight. For example, whereas a talent development approach focuses on outcomes such as high achievement and eminence, other psychological approaches do not define giftedness in those terms, and focus instead on inter- and intrapersonal experiences. Rinn and Bishop (2015) synthesized information from all 59 studies reviewed, without distinguishing between different conceptual approaches, thereby inadvertently obscuring important information about researchers' aims and agendas.

A closer examination of the studies reviewed showed that 46 of them conceptualised giftedness within a talent development framework, and 13 of the papers reviewed sat outside of this. Of the latter, nine researchers aligned with psychological approaches including the child-centered model of giftedness, and four viewed the topic through the lens of Dąbrowski's (1964) Theory of Personality Development (TPD).⁴ By not distinguishing between different conceptual approaches, Rinn and Bishop seemed to have missed that these 13 researchers were interested in gifted adults' inner experiences. These researchers studied, for example, sensitivities, well-being, factors associated with self-esteem at various ages, and the co-occurrence of adult giftedness and disorders such as Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and mental illness (twice-exceptionality).

Concern 2. Unexamined positionality. A second and related concern is the reviewers' failure to explicitly address their own positionality regarding the topic of gifted adults, and giftedness as a concept. This is important because the lens we look through colours what we see. Even though Rinn and Bishop (2015) do not explicitly state that they are using a talent development lens, we see this implicitly in their definition of giftedness. They state that they understand giftedness to be "an inherent capacity for exceptional performance within a particular talent domain, not necessarily in the product of that talent" (p. 227). Related to this,

⁴ There is debate amongst scholars about what to call the theory. Some refer to Dąbrowski's work as the Theory of Positive Disintegration and others call it Theory of Personality Development. I use the latter because I think of Dąbrowski's work as theorizing a full personality development process, *including* the concept of positive disintegration.

they do not acknowledge any potential bias in their selection of studies, and any publication bias that might exist in the literature.

Concern 3: What was missed. Notably, most of the literature reviewed by Rinn and Bishop (2015) relates to quantitative research and longitudinal or retrospective studies, methods that are consistent with the talent development approach. The review includes only a few qualitative studies, and the authors appear to have excluded phenomenological work. As a result, the subjective voices of gifted adults and others interested in the topic - voices that I consider to be important - are largely missing from the conversation. I address this gap below.

Addressing gaps in the Rinn and Bishop (2015) review. A more complete picture of the range of research interests emerges when the lens is widened to include 62 qualitative studies related to gifted adults published prior to 2016, that were not included in the Rinn and Bishop review. A look at the 62 qualitative studies published between 1995 and 2015 shows that researchers were interested in a wide range of topics, and their approaches reflect multiple conceptualizations of giftedness.

In analysing these additional studies, I set out to identify key themes across these papers to describe researchers' interests. The five themes, sub themes and corresponding studies are shown in Table 4. At the same time, I wanted my descriptions of the studies to accurately represent the diversity in the field, including any differences in approaches, interests, conceptualization, and methods. In other words, I didn't want the themes and sub themes to misrepresent or prematurely reduce what is essentially a complex and messy field. I therefore briefly describe the studies within each theme, paying particular attention to the research aims, and approaches and methods used in each study.

Table 4*Themes and Sub themes of Qualitative Studies Published between 1995 and 2015*

Theme	Sub theme (if any)	References for studies
1 Talent development of women		Kitano, 1995; Kitano, 1997; Bizzari, 1997; Callahan & Reis, 1996; Leroux, 1998; Rimm, 2000; Rimm & Rimm-Kaufman, 2001; Kerr & McKay, 2014; Reis 1995a, 1995b, 1998, 2003; Burton et al, 2006; Miller & Kastberg, 1995; Napier, 1995; Battle et al., 1995; Thorne, 1995; Al-Lawati & Hunsaker, 2002
2 Gifted university students	University and college students	Noldon & Sedlacek, 1998; Ruban and Reis, 2006; Grant, 2000; Sayler et al, 2009, 2015; Cummins et al., 2003; Garrett & Rubie-Davies, 2014
	Gifted African American males at university	Bonner, 2001; Fries-Britt, 1998; Fries-Brit & Turner, 2002; Hébert, 2002; Strayhorn, 2009
3 Psychology of gifted adults		Falk and Miller, 1998; Greenspon, 1998; Landau, 1998; Mahoney, 1998; Streznewski, 1999; Freeman, 2010; Jacobson, 2000; Fiedler, 2015
4 Mental health & well-being	Counselling and therapy	Rocamora, 1995; Gatto-Walden, 1999; Mahoney, 1999; Prober, 2008; Mendaglio, 2013; Persson, 2005; Grobman 2009; Jacobson, 1999; Overzier & Nauta, 2014; Levy & Plucker, 2003; Silverman, 2005; Kooijman-van Thiel, 2008; Prober, 1999
	Non-clinical research	Persson, 2007; Peterson, 2000, 2001, 2012; Mróz, 2009; Kutner, 1999; Lefever, 2010
5 Gifted workers		Persson, 2009; Nauta & Ronner, 2008; Stamm & Niederhauser, 2008

Talent development of women. Most qualitative research with gifted women during this time focussed on factors related to talent development, particularly with respect to careers. A look at the literature on talent development of gifted women shows some diversity of interests in the early years, as well as changing interests over time.

A number of researchers studied psychological and social factors related to women's talent development. Kitano and colleagues (Kitano, 1995, 1997) compared attitudes and

experiences of African American, Asian American, Hispanic, and white high-achieving women, across various stages of life. Bizzari (1997) used an intergenerational approach to investigate perceived career-related obstacles and challenges. Leroux (1998) interviewed 40 high achieving Canadian women to understand what social and personal factors they believed contributed to their success, and the sacrifices they made.

Other well-known American researchers conducted extensive research projects to explore a broad range and combination of factors related to women's high achievement. Rimm and colleagues (Rimm, 2000; Rimm & Rimm-Kaufman, 2001) used data obtained from questionnaires and extensive interviews to identify psychological, social, and environmental factors related to women's perceived success. The research aimed to inform educators, counsellors and families of gifted girls.

Barbara Kerr (1981) also examined a broad range of topics related to women's achievement in the USA. Similar to the work by Rimm and colleagues, the results of this extensive biographical research project with eminent American women were initially applied to career counselling with gifted adolescent girls. More recently, Kerr and colleagues (Kerr & McKay, 2014) used data from follow-up studies conducted over many years to describe lived experiences of gifted women of various ages, including their aspirations, interests, achievements, and perceived obstacles to success. Sally Reis, an American gifted education scholar, examined topics including trajectories of talent development, personality attributes, personal choices, educational opportunities and relationships (Callahan & Reis, 1996; Reis, 1995a, 1995b, 1998, 2003) and, somewhat later, the lived experiences of female Olympic athletes (Burton et al., 2006).

In a special 1995 issue of the journal *Roepers Review*, scholars engaged in discussions about a range of topics related to talent development of gifted women. The guest editors, all well-known for their research on achievement, eminence and high ability (e.g., Noble et al.,

1999; Subotnik & Arnold, 1995) compiled articles related to women's achievement across multiple domains, work that explored individual and group differences, advantages, and disadvantages. Contributors' areas of research include the subjective experiences of women from blue-collar families in higher education (Miller & Kastberg, 1995; Napier, 1995) and of high achieving rural young women (Battle, 1995), and achievement motivation in gifted Latina women in the USA (Thorne, 1995). A study published in a later issue of the journal used a multicultural perspective and in-depth interview methods to examine factors related to the development and expression of giftedness of Islamic women living in the USA (Al-Lawati & Hunsaker, 2002).

This early qualitative work on the talent development of gifted women shows that scholars' views and research topics extended somewhat beyond the domain-specific understanding of achievement that was historically more typical of the approach. For example, interest in women as leaders (Napier, 1995) crossed domains, as did studies of experiences at different stages of life (Kitano, 1995; Kerr & McKay, 2014). Reis' understanding of *talent*, and therefore her research agenda clearly expanded beyond domain-specificity. She writes:

Feminine talent development occurs when women with high intellectual, creative, artistic or leadership ability or potential achieve at high levels in an area they choose and when they make contributions that they consider meaningful to society; these contributions are enhanced as the women develop personally satisfying relationships and pursue what they believe to be significant and consequential work. (Reis, 2005, p. 217)

Additionally, while almost all of the studies related to women in the USA, some researchers were, during that time, clearly aware of and interested in learning more about gifted women from diverse backgrounds.

There has been very little published research related specifically to talent development and gifted women since the early 2000's. This is likely related to changes in research funding.

For a time, women's advancement was a research and funding priority in many scholarly areas including gifted studies, but that waned toward the end of the millennium (K. Noble, personal communication, July 15, 2018). Whatever the reasons, some of these prominent American scholars shifted their research from studying gifted women back to gifted education studies, where their talent development approach evolved as a way to frame research in gifted-related fields more generally (e.g., Preckel et al., 2020; Subotnik et al., 2011).

Gifted university students. Only a handful of researchers studied topics related to gifted university students, and there is general agreement that this remains an under researched area (Abeysekera, 2014; Rinn & Plucker, 2004).

Psychological approaches were used to study gender differences in attitudes and behaviours of academically gifted first-year university students (Noldon & Sedlacek, 1998), and to compare self-regulatory techniques used by high achieving (gifted) and low achieving university students (Ruban & Reis, 2006). Grant (2000) used what appears to be an interdisciplinary approach to study influences on the career-related decisions of seven female gifted university students during their five years of undergraduate study in the USA. Grant's perspective acknowledged the contextual nature of giftedness and included concepts from psychology, career guidance, talent development, and gifted education studies.

Sayler and colleagues (Sayler, 2009; Sayler, et al., 2015) conducted a number of studies on the assessment of personal well-being of gifted students attending an American college. These researchers approached the topic within a broader gifted education framework. Their main aim was to evaluate the potential usefulness of the Personal Well-being Index for Adults (PWI-A) (Cummins et al., 2003) for assessing gifted college students' subjective well-being. All of the studies recruited participants from American universities or colleges.

Researchers in New Zealand (Garrett & Rubie-Davies, 2014) explored two topics: the subjective experiences of talented⁵ undergraduates, and instructor's perceptions of talented students in their programs. Their research used focus group methods and was exploratory, as is evident in the title: *Talented Tertiary Students: A Largely "Forgotten" Group within the Tertiary Sector?*.

African American males at university.

A search of the existing literature reveals wide gaps in research and studies conducted with [gifted] African American K-12 students, but when this search is extended to postsecondary populations, the literature almost becomes non-existent. (Bonner, 2010, p. 23)

Fred Bonner, a higher education scholar, named this gap in the literature following a decade where he and a few other American researchers carved space for new thinking about gifted African American male college students. While thin on the ground, research on this topic, including Bonner's work, is uniquely important to the topic of how to move forward with research with gifted adults. Specifically, as I discuss below, the small body of literature shows how voices and research interests can co-emerge and develop in ways that reveal, and eventually challenge, taken-for-granted assumptions and research practises.

Strongly influenced by Ford's work on multicultural gifted education (e.g., Ford et al., 1996), Bonner was initially interested in issues that perpetuate the underrepresentation and underperformance of African American male students in gifted and talented programs in schools. His early research focussed on policies and procedures for identification, curriculum differentiation, learning styles, student performance, teacher training and peer influences, all typical of a gifted education approach (Dai, 2014).

⁵ Most New Zealand scholars in gifted-related areas use the term *gifted and talented* rather than *gifted*, as per Gagné's (2004) Differentiated Model of Gifted and Talented (DMGT).

As Bonner's interest shifted to gifted male African American college and university students, his research agenda and perspective changed to take into account issues and factors relevant to the new contexts, ages, and demands. For example, in his most influential study (published as a report to the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented in the USA), Bonner (2001) used in-depth case study methods to investigate the perceptions and experiences of two gifted African American male college students. He was particularly concerned with how self-perception, relationships with faculty and peers, college selection, and the higher education institution environment uniquely impact expressions of giftedness in this group.

Bonner and others doing similar work at the time (Fries-Britt, 1998; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Hébert, 2002; Strayhorn, 2009) introduced three important changes into research with gifted adults. First, their research agendas extended beyond the usual scope of gifted education research to examine the experiences of young adults, not children. Second, they valued subjective experiences and explored those using a variety of in-depth qualitative methods. Third, these researchers critically engaged with and challenged historic structural inequities, with the explicit intention of creating change. I discuss the historical and current lack of multicultural approaches to research with gifted adults in Section Three below, and refer to the problem of predominantly white, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic (WEIRD) cultural bias throughout the thesis.

These aims and methods align with critical multicultural research (CMR), a broad term that refers to approaches that value diversity while “acknowledging the politics of cultural differences and social location” (McDowell, 2005, p.2). To my knowledge, this term has not been applied to studies with gifted adults. Nonetheless, the values and imperatives of CMR seem to underpin the small body of research related to gifted African American males in higher education. Naming the approach as CMR more accurately portrays these researchers' interests and agendas, and prevents misrepresenting their views as being aligned with gifted education.

This is an important consideration when looking at research with *adults*, especially in the context of tertiary education, where the policy and programming issues typically of interest in gifted education studies are no longer relevant.

Psychology of gifted adults. This theme describes the qualitative studies that apply psychological theories and concepts to gifted adults, and/or explore psychological and psychosocial aspects of gifted adults' lives and experiences.

Four studies within this theme were published in a special issue of *Roeper Review* entitled "Perspectives on the Self of the Gifted" (Lind & Roeper, 1998, p. 141). The journal is aligned with the philosophy of George and Annemarie Roeper, described by Kane (2013) as a humanistic and child-centered approach that "embodies the concept of social-emotional learning" (p. 21). As Annemarie Roeper writes: "We are concerned with the whole impact of life on the young person and the impact the person will make on society. We are concerned with the development of the 'Self' and the interdependence of all 'Selves'" (Roeper, 1990. p. 15).

The four articles published in the *Roeper Review* special issue relate to mature development of gifted individuals. Falk and Miller (1998) took a sociological perspective to explore relational and developmental aspects of self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-concept, and self-image of gifted adults, whereas Greenspon (1998) applied a psychoanalytic and clinically informed lens to the topic of development of the self. Landau's (1998) developmental work focused specifically on synergy between intelligence and emotional maturity. Finally, Mahoney (1998), a counsellor, was interested in developing methods to identify and clinically assess factors that impact identify-formation.

The results of other qualitative studies of the psychology of gifted adults were reported in books. For example, in Streznewski's well-known book *Gifted Grownups: The Mixed Blessings of Extraordinary Potential* (1999), the author discussed what she broadly called 'grownup' experiences of being gifted, and Freeman (2010) wrote extensive descriptions of the

experiences of gifted adults in *Gifted Lives: What Happens When Gifted Children Grow Up*.

Both researchers based their findings on years of qualitative research with cohorts of gifted (now) adults from a variety of backgrounds. These researchers used descriptive inductive approaches to explore both commonalities and differences of lived experiences, including inner experiences.

Jacobsen (2000) was most interested in commonalities. Drawing on her clinical practise as a psychologist in the USA, she used a phenomenological approach to identify and describe characteristics of gifted adults, and the social challenges they face. Results of this research were included in *The Gifted Adult; A Revolutionary Guide for Liberating Everyday Genius*. Similarly, Fiedler (2015) used a developmental lifespan approach and composite biographical data to examine patterns in the lived experiences of gifted adults across the life course, in *Bright Adults; Uniqueness and Belonging Across the Lifespan*. Both of these books straddle a somewhat nebulous line between scholarly and popular or self-help literature related to gifted adults.

Mental health and well-being. This theme describes studies that explore aspects of the gifted adults' mental health and well-being, with the intention of applying knowledge therapeutically. Compared to the studies described by the previous theme, the research tends to be more pragmatic than theoretically or ideologically driven. Studies are described below under two sub themes: counselling and therapy, and non-clinical research.

Counselling and therapy. Case study methods have been used to understand and describe the experiences of counsellors and their gifted adult clients⁶ in the USA (Gatto-Walden, 1999; Mahoney, 1998; Prober, 2008; Rocamora, 1992), Canada (Mendaglio, 2013) and Sweden (Persson, 2005). Grobman (2009) and Jacobsen (1999) both drew on extensive clinical work to describe the process of psychotherapy with gifted adults in the USA. Overzier and Nauta (

⁶ Some clinicians have written about counselling practises with gifted adolescents and teens, usually within the context of school and career counselling. For examples, see Mendaglio & Peterson, 2007; Pfeiffer, 2013 and Silverman, 1993a.

2014) reported the results of group work with adult members of IHBV, a High-IQ group in the Netherlands, and Prober (1999) drew on experience with therapeutic groups in the USA to examine gifted women's experience of motherhood.

Additionally, clinicians developed tools to assess and work with gifted adults in counselling. The Multicultural Assessment Procedure (MAP) was designed to help clinicians understand the social and emotional needs of gifted clients, including adults (Levy & Plucker, 2003). Silverman (2005) drew on clinical work as a psychologist to create the Giftedness in Adults Rating Scale, a trait-based instrument used to improve self-awareness amongst gifted adults. A group of Dutch researchers used a phenomenological approach to study psychological, social, and existential experiences of 20 gifted adults, resulting in the Delphi Model of Giftedness (Kooijman-van Thiel, 2008), a descriptive model developed to increase awareness, and often used in counselling situations.

Non-clinical research. Aspects of mental health and well-being of gifted adults were also studied outside of clinical settings. Persson (2007) used online survey methods and a descriptive approach to explore a wide range of social and socioemotional characteristics and experiences of intellectually gifted Swedish adults. Persson was particularly interested in understanding factors related to subjective well-being and, related to that, examining and dispelling any unwarranted and harmful myths about gifted adults.

In a longitudinal study with 'at risk' intellectually gifted young adults in the USA, Peterson (Peterson 2000, 2001; Peterson et al., 2012) used a phenomenological approach to gain insight into relationships between emotional health, developmental tasks, life transitions, decision making, academic achievement, and family functioning. Participants had histories of depression, underachievement in high school, and/or family dysfunction. A key aim of the research was to generate data to inform those working to support other gifted young adults with similar problems.

Mróz (2009) used in-depth biographical methods to examine the developmental patterns and processes of seven gifted adults. The research had two related aims: to build knowledge about factors that support the development of the personality ideal - a key construct from Dąbrowski's (1964) TPD – and to apply that knowledge therapeutically to benefit gifted adults.

Four studies described by this theme were published in *Advanced Development*, a journal conceptually aligned with the child-centered approach to giftedness, the Columbus Group descriptive definition of giftedness (Silverman 1997) and Dąbrowski's (1964) TPD. Authors whose work was published in the journal therefore interpret the experiences of gifted adults through those lenses (Silverman et al., 2014).

Researchers whose studies were published in *Advanced Development* were interested in a range of topics related to mental health and well-being. Two descriptive studies published in the journal explored problems related to twice-exceptionality, and the implications for identification of gifted adults. Kutner (1999) used a single-case study design, and focussed on how ADHD in adulthood may mask giftedness, whereas Lefever (2010) used autobiographical data to describe the subjective experiences of living with learning difficulties and undetected giftedness. Makarem (2007), a gifted woman, also used autobiographical data. Her study explored interpersonal experiences in groups and intimate relationships, including within different cultural contexts. As can be seen, all of these qualitative studies were descriptive and exploratory in nature.

Gifted workers. A few researchers, all outside of the USA, were interested in building knowledge to ultimately benefit gifted adults in their work lives, either directly through education or counselling, or indirectly by informing and influencing employers. Each of the studies explored a broad range of participants' experiences in specific work contexts. In contrast to talent development research, these studies did not primarily focus on achievement-related outcomes and tended to have applied aims.

In Sweden, Persson (2009) applied a psychological lens to investigate career choices and work satisfaction. Dutch researchers (Nauta & Ronner, 2008) looked at gifted workers and their challenging experiences in employment, from an occupational health perspective. In both studies, participants were recruited from high -IQ organizations. Stamm and Niederhauser (2008) studied a group of exceptionally gifted Swiss adults in an apprenticeship program. They used a human resources (HR) perspective to explore relationships between occupational choice, stress, and performance, comparing females and males.

Notably, these researchers aimed to contribute to scholarly literature *and* apply findings in real-world situations, a combination evident in some studies described in previous themes and also reported in the Delphi study (Chapter Six). This blend of priorities pursued within pragmatic approaches is akin to the scientist-practitioner model in applied psychology (Lane & Corrie, 2007) and has some resonance with what gifted education scholar David Yun Dai calls a “paradigm of practise” (Dai & Chen, 2013, p. 152). To my knowledge, the relevance of a science-practitioner model or practise-driven approaches to research with gifted adults has not yet been examined. In Chapter 6, I engage with both ideas in relation to my second research question – how to move forward with research.

To sum up this section, this survey of qualitative research with gifted adults published between 1995-2015 shows a broad range of interests spread thinly amongst researchers in the USA and, more recently, in other countries. Topics studied included the lived experiences of gifted adults in contexts such as university, work and clinical settings. The range of topics studied narrowed around the turn of the millennium, as research with gifted women dropped off and some prominent talent development scholars turned their attention back to gifted education. For those using approaches other than talent development, interest in pragmatic, practice-oriented research with gifted adults emerged in the early 2000’s, and appears to be growing, particularly outside of the USA, and in areas related to mental health.

Summary of gifted adult research published before 2016. In summary, the Rinn and Bishop (2015) review of gifted adult literature shows that, historically, most researchers interested in gifted adults used a talent development approach focused on identifying and understanding factors related to high achievement in adulthood, and were strongly influenced by early intelligence research, including seminal longitudinal studies. While my reanalysis of the 59 studies looking at researchers' aims confirms a preponderance of work from these paradigms, it also revealed some important differences and diversity in how researchers approached the subject, and their specific research interests - distinctions that were not clear in the original review.

The concerns raised here suggest that this first review of the gifted adult literature may have inadvertently privileged one perspective of gifted adults over others, at the very least by what was not said and what was missed out. Related to that, while Rinn and Bishop (2015) concluded that researchers have paid relatively little attention to lived experiences of gifted adults, a different picture emerges when distinctions are made between different perspectives, and when qualitative studies omitted from the review are included.

A look at qualitative studies published between 1995 and 2015 shows that researchers were interested in a wide range of research topics, and their research aims and methods reflect multiple conceptualizations of giftedness. Notably, the qualitative research published during this time began to add the voices of gifted adults and others interested in the topic, including clinicians and those working in areas outside of the usual gifted-related fields.

Overall, trends in the gifted adults research literature overall include the longstanding prevalence of a few longitudinal and retrospective American studies, strong interest in studies with gifted women in the 1990's, and rare pockets of research using cultural and context-sensitive approaches. The work by Bonner (2001, 2010) and others illustrates that there are contextually-relevant alternatives to the lenses historically used in gifted related studies, and that

there is some history of critical and multicultural perspectives being applied to research with gifted adults, albeit applied within the USA.

Notably, despite different conceptualizations of giftedness and approaches to research with gifted adults, almost all of the studies surveyed here selected gifted participants based on membership in Mensa⁷, a threshold SAT or IQ (or similar) score, and/or a high GPA, and many use a single criterion. These tools and methods are conceptually inconsistent with many of the researchers' approaches, a problem that was identified in the Delphi study, and is discussed more thoroughly in Chapters Five and Six. In terms of the research literature, almost universal and unexamined use of these methods in studies with gifted adults over many decades also raises important questions about selection bias, and I discuss this in Section Three below.

Section 2: Gifted Adult Research Published After 2015

In this section, I shift attention to the present by including studies with gifted adults published after 2015. The intention here is to start to address issues related to the second research question - how to move forward with research with gifted adults. To begin to answer that question, it is important to look at topics of interest to those *currently* conducting research with gifted adults, and to place that literature in contemporary contexts. A key consideration is whether or not current topics and research methods are a 'good fit' for the unique contexts of 2020 and beyond. A survey of studies published in the past five years helps answer that question.

Themes and sub themes. This survey and brief discussion of contemporary research includes quantitative and qualitative studies published in peer-reviewed journals, and some key texts. In total, I describe 21 studies using six themes. Four of the themes - psychology of gifted adults, mental health and well-being, gifted university students and gifted workers - are identical

⁷ Membership in the international organization Mensa is based on having scored above the 98th percentile on a validated intelligence test.

to those used above. Two themes are new: psychometric assessment and SMPY studies. One theme found in earlier research – talent development in women – is not apparent in the most contemporary gifted adult literature. The six themes, sub themes and corresponding studies are shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5

Themes and Subthemes of Studies Published After 2015

Theme	Subtheme	Studies	
1	Psychology of Gifted Adults	Grant, 2016; Her & Haron, 2016; Wigtil & White, 2017	
2	Gifted University Students	Hébert, 2019; Millward et al., 2016	
3	Mental Health and well-being	Counselling and therapy	Soloman & Trainor, 2016; Smith, 2018; Matta et al., 2019
		Non-clinical research	Pollet & Schnell, 2016; Vötter, 2019; Vötter & Schnell, 2019a, 2019b
4	Gifted Workers	Vreys et al., 2016; Racki et al., 2018	
5	Psychometric Assessment	Lang et al., 2019	
6	SMPY Studies	Bernstein et al., 2019; McCabe et al., 2020	

Psychology of gifted adults. This theme describes studies of psychological and psychosocial aspects of gifted adults’ lives and experiences, as explained in Section One. Similar to previous years, recent publications show a broad range of researcher interests.

Two studies published in the journal *Advanced Development* are examples of the range of interests and diversity of approaches applied to the topic of gifted adults. Grant (2016) used an autobiographical approach to describe the lived experiences of twice-exceptionality (Asperger Syndrome and giftedness). The study reports on subjective experiences in a variety of adult contexts, including work and relationships. In a very different study, Malaysian researchers (Her & Haron, 2016) used data from 263 Malaysian adults to examine relationships between giftedness, creativity, and post-formal thinking, with a particular interest in the creative

potential of gifted adults. The three constructs were measured using self-rating questionnaires: Giftedness in Adults Rating Scale (Silverman, 2005), Creative Personality Scale (Gough, 1979) and Postformal Thought Scale (Sinnott & Johnson, 1997).

Wigtil and colleagues (Wigtil & White, 2017) examined relationships between exceptionally high intelligence⁸ and adult psychosocial development, career achievement, and eminence. In this follow-up study, the researchers compiled life narratives using biographical data from participants who were part of a cohort of children originally studied nearly eighty years ago (Hollingworth, 1942/1975). As I discuss in Section Three below and elsewhere in the thesis, issues related to potentially out-dated tools and data are seldom examined in gifted-related research. In contrast, this study explicitly addressed potential problems in two ways:

- i) the qualitative approach captured gifted adults' subjective views of how (or if) their childhood IQ scores related to the other factors of interest, and
- ii) the authors of the study explicitly acknowledged the subjective experiences of the participants, and that "conclusions about their outcomes are coloured by both the generational and individual circumstances in which they lived" (Wigtil & White, 2017. p. 89).

Overexcitability. As mentioned above, some researchers apply Dąbrowski's (1964) TPD to gifted adults. In particular, there seems to be increased interest in applying the concept of overexcitability from Dąbrowski's theory to the topic of gifted adults, at least in published studies. Four very recent studies include the concept of overexcitability in their research on gifted adults' inner experiences of intensity and sensitivity

In the Netherlands, a multi-disciplinary team of researchers (Dijkstra et al., 2017) employed what appears to be a pragmatic multi-lens perspective (Okhuysen & Bonardi, 2011) to

⁸ Exceptionally high intelligence in this study reflected work by Leta Hollingworth (1942/1975), and was understood to mean those scoring above 180 on the revised "Stanford Binet" (Terman et al., 1937). Participants were assessed in childhood

examine intimate relationships of gifted adults recruited from Mensa. The authors interpreted and report their findings through a lens that combines the concept of overexcitability from TPD (Dąbrowski, 1964), intelligence theory, attachment theory (Ainsworth, 1968; Bowlby, 1969), and sensory processing sensitivity from Aron and Aron's work on the Highly Sensitive Person (HSP) (Aron, 1996; Aron & Aron, 1997). The study looked at relationships between conflict style, attachment style, and relationship quality, comparing gifted and non-gifted adults.

Other researchers (Rinn, et al., 2018) combined the concepts of overexcitability, sensory processing sensitivity (Aron, 1996, Aron & Aron, 1997), and intelligence in a study designed to validate the Highly Sensitive Person Scale (HSPS) (Aron & Aron, 1997), using a sample of gifted young adults. As these authors point out, while scholars have written about gifted individuals' tendency to react strongly to stimuli, and Dąbrowski's (1964) concept of overexcitability has been applied in many gifted-related fields, there is little empirical research on the topic, particularly as applied to adults (see next sub-theme for three recent published studies). Hence, the primary aim of their work was to advance research methods by exploring the usefulness and limitations of the HSPS.

An American study (Beduna & Perrone-McGovern, 2016) also applied multiple lenses to study well-being in gifted adults. The study examined relationships between Dąbrowski's (1964) constructs of intellectual overexcitability and emotional overexcitability, emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990), and subjective well-being in a sample of academically high-achieving American undergraduate students. The aim of this study was to build knowledge about "sensitivities and differences" (p. 30) in gifted adults with the overall aim of supporting well-being.

Finally, a very recent study of five peer-nominated gifted adults in the USA used phenomenological case study methods to retrospectively explore participants' lived childhood and adolescent experiences (Szymanski & Wrenn, 2019). The researchers used data collected

from interviews and a modified version of the Overexcitability Questionnaire Two (OEQII) (Falk et al.,1999) - a measure of overexcitabilities - to gain insight into participants' early experience and influences, particularly those related to the educational environment. The study formed part of a larger research project aimed at supporting the well-being of *gifted children* by helping them understand their intense inner experiences and sensitivities. While the study aims are not completely aligned with the intentions of this survey of the literature, I include it here as one example of where researchers study gifted adults, but their primary interests relate to children.

Dąbrowski's (1964) TPD is clearly of interest to some researchers working with gifted adults and, as shown in Section One, has been part of the theoretical framework of many studies over the years. However, it is important to note that there is controversy amongst scholars about how the theory is currently used in gifted research. The controversies, differing opinions, and related methodological distinctions are rarely acknowledged in published studies, but need to be taken into account when considering current research interests and future direction in research with gifted adults. I therefore briefly introduce two debates here and provide references to more comprehensive discussions of each.

One area of disagreement relates to the concept of overexcitability and its place within the theory. The concept is well-known and relatively well-researched in gifted studies compared to other aspects of the theory and the theory as a whole (Pyryt, 2008; Winkler & Voight, 2016). Nonetheless, some scholars argue that the concept of overexcitability can only be understood within the context of the theory and that, as a stand-alone construct, it is misunderstood. For example, Mika (2005) believes that "talking about (overexcitability) outside of the context of positive disintegration is akin to discussing single planets without ever mentioning the existence of the universe" (p.75). The conversation is ongoing and well documented in gifted-related

scholarly literature (e.g., see Daniels & Piechowski, 2009; Kane, 2009; Mendaglio, 2012, and Winkler & Voight, 2016 for discussions and examples of different views).

The second area of concern is where authors mistakenly misrepresent Dąbrowski's work as relating specifically to gifted individuals. The history of the theory is well-documented, and shows that Dąbrowski was interested in personality and individuals who exemplify exceptional personality growth, not giftedness (for an extensive argument, see Tillier, 2009). The application of the theory to gifted studies came later and is somewhat contested. Some scholars advise caution in applying the theory and concepts in gifted studies, and argue for a more accurate portrayal of the theory as a comprehensive theory of personality development (e.g., Tillier, 2009). Others (e.g., Piechowski, 2014; Silverman, 2009) believe that theory can evolve, and its application can broaden without damaging the usefulness and internal consistency of the work overall. This conversation is also ongoing and well-documented in the literature (e.g., Mendaglio & Tillier 2015; Piechowski, 2017).

Mental health and well-being. As explained previously, this theme describes studies that explore mental health and well-being with the aim of applying knowledge therapeutically. Whereas historically, much of the clinical or counselling-related research applied concepts and approaches that were more aligned with gifted education and the study of gifted children, some very contemporary studies (particularly those from outside of the USA) appear to be specifically adult-focused.

Counselling and therapy. Two articles published in *Advanced Development* address topics directly related to gifted adults in a clinical counselling or therapy context. Soloman and Trainor (2016) provide an autoethnographic account of the experience of therapy and recovery from mental illness, from the perspectives of a gifted adult as 'client' and the therapist. Smith (2016), an Australian psychologist and a gifted woman, also used autoethnography to describe her experiences with what she calls 'reactive empathy' (p. 96). Both studies include concepts

from Dąbrowski's (1964) TPD and the Columbus Group definition of giftedness (Silverman, 1997), as would be expected in articles published in *Advanced Development*, and both explicitly aim to contribute knowledge that informs gifted clinical practise.

A very recent study by Italian psychology researchers (Matta et al., 2019) also aimed to contribute to clinical practise with gifted adults, using a very different approach. The researchers' primary interest is clinical assessment of what they call "subtle but crucial psychological maladjustments" (p. 25) that may be typical of some sub-populations of gifted adults. Drawing on a combination of personality and developmental psychopathology theories from psychology, the researchers attempted to identify personality traits of gifted adults, using the Dimensional Assessment of Personality Pathology – Basic Questionnaire (DAPP-BQ) (Livesley & Jackson, 2009), a self-report questionnaire designed to clinically assess personality traits and pathology.

Non-clinical research. A team of researchers recently published the results of four studies using online survey data from member of German and Austria Mensa. An aim of the project is to identify "the existential and psychological needs of gifted individuals ... to support gifted individuals in reaching their best potential and living fulfilled and happy lives" (Vötter, 2019). In terms of research interests, this work is difficult to theme. While 'mental health and well-being' broadly describes the topics studied, and the work is non-clinical, a close look at the studies shows that a wide range and combination of topics were explored, and that approaches and conceptual frameworks seem muddled.

Three of the studies focussed on well-being among gifted adults. One (Pollet & Schnell, 2016) examined what the authors understand to be "two facets of well-being" (p. 1459): meaningfulness and subjective well-being. They also attempted to identify predictors of these two facets of well-being, comparing two groups of gifted adults – Intellectually Gifted (high IQ) and High Academic achievers. A second study (Vötter, 2019) explored possible relationships

between subjective well-being and self-assessed resilience, self-control, and crisis of meaning. The third study added the concept of self-compassion, and examined possible links “between meaningfulness, self-compassion, and subjective well-being among gifted adults.” (Vötter & Schnell, 2019b, p. 1301).

A fourth study (Vötter & Schnell, 2019a) focussed more on the *manifestation* of giftedness. In that study, the researchers were interested in gifted adults’ expression of generativity and self-control, and their sense of meaningfulness. They positioned these concepts as contributing to happiness.

Gifted university students. Despite being recognized over the past decades as an under-researched area, there continues to be a dearth of published research about gifted adults within tertiary education systems. This seems odd, given the strong focus on learning and on academic achievement in gifted education studies generally. The findings from the Delphi study also call attention to this and other context-specific gaps in contemporary research with gifted adults (see Chapter Five).

Two recent qualitative phenomenological studies, one in the USA (Hébert, 2018) and the other in New Zealand (Millward et al., 2016), examined the lived experiences of low- income high-achieving undergraduate university students. Each study used data obtained from semi-structured interviews, and both selected participants based on demonstrated superior academic performance (GPA) and evidence of a low-income environment. Participants in the American study were also first-generation college students.

Hébert’s work (2018) is informed by a longstanding interest in systemic obstacles to achievement and well-being for minority populations in the USA. The study focussed on gifted university students’ subjective well-being in the face of hardship, and the psychosocial factors that contribute to resilience within the context of attending university. Here, giftedness was conceptualized as the cognitive skills and abilities underlying high academic achievement.

Similar to Bonner's work described in Section One, the topic was viewed through a critical multi-cultural lens, and explored social, psychological, and systemic influences on overall well-being.

In contrast, the New Zealand researchers (Millward et al., 2016) have backgrounds in gifted education studies. Their work aligns strongly with the talent development model proposed by Subotnik and colleagues (Subotnik et al., 2011) and Gagné's (2004) DMGT, influences which are apparent in the concepts they use and topics of interest. The construct of interest is talent – that is, high achievement understood to be the manifestation of giftedness (potential). The study primarily examined participants' experiences of their developmental trajectories or journeys within the university learning environment, and asked the question "What single factor has contributed most to your academic success?" (p. 42).

As can be seen, these two groups of researchers approached the topic of gifted university students with very different questions and underlying assumptions, even though the context and the methods they use are alike. Notably, a close look at the two studies show there is little cross-referencing, suggesting that the two groups of researchers are unlikely to have engaged in dialogue about the topic, despite their shared interest in this particular sub-group of gifted adults.

Gifted workers. Studies of gifted adults within the context of their work environments continue to be rare. As mentioned above, results of the Delphi study (Chapter Five) highlight this and other gaps in published research. Two recent published studies, one conducted in Croatia and the other in Belgium, examined work-related topics, using very different approaches and methods.

Croatian researchers (Rački et al., 2018) were interested in the social construction of giftedness in adulthood, specifically as applied to primary school teachers. They used a talent development lens and longitudinal methods to collect and analyze data. The researchers were

primarily interested in the stability and emergence of exemplar characteristics (talent), relationships between the characteristics, and any social, psychological and contextual influences. At the start of the study, all participants were university students in their third year of a 5-year teacher training programme. A combination of peer and self-assessment methods were used to identify characteristics of an ideal-type primary school teacher, nominate participants (based on the prototype), and rate participants over a period of 5 years as they progressed through their training and into teaching careers.

In a very different study, researchers in Belgium (Vreys et al., 2016) were interested in job satisfaction amongst gifted employees. Their exploratory study focussed on “the strengths and needs of gifted employees and ... how well these fit with their current job(s)” (p 51), including factors that hinder gifted adults in the work contexts. The research used biographical data obtained via online questionnaires and career coaching interviews. Participant selection was based on IQ scores or self-identification.

Psychometric assessment. This theme describes studies that examine the use of psychometric assessment methods with gifted adults. Considering the historical and almost universal use of psychometric assessment in gifted related areas of study, including as selection methods for studies with gifted adults (discussed in Section Three below), I expected to find strong research interest in this topic. I was, therefore, surprised to find only one published study. This apparent lack of researcher interest might reflect the emergence of new approaches to the study of gifted adults, and the inevitably messy confluence of historic approaches and new ideas. I discuss the idea of an emerging field and implications in Chapter Six.

Lang and colleagues (Lang et al., 2019) examined performance on the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS -IV), comparing intellectually gifted adults (Mensa members) and a non-gifted group. They were particularly interested in understanding patterns of the data across and among the four intellectual domains measured in the WAIS-IV indexes. As the authors note

(and is obvious in this survey of the research literature), gifted samples are often selected on the basis of a cut-off score on a broad IQ test, or scores on specific subtests measuring, for example, verbal abilities. On the other hand, these researchers studied differential patterns of performance and discrepancies across the four cognitive domains, and were interested in what that data might reveal about gifted adults. A practical aim of the work was to inform clinicians about how to interpret the WAIS-IV when working with a gifted adult

SMPY studies. This theme describes follow-up studies with the 1992 cohort of SMPY (Keating & Stanley, 1972; Stanley, 1996), one of the early longitudinal studies identified above in Section One. Two follow-up quantitative studies have been published very recently and, consistent with the talent development approach and overall aims of the SMPY, the researchers were interested in identifying early predictors of high career achievement and eminence in adulthood. One study (Bernstein et al., 2019) looked at whether or not high ability and preference clusters measured in adolescence predicted eminence 35 years later. In the second study (McCabe et al., 2020), researchers were specifically interested in early predictors of leadership in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) - related careers.

What seems obvious here, but is not commented on by the authors of these studies, is that the contexts within which their participants lived and matured are unique in ways that seem particularly relevant to the topics studied. For example, both studies have a strong focus on STEM-related careers, and the participants entered and developed their careers during a time of particularly rapid growth and advancement in technology and science. Not only did the authors apparently find these unique contextual factors unremarkable, they also failed to examine the relevance of their findings to current and future populations, who will undoubtedly mature in very different contexts vis-à-vis STEM related careers. In fact, the authors appear to apply their findings explicitly to 2020 and beyond, as seen in a concluding remark in one study: “By the time children are 13 years old, we can predict who is likely to become eminent and the ways in

which their eminence is likely to be expressed in modern economies fuelled by innovative products and ideas” (Bernstein et al., 2019, p. 453). In Section Three, I discuss issues of transferability and other aspects of retrospective and longitudinal gifted-related research as being potentially problematic.

Summary of gifted adult research published after 2015. In summary, an overview of the gifted adults research published after 2015 shows some movement toward integrating ‘new’ and ‘old’ by using multiple lenses, but methodologically sound research frameworks are lacking. Researchers are scattered geographically and across disciplines, with little evidence of collaboration or shared discourse, and there is no evidence yet of clear research agendas for the field. These findings are consistent with the views of experts in gifted adults, as discussed in Chapters Five and Six.

Recently, researchers including gifted adults themselves have introduced concepts from broad psychological theories such as Dąbrowski’s (1964) TPD to understand aspects of adult giftedness. There also appears to be a growing interest in clinical practice-based research with gifted adults, using approaches that are specific to adults. Currently, however, researchers’ interests in the psychological and social experiences of gifted adults tend to be broad, and their approaches to research vary and are often unclear, making it difficult to get a clear picture of what specific issues are driving that interest.

While scholars from disciplines not traditionally linked to gifted studies contribute new questions, ideas and methods, some important gaps remain. Notably, studies with gifted adults in contexts such as tertiary education and employment, and at different ages and developmental stages, are largely missing from academic journals. However, in terms of researcher interest, a general lack of published studies about *adults* in gifted-related journals makes it difficult to know if these gaps reflect a lack of interest or publication bias. The findings from the Delphi study (see Chapter Five) suggest the latter.

Importantly, recently published research with gifted adults provides no information about interest in the topic in non-Western countries. A look at very contemporary research, including two recent studies using data from the SMPY, signals that the field lacks a multicultural framework and continues to be dominated by Western views of giftedness. This is discussed below in Section Three and elsewhere in the thesis.

Finally, some recent studies with gifted adults appear to be theoretically ungrounded and/or methodologically muddled. Notably, a close look at the recent gifted adult research reveals that few authors name their approaches to research, or clearly articulate their methodology - that is, how the methods they use relate to their research aims and their theoretical and philosophical premises and assumptions. It is therefore difficult (and inappropriate) for researchers to draw conclusions or even make strong inferences. I discuss the lack of clarity and inconsistency, and the related pressure for new paths, as indicators of an emerging field in Chapter Six.

Section 3: Reflecting on the Literature from a Social Justice Perspective

Overall, the range of interests and diversity of approaches to research with gifted adults makes it difficult to present a coherent summary of this survey of the literature. As data, it is unwieldy to say the least. However, from a social justice perspective, plurality and difference are valued, and things are allowed to stay messy. Above I have tried to summarise the findings related to my first question about what is driving current interest in gifted adults. What follows is a short critical discussion of some concerning issues. The discussion is most related to the second research question about moving forward and building knowledge.

When conflict extends from the particular issue to capture the broader themes of opposition between groups, there is an opportunity to share information. When sharing information, there is an opportunity for social justice through emerging understanding. (Frederking, 2013, p. 137)

A social justice perspective requires that researchers care about whose voice is silenced and whose is privileged, what about a topic is bracketed and why, and where more clarity and insight is needed (Fine, 2012, 2018; Frederking, 2013). To conclude this chapter, I summarize and briefly discuss some aspects of the research literature that, from a social justice perspective, appear to be under-examined and problematic. In relation to my research questions, such blind spots need to be brought to light to fully understand the current state of research with gifted adults, and to find paths forward. These and similar issues - some of which have already been discussed in relation to specific studies - are critically examined throughout the thesis, particularly in Chapter Six, and revisited in discussions on how to move forward in Chapter Eight.

WEIRD approaches to the topic. An important finding here is that all of the gifted adult studies published in scholarly journals come from WEIRD countries. Where researchers have been interested in the experiences, traditions, values, or beliefs of gifted adults from other cultural, racial, or ethnic groups, the work has been with minority groups *living within* Westernized countries.

From a social justice perspective, the predominance of a WEIRD approach is obviously of concern, as it privileges a sub-set of voices and ideas. There can be no doubt that any construct of *gifted* includes reference to something valued – by a culture, a sub-culture, a person, or within a specific context. This is acknowledged in gifted studies generally (for a variety of views, see Ballam & Moltzen, 2017; Kerr, 1985; Persson, 2018; Phillipson & McCann, 2007; Vaille, 2011), and some gifted *education* researchers have used cross-cultural approaches to examine conceptions of giftedness from non-Western and indigenous perspectives (e.g., Bevan-Brown, 2011; Karami & Ghahremani, 2016, 2017; Moltzen, 2011; Oh et al., 2015; Webber et al., 2020). Results of the Delphi study and the Questionnaire study also show that some experts

interested in gifted adults are critical of the predominance of Western ideology in the field (see Chapters Five and Six).

Nonetheless, a concerning finding in this survey of published studies is the absence of critical reflection and discussion about what seems to be entrenched cultural bias in published research with gifted adults. In fact, a close look at studies published during the past decade reveals that the predominance of Western ideology is virtually unchallenged.

Notably, gifted-related scholarly *journals* are published in Western countries and, in the case of gifted adult research, predominantly in the USA. Hence, voices of researchers and gifted adults outside of those countries remain unheard, and the published research tells us nothing about whether or not there is interest in the topic of gifted adults in non-Westernized cultures and countries.

From a social justice perspective, researchers, authors, and publishers share the responsibility for disseminating information in ways that promote engagement with all communities of interest, and for dismantling practises that structure exclusion (Weis & Fine, 2005). In the case of research with gifted adults, it seems timely to acknowledge and engage with some unexamined problems, including those related to publication bias. These and related issues were raised in the Delphi study and taken into account in the recommendations from the panel of experts (see Chapter Five).

Selection bias. Problems related to selection bias are obvious but rarely mentioned within the publications surveyed. A social justice lens, on the other hand, brings the practises and consequences into sharp focus.

What is very apparent in this survey of published research with gifted adults is that almost all of the studies applied narrow intelligence-based definitions of *gifted*, either explicitly as part of an overall conceptual framework or, more often, implicitly in the methods used to select participants. The preponderance of such methods privileges the voices of those who are

intelligent as measured by the tests or memberships and, more exclusively, those who engage with the systems that provide access to those measures. Almost universal use of such methods in historical and current research with gifted adults effectively silences the voices of those who, for whatever reasons, are outside of the thresholds for IQ and other psychometric tests, do not achieve well on SAT or similar markers of domain-specific academic achievement, choose to avoid the testing and high-IQ organizations, or do not have access to such testing (including those who were not nominated to be tested as children).

The few phenomenological or exploratory studies that did not use test scores and the like provide some examples of voices that might otherwise be silenced: twice-exceptional adults who live with autism (Grant, 2016) or mental illness (Soloman & Trainor, 2016), women with eating disorders (Gatto-Waldon, 1999); those whose clusters of qualities and abilities are highly specific to a particular context such as a profession (Racki et al., 2018) and adults who have been labelled *underachievers* (Mahoney, 1999).

Anachronisms. Compounding, or perhaps at the root of some of these problems, is the historic and continuing influence of early talent development and intelligence research, including a few longitudinal studies. As shown above, this early work continues to influence thinking and research practice with gifted adults, either explicitly via the application of broad theories or concepts, or implicitly in unexamined ideologies, discourse, and methods. Left unexamined, these legacies can inadvertently perpetuate concepts that have little relevance to personal, social, and political contexts of 2020 and beyond, and, from a social justice perspective, may actually be harmful.

Continued reference to these studies and uncritical use of the data in current published research may well represent an etymological fallacy, that is, the idea that historical usage of the word *gifted* is similar to present-day meaning. Given that most scholars now understand giftedness to be a complex, multidimensional, context-dependent, and culturally-embedded

construct (Dai, 2017; Lo & Porath, 2017; Plucker & Barab, 2005; Webber et al., 2020), the relevance of data, methods, and findings from many early (and some more recent) studies may be questionable, particularly beyond the specific cohorts studied.

It seems timely to critically examine the foundations of published research with gifted adults, and carefully consider ongoing legacies and unexamined assumptions in light of current conceptualizations and emerging research priorities. If, going forward, researchers aim for methodological consistency and employ appropriate caution in their interpretation of findings, there is an opportunity for exploration, discovery, and expanding beyond some very outdated thinking.

Chapter 5: Research with Gifted Adults: What International Experts Think Needs to Happen to Move the Field Forward

In the previous chapter, I began to answer the research questions by surveying research with gifted adults published in academic journals. This chapter describes the Delphi study, where I extend my enquiry beyond interpretation of historical and current published studies. Here, I engage directly with a *panel* of experts – published authors or otherwise – who are currently interested in research with gifted adults. A substantial part of this chapter is a published paper (Brown et al., 2020).

Despite a growing interest in understanding more about gifted adults amongst health professionals, researchers interested in adult development, educators, and gifted adults themselves, this remains a relatively unexamined group in the research literature (Fiedler, 2015; Rinn & Bishop, 2015; Silverman, 2013; Wirthwein & Rost, 2011). The field of giftedness studies lacks a framework to guide current and future research in this age group and to integrate emerging ideas about this complex phenomenon. This exploratory study is a response to the efforts of those calling for a fresh look at research on giftedness (Dai, 2018; Glăveanu & Kaufman, 2017; Plucker & Callahan, 2014; Renzulli, 2011; Sternberg, 2018) including gifted adults (Jung, 2012; Keating, 2009; Persson, 2014; Simonton, 2008). Using a modified Delphi method (Linstone & Turoff, 1975) involving a multidisciplinary panel of 76 subject matter experts (applied and academic) from 14 countries, this study is the start of an important and long-overdue conversation about how we build knowledge and improve understanding about gifted adults.

Historically, academic research with gifted adults has tended to fall within fields such as gifted education, and the psychology of intelligence or individual differences. Most

current interest in gifted adults often falls outside of or is lost within large and organized academic disciplines (e.g., within human resource management, occupational health, higher education studies, and counselling), and so is not well represented in the academic literature. Those currently interested in knowing more about gifted adults tend to focus on a substantive issue or specific contexts such as employment, family, mental health and lifelong learning, and as a result, the work and ideas remain sequestered within the boundaries of specific disciplines or scopes of practice, each with its own aims and discourse. Furthermore, with the possible exception of a number of longstanding longitudinal studies (Cramond, Matthews-Morgan, Bandalos, & Zuo, 2005; Gottfried, Gottfried, & Guerin, 2006; Wai, Lubinski, Benbow, & Steiger, 2010), rare collaborations are siloed geographically and culturally (see Van Thiel et al., 2019 for a recent Dutch collaboration), and results not broadly disseminated. Despite a growing number of popular books and websites related to gifted adults, journals and other academic literature related to giftedness largely focus on gifted education and young people. Currently, there appear to be few opportunities for researchers and others working with gifted adults to share knowledge and ideas and to strategize.

Worrell and colleagues (Worrell, et al., 2019) review and highlight some of the historic controversies and tensions in giftedness studies. Common tensions include the relative importance of biological endowment and environment, entrenched views and practises such as using IQ and other single psychometric measures to select research participants, and the impasse around use of terms often found in the gifted education field (Ambrose et al., 2012; Dai, 2018) and intelligence research (Davidson, 2012; Simonton & Song, 2009). These longstanding debates can complicate attempts by those interested in gifted adults to find a starting point of common ground, highlighting the need to listen to multiple voices and apply a variety of lenses and levels of analysis to generate new insights and direction. This study is part of a broader program of work in this important space. This paper focuses on a panel of experts studying and

working with gifted adults, to find out what they think about the state of research in the area, and what they believe are fruitful future directions.

In contrast to the field of gifted adults, in the past decade scientists and practitioners have reflected on the standing of the relatively well-developed areas of gifted education and talent development (Ambrose, 2017; Persson, 2017; Silova et al., 2017; Subotnik et al., 2017; Tan, 2013; Ziegler et al., 2012). Leading researchers in those fields now propose new theories and paradigms to guide future research (e.g., Dai, 2017; Dai, 2020; Lo et al., 2018; Subotnik et al., 2019; Ziegler et al., 2012). Recently, a group of creativity researchers, many of whom are also well known in giftedness research, proposed a “manifesto” of guiding beliefs and aims to build common ground and advance both theory and research in that field (Glăveanu et al., 2019). This exploratory Delphi study supports the efforts of others in these neighboring and related fields who call for a fresh approach to inquiry into such complex phenomena.

The primary research questions were “what is needed to develop research that increases our understanding of gifted adults?” and “how should research efforts be directed in the next 5 years?” Importantly, the aim was not to seek consensus, but rather to discover and accurately report on the spread of relevant views and opinions within the panel. The results of a semantic-level TA of the data (Boyatzis, 1998) presented in this paper, are themes related to obstacles, priorities and actions, and six recommendations that reflect areas of agreement and consensus as well as differences in views amongst panel members.

It is important to acknowledge that there is a longstanding debate about the use of the term *gifted* in both research and practice (Ambrose et al., 2012; Borland, 2005; Mendaglio & Tillier, 2006; Tansley, 2011). In this study, a conceptual or operational definition was not imposed. Instead, consistent with the exploratory qualitative methodology, the word *gifted* was used as a heuristic device - an investigatory and analytic tool that offered an opportunity to communicate, explore, and examine ideas, and aid analysis (Hellowell, 2006) with no intention

to reify a concept (Shiner, 1975) or to assume shared understanding. This is reflected in, for example, participant criteria which acknowledge that potential panel members might use or prefer terms other than *gifted*. Use of the term in this study was explicitly evocative, in the sense of inviting reflection and considered responses. Ideas and opinions about the use of the word *gifted* emerged from the data, thereby contributing information grounded in the lived experiences of panel members.

Methods

This study used a modified Delphi method - an iterative process consisting of a series of electronically administered questionnaires, between-round analysis, and dissemination of data after each round to participants (panel members) for further comment. The method is well regarded as a means of producing detailed critical examination and building knowledge (Turoff & Hiltz, 1996), especially where experts are dispersed geographically, information is insufficient or incomplete, and it is important to maintain the heterogeneity and contributions of all members of a group (Ziglio, 1996).

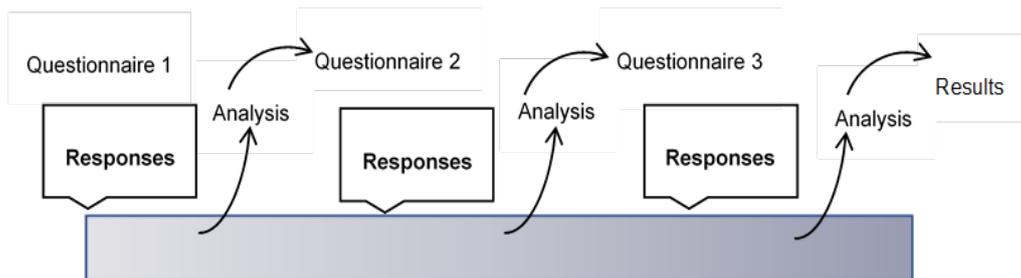
I considered it important to understand within-group differences of opinion or ambivalence as well as areas of agreement, and therefore used a version of the method called the Policy Delphi (Turoff, 1970) in which the iterative analytic process is a way to understand a spread of opinion, including key pro and con arguments for differing positions, rather than a tool for reaching consensus. Like the original Delphi, the Policy Delphi is well regarded as a way to structure group communication and sharing of views (Landeta et al., 2011), but because the focus is on having the multidisciplinary panel present all options for consideration, it is particularly suited to this study and the research questions (Turoff, 1970).

The Delphi process. Three anonymous questionnaires were administered online, and completed iteratively by panel members over an eight-month period in 2018. Data were

collected across the three rounds. Each round was analysed, and the results were presented back to the panel for further reflection and comment in subsequent rounds (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

The Three-round Iterative Delphi Process



Note: Responses to each of the three questionnaires comprise the entire data set. Arrows show the data retrieval and analysis process leading to subsequent questionnaires in rounds two and three, and to results after round three.

The three rounds of questionnaires resulted in a wealth of information to be analysed. In this paper, the intention is to accurately report views and opinions of the panel about the research problem that drove the study, how to move forward with our understanding of gifted adults. The TA for this paper was therefore primarily at the semantic level, staying with the explicit meaning of the data (Boyatzis, 1998). However, as the iterative Delphi method involves a process that moves beyond simply summarizing and describing the data, interpretation is required to make sense of and organize the data for comment in subsequent rounds. Two specific research questions provided an interpretive lens and focus for the analysis:

1. What is needed to develop research that increases our understanding of gifted adults?
2. How should research efforts be directed in the next five years?

Anonymity. A key aspect of the Delphi method is the anonymity of responses. This is particularly important in this study. I wanted the results to accurately reflect the views of all panel members, without inadvertently privileging the voices of those deemed (by other panel members) as authoritative. In other words, it was important that panel members offer their opinions and comments freely, without feeling influenced or intimidated by a ‘big name’.

This is an emerging field with a few experts who are well recognized and many more who are not known outside of local or discipline-specific circles. Research has found that the mere presence of those perceived as powerful can evoke deference (Petty & Cacioppo, 1996) and inhibit one’s direct expression of ideas (Keltner et al., 2003), even when there is no overt attempt to persuade. In situations like this study, where there may be power disparity, anonymity can help bring forward disparate and dissenting views, and produce a form of task conflict that is useful in “settings when the status quo beliefs are insufficient for what lies ahead” (Tegarden et al., 2016, p. 25).

In this study, confidentiality and anonymity of responses were maintained by using software-generated codes (pseudonyms) to link a participant’s responses across rounds, and for generating emails. All care was taken to avoid using potentially identifying information when presenting results back to the panel. I remained blind to the identities throughout the analysis, and arranged for one of my supervisors to remove personal identifiers from the survey site data.

Research process. The research was carried out in four interrelated steps:

- 1) Study and survey development
- 2) Panel recruitment and selection
- 3) Questionnaire design
- 4) Data collection and analysis processes

While these steps are presented sequentially, the iterative nature of the Delphi study means that steps also overlapped.

Step One: Study and survey development. As a first step in the research project, I engaged in an extensive search for and review of literature across relevant disciplines. Initial search terms included combinations of gifted, adults, high ability, talent, high intelligence, innovation, adulthood, and lifespan. Sources included electronic databases, journals, scholarly books, websites, and blog sites. Information, gaps, and inconsistencies apparent in the literature helped refine our search terms, and eventually our research aim.

In this early review stage, I identified three key organizing ideas directly related to that aim: obstacles to moving forward, priorities and actions. These were used as a framework for collecting and grouping data in Round One, and for reporting some of the results of the TA.

Step Two: Panel recruitment and selection. In this Policy Delphi, heterogeneity and representation of the sample are important considerations for the validity of the results (Hasson & Keeney, 2011; Turoff, 1970). Through the literature review and development phase, it became clear that expertise was spread across a broad range of academic and professional disciplines, and not always publicly well known. Selection methods addressed this in several ways. Participant criteria, shown in Table 6, were developed to include breadth of knowledge, variation, and specialization. The number of participants, large for a general Delphi, is more typical of a Policy Delphi for the same reasons. To be certain that panel members had relevant knowledge I purposively searched for potential panel members who met all criteria using a combination of expert and snowball sampling (Paraskevas & Saunders, 2012).

Table 6*Participant Criteria for the Delphi Study*

Criterion number	Details
1	A panel member will have an established (5+ years) interest in gifted adults. This may be a specific adult focus or a lifespan approach with a particular interest in contexts relevant to ages 18+.
2	A panel member will have an established (5+ years) interest in giftedness, and/or in a construct that they believe to be directly related to giftedness. Lack of conceptual clarity in this area means that Panel Members may differ in the words & constructs they use. We invite this diversity.
3	A panel member will demonstrate an ability to understand and critically analyze research related to gifted adults. Some members will be experienced researchers. Others working outside of a research environment demonstrate their ability by, for example, using current clinical research, presenting at meetings, attending conferences, writing, or teaching. This diversity is welcome.
4	A panel member will be interested in engaging in this exploratory study

The study announcement (see Appendix C). was posted on relevant social media sites and directed anyone interested in participating to contact the lead researcher directly. Those who met all criteria were sent an invitation email (see Appendix D). Correspondence was in English, but the website (<https://www.delphistudy.auckland.ac.nz/>) had a translation tool. Panel members were invited to submit responses in any language, and translation was available if required.

In total, 115 potential panel members were identified in the development phase as meeting the criteria for participation. Each received an invitation email with information about the study, participant criteria, a link to the study website, and a personal link to the online survey site to accept the invitation. The email also requested the invitee to share the study website URL with others who likely meet the criteria. An additional 37 invitees were identified via snowballing and social media.

The recruitment resulted in a total sample for round one of 76 participants from 14 countries. Disciplines, professions, and countries represented in round one are shown in Table 7 (note: some panel members worked in more than one discipline or profession). The panel was comprised of 64 members for round two, and 58 members for round three.

Table 7

Disciplines, Professions and Countries Represented in Round One

Country	Discipline or profession
Austria, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Greece, Hungary, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, USA	Academic Research, Adult Education, Human Resource Management, Mental Health and Wellness, Occupational Health and Medicine, Organizational Consultancy, Psychology, Writing

Step Three: Questionnaire design. An initial draft of items for Questionnaire One was peer-reviewed by three independent experts in qualitative research design and giftedness research. I refined the questionnaire until consensus was reached. All processes related to online survey delivery and data collection were piloted extensively prior to round one to help ensure anonymity and smooth processes. In subsequent rounds, questionnaire items emerged from the data analysis process described in Step Four. I drafted items, which then a second researcher (one of my supervisors) involved in the coding and TA, checked independently.

Given that one of the assumptions of the Delphi method is that the group process and group opinion provide information that is useful beyond individual perspectives (Turoff, 1970), the three questionnaires were designed to move focus from individual perspectives in the first round (Me) to learning about the views of others (Others) and eventually to group opinions (Us). I provide more detail on the content of each questionnaire below.

Questionnaire One: Me. The first questionnaire was the Me round, where the aim was to begin to understand individual perspectives. This round also collected personal descriptive (demographic) data to characterize the panel in terms of, for example, geographic spread, disciplines represented, and areas of interest and expertise. Panel members were then asked to reference their own work and experience when responding to the following questions:

- 1) In your work related to gifted adults, what are the priority issues? (e.g., these might be questions you most want to answer, problems you most want to solve, or what you feel most inspired to change).

- 2) The field is not without its challenges. In your work, what are currently the biggest hurdles?
- 3) How do these hurdles impact your work?
- 4) What do you think is well known, or well established, about adult giftedness in your area of interest?
- 5) In your opinion, what needs to happen to further develop this field?
- 6) What questions/issues do you think this community ideally should be seeking to address?

Questionnaire Two: Others. The focus of Questionnaire Two shifted to engaging with the ideas of the other panel members. I presented information about individual perspectives back to the group, and panel members became aware of and commented on others' views and opinions, including areas of agreement and differences.

This questionnaire included eight items describing emerging themes or sub themes. Four items included statements that reflected ideas or patterns where panel members appeared to disagree to some extent. Each of these was presented as a summary statement representing one point of view, followed by several exemplar statements 'for' and 'against'. Panel members individually rated how well each summary statement reflected their current views (an example of the summary statements is provided in Appendix E). A second group of four items reflected ideas that panel members seemed to agree on to some extent. Panel members rated their level of agreement with each statement (an example of these items is provided in Appendix F).

Questionnaire Three: Us. Questionnaire Three included eight items, each reflecting themes from the previous rounds of data. The challenge here was to present key group (Us) patterns for comment while continuing to accurately represent varied and sometimes disparate views. When the TA indicated both relevance and some degree of agreement amongst panel members, those themes were presented in the form of six recommendations (see Table 8). Panel

members were asked to indicate their level of agreement, rate each recommendation in terms of importance and feasibility and comment. This served two purposes: it provided additional data to refine themes and increased the reliability of the findings via member checking.

Table 8

Recommendations Put to Panel Members in Questionnaire Three

Recommendation	Details
1	We will need to frame a research program to support a plurality of views. Differing and divergent views do exist, as would be expected in an emerging field with a slim research base. While we may flounder a bit, ultimately the application of different lenses will broaden our knowledge & prevent premature narrowing, collapse or fragmentation of concepts.
2	Clearly articulated research questions are essential for designing studies & building knowledge in this emerging field of study. Much of existing research with gifted adults is theory-neutral & research questions provide important direction.
3	Existing descriptive & conceptual models of adult giftedness are largely untested. The value of these models needs to be explored & tested by the research community, in partnership with those working with gifted adults in specific contexts & with gifted adults themselves.
4	Context matters! Researchers will need to build knowledge about gifted adults in a wide variety of contexts including domains, physical environments, roles, cultures, families & stages of life. Collaboration & sharing of information is needed. Research will likely cross traditional disciplinary boundaries.
5	Debate about using the word 'gifted' (& similar) could side-track research efforts. At this point, little will be gained by trying to find 'better' words. Rigour & clarity are needed around the use of terms. It may well be useful to explore context-specific attitudes about the word 'gifted'.
6	Research must be framed to support the complexity of the phenomenon, with no assumption of a universal 'definition' of adult giftedness across domains. This may limit sample size & make it difficult to control variables for quantitative research. Strong qualitative & mixed-methods studies (including case studies & longitudinal research) can provide relevant & meaningful information without prematurely defining conceptual boundaries.

The second section consisted of two thought provokers - summary statements reflecting themes of uncertainty or dilemma. For each, panel members were invited to comment on how (or if) to move forward (an example is provided in Appendix G).

Step Four: Data collection and analysis processes. The Delphi method requires that after the first questionnaire round, subsequent data collection rounds are informed by an analysis of the previous round, making the data collection and analysis process intricately linked. In each round, I used password protected Qualtrics online software to deliver information and the

questionnaires, and to collect data. Panel members had a minimum of 5 weeks to complete each of the questionnaires, and received a reminder email a week prior to each closing date. To promote ongoing engagement and interest, and ultimately retention, a short email between rounds provided a summary of descriptive data such as the number of respondents or geographic spread.

While the broad description of the three questionnaire rounds suggests a linear sequence of data collection, this oversimplifies a much more complex iterative and emergent process. Each round of the Delphi study included analyzing and revisiting earlier data to include emerging information in the next round of the questionnaire.

Thematic analysis. Data were organized and categorized using qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12 (QSR International, Melbourne, Australia) and manually at times. The analysis process of each round of data broadly followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six phases of a reflexive TA. This process is summarised below in Table 9

Table 9

Phases of the Thematic Analysis (TA)

Phase	Task	Process
1.	Become familiar with the data	Export the data from Qualtrics to NVivo. Read and re-read for familiarization and note initial ideas.
2.	Generate initial codes	Re-read looking for patterns or ideas that are of interest, keeping the research questions in mind. Check and recheck entire data set, name ideas as codes and begin coding data. Collate data by code.
3.	Search for themes	Check coded data for potentially relevant themes. Collate data by theme. Use organizing ideas to ‘chunk’ themes as needed.
4.	Iteratively review themes	Search within and across themed data for overlap and relationships. Re-sort and organize accordingly.
5.	Define and specify themes and sub themes, and the overall story of the data	Clarify and specify themes, naming them. Identify sub themes. Collate data by theme and sub-theme; ‘chunk’ using the organizing ideas where relevant. Check and re-check entire data set to refine understanding of the overall story of the data.
6.	Report results	For each theme, identify compelling extracts from data to thicken the analysis. Organize results to address the research aims and questions.

The flexible analysis process was well suited to the iterative nature of this Delphi method and provided structure for working with the large volume of data.

In keeping with the exploratory aims of the study, the analysis employed a reflexive and inductive coding process, where descriptive codes developed and were modified as part of the (Braun et al., 2019). This orientation helped to assure the validity of the results by reflecting and preserving the heterogeneity in the data.

For each round of data collection and analysis, the data were checked and rechecked multiple times, coded and gradually understood as broader themes. The data from previous rounds were frequently revisited and included in the analysis to, for example, identify and understand a pattern or thread across the data set, or confirm a unique perspective. For each round of analysis, one of my supervisors independently checked and rechecked randomly selected sections of the data, and we then compared and discussed the results. I drafted items for Questionnaires Two and Three to reflect emerging themes. These were checked by the supervisor who assisted with the analysis, and modified as needed to best represent the data.

Codes and themes were revised throughout the study to improve their fit with the data across panel members and rounds (Charmaz, 2014). Emerging themes and sub themes were increasingly explanatory, capturing something meaningful in relation to the two research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006), whether that be a pattern, thread, novel idea or dissenting view (Bazeley, 2009).

Results and Discussion

The main intention of this study and hence the focus of the findings from the TA was to capture the essence of what panel members had to say about how to build knowledge about gifted adults. I wanted to discover and shed light on current obstacles, directions, and priorities for the next five years, from the perspective of this panel, including areas of disagreement or uncertainty

With those aims in mind, I present and discuss the results of the TA (i.e., nine themes with sub themes shown in Table 10) under the organizing ideas employed at the start of the study: obstacles, priorities, and actions. Narrative extracts are included to thicken descriptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Ryle, 1949), to more fully capture my interpretation, and to show differing views. We then present and discuss some results of the final Delphi round, during which key themes were presented back to the panel as recommendations for response and comment.

Table 10

Themes and Sub themes from the Three Rounds of Data

Organizing idea	Themes	Sub themes
Obstacles	Fragmentation of the field	Knowledge silos: Research/practice disconnect Weak or scattered knowledge base
	Conceptual differences or confusion	Conflation Results are not transferable. Untested models
	Problems with the word 'gifted'	Concern over stigma around 'gifted' The impasse
Priorities	Gifted is a contextually embedded phenomenon	Lifespan approach Multicultural lens
	Understand lived experiences	Voices of gifted adults Relevant research methods
	Acknowledge (don't reduce) complexity	Within-group heterogeneity Holism The question of domains
Actions	Link research and practice	Mutually informative Context-specific research
	Improve knowledge and build awareness	Public awareness: must be reliable, accessible and relevant Need for strategic research and public awareness initiative
	Plan cross-disciplinary projects	Establish networks specific to adult contexts/lifespan Explore funding options Collaborative cross-disciplinary research initiatives

Themes.

Obstacles. Three themes about obstacles were identified: fragmentation of the field, research/practice disconnect, and problems with the word *gifted*.

Theme One: Fragmentation of the field. This first theme describes how the current fragmentation of research with gifted adults limits progress. Panel members reported and provided examples of “*knowledge silos*”, noting that ideas and research with gifted adults are stored within disciplines, and countries with little cross-referencing and few opportunities to collaborate. Panel members commented that attempts to convene are usually *ad hoc* additions to gifted education conferences: “We don't currently have organization specifically around studying gifted adults. We do our work in isolation, and on the edges of gifted education or the study of gifted children”.

Many panel members mentioned the lack of connection between research and practice with gifted adults. Examples included counselling practices that are not informed by research, and academic researchers with limited access to participants in real-world contexts.

The absence of a disciplinary home was noted by almost all panel members. As one panel member said: “It's difficult to build on previous research when the research is so fragmented”. Panel members noted a lack of adult-specific conferences, journals, and scholarly initiatives, and almost all expressed a desire and willingness to establish a recognized field of study.

Theme Two: Conceptual differences or confusion? The second theme captures how panel members believe existing conceptual differences affect knowledge building. Three sub themes reflect a variety of views.

Many panel members noted examples of conflation, in which “we're comparing apples and oranges”, or “operational definitions seem unrelated to the concept being studied”. Whereas some believed that a unified conceptual definition is needed, others expressed the view that conceptual differences are important: “Any consensus now will not be based on good evidence”, and that conflation can and must be avoided through “rigor in research design and publication requirements”.

The issue of lack of transferability of research findings was of concern to many panel members. For some, the differing conceptual definitions limit sharing of important knowledge across contexts and disciplines: “It is difficult for this work to gain any traction in the world of work where arguably it could have the widest impact”. Others noted that sampling based on, for example, membership in high-IQ organizations, may be conceptually inconsistent, and restricts the generalizability of any claims.

Some panel members believed that many current models of giftedness (applied to adults) were initially developed within “an education-centric child-focused paradigm”, and there is little if any empirical or other evidence of a model’s fit for adults in adult contexts. The concern is that publication of untested models, particularly in the public domain, “reinforces the myths and plain errors about this field already in the public opinion”.

Theme Three: Problems with the word gifted. The third theme captures how issues related to using the term *gifted adults* negatively affect research efforts. Panel members are aware of the potential for the term to be unpopular and possibly unacceptable in academic circles and in the public domain. Those who use the word *gifted* do so to maintain historical continuity within the academic literature, or to create a thread between childhood and adulthood in a lifespan approach, or, most often, because “there is no better word right now, and any word we use will eventually carry the same stigma”. Many practitioners are ambivalent. They use the term if the adults they work with relate to it, but this is often unknown or unacceptable in their communities of practice or training.

Panel members noted they had previously engaged in discussions about the word *gifted* and have made informed decisions about whether to use it. Some, particularly those who have chosen to use other words, believe that using *gifted* creates obstacles for obtaining funds, and for finding subjects for research. Others are aware of the historical impasse and want to move on:

“In my experience, this has been an ongoing trip down a rabbit hole that continually leads to dead ends far afield of the essential issues initially intended for exploration”.

Priorities. In terms of priorities, three themes were identified: gifted is a contextually embedded phenomenon, the value of lived experiences, and acknowledge (don't reduce) complexity.

Theme Four: Gifted is a contextually embedded phenomenon. Theme four was present throughout the data in various forms and describes how a construct of adult giftedness cannot be separated from contextual factors across the lifespan.

Some panel members noted that building knowledge about gifted adults necessarily means paying attention to adult contexts and the developmental tasks of adulthood, suggesting a need for a lifespan approach: “to understand how early developmental experiences impact gifted adults, AND gifted adults have specific needs and issues and should be researched in their own right with adult-specific questions, methods, and models”. Panel members' specific interests included contexts such as work and family, and developmental issues related to, for example, early adulthood and aging.

Most panel members wrote about the need to move beyond a Western view of giftedness, to understand how (or if) adult giftedness is understood in various cultures and sub-cultures. Many panel members emphasized that a multicultural approach represents a noteworthy change that requires reflecting on implicit biases in, for example, research funding and publication. A multicultural lens may also shed light on inequities: "If an adult 'achieves' in culturally-valued ways, their giftedness is acknowledged; otherwise, it goes unrecognized, even by themselves ... What does this say about the construct?"

Theme Five: Understand lived experiences. This theme reflected the belief that the phenomenological experiences of gifted adults matter. Many panel members believed that rich and valuable data come from gifted adults and that the voices of gifted adults need to be heard

and better represented in the public domain and within the academic community. One panel member wrote this: “we need gifted-informed research - gifted people with both experiential and theoretical understanding conducting and sharing research”.

There were a variety of views on how to include and represent the lived experience of gifted adults in research. Panel members who prefer quantitative methodology raised issues and ideas about selection criteria and finding participants. Qualitative researchers noted the need for change in research funding and publication: “There is a bias against qualitative research. Case studies and other narratives, and the data they provide are often discarded”.

Theme Six: Acknowledge (Don't reduce) complexity. Theme six captured the various ways panel members view *gifted adults* as a complex and irreducible phenomenon. Most panel members viewed gifted adults as a heterogeneous group and were interested in understanding differences as well as commonalities. Research interests included twice-exceptionality, cultural values, age and developmental stage experiences, gender, and equity issues, and domain-specific talent.

While a few panel members ascribed to a single-variable view of giftedness, the predominant view was holistic, considering the entire system, including environment, development, domain, intra-individual characteristics and phenomenological experience. Comments emphasized the need to understand real-world situations:

What happens at work or in a group may be completely different than what happens outside of that environment. Whether we look at performance or behavior, the gifted adult does not exist in a vacuum. What else is happening?

Another thread was to expand inquiry beyond cognitive skills: “Take the whole gifted self into account, not just cognitive capacity and needs, but also social, emotional, physical and spiritual.”

The issue of domain-specificity and its importance in understanding gifted adults was acknowledged by most panel members and was particularly related to a developmental, lifespan approach. As one panel member wrote, “Abilities and what we call giftedness may change over time. We have to look at the intersection of domain characteristics and developmental tasks and challenges for specific age periods.”

Actions. Three themes related to actions emerged: linking research and practice, increasing awareness, and planning collaborative cross-disciplinary projects.

Theme Seven: Link research and practice. Panel members wrote about a historic lack of opportunity for research and practice to be mutually informative. Many expressed the view that collaborations are essential now and in the future. As one person wrote, “It’s important to bridge academic research and experience-driven theories and observations”. Another suggested, “a combination of ecological and practical/applied approaches for research-informed support and advocacy.”

The value the panel placed on linking research and practice across contexts was reflected in a comment from one member: “A strategic cross-institutional and cross-sector (educators, psychologists, counsellors, therapists, etc.) plan for research in this area is badly needed. A team that could tap into research funding from different sectors.”

Theme Eight: Improve knowledge and increase awareness. Theme eight reflects panel members' concern about the lack of awareness and misinformation about gifted adults in the public domain and in practice and academic communities. Some panel members believed that reliable information is not yet available, but that it needs to be accessible and relevant to specific audiences. As one panel member wrote, “People are treated and medicated for diseases they do not have. A priority is to increase awareness of this population among mental health providers.” Others believed that we do not yet have reliable information to share and that the urgent need is for strong evidence including myth-busting.

Despite these differences, there was strong interest in moving forward, as expressed by one participant: “We must convene (physically or virtually) and agree on some foci of research, and on a direction for publications for laypersons.”

Theme Nine: Plan cross-disciplinary projects. The final theme describes a view that was prevalent throughout the study: panel members want to establish cross-disciplinary networks, projects, and communities of interest aimed at building knowledge about gifted adults. As one panel member wrote, “Conferences, collaboration, a research agenda, funding separate from gifted education – all are needed!” Other ideas included a special journal issue, symposia, and special interest groups (SIGs) within existing academic and advocacy groups. Many panel members saw potential benefit from joint funding applications for multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional projects. The panel generally expressed some urgency, as noted by one participant: “The needs of gifted adults are largely unknown (to the adults themselves, as well as to those in their environment). It’s time to establish robust scholarship and networks of communication and support specifically for the adult gifted field.”

Recommendations from round three. Based on the themes emerging from the first two rounds of the Delphi process, I identified six provisional recommendations related to the research questions (Table 8). These were presented to the participants in round three for rating and comment.

The first recommendation centred on the need to develop a research program that captures the plurality in the field by using a variety of lenses to avoid fragmentation of concepts. Almost all panel members either agreed or strongly agreed that this recommendation was either essential or important. One panel member, however, expressed concern that the recommendation would be counterproductive, noting that “When we try to make a field of study all inclusive, we dilute the important issues that should be apparent from the start”. In terms of

feasibility, as one participant said: “I would think it is not only feasible but impossible to avoid a plurality of views, theoretical stances and methodological approaches in such research!”

The second recommendation reflected various themes and sub themes related to a perceived lack of methodological rigor and focussed on the need for studies to be directed by clear research questions. Most panel members agreed with this recommendation to some extent, and half of the panel agreed strongly. Of those who disagreed, most preferred other methodologies. For example, as one participant said:

I do not wish to rule out research methods that do not start with 'clearly articulated' research questions per se, but allow these to emerge, dictated by the research 'data' itself. To do otherwise is to limit the field to a quasi-scientific paradigm, and risk ignoring important information and insights.

The third recommendation centred on existing models of giftedness and the importance of testing the validity and usefulness of those models for gifted adults. There were some polarized views around the recommendation. All but three panel members agreed to some extent and viewed the recommendation as either essential or important. One said, “It is essential because these models tend to pop up in literature reviews, etc. but lack the authority empirical testing would deliver”. In contrast, another panel member said: "Testing existing models would be an expensive exercise in time-wasting". One panel members' comment captures important differences in aims:

The researcher in me says that this is important and should be clarified, strengthened, and generally firmed up. The practitioner in me just wants to work on fixing stuff, not wait for the models to be thoroughly vetted first. The researcher in me answers that the solutions will be better and more likely to be effective if they come from well-tested models. The practitioner argues that individuals don't necessarily fit in models anyway. And so on. It's a crowded conversation in my head.

The fourth recommendation focused on the need to understand adult giftedness as a contextually embedded phenomenon, requiring collaboration across disciplines. Panel members are aware of the unique challenges of cross-disciplinary research. One member said: “Funding to do this well is essential and would be dependent on the construction of a credible, authoritative team of researchers.” Despite the challenges, there is almost unanimous agreement amongst panel members that complexity and contextuality must not be reduced. One member summed this up:

This versatile subject matter needs to be addressed from a human perspective to take into account where it occurs, when, with whom, by whom, etc. and the impact(s) it has in the ‘real life’ of gifted adults around the world.

The fifth recommendation addressed the contentious issue of the word *gifted*, presenting a view that this is not the time to try to solve that problem. While nearly three-quarters of panel members felt it is either essential or important to move forward without debate about the term, others viewed the recommendation as counterproductive, with one saying, “The negative connotations of the word gifted are rife”. Some panel members already used alternative terms. One said:

I seldom use the word *gifted* in my work, and always use the word *talent* as I discuss talent in domains. The split in the field would disappear if we were specific in what kind of talent we are talking about.

Another member acknowledged stigma but advocated for continued use of the word *gifted*, suggesting some degree of inevitability: “There will always be emotional responses to the word, and the populace it represents - that’s entirely understandable. Let’s embrace the word, its meaning and the realities of outlier experiences and move on. It’s time”.

The sixth recommendation concentrated on the historically divisive issue of definition. Here the recommendation was that seeking a universal definition is currently neither possible

nor productive. Whereas most panel members agreed with recommendation six and viewed the recommendation as either essential or important, others expressed strong opposing views, one saying:

Creating more noise but all following our own 'definitions' of giftedness has led the field here. If we want to be able to produce good defensible research, gain esteem for our field, and increase our grant ability, we need to agree on a common, measurable definition.

Among those who agreed with recommendation six, some believed that consensus on a definition is eventually necessary. As one panel member said, "For this period yes ... aim for more clarity in the long term". In contrast, others opposed a search for a universal definition now and in the future, one saying it "stifles the voices of a range of scholars and commentators who don't believe that a simple scientific paradigm is sufficient to explain giftedness. This would drive the field further to the margins of educational and psychological research". A third group agreed with the recommendation, advocating for methodological rigour in the face of differing definitions, with one group member saying "this can only succeed if there is sufficient and strong theoretical foundation, adequate description of what a researcher means by giftedness, use, and description of a correct analysis method and a correct selection of the research group".

Conclusion

The nine themes and related sub themes identified in this study provide insight into relevant experts' opinions about the current state of research related to gifted adults. The aim was to explore the state of research in the area, and to discover what experts think needs to happen to move the field forward. This was the first time these key stakeholders had come together to express and share their views. The recommendations and ideas presented by experts in this study provide a snapshot of what is current and some direction for immediate action and future research with gifted adults. Hence this study is an important step in advancing the field.

Although I found that this area of study lacks cohesion and remains somewhat marginalized for various important reasons, it also is clear that panel members believed that these and other obstacles are not insurmountable. The three key obstacles found were fragmentation of the field, conceptual differences, and problems with the word *gifted*. These obstacles are not new, and these results revealed that this group of experts was motivated to move toward solutions. Notably, panel members believed that these, and many other identified problems, could and should be addressed immediately through transparent communication and debate, and collaborative research. Specifically, panel members called for immediate action to develop an online community of interest, special issues within relevant journals, and symposia.

In terms of priorities for research, group opinion supported, amongst other things, a shift toward a systemic or ecological lifespan approach. What emerged from this study is a strong, albeit not unanimous, call for recognition of complexity. Related to that, the panel recommended using models and research methods that take into account the experiences of gifted adults in adult contexts (e.g., employment, family, community, lifelong learning, retirement, and aging).

The analysis of data from the first two rounds suggested six recommendations on how to move forward with research. Panel members' opinions about those recommendations (collected in round three) revealed differing priorities, as well as areas of agreement and controversy. There was broad agreement on some specific actions related to cross-disciplinary collaboration and increasing methodological rigor, and on key conceptual considerations such as the importance of a multicultural adult-focussed lens. There was less agreement about the current feasibility and value of testing models, and panel members presented pros and cons. Most apparent was the diversity in how panel members construed adult giftedness. Given the complexity of the subject matter and paucity of research, it seems timely to value differing conceptualizations, each highlighting specific aspects. While it remains to be seen if the

diversity can be embraced moving forward in research, the results show that this panel had the will and intent to be inclusive.

A key point of difference relates to the use of the term *gifted adult*. As anticipated, panel members employed a variety of terms, which raises important philosophical and practical questions. How do we understand the squeamishness around the use of the term *gifted adult*? What are the constraints and possible opportunities afforded by that discomfort? Does using the term *gifted adult* necessarily perpetuate biases? Is the term useful and appropriate in some contexts, but not in others? Answers will require the sort of cross-disciplinary reflection, debate, and transparency begun by this study. Furthermore, this panel agreed that the voices of gifted adults must be included in research, and I suggest that any future debate about terms requires such inclusion.

The high level of participant retention and engagement, together with comments from panel members, indicate that this study was an important catalyst for future action in the field. Specifically, panel members wanted to convene, share information, collaborate across disciplines and work toward increasing awareness about research with gifted adults. The iterative Delphi process provided panel members with new insights into the views of others, and the opportunity to reflect on, articulate and even modify their own views and opinions. The TA allowed me to understand and report a wide array of views to the panel, and in the published paper.

The findings are, however, limited to this sample. While the panel consisted of experts from 14 countries and included researchers and practitioners, ideally the study could be widened to include other voices, for example, those of stakeholders from various cultural and language backgrounds, and the results compared. Such research is important to fully reflect the current state of research in the field, and to catalyze interest, conversation, and action more widely.

Similarly, future research in the area could explore whether differing constructs of *gifted adults* are used in various disciplines, countries, and areas of research interest. Research could shed light on any cultural, geographic or discipline-specific differences in preferred terms, models, and theories.

Finally, the results of this study suggest that a key obstacle to building knowledge in this field is the lack of opportunity to publish and disseminate relevant information. In contrast, the level of participation and the responses from the panel members in this study reveal a strong international interest in creating more opportunities to disseminate information and to improve knowledge about gifted adults. As discussed in Chapter Four, there appears to be a history of publication bias that may not be well recognized. Hence, it remains to be seen how (or if) results of innovative research with gifted adults will be shared in the future.

Chapter 6: Differences Known and Unknown

The previous chapter described and reported the results of the Delphi process, including priorities, obstacles and recommendations for moving forward identified by a panel of experts interested in research with gifted adults. The Questionnaire study described in this chapter engages with those same experts but as individuals, rather than as a group, to more clearly understand the plurality of views that became apparent in the Delphi process, including differences and commonalities. A substantial part of this chapter is a paper submitted for publication.

Background

Research with adults who are gifted is an undeveloped and complex field (Rinn & Bishop, 2015) and as such it is important early on to shine a light on potential differences in conceptual and operational definitions, methodological approaches and the assumptions that lie behind them. This helps those already working within the field, and new and emerging researchers, to either avoid, or respond to the different approaches, assumptions and critiques. It can also help stimulate a lively and constructive dialogue that encourages transparency, rather than defensiveness and fragmentation, and that values differences, all while remaining conscious of a common interest: advancing the field to serve the gifted adult community.

This study seeks to shine such a light, by building on the findings of a recent Delphi study (Brown, et al., 2020) which identified what a panel of 76 international experts working with gifted adults thought were priorities for study, potential obstacles and paths forward. The experts in that panel broadly supported a number of key recommendations for future research. While the recommendations are a step forward, there was also a range of difference in interests and priorities amongst the contributors that are important to acknowledge and explore. Many expert panel members pointed out possible risks of proceeding with a spread of views and

approaches to the field with potentially little in common and expressed concern about ignoring the problematic legacies from other related fields. One way to start to address such concerns and avoid problems is to make researchers' theories, aims and disciplinary influences more salient within the current the literature.

The analysis of data from the Delphi study was largely at a descriptive level and did not explore the diversity of the experts' research interests, differences in conceptual and operational definitions and, importantly, what theories and disciplines influenced their research approaches. The current study delves into the data from the 76 international experts working in the gifted adult field to engage more deeply with their individual responses, and make their implicit assumptions or perspectives more transparent and available for reflection. Hence, I conduct a latent analysis which "goes beyond the semantic content of the data, and starts to identify or examine the *underlying* ideas, assumptions, conceptualisations – and ideologies - that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data." (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). Specifically, I seek to highlight the spread of approaches taken by the experts in the gifted adult field, and identify the assumptions and theoretical and disciplinary influences on the approaches the experts take.

While the analysis highlights some unresolved problems, blind spots and methodological flaws within the field the aim is not to resolve debates or aim for consensus, but rather to map out key differences and, where possible, identify useful themes. In taking this approach, my aim is to underline the importance of experts taking a reflexive stance in this area of study so that the field can avoid some of the problems plaguing, for example, the related field of gifted education studies, where philosophical and methodological differences have now been debated for decades, and led to fragmentation and, according to some, stagnation of the field (Ambrose et al., 2010; Dai, 2018).

Related Fields. Similar investigations of differences amongst scholars in related fields provided some direction for the analysis. Researchers reflecting on the fields of gifted education (Ambrose, 2017; Dai, 2017; Lo & Porath, 2017; Persson, 2018) and talent development (Preckel et al., 2020; Subotnik et al., 2018; Ziegler et al., 2012), for example, have recently explicated historical and current differences in perspective, and usefully discussed the applicability and limitations of the various investigative paradigms, philosophical approaches and disciplinary emphases.

Creativity researchers also recently took stock of the various approaches in their area of study (Glăveanu et al., 2019). They drew attention to the phenomenon's multidimensionality and the importance of understanding and addressing various and sometimes oppositional perspectives. As a result, they developed a manifesto consisting of several beliefs, aims and propositions in what has been described as an attempt to invigorate the field of creative studies (Ambrose, 2017).

In summary, in this study I draw on insights from the recent critical and self-reflexive work in gifted education, talent development and creativity studies for guidance, and orient the analysis and interpretation towards how the experts working with gifted adults talked about their research aims and priorities, the theories, concepts and definitions they use, and preferred methods. I also consider how the experts' respective backgrounds, including discipline-driven ideological assumptions and research traditions, may shape their views in order to make any differences and commonalities salient.

Method

Participants. Current expertise with gifted adults is spread geographically and across a range of academic and professional specializations so our participant selection criteria (see Table 6 in Chapter Five) were created with that heterogeneity in mind (Paraskevas & Saunders, 2012). The recruitment resulted in a total of 76 experts, from fourteen countries: Austria,

Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Greece, Hungary, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and the United States.

Although the recruitment focus was on expertise and interest in *research*, the experts also brought various other perspectives to the study. When asked to name their interest in gifted adults, the roles the experts identified with included writer, researcher, teacher, clinical practitioner, business consultant, and health consultant. Many of the experts self-identified as having multiple roles in relation to their interest in the topic of gifted adults.

Procedure. A questionnaire was designed to solicit comments and opinions from experts in gifted adults regarding their own work in the field. An initial draft of items was peer-reviewed by three independent experts in qualitative research design and giftedness research. We refined the questionnaire until consensus was reached. All survey delivery and data collection processes were piloted in advance.

Participants were purposively recruited using a combination of expert and snowball sampling. Potential participants, identified from an extensive review of the literature, received an invitation email (see Appendix D) and were invited to share the study's details with prospective participants. The study website was also posted on relevant social media sites.

Each participant received a personal link to the online survey site to agree to participate and to start the questionnaire. The questionnaire and all correspondence were in English, but the website had a translation tool. Panel members were invited to submit responses in any language, and translation was offered using Google Translate. Four participants responded in languages other than English and used the translation service.

Participants were informed that the questionnaire aimed to solicit the views and opinions of experts interested in gifted adults, and that all responses would be anonymous. Confidentiality and anonymity of responses were maintained by using software-generated codes

(pseudonyms). A research assistant removed personal identifiers from the survey site data prior to analysis, and the two other researchers were blind to participants' identities.

Participants were also specifically asked to think about their current work with gifted adults when answering open-ended questions about their interests, aims and research priorities, the definitions they use, and their preferred methods. They were able to skip questions they did not want to answer. The questionnaire also included multiple-choice items about participants' geographic location, their disciplinary or professional background(s), and the type of work they do. A sample of questionnaire items is provided in Appendix H.

Finally, an online system was set up to ensure that only one response per IP address was allowed. The questionnaire took between 40 - 60 minutes for most respondents to complete, but some took considerably longer. Participants were able to save their responses and return to their questionnaires over a period of 5+ weeks, and a reminder email was generated one week prior to the closing date (see Appendix I). On completion, each participant automatically received a copy of the questions and their responses via email.

Analysis. Qualitative data analytic software NVivo 12 (QSR International, Melbourne, Australia) was used to support the data analysis, and I also worked with the data manually at times.

Data were analysed and interpreted following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process of TA. I used an inductive approach with the research questions in mind, working from the data to eventually identify patterns of meaning beyond the words.

In the *familiarization* phase, two researchers (myself and the co-author, who is one of my supervisors) read the entire data set-which includes responses from all participants to the nine open-ended questions - several times. This generated some initial ideas which were noted and shared. In the *coding* phase, I re-engaged with the data, paying particular attention to how the participants talked about their research aims and priorities, the theories and concepts they

use, and their preferred methods. This resulted in a set of initial semantic-level codes. Relevant extracts were collated, and we again worked together to refine the codes.

In the linked *theme search, review and defining* phases, I engaged deeply and iteratively with the data to clarify underlying patterns and overlaps, revise candidate themes, and ultimately map the data set according to a final set of themes and sub themes. During this analysis, patterns *within* individual responses also began to tell important stories. I therefore repeated the five phases, this time reading across each participants' responses to the nine questions.

Throughout the process, the analysis moved purposefully from the semantic or obvious content, to implicit meaning. In practise, the focus often shifted back and forth from the semantic to the latent level, to identify and then verify deeper meanings of patterns in the data and to name them as themes and sub themes. In the final readings, I looked across the entire data set *and* within individual response sets to ensure that the interpretation accurately represents the heterogeneity of the data.

At the start of the *writing phase*, two of us revisited large data extracts to refine and agree on themes and sub themes, and to select examples of each for the final report. This final phase also helped to ensure that the TA provides “a coherent and compelling interpretation of the data, grounded in the data” (Braun et al., 2019, p. 848), and that the research is trustworthy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Results

Question One: What issues are currently being explored, and why? While the findings show that most of the experts are currently interested in solving substantive real-life issues for gifted adults, found differences were found in:

- i) their populations of interest and, by implication, their research definition of gifted adults,
- ii) specific issues or questions that people are focusing on, and

iii) the aims of their work.

Populations of interest. Across the sample, there was interest in the general population of gifted adults despite acknowledged differences in what a general population of gifted adults might look like or how it might be operationalised. However, there were a few exceptions, with some preferring to use terms other than *gifted* - either *gifted and talented* adults (where a few experts distinguished between early potential and actual accomplishment) or *high ability* and similar non-English terms such as *Haut potential* (French) and *Hohes potential* (German).

Conceptual and operational definitions. When asked about the definition of *gifted adult* (or similar) they use in their research, some experts provided an operational definition, and others referred to a particular model. The models and definitions specifically named in the data are shown below in Table 11, along with key references cited by the experts.

Table 11*Specific Models or Definitions Used by the Experts*

Model or definition	Key reference(s) cited	Number of experts	Brief description
Dutch Delphi Model of Giftedness	Kooijman-van Thiel, 2008; van Thiel et al., 2019	12	A quick and clever thinker, able to deal with complex matters. Autonomous, curious and passionate. A sensitive and emotionally rich individual, living intensely. He or she enjoys being creative.
Columbus Group Definition	Silverman, 1997	10	Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity.
National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC)	https://www.nagc.org/sites/default/files/Position%20Statement/Definition%20of%20Giftedness%20282019%29.pdf	5	Gifted individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains.
Roeper Definition	Roeper, 1982; Roeper, 1991	6	A greater awareness, a greater sensitivity, and a greater ability to understand and to transform perceptions into intellectual and emotional experiences.
IQ score		6	Two standard deviations above the mean.
Talent Development Model	Gagné, 2004; Subotnik et al., 2011	3	Giftedness is the manifestation of performance or production that is clearly at the upper end of the distribution in a talent domain even relative to that of other high-functioning individuals in that domain.

Table 11 (continued)

Heylighen Characteristics	Heylighen, 2007	2	Giftedness, the potential for exceptional achievement, is characterized by high intelligence and creativity. Gifted people exhibit a complex of cognitive, perceptual, emotional, motivational and social traits
Extra Intelligence (Xi)	Kuipers, 2010	2	Extra intelligence (Xi) indicates a subjectively verified, uncommonly high level of one or more kinds of intelligence, in the Gardner multiple intelligences sense ... People who recognise themselves in essence in at least three of the five following traits: Intellectually able, incurably inquisitive, needing autonomy, excessive zeal in the pursuit of interests, contrast or imbalance between emotional and intellectual self-confidence.

The findings show that most experts understood *gifted adults* to be a multidimensional construct. Of the 46 experts who named a specific definition or model, for example, nearly half use either the Dutch Delphi model of giftedness (Kooijman-van Thiel, 2008), a descriptive model specific to gifted adults, or the Columbus group definition (Silverman, 1997), initially developed to describe gifted children.

In contrast, nine experts define adult giftedness as unidimensional. For example, six people understand the concept as high intelligence, measured by scores on psychometric tests, such as this example: “Gifted adults are adults who score in the top two percent of a standardized intelligence test”. Three people specifically referred to talent development models (Gagné, 2004; e.g., Subotnik et al., 2011) when responding to questions about definition, and understand giftedness to be potential for exceptional performance: “it is all related to high performance. someone who has a 'special' (innate or developed) ability and reaches outstanding performance”.

The models and definitions of gifted adults offered by the experts only show part of the pattern. A deeper analysis of the data across all questions showed that, even when a specific model or definition was named, most experts combine or in some way cluster various characteristics, standardized test scores, behaviours and achievements as they talk about gifted adults. For some, this mixture seems conceptually consistent with an overall understanding of giftedness as a multidimensional concept, such as when the Dutch Delphi descriptive model (Kooijman-van Thiel, 2008) is used.

However, a more common pattern in the data is where, when talking about gifted adults, experts appear to combine or blend conceptually distinct phenomena without reference to an integrating theory or model. For example, nearly half of the experts described gifted adults using aggregates or lists similar to these quotes from two participants:

Scoring higher than 130 on the WAIS scale, possessing a higher potential of (self-) actualization than the majority of the population, being skilled across several areas, and achieving results above average in a variety of disciplines. Soft/life skills are also paramount and (gifted) implies superior cognitive abilities in terms of understanding, memory, depth, and multidimensional thinking. It also demonstrates an unparalleled sense of adaptation to each new context.

My preferred term is High Ability which for me, means the following: - An IQ of at least 130 with characteristic traits such as: high intensity (perception, processing, reaction), heightened sensitivity, and increased/pronounced drive.

As shown in the examples above, such lists combine performance on normed tests, some measure of outcome such as achievement or recognition, and an array of characteristics including fixed, emergent and malleable traits, cognitive and non-cognitive processes, subjective intrapersonal experiences, interpersonal skills, and behaviours. Some of the lists also

included items that infer neurological underpinnings and others make that inference more explicit, as shown in these two excerpts: “I am particularly interested in the neurobiological bases of giftedness, e.g., its heritability, neurotransmitters, proteins such as Klotho, altered BOLD levels”, and “Densely wired brains enabling more and quicker connections”.

Where lists were provided, I looked across the experts’ responses to all questions and often found strong discursive tendencies to move beyond description toward categorization or classification, and at times even prediction, as illustrated in these excerpts from one expert (presented in the sequence found in the data):

I usually define it as a combination of unusual intelligence, creativity, sensitivity and a strong drive to learn and explore ... The intelligence, creativity and deep curiosity are pretty clear, well-established characteristics of giftedness, and therefore provide a solid basis for a definition ... gifted people are different from others and need an appropriate kind of environment.

Definitions such as this raise the possibility of inadvertent circularity, whereby a concept of *gifted adult* comes to be defined by criteria indicators, with no theoretical or guiding framework. It also raises questions about predictive power (discussed below).

While the experts all offered some form of a definition or operationalisation, most also acknowledged the current conceptual diversity and muddiness surrounding definitions and felt that this was problematic, as shown in this excerpt:

This is complex, and my definition, or how I sense that someone is gifted or talented might be based on a combination of theory, my intuition, and, frankly, when it comes to operationalizing, or selecting subjects, convenience. I’m used to using the Gagné’s 2004 DMGT model, and I also see value in the asynchronies from the Columbus Group definition. Lately the concept of OE’s from Dąbrowski’s theory, and actually the process of positive disintegration

from that theory seem useful. So, maybe the question of definition isn't the right one. I don't think we're there yet.

Subgroups. The majority of the experts were primarily interested in knowing more about a subgroup of gifted adults, and some were interested in more than one sub-group. Table 12 below shows the sub-populations explicitly named in the data.

Table 12

Sub-groups of Gifted Adults of Interest to the Experts

Named sub-group of interest	Number of experts interested
Employees	9
Elders	9
Women	9
University students	6
Executives/managers	6
Gifted parents	6
Highly/profoundly gifted	5
Adults of color	5
Twice-exceptional adults	4

Some of these subgroups, such as university students, have obvious or well-defined boundaries. However, a deeper look into the data raises important questions about conceptually meaningful distinctions between different groups. For example, the five experts interested in exceptionally or profoundly gifted adults did not appear to agree on the subgroup's boundaries. Their descriptions, including any categorical distinctions, varied and seemed to reflect different ways of conceptualizing *giftedness*. For example, one wrote "Exceptionally and profoundly gifted children and adults are the outliers of outliers on the standard curve of intelligence and aptitude, representing less than 1% of the population", and another provided this description:

The Exceptionally and Profoundly Gifted (EPG) ... have uncommon and extraordinary intelligence and talent, in many domains. The terms highly,

exceptionally or profoundly gifted are not exact; the degree of giftedness they designate cannot be absolutely and precisely defined. Overall, they refer to a narrow range of exceptional human ability.

Generally, the findings show that those interested in a broad population of gifted adults tended to acknowledge problems with unclear and imprecise definitions, whereas those interested in subgroups of gifted adults usually did not. This is important because we therefore can't be certain that any two researchers who name a sub-population are actually interested in the same group of people, as the two excerpts above demonstrate.

Specific issues and questions of interest. Almost all of the experts participating in this study explore issues and questions that relate directly to how gifted adults function in their day to day lives. Named areas of interest and exemplars are shown in Table 13 below (some experts named multiple areas of interest).

Table 13*Areas of Interest to the Experts*

Area of interest	Number of experts interested	Examples of stated interests
Mental health or related service provision	36	<p>Problems remain invisible and unidentified and are often misdiagnosed.</p> <p>We do not have enough information or evidence about the services or modalities that 'work' for gifted adults.</p>
Self-awareness or "gifted" identity	30	<p>What did it mean to be identified as a gifted child? How did this identification affect your development and choices as an adult?</p> <p>Helping gifted adults and women in particular to understand, appreciate and constructively express their giftedness.</p>
Relationships	25	<p>Issues about relationships with others, living as a single or as a couple... integrating in a team of non-gifted colleagues.</p>
Occupation/work contexts	25	<p>Mentorship, niche picking in a profession, overcome plateau, peak performance or productivity.</p> <p>Our organisations are not designed for gifted adults to thrive. I am working to integrate different fields of work e.g., adult development theory, and make them practically available to gifted adults in workplaces.</p>
Awareness	23	<p>My number one goal is to spread knowledge. The general public, gifted adults themselves, and the medical or health professions only know the stereotypes.</p> <p>Too many gifted adults either don't recognize their giftedness (even though they know they're smart) and don't understand how it does - and doesn't - affect their daily lives and personal interactions, happiness, and careers.</p>

Table 13 (continued)

Domain-related Achievement	17	I am interested in the predictive behaviors within domains of achievement, for visual arts, architecture, creative writing, science, mathematics, entrepreneurship, invention, acting, dancing, athletics, teaching, and spiritual leadership. The lack of scientific attention to ensuring that gifted adults achieve well in educational settings (such as universities).
Age-related issues	16	Examine the intersection of domain characteristics and developmental challenges for specific age periods. Dealing with high levels of frustration in intellectually gifted elders as practical things like mobility and fine motor skills become impacted by issues like arthritis and heart disease.
Neurological factors	9	It would be particularly helpful to see more brain imaging research designed to explain Spearman's Law of Diminishing Returns at the neurological level Understanding the unique neural networks related to giftedness - behavior, sensory processing, and emotions - is critical

Nearly half of the experts were interested in exploring more than one issue or context, and most of those explicitly indicated interest in broad and complex issues such as: “understanding the factors that prevent gifted adults from reaching their goals and living satisfying lives” and “How can we help gifted adults find their way to living truly satisfying and meaningful lives?”. This suggests that many of the experts are searching for answers to complex questions and for solutions to broad problems that may not yet be well understood, as shown in this example:

I am very interested in what the discovery of giftedness does with the self-image over the life-span and what influence this has on various aspects of psychological well-being. Another aspect that I find to be of great importance is the balance between cognitive brainpower and emotional

sensitivity/intensity. This balance seems difficult to be found for some gifted individuals. Also, little is known about gifted individuals who seek help for their mental health problems yet. Although initial research suggests that gifted individuals often need help, it seems to be very difficult for them to find the right help, because there is too little knowledge amongst psychotherapists, psychologists, psychiatrists etc. As a result, gifted individuals *are faced with incomprehension, (incorrect) diagnoses and ineffective help.*

The findings show many methodological mismatches between concepts, research questions, aims, and methods used, particularly where people used tools outside of their original intended use. For example, most of these experts are interested in identifying and then supporting gifted adults in complex contexts such as employment or personal relationships. Of those, nearly a third use instruments and approaches developed for other purposes such as identifying or supporting gifted school children who require specialized teaching and learning environments. Notably, where this is the case, these experts tend to be aware of the mismatches and acknowledge them as being problematic, as shown here:

I'm interested in understanding the types of environments and skills gifted adults need to thrive in their lives – and that means relationships, careers, aging etc. So far, there is very little information available apart from what we can find in gifted education. Even career counselling information is mainly for gifted students. When I apply some of the models and theories about giftedness to adults, they either don't apply or are too broad. They might apply to education and even some learning environments in adulthood, but it's frustrating that we feel we need to use them, or cite them, in our work with adults. Same with the testing – I'm not sure the scores tell us much about adulthood, but we need some sort of identifier.

Question Two: What different approaches are being used? Few of the experts explicitly named or described a specific approach. I therefore focused on how the experts talked about disciplinary, theoretical and cultural influences.

Disciplinary influences. Expertise and interest in gifted adults are currently spread across many disciplines and professions, and this is also the case within this group of experts, as described above.

A deeper look at the experts' backgrounds, discursive patterns within the data, and the tools and methods they use revealed some recurrent patterns of overlap and convergence, which led us to identify and distinguish four strong disciplinary and/or professional influences on researchers working on the field of gifted adults: Mental Health and Wellness, Gifted Studies (children), Talent Development (adults or lifespan) and Occupational Studies, as shown below in Table 14. Most experts were primarily working within one of these categories.

Table 14

Disciplinary and Professional Influences Apparent in the Data

Influential disciplines and professions	Number of experts
Mental Health and Wellness: includes Psychology, Counselling and Coaching.	24
Gifted Studies: includes Gifted Education, Gifted Children, and child-oriented Talent Development and Intelligence Studies.	22
Talent Development: includes High Ability studies, and adult or lifespan-oriented Talent Development and Intelligence Studies.	14
Occupational Studies: includes Occupational Health, Human Resource Management, Organizational Development and Career Development	13

Three outliers, whose work does not appear to be strongly influenced by any of these four disciplinary groupings, were also found. Two of those experts had backgrounds specific to adult education (not within a gifted education paradigm), and one was a sociologist.

Theoretical influences. Many different theories or models were also named in the data. In some cases, specific theories or models were referred to mainly in terms of providing a

definition or description of *gifted adult* as shown earlier in Table 11. Other theories appeared to underpin experts' approaches more broadly. For example, 14 experts referred to Dąbrowski's (1964) TPD and wrote about related concepts such as 'overexcitabilities' in their responses to questions about their work with gifted adults. A smaller number of experts referred to models of talent development reasonably consistently within their responses. More often, however, experts wrote about theories and models that they had previously used in work with gifted children, such as Gagné's (2004) DMGT, which they now consider worth exploring in their research with gifted adults.

On the surface the theoretical distinctions might suggest well-defined differences in perspective within the group, but the picture is not quite so clear. When I looked across the data at how individual participants talked about definitions, theories, models, aims and methods, I often found incongruences, making it difficult to infer a strong theoretical foundation, even when theories or models were explicitly named. For example, while most of the experts view giftedness as a complex multidimensional construct, only 20 people describe their work using a specific theoretical framework and of those, eight people appear to collapse the assumed complexity into a single factor by reporting they use unidimensional measures or narrow criteria such as IQ scores (or similar) to either select participants, operationally define giftedness, or both, as shown in this excerpt:

Our participants were nominated by teachers for gifted programming at school, or achieved in the top 10% on their SAT exams ... so in my research I select them on the basis of being identified early as high achievers. That is how I find them. But I've learned that there is more to it –emotional and other qualities are also part of (being gifted), and Dąbrowski's theory is useful for that ... I think of how many gifted adults we're actually missing when we just look at the achievers. It's something I'm working on now – trying to find

ways to identify those who have most of the qualities but fall outside of the usual definitions.

For some experts, while they may state they see gifted adults as a multidimensional construct, the pressure of time and the need for convenience seems to drive them to make research choices that align with a unidimensional view of gifted adults, as shown in this excerpt:

Mensa provides adequate testing of the intelligence part. We can't do all of the testing needed to find a large sample otherwise. I know this is only one part of the model but it's a place to start. The time and funding aren't there. But when it comes to finding subjects to research, I think I revert to intelligence testing because it's all we have for now. Unless you view gifted or talented only as high intelligence (and I don't), then there is a problem. Obviously, I'm not alone in this one.

This apparent contradiction is often mirrored in gifted adult literature, as discussed in Chapter Four, where authors may acknowledge the complexity of the concept at some level yet operationalise their studies in a very different way with little, if any, acknowledgement of this contradiction.

Cultural influences. The data show that most experts' approaches to the topic reflect the ideas, values and experiences of people living in WEIRD countries, and the dominant cultures within. As with the historic and current literature related to gifted adults (discussed in Chapter Four), there appeared to be little consideration amongst these experts of cultural pluralism or difference. Of the 18 experts who mentioned the need for cultural sensitivity to research with gifted adults, only nine described actually using an approach which could be considered culturally sensitive, and of those, six are interested in racial and ethnic diversity in the USA, as exemplified in this excerpt: "It is well known that black or other diverse and under-served gifted adults face societal barriers here that many from the dominant/majority group do not face".

Only three participants used multicultural approaches that specifically acknowledged non-western cultural understanding of gifted adults. As one said:

When it comes to research, the most important question for me is to get a clearer picture of how the culture influences what giftedness is, how it is viewed and how people experience being gifted. We know very little about this, and it is important because it can tell us how much of the present research that can be generalized and how much is local. A large majority of results are from the US, and how much of it is actually valid abroad? We don't know.

These results are discussed as a potential blind spot below, and elsewhere in the thesis.

Discussion

This study explored differences in approaches to the study of gifted adults among 76 experts working in the field, with a view to trying to inform future research on the topic. In this discussion I present two ways to understand the current range and diversity of interests and approaches to research with gifted adults, each with important implications. First, some of the results reported here appear typical of an emerging field of research, where terms are not yet clearly defined and where existing areas of study are transforming in response to new questions. Second, some of the findings may reflect the legacy of unresolved problems from other related disciplines. I discuss these two ideas and their respective implications separately.

An emerging field. Most of the participants were interested in problems that related exclusively to adult contexts, which are rarely addressed in other gifted-related disciplines. Therefore, some of the results can be understood as reflecting the early development of a new field of study – a phase where emerging interests and priorities are responses to problems and ideas that fall well outside of the purview of established disciplines (Kuhn, 1996).

The patterns of disciplinary influence found here appear typical of a very early stage of research, where previous disciplinary traditions or paradigms continue to shape scholars'

assumptions, the questions they study and the methods they use (Morgan, 2007). For example, many of the experts used theories and investigative tools developed in other fields including gifted education and intelligence studies. While these pre-existing concepts and methods are not designed to address the specific population of gifted adults, and may not be appropriate for the complex issues that are of interest to these 76 experts (e.g., supporting gifted parents or understanding factors that influence health and performance), new methods and approaches designed specifically for this population have not yet been developed. As one expert said:

We're at a stage where we know that the methods and the tests we use are borrowed from research with children, but there isn't a concentrated effort to develop our own ... suitable for the adults we are studying.

When new problems and questions emerge, as is the case with most research within an emerging field such as gifted adults, concepts and methods should eventually co-evolve with researchers' changing interests (Morgan, 2007). Booth (2008) argues it may take time for scholars to realize that old concepts are not adequate for solving new problems and to evolve ways of thinking and practises that are more 'fit for purpose'. The results of this study appear to reflect the very start of that change, in that 58 experts view their current concepts and definitions to be in some way inadequate. One expert said: "The terms and ideas of this (gifted adult) field are difficult to match with those used in gifted education, experts of the two fields do not speak the same language". However, while this is a clear acknowledgement that change may be needed, actual change is likely to remain slow.

The pervasiveness of traditional disciplinary influences found within the data suggests a distinct framework for understanding the particular problems and issues related to gifted adults may still be a long way off. Consequently, in the early phase of its development, the area of study will continue to feel fragmented, with multiple and even conflicting views, practises and priorities. Through the lens of an emerging field, many of the differences reported here,

compatible or otherwise, help avoid premature reduction, and can be seen to be useful and necessary rather than problematic, as long as they continue to be salient, reflected on and addressed. Minikin (2018) describes this as an active process of pluralism, based on the willingness and intention to seek understanding across differences.

Another implication is that those working with gifted adults can expect to see continued challenges to the status quo. Such challenges may not be comfortable but eventually old assumptions, methods and research aims may either disappear or need to transform. In the end, the relative value of new and existing approaches will be determined by their ability to address the specific issues and problems related to gifted adults. Therefore, it will be important to be as clear as possible about what those issues and problems are so new tools approaches can be developed and the field can move forward.

Legacies of unresolved problems from other disciplines. Some of the differences found in our data may be better explained as reflecting unresolved problems inherited from related fields of study. Such legacies are expected, given the disciplinary influences found in this study and in the gifted adult literature (described in Chapter Four), and the intransigent problems reported in many of those fields (Ambrose et al., 2012; Dai, 2018). Two notable legacies from other disciplines are:

- i) unintentional reduction, and
- ii) conceptual muddiness.

Unintentional reduction. As discussed above, the data included many examples of the tension between capturing complexity and the practical constraints of different research methods, including available tools. One notable pattern was the mismatch between multidimensional constructs of giftedness and the use of unidimensional and/or domain-specific measures. There are a number of potential problematic consequences of applying unidimensional or otherwise narrow ideas to a complex phenomenon. Problems include the

inadvertent reduction of assumed within-group heterogeneity (e.g., by using a single method for identification or sampling, such as membership in Mensa), conflation (e.g., where measurement tools such as SAT scores are used for convenience, outside of their intended purpose) and the collapse of conceptual complexity (e.g., in the use of single-domain psychometric measures such as IQ scores).

Conceptual muddiness. Additionally, the lack of consensus and disagreements about key terms and their definitions found here has been a longstanding issue in all gifted-related disciplines. The results of this study suggest that this is not (only) a question of preferred vernacular, or a classification exercise, but often a problem of imprecision. As explained, I found many examples of conflation and inconsistency in the data.

This is not to say that the experts are unaware of historical and current arguments about terms and definitions (most seem to be). As shown, some explicitly acknowledged that current words and definitions related to gifted adults do not necessarily reflect useful conceptual differences. What may be less apparent is the tendency to ‘drift’ to using descriptions as proxies for conceptual definitions, thereby creating a taxonomy that is not (yet) evidence-based and, when used in research to operationally define *gifted adult*, raises questions about circularity (Booth, 2008). Here is an example of potential ‘drift’ to circularity, similar to confirmation bias: “I prefer to use the Columbus group definition, and Silverman’s Gifted Adult scale⁹ [*sic*]. These give me a much broader group of people than, say, using just an IQ score, which would miss so many”.

Given the range and complexities of the phenomena of interest to these experts, and their various backgrounds, it seems likely that disagreements and differences will continue as this field develops. Consensus around concepts and definitions may not be a realistic or immediately useful aim. Therefore, it seems particularly important to continue to highlight and observe

⁹ Silverman, 1993b.

relevant distinctions, and to use descriptive models carefully, for their intended purposes. Precision and transparency will minimize misunderstandings, enable integration across disciplines, and ultimately impact the consistency with which we identify and pursue specific gaps in knowledge (Booth, 2008; Uher, 2018).

Potential blind spots. Most of the experts in this study acknowledged that there are problematic legacies from other fields, as described above, and that attention to this is needed. However, I found two examples of where other potential problems seemed less apparent to the experts, and we discuss these below.

Bias. The first potential blind spot relates to the paucity of culturally relevant and inclusive approaches to gifted adult research. This result is both predictable and troubling given well-documented concerns about cultural bias and potential for harm in related fields (Persson (2012) comprehensively discusses the lack of cultural variation in gifted research and implications for gifted-related studies). Criticism has been directed at many of the commonly used constructs, measures and methods in intelligence studies and gifted education in relation to a strongly western orientation, and these criticisms are well known across all gifted-related fields (e.g., Ballam & Moltzen, 2017; Bonner, 2001; Cross, 2013; Persson, 2012; Webber et al., 2020).

While most of the experts in this questionnaire study acknowledge the problems of a solely Western perspective, only a handful appear to design their current research with potential biases in mind. It seems that, despite shifts in thinking, cultural inclusivity is not yet well addressed in relation to research with gifted adults. The obvious implication is that more needs to be done to raise awareness in the field and overcome cultural bias.

Perhaps less obvious is the opportunity available to those working in this emerging area of study to affect change by critically examining the cultural validity of historic and current theories, models and practises related to giftedness in light of both *adult* populations and

contemporary socio-political contexts. I suggest it may well be easier to critique, dismantle and replace outdated ideas from *outside* of the disciplines where they originated.

Methodological flaws. A second blind spot has to do with a methodological flaw where models (and related tools) are applied outside of their intended purpose. This is most apparent in the data when descriptive models (models derived from a process of gathering and summarizing real-life data) are apparently used to identify gifted adults for gifted-related interventions such as counselling. The data include many examples of where descriptive models or concepts such as the Delphi Model (Kooijman-van Thiel, 2008), the Columbus Group definition (Silverman, 1997) and the concept of overexcitability (Dąbrowski, 1964) appear to form the basis of what are diagnostic and prescriptive decisions including acceptance into treatment.

Specifically, many clinicians reported using the models and concepts mentioned above to diagnose (identify) patients as ‘gifted adults’ and to accept them into their clinical programmes, and some appear to frame their treatment or services around the model or concept. Notably, the aforementioned models or concepts were not designed for this purpose.

While these and other constructs identified and used by many of the experts in this study were developed and are useful for *description and discovery*, their *prescriptive or predictive* accuracy in clinical settings has not (yet) been tested, and evidence that this is effective clinical practise is lacking. In terms of research methodology, the descriptive models were not designed to distinguish between people who do and do not have certain characteristics; hence they lack the ‘construct validity’ needed to be used to categorize for any purpose, applied or otherwise.

The practise of using descriptive models as categorization and selection tools for entry into programs is familiar in many practise-related disciplines including gifted education and psychology. In those fields, predictive or prescriptive accuracy are often mistakenly assumed, and left unexamined and unchallenged, which can lead to inaccurate scientific and practical conclusions (Shmueli, 2010). This highlights an important gap which needs to be acknowledged

and eventually filled, namely the need for valid tools and strategies to support both practise-based research and research-based practise. Meanwhile it is important to maintain the distinctions between description, prescription and prediction, and to highlight existing gaps.

Conclusion

The main aim of the present study was to examine the plurality of interests, perspectives and approaches used by 76 experts currently working with gifted adults. A second and related aim was to make any differences more transparent and available for reflection for those currently working in and those looking to work in the gifted adults field.

This study found that experts in the field are interested in exploring and solving real-life issues that impact gifted adults across a wide variety of social, relational, educational and vocational contexts, and at different stages of adulthood. There is also strong interest in understanding more about, and having impact on, the well-being of gifted adults generally. The study also found some specific interest in sub-groups including profoundly gifted and twice-exceptional adults (although specific descriptions of these sub-groups differed), age groups such as elders, and contexts such as employment. Culturally, with a few exceptions, this group of experts follow a traditional Western approach, and this is discussed as a potential blind spot.

The findings revealed differences in how the experts conceptualize *gifted adults* and, related to that, a general muddiness and lack of precision in how they use the term. While most understand the concept of giftedness to be multidimensional, there are exceptions who focus specifically on intelligence.

The study has also revealed diversity and some lack of clarity in how experts approach their work. Related to that, I identified a number of strong disciplinary influences including theories and concepts, and some long-standing methodological flaws in those disciplines which have important implications for research with gifted adults.

Together the findings suggest that research with gifted adults is a new and emerging field, with current interest spread across many disciplines, each contributing useful perspectives but also bringing in some problematic legacies. As such, it does not yet have conceptual or research frameworks that are distinctly ‘fit for purpose’. Overall, the results suggest that these 76 experts are generally aware of the current lack of clarity and the diversity of approaches, but I also found and reported on some bias and methodological shortcomings that appear to be less well acknowledged.

The main weakness of this study was the paucity of information from experts from non-Western cultures. There are several reasons for this. First, invitations to participate were in English, and some recipients may have chosen not to read them. Second, the concept of *giftedness* is prevalent in scholarly literature published in WEIRD countries, and the recruitment methods may not have reached experts who are unpublished, or unknown in the predominantly western academic and professional circles. More research is needed to include the interests and views of those experts not represented here. Furthermore, some cultures may not recognize or feel comfortable with the term *gifted adult* and/or may not have a similar concept. While somewhat outside of the scope of the present study, culturally sensitive exploratory research about any *absence* of the concept would provide useful insights and prevent overgeneralizing.

This study also has several strengths. To my knowledge this is the first study to thoroughly examine and report on the different research interests of experts currently working with gifted adults, and the approaches they use. In doing so, I draw attention to issues that are relevant to the study of adults, as distinct from child-oriented gifted studies, a distinction that is not always clear in gifted-related fields. Another strength is that the findings include international perspectives from experts from a variety of disciplines. Finally, open-ended questions yielded rich data for an in-depth latent level analysis. These methods provided

detailed information and exemplars that capture and reveal important but nuanced complexities in the data.

In this study, I also asked questions that have not previously been asked about current research with gifted adults and in doing so contribute to the current literature, and to the development of this emerging area of study. I believe this study fills an important gap by bringing to light different views and perspectives of international experts currently interested in gifted adults, their influences, approaches, and research aims. As reported in Chapter 5, before this study, the participants said they were largely unaware of the work being done outside of their own small teams, and many worked in isolation. The commonalities and differences identified here will likely prove useful for establishing future research agendas.

These results also add to the value of the Delphi study (Chapter 5) where, as a panel, the experts recommended that different views be accommodated but raised important questions about how to move forward in the face of differences. Results of this questionnaire study provide more details about what those differences are, and the reasons they exist. Importantly these results also shed new light on where some perceived differences might actually reflect a lack of clarity or precision, blind-spots or methodological issues that need further development, and show where critical reflection and clarification are needed to avoid well-known pitfalls in related fields

The findings from this study highlight that research with gifted adults is an emerging field of study, still in its infancy and, as was found in the review of gifted adults literature, heavily influenced by other disciplines. Framing the field in this way should help researchers and others interested in gifted adults to clarify and debate priorities and approaches, without expecting consensus or requiring agreement. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the study opens an important conversation early in this emerging area of study, providing both a baseline

from which to monitor progress and trends, and an opportunity for those interested in gifted adults to reflect on priorities.

Chapter 7: “We are Not That!” A Focus Group Study with Gifted Adults

The results of the literature survey, Delphi study and Questionnaire study reported in the previous chapters provide some answers to the research questions from the perspectives of experts, past and present. In this chapter I add the voices of 15 gifted adults to the conversation. A substantial part of this chapter is a published paper (Brown & Peterson, 2020).

The TV character Sheldon, a studious and emotionally flat scientist (Oshima-Belyeu, 2007) and former prodigy (Marx, 2017), typifies what many people think of as a gifted adult. This is understandable given the language and stories around giftedness that developed in the 20th century. The familiar stereotype that grew from the intersection of two disciplines, adult intelligence studies and gifted education, reflected their shared assumption of predictable developmental trajectories, interest in cognitive processes, and aspiration for academic achievement. According to that narrative, gifted ‘bookish’ and socially awkward Sheldon emerges into adulthood predictably recognizable from his younger self and highly successful as a scientist.

Of course, human development and adult lives are more contextually rich and varied than any stereotype implies. Historically, some scholars interested in giftedness have challenged the focus on achievement and cognitive skills, calling attention to qualities such as heightened sensitivity (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009; Roeper, 1982; L.K. Silverman, 2013), excitability (Lovecky, 1992) and spirituality (Noble et al., 1999). Contemporary scholars interested in *adult* giftedness call for research to broaden our understanding (Perrone-McGovern et al., 2015; Rinn & Bishop, 2015), arguing that, in order to be meaningful, research with gifted adults should be responsive to a full range of their experiences and issues, across important adult contexts

(Brown et al., 2020; Fiedler, 2015; Mazzoli Smith, 2014). Unfortunately, at present, there is no adult-focused research agenda to help us name and understand what those experiences and issues are (Rinn & Bishop, 2015).

In contrast, there is a growing community of health practitioners, writers, and gifted adults engaged in conversations about giftedness in a range of adult contexts. While these voices have been relatively silent in the scholarly literature (discussed in Chapter Four), their stories are shared in popular books (Jacobsen, 2000; Kuipers, 2010; Prober, Paula, 2016; Streznewski, 1999) and blogs, and reveal something about what matters to the gifted adults who contribute. For example, posts in *Your Rainforest Mind* describe experiences with personal relationships (Prober, 2018) and depression (Prober, 2019). In an *Intergifted* blog post the author examines issues related to careers (Rhodes, 2016). Navan (2018) posts about issues that are meaningful to her as a gifted elder, including intense emotionality.

In reviewing the literature (Chapter Four) I found that a handful of scholars interested in adult giftedness have responded by studying, for example, well-being (Perrone-McGovern et al., 2015), counselling and therapy practices (Grobman, 2009; Mahoney, 1998; Mendaglio, 2007), underachievement in women (Reis, 2001, 2002), and employability (Nauta & Ronner, 2016; van der Waal et al., 2013). Others examined the lives of gifted adults using case studies and autoethnographies, some of which are published in academic journals (Lefever, 2010; Szymanski & Wrenn, 2019; Tolan, 2012; Wells, 2017). and others in books (e.g., Fiedler, 2015; Freeman, 2010; Gatto-Walden, 2016).

While this work explicitly identifies issues encountered by gifted adults, results of the Delphi and questionnaire studies (Chapters Five and Six) show that researchers are far from developing frameworks to understand and study this complex phenomenon. It appears that research with gifted adults is entangled in many of the well-known controversies found in gifted education studies including conceptual and methodological confusion, inconsistent use of terms,

and what Johnson (2005) calls “dangling paradigms” (p. 67). For example, Wirthwein and colleagues (Wirthwein & Rost, 2011) use Dąbrowski’s (1964) TPD, a complex theory of personality development, to conceptualize giftedness in their study of adults but adopt an operational definition of *intellectual giftedness* using a single psychometric (IQ) measure. Similarly, Perrone and colleagues (Perrone et al., 2006) appear to understand adult giftedness as contextual and encompassing social, emotional, and relational factors, but select participants using measures designed to assess school performance in children. The use of models and measures designed to understand and support school-aged children together with a strong research emphasis on career and academic success may have perpetuated narrow stereotypes of bookish high achieving adults.

If research is going to be relevant to gifted adults, this needs to change. Results of the Delphi study show that the panel of experts interested in adult giftedness recommended that future research should include the voices of gifted adults themselves, and be grounded in their full lived experiences as adults, rather than on information about children. Philosophically, that aligns with a socially just approach, where experiential knowledge is valued as expertise (Fine, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 1981) and the goal is “full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is *mutually shaped to meet their needs*” [emphasis added] (Bell, 2007, p. 1).

Acting on that recommendation, the aim of this Focus Group study is to identify priority issues for research with gifted adults, from the perspectives of adults who self-identify as gifted. In this study I asked 15 gifted adults in four online focus groups the question: “What do you think are the priorities for researching and building knowledge about adult giftedness?”

Dialogues within the four focus groups generated a core theme: *We are not that! Our experiences tell different stories*. This and three sub themes answered the research question in unexpected and important ways.

As I listened carefully to the conversations, I heard how some discourses prevalent in both academic research and popular media, particularly those that take a narrow view of giftedness and focus on achievement, cognitive ability or both, may entrench problematic stereotypes of gifted adults including assumptions about achievement aspirations, personality characteristics, and even personal values. The results suggest that, within such a narrative, important experiences may remain unheard and therefore unincorporated into conceptualizations of giftedness in adults. As one participant said: “I tend to think that the things that are reasonably well known are often not true”.

In this chapter I describe how, within the interactive contexts of the focus groups, participants persevered with a tangle of unsatisfactory and ill-fitting words to share their understanding and experiences of giftedness and give voice to what is important and meaningful to them. Using excerpts, I discuss how a sensitive analysis and interpretation of the data highlighted a mismatch between many current assumptions and constructions of giftedness and the lived experience of these adults. Finally, I discuss what the theme and sub themes may signal for ensuring that future research with gifted adults is responsive to a broader range of experiences and issues.

Method

Socially just research. This qualitative focus group study was informed and supported by the values of social justice, and is strongly aligned with Frederking’s (2013) four key principles of social justice: diversity, transparency, understanding and engagement, as explained in Chapters Two and Three, and shown in Table 1. A key aim of socially just research is to serve the individuals and communities under investigation (i.e., gifted adults), and I placed particular value on the participants’ perspectives, a healthy reciprocal relationship between the researchers and participants, contextual sensitivity, and awareness of equity and power issues (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Fouad et al., 2006; Morrow, 2005). I used four principles of socially

just research: equity, access, participation, and harmony (Crethar, Rivera, & Nash, 2008) to embed those values in practice throughout the research process, as shown below in Table 15.

Table 15

Social Justice Principles Embedded in the Research

Research phase	Social justice principle			
	Equity	Access	Participation	Harmony
Study Development	Selected on-line method to remove geographical barriers.	Established collaborative relationships with key community leaders.	Built community awareness of study aims prior to recruitment; clear consent processes.	Considered potential benefits and risks of research.
Data Collection	Used inclusion criteria grounded in participants' experiences; accommodated time zones;	Recruitment strategies included detailed information; provided opportunities to trial ZOOM.	Semi-structured flexible interview style; engaged with participants' perceptions of the research during and after focus groups.	Asked questions that were meaningful to the community.
Analysis and Interpretation	Researcher and moderator competent in multicultural skills.	Member checks to ensure all voices represented.	Analysed verbal and nonverbal data; member checks improved trustworthiness.	Remained vigilant to what is valuable to the community.
Aims and Application	Results shed light on current issues affecting the community.	Dissemination of results to the community is a priority.	Excerpts increased participant visibility.	Application of findings to real-world issues that have meaning to the community.

Participants and recruitment. Focus group participants were adults (aged between 18 and 53) who self-identified as being gifted. I did not impose a definition or set of criteria for identifying as gifted. Rather, the research was grounded in the participants' own experience and understandings of giftedness which emerged in their responses (Wilkinson, 1998). Additional eligibility criteria were established to ensure participants felt confident and comfortable to participate in web-based video conferencing. Because the focus groups were conducted in

English and recruited internationally, potential participants were also asked to consider their level of English language proficiency.

Participants were purposefully recruited by posting the announcement (see Appendix J) on the websites of two adult gifted-related organizations with international coverage - the website of SENG (www.seng.org) and IHBV (www.ihbv.nl), and on three public Facebook pages – Hoagies Gifted Discussion Group, European Council for High Abilities (ECHA) and Intergifted. The study website (<https://focusgroupsgifted.blogs.auckland.ac.nz/>) described the study aims, research questions, and eligibility criteria, and directed anyone interested in participating to contact the lead researcher via email for more information, and to confirm eligibility. Those who met all criteria received an email with an individual link to detailed information about the study, and to the Consent Form.

I used demographic information provided by participants via a secure online questionnaire to construct the groups. I aimed for small groups to encourage high involvement (Morgan, 2006) and for within-group heterogeneity in terms of identified nationality, age, and gender. This, together with practical considerations for time zones resulted in a total of 15 participants and four groups, as shown in Table 16 below. Participants came from North America (Canada and the United States), Europe (Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands), Australasia (Australia and New Zealand) and Asia (South Korea).

Table 16

Focus Groups Showing Size and Identified Gender

Focus Group	Group Size	Identified gender	
		Female	Male
A	4	2	2
B	3	2	1
C	5	3	2
D	3	2	1

The focus groups. The study was comprised of four separate synchronous internet-based focus groups (Lobe, 2017) where the interviewer and participants were online simultaneously. I used the web-conferencing service ZOOM (www.zoom.us) to conduct each sixty-minute focus group and to capture audio-visual data. Visual displays were set so that everyone could be seen at all times regardless who was speaking, in order to support the high degree of responsiveness and interaction that is central to focus group research (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017; Wilkinson, 1998).

Prior to each focus group participants received written instructions on how to use the web-conferencing service, and a link to join the meeting. Participants were offered the opportunity to test the service in advance.

I developed a semi-structured interview format consisting of three questions to facilitate in-depth conversations about participants' experiences and opinions:

1. What do you think is well understood about gifted adults?
2. What experiences do you use to identify yourself as being gifted?
3. What do you believe are the priorities for research with gifted adults?

The first two questions were designed to open the topic, engage participants, and facilitate interaction. The third question directly reflected the aims of the study and was used to stimulate a more specific discussion. In practice, as the interviewer, I was also responsive to where the conversation went.

At the start of each focus group, participants were encouraged to consider their own experiences when responding to questions or sharing opinions. This focus was relaxed as interactions revealed "shared experiences, and shared ways of making sense of these experiences" (Wilkinson, 1998, p. 189).

Thematic analysis. The analysis process broadly followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of a reflexive TA with modifications to suit our data set. Data were organized and

categorized using qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12 (QSR International, Melbourne, Australia) and manually at times.

The entire data set was comprised of audio-visual (video) recordings and written transcripts from all four focus groups. Codes and themes were revised throughout the analysis to fit data across the four focus groups (Charmaz, 2014).

I first viewed written transcripts of the data to analyze and interpret content, with some attention to structure such as pauses and interruptions. Transcripts from each focus group were analysed separately, checked and rechecked multiple times, coded and gradually understood as sub themes of a broader theme. I then analysed the four transcripts together, using the codes and emerging sub themes to identify and interpret patterns generated across the data set. Finally, I revisited transcripts from each focus group to search for group-specific or unique perspectives.

I then viewed the video recordings to enrich the analysis and interpretation by adding the structure of the data such as gestures, changes in voice inflection and volume, and times when multiple people spoke simultaneously. Viewing the video recordings allowed me to attune to the affective dimensions of individuals and within the groups, to gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the data (Thomson et al., 2012) Like the transcripts, each video was analysed separately, then the data across the four were analysed, and finally, each focus group video was revisited.

A second researcher (one of my supervisors) carried out a cross-check of coding and themes to ensure consistency, and there was a high level of agreement thereby enhancing the trustworthiness of the findings. I emailed each participant a summary of the theme and sub themes, and invited comments. This member checking further confirmed the consistency and trustworthiness of the interpretation (Hill et al., 1997).

Results and Discussion

The TA resulted in one key theme and three sub themes as shown in Table 17 below.

Table 17

Theme and Sub themes from the Four Focus Groups

Theme	Sub themes	Illustrative excerpt
We are not that! Our experiences tell different stories.	Trapped by the usual narratives.	I don't know how to talk about what it's like to be gifted. For me it's not about IQ and being at the top, but those are the words being used. It's so much more.
	Othering: out of place and somehow wrong.	It was bad enough to be different when I was a kid. But now? How can I explain being different? If I say I'm gifted, I'm seen as arrogant. But if I don't say that, then I'm just a freak.
	Values are being imposed.	Eminence? [groans]. That's what someone else expects. I really don't care and don't want it.

Theme: We are not that! Our experiences tell different stories. The central theme described the numerous ways common academic or vernacular discourses around giftedness may fail to reflect the lived experiences of gifted adults, as discussed in these groups. Contained within the central theme were three sub themes, each telling a unique story about how current narratives of giftedness fail to be congruent with participants' lived experiences. The analysis disentangled and examined those sub themes, allowing me to understand more specifically the impact of the mismatch, and what these gifted adults believe needs to happen moving forward. It also revealed threads of stories that more accurately reflect their experiences, including issues that were meaningful to them.

Sub-theme 1: Trapped by the usual narratives. There was an apparent mismatch between the narrowness of stereotypes of giftedness and the breadth of participants' lived experience yet, as the word "trapped" suggests, they struggled to free themselves from the constraints and implications of familiar terms. Attempts to move beyond the "wrong stories" were frustrating and not entirely successful, as this example shows:

Gina¹⁰: It's important to understand all of the characteristics ... or personality traits or whatever ... all the other things that go along with this quote-unquote giftedness. How it affects you, or how it [long pause] feels? Not only intellectually which is pretty easy maybe but socially, emotionally and all of those things ... it's just hard to even find the words. It's the whole package.

Social and intrapersonal factors such as intense emotions, sensitivities, curiosity, and strong empathy were central to all participants' experiences of being gifted yet these aspects are outside of the more usual rhetoric around adult giftedness, especially in the academic literature. This was raised and discussed within all four focus groups, and Gregory explicitly named the problem:

As adults we're stuck. Even if we were identified as being gifted as a kid, nobody shared what it's really like. It's all about being smart or doing something well. And if you read the research, it seems like it's about being intelligent—math intelligent, or science or STEM. Or maybe music or sports. You can get that you're different in that way. But why am I sad? Or anxious? Or have deep existential loneliness? It seems taboo to say that's part of it, especially to a kid. And so, we don't look at what that is, or how that affects adults, long-term. I've experienced these since I was five years old!

In the example below, Ann's attempt to broaden the story to include her emotional and relational experiences clashed with common conceptualizations of giftedness that privilege cognitive factors and performance:

I learned that I was gifted as a child. I did well in school, so no one understood why I wasn't happy. And I still do well in those ways. But. Um. I really want to connect with people, and I get excited to meet people and connect deeply

¹⁰ Pseudonyms are used throughout.

about something. It's intense, though. And sometimes it's hard to spend too much time with other gifted people. But I love it. I went to a counsellor and she asked me 'Have you tried not being this way?' [group laughs] Ya, and I said sure, ya, I have tried, so it's not something I can really change.

Participants who were in some way "identified" as being gifted during childhood tried to live within the meanings embedded in the discourse and practices of gifted education and struggled to move beyond the bounds of that narrative in adulthood. As David said:

I was identified early, and accelerated, graduated college early and have three graduate degrees. I knew I was different in academic situations but what I didn't understand was all the other ways I was different. I thought giftedness was in this intellectual box—that accounted for my academic successes. It wasn't until my 40s when I started realizing something was missing, I feel so alone, there's gotta be something else, I'm not understanding this. But I didn't have any words.

Some experiences are not only outside of the usual stories but are prohibited. For example, an emphasis on extraordinary natural ability and heroic achievement focuses attention on success, not problems. This, together with the often-unspoken assumption that being gifted means "having things come easily" silences stories of fallibility and vulnerability, and may preclude prevention or intervention, as shown in the following excerpts:

Gina: There has been a bias, with gifted children, adolescents, adults—they don't need any help, they're smart. If they're smart, they can deal with everything. At work, they shouldn't need support, they can take care of themselves. But I've left many jobs.

Tom: Some things do come easily, but at the same time they can almost be harder because you look at things more intensely, you're probably going in more depth or in other

directions. You see the complexity. I'm always told that I ask too many questions.

But I need to understand all of the complexity first.

Barb: It's expected that we are good at everything. So I hide my anxiety. At work, I might do everything well, but no one knows if I'm nervous and I even have to calm down my energy because I can be so passionate, and then I crash. Maybe I look like superwoman but [laughs].

Different stories emerged as participants engaged with each other and persevered with finding new ways to describe their lives as gifted adults. The following exchange exemplifies how they expanded the conversation to share experiences:

Andrew: It doesn't make sense to have one narrow definition. Some people might be vocal, but that is just one way of understanding it. Being kinesthetic or not so verbal, or not STEM-focused, that doesn't get into the research. We're missing the differentiation. In companies, say, where employees might be seen as smart—the cognitive aspect. It might be helpful for them to understand the emotional intensity that's also part of it.

Helena: And the complex thinking and just sort of knowing things intuitively. Getting the big picture quickly. Plus, emotional and energetic sensitivity, picking up on things that are going on in my environment, like a kind of osmosis. It's a whole spectrum of things that contribute to being, you know [*whispers*] gifted.

Claire: Yes! I have dyslexia and so the gifted thing didn't fit because in school it was all about doing well. I thought I wasn't intelligent, but then I also knew I was. The sensitivity and energy and just knowing things—when I hear you all talk about it it's as if someone is viewing me through a camera!

Sub-theme 2: Othering: Out of place and somehow “wrong”. Contrary to a popular narrative of feeling blessed with gifts, a recurring story was of feeling deviant, problematic and

excluded. One person called himself “the black duckling amongst all the white ones,” and another spoke of needing to assimilate at work to avoid being “the tall poppy that gets cut down.” Participants shared many stories of being misperceived and marginalized in important contexts including work and relationships.

We are not used to seeing ‘the gifted’ as a disempowered and marginalized group, but for adults, it may be an appropriate and useful lens. Their experiences suggest an identity shaped by a process of *othering* frequently discussed in disability and queer studies. Jensen (2011) defines *othering* as “discursive processes by which powerful groups ... define subordinate groups into existence in a reductionist way which ascribes problematic and/or inferior characteristics to these subordinate groups” (p.65).

For these gifted adults, a similar process appeared to start in childhood, as they were seen as being ‘different’ within the education system, whether or not they were formally assessed as fitting the criteria for gifted programming. While none of the participants enjoyed being viewed as different from other students, there was general agreement amongst those that performed well (and not all did) that at least they were not alone and were appreciated as top students.

At the end of school years, they moved into the relational, vocational, and academic contexts of adulthood. They retained a sense of being “not the norm” but lost the relevant (school-related) normative frames of reference. Without that, they fell prey to reductive stereotypes, common misperceptions and even medicalized (mis) diagnoses (Webb et al., 2005) with high personal costs as shown in this exchange:

Jan: In my experience, in the adult realm giftedness just falls off the radar. Once you’re out of the school system you’re just out there with everyone else and just left. OK maybe there’s something for you at college but after that? Nothing.

Paul: Organizations like Mensa and a couple of others are out there, but they're about being smart, y'know, and a lot of old stereotypes that are hard to overcome. I'm certainly not telling everyone I'm meeting "Hey I'm gifted." People don't like it. It's threatening.

Kim: In a way, if we just focus on gifted as smart, there is a kind of distancing there.

David: And then they don't understand the intensities: emotional intensity, sensitivities which may appear to others as weird, strange, different, difficult

Jan: [*interrupts*] Too difficult, Too strange, you're this, you're that ...

Kim: Ya, we're careful about the emotions and sensitivities with children. We know to be careful about "diagnosing" them, but when it comes to adults, I think people are much quicker to give a label: they must be autistic, or ADHD or mentally ill because they're different from the norm.

There was consensus on the immediate need to build knowledge and shift public perception about gifted adults to include the full range of experiences, including those that are difficult. As Gina said:

What might work for gifted education and children isn't right for adults. We're not Sheldons. It's so important to tell the whole story. I needed to know that there are people in the world like me, that don't see the world the same way as most people. And employers and doctors and mental health professionals need to understand why we might be anxious, or sad, intense. These aren't things to be ashamed of. If we hide away it's such a waste of resources.

Sub-theme 3: Values are being imposed. The third sub-theme focuses attention on the contrast between the personal and shared values expressed within the focus groups and those implicit in many conceptualizations of giftedness. Whereas historic and current measures of

“success” in gifted studies may imply that high achievement and eminence are important to gifted adults, the priorities and aspirations expressed in the focus groups tell a different story.

Each person spoke of valuing relationships and contributing to some greater social good, and every group interview included lively discussions about the importance of social connection, collaboration, and action directed at solving global problems. The content and the tone of one exchange reflect what appeared to be shared values across all groups:

Gregory: I imagine what we could do if there was a communal effort: gifted adults getting together to really get to some big solutions. Using all of that energy and firing off of each other, not having to use a lot of words but just getting the ideas quickly

Barb: [interrupts] I want that. I dream about it. This need for communion. Feeling alone a lot of the time, but you come across like-minded peers—gifted peers—and you understand each other, the cues, it all happens so easily. We could do so much for the world.

Participants placed as much if not more importance on intrinsic non-cognitive abilities as they did on skilled performance or intelligence (however defined). Furthermore, for these 15 people, moral and ethical concerns and a strong sense of justice *are part of* giftedness, but being acknowledged as a highly successful individual is not:

Andrew: To me it’s not about high performance as much as a curiosity, a sense of ethics and fairness, and seeing and contributing to the big pictures. We all know it in ourselves and see it in somebody else. That hasn’t really been well defined or identified or even well studied, but we all know it.

Jean: I think the sense of ethics and justice and morality is huge. There is an inner need to teach or show something, to make a difference, not stand above others but to really contribute.

The sense of being both missed and wronged was of concern to many, as exemplified by this comment:

You're never really told what it means and doesn't mean to be gifted. That you're not better or worse than anyone else, it's just the way you take things in in the world. We need to see the long-term effects of this [stereotype]. We've got to make it OK to be this way.

Implications for research. These results invite reflection on how scholars conceptualize and operationalize *gifted adults* and the processes and questions that seem to drive current research agendas. In research, it is often the case that what is measured, and therefore seen, is valued. The results raise the possibility that what is often studied and valued by the research community may not be (as) meaningful to gifted adults, a criticism that has been voiced frequently, over years (e.g., Freeman, 2006; Holahan & Holahan, 1999; Jacobsen, 1999; Persson, 2017). The central theme from the data across all four focus groups - *We are not that! Our experiences tell different stories* - signals the need to critically examine how current research practices may have solidified and perpetuated problematic narratives. Each sub theme highlights particular areas of concern to these gifted adults.

The gifted adults in this study spoke of valuing deep personal relationships with family, friends, and colleagues, and within their communities. They find meaning by contributing to solving complex systemic problems, not necessarily in prestigious or high-status roles. Participants also prefer collaboration over competition, despite finding it difficult to 'fit in'.

These and other personally meaningful experiences are well beyond the scope of the usual psychometric measures and achievement-related variables of interest in gifted studies, as shown in the results of the survey of gifted adult literature (Chapter Four). The experiences described in the focus groups are also complex, context-specific, and likely embedded in cultural and socio-political systems, and therefore may not be measurable in ways that are consistent with the paradigms that have historically dominated gifted studies.

Participants' sense of being trapped by narrow stereotypes implies that current conceptual and operational definitions and measures may be unhelpfully reductive and potentially harmful. As argued by Ambrose and colleagues (Ambrose, et al., 2010; Ambrose, et al., 2012), dogmatism in gifted studies forces scholars to "think more superficially, narrowly, and in more short-sighted ways than we should" (Ambrose, 2014, p. 5). The results of the focus groups suggest that a strong emphasis on academic or professional achievement limits the inquiry, leaving important experiences unexamined.

One implication is that communities interested in gifted adults need to find different ways to understand, conceptualize, and disseminate information about this complex phenomenon, including potentially unmeasurable experiences. This likely requires a shift to more qualitative methods such as this focus group study, where we do not impose a story and, instead, listen with a willingness to embrace multiple stories grounded in the experience of those who live them.

These gifted adults reported feeling not only different but somehow problematic, affected by stigmatizing narratives of 'odd' or 'strange', or by shame associated with failing to produce the ideals of a gifted designation. Many were affected by both.

Those interested in understanding gifted adults may want to reflect on how some research practices and related terminology may emphasize certain qualities and behaviors in ways that undervalue or denigrate others, including emotional experiences. Such reflection necessarily includes examining our definitions, tools, and variables of interest. Most importantly, these results suggest that we need to consider how underlying biases and assumptions may inadvertently contribute to stigmatization and subsequent marginalization, doing harm to some gifted adults in ways described here and elsewhere (Persson, 2009).

Transformative work in other fields, where researchers listened to the stories of those impacted and re-oriented their aims and methods, may provide direction. For example, gender

and sexuality studies (Laurie, 2014; O'Toole, 2000) and indigenous studies (Denzin et al., 2008; Rata, 2013) are currently being radically transformed in response to challenges that historical narratives perpetuate harmful stereotypes and *othering*. Disability studies (Shildrick et al., 2012), rehabilitation psychology (Levine & Breshears, 2019), and community psychology (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010) now embrace grassroots approaches that shift attention to understanding the issues and experiences that are important to the communities of interest. In all of these fields, scholars reflected on historic and current systemic influences and biases, and now include socially just principles that honor and privilege the voices of their communities of interest, and explicitly engage with and seek to disrupt harmful stereotypes.

A similar shift may be useful for reframing research to acknowledge and center on what is meaningful to gifted adults in adult contexts. The results of the literature survey and the Delphi and questionnaire studies show that there is some movement in that direction. Reis (2005), for example, offers a feminist perspective and a conception of talented women that is grounded in lived experience. In that model, satisfying relationships and personally meaningful contributions are acknowledged as important, albeit within the context of contributing to recognized achievement. Other recent studies of gifted adults based on experiential knowledge include detailed descriptions of intrapersonal experiences, including many of those identified above and in elsewhere the thesis (e.g., Van Thiel, et al., 2019; Smith, 2016; Mannisto, 2019; Szymanski & Wrenn, 2019). While largely untested, and therefore not suitable as predictive models, these existing descriptions shed more light on the lived experiences of gifted adults, and thus could be useful starting points for collaborative exploratory research.

However it happens, future research needs to respond to actual needs and issues. It is therefore essential that we broaden our scope of enquiry to include what is important to gifted adults. The focus group results suggest that researchers start by valuing the lived experiences of gifted adults, listening to those stories, and creating space in research programs and academic

journals for qualitative and socially just approaches, to bring the soul back (Reynolds & Piirto, 2005) into our narratives.

Conclusion

Some stories are not easy to tell. In this focus group study, the participants persevered, sharing often highly emotional experiences of being gifted adults. In doing so they challenged many of the assumptions that underlie scholarly discourse and research in the field.

It is not my intention to infer that the experiences and concerns expressed in this study generalize beyond this group. All participants were English speaking, belonged to Western cultural groups, and had some connection to online sites about giftedness. All but one person was Caucasian. These are recognized limitations. Going forward, research efforts will also need to be guided by stories from gifted adults of other cultural, ethnic, and racial groups.

It is nevertheless noteworthy that the analysis captured a single theme within and across four intentionally heterogeneous focus groups. Despite differences in age, identified gender, and where they lived, these 15 people appeared to have many experiences in common, and they shared serious concerns related to being misperceived. Further research is needed to determine how pervasive the experiences and concerns voiced in this study are among gifted adults. While the results may not generalize beyond a sub-group or specific community of gifted adults, the issues are nonetheless important if research is to be responsive to the actual needs of those groups or individuals.

The voices of the gifted adults in this study provide some direction for future research and also make an important contribution to current understandings of gifted adults. Participants spoke candidly about how difficult it can be to talk about being gifted, and how they are often misperceived by others. The frank and open opinions and reflections shared here may inform counsellors, physicians and others working to support gifted adults, and offer new insights to

families, employers and friends. As a clinician, I also anticipate that the shared stories will be personally validating to gifted adults whose experiences have not yet been voiced or heard.

This study is informed by principles of socially just research (Frederking, 2013; Crethar, Rivera, & Nash, 2008) including the aim of applying findings to real-world issues. I hope that the concerns outlined here, and in the published paper, provide new ways of understanding the lived experiences of gifted adults, and provoke research that is responsive to what is valuable to them. I recommend that this and similar bottom-up methods be employed with other gifted adults to ensure that their stories are heard and responded to in future research agendas.

Chapter 8: Discussion

Prelude and Researcher Reflexivity

Life mirrors writing or vice versa. Perhaps both. Either way, the 2020 contexts within which I write have impacted me, and it feels important to reflect on and bring some of those experiences to light as a prelude to the discussion.

Previously, I described my experience writing parts of this thesis during a COVID-19 lockdown. That was several months ago, and, at the time, I needed to reconnect with my passion for the topic and the values that underlie my approach to my research and this thesis. Following that, here in New Zealand we had a reprieve, life inside the country went back to some sort of normal, and I immersed myself in the analysis of the data - trying to make sense of ‘difference’ and to find ways forward that take into account conflicts, disagreements, and diverse backgrounds, interests and needs.

Throughout this thesis I discuss the results of the various studies in terms of anachronistic and biased legacies, reductive thinking, differing ideologies and conceptual muddles, leading to confusion in research with gifted adults and potentially opposing camps. Within my relatively safe New Zealand bubble, I watched the same processes shape the global confusion over a pandemic, as some decision-makers and citizens failed to take into account the complexity of the pandemic and the likely repercussions of decisions based on reductive and muddled thinking.

In this thesis, I have described some of the historic shifts in ideas about social justice, including the weakening of the essential tension between individual freedoms and social responsibility, and the resulting conflicts in, for example, gifted education. Over the past months, conflicting ideas about justice pitting individual rights against social responsibility could not be more obvious in many parts of the world, including countries that I ‘visit’ daily in

my psychotherapy work. As the different priorities become more polarized, it seems less and less likely that bridges can be built.

New Zealand has now returned to lockdown and a national election is in full swing. It seems that ‘difference’, polarized thinking, and apparently unexamined bias are suddenly ‘in the air’ here. Whereas a few months ago I was able to remain optimistic about an effective global response to COVID-19, and to see possibility, right now I’m not so sure. It is hard to see the way forward.

As I wonder and worry about ‘the world’, including confusion, conflicts, uncertainty, and the need for careful examination and consideration, I similarly wonder about this emerging interest in gifted adults. As I examine the data from my studies, and consider my overall findings including the recommendations from the various studies, I wonder if there is enough common ground and motivation for the various communities of interest to fruitfully engage with the differences. Given the plurality of views, opinions, and influences, and the apparently embedded Western bias, is it possible to move forward with research with gifted adults? And if so, how?

The process-oriented social justice lens through which I view this research problem focuses attention on engaging with difference, with the understanding that diversity and oppositional views need not stop progress in its tracks. I therefore rely heavily on that framework as I engage with the findings in this discussion chapter.

In this discussion, I return to the original aims of the thesis and my studies, and critically engage with key findings across the literature survey and the three studies, keeping in mind the two research questions:

1. What is currently driving interest in the topic of gifted adults?
2. What is needed to continue to move forward and build knowledge in ways that are meaningful to the various communities of interest?

To address these research questions, each component of the research project contributed findings from a particular community of interest. The literature survey focused on the interests of researchers whose studies are published. The Delphi study and questionnaire included published researchers but added the voice of experts whose work with gifted adults may not be published, either because of publication bias that favours quantitative research and particular approaches, or because the experts choose not to submit their work to academic journals. The focus groups added the voices of gifted adults, voices that seem uniquely able to contribute essential information and direction to the field, but that, to my knowledge, have not previously been included in conversations about research.

The combination of voices included in this work is unique and offers an original and timely contribution to the field. As I discovered, and discussed in Chapter Four, the only published review of gifted adult literature to date presents a rather narrow picture of the field by largely omitting qualitative research and focusing primarily on a single approach to the topic. The addition of information and ideas from those who address the topic using different lenses, including the subjective lenses of gifted adults themselves, not only adds to our knowledge but, importantly, paints a very different and arguably more accurate picture of the current state of the field. As I discuss in this chapter and elsewhere in the thesis, the diversity, commonalities and problems that emerged within and between the various studies have important implications for designing research that is relevant and meaningful to the various communities of interest, now and in the future.

Structure of the Chapter

This Discussion chapter has three sections. Section One is a summary of key findings from the literature survey and each of the studies – the Delphi study, the questionnaire and the focus groups. I engage briefly with each to show how the different communities of interest approach the topic, and where there appear to be new ideas, useful approaches, conflicts and

gaps. Throughout the section, key findings are discussed in light of the research questions, including implications for future research on the topic.

In Section Two, I draw on the findings across the literature survey and all studies, and specifically address the question of moving forward and building knowledge in ways that are meaningful to the various communities of interest. In that section, I present and discuss three considerations for moving forward with research that builds knowledge about gifted adults in ways that honour differences and are meaningful to the various stakeholders.

The thesis concludes in Section Three by discussing some key contributions that the research, publications, and this thesis make to the field, acknowledging limitations, and reflecting on future research that extends my work on the topic and addresses limitations.

Section One: Summary of Key findings

The results of the literature survey, Delphi study, questionnaire and focus group study have been thoroughly discussed in previous chapters. Here, I summarize what I consider to be key findings from the literature survey and the studies, referring back to discussions in previous chapters where possible, to minimize redundancy.

What the published research says: The literature survey. The survey of research with gifted adults was specifically configured to provide insight into the interests and approaches of published researchers and, related to that, to position current studies with gifted adults within larger historical and disciplinary contexts. The findings from the survey, reported in Chapter Four, help answer the question about what drives current interest in gifted adults; and shed light on some historic and current problems with research on the topic – problems that need to be taken into account moving forward.

The results of the survey extend the findings of the only published review of the gifted adult literature (Rinn & Bishop, 2015) in three ways:

- i) the survey adds qualitative studies omitted from the Rinn and Bishop review,
- ii) gifted adult research published since 2016 is included
- iii) the analysis provides information about researchers' *interests* and the approaches they use.

In total, 141 studies were surveyed, including the 59 studies reviewed by Rinn and Bishop. Of the studies included in the survey, 21 were published since 2016. In general, the results of the survey of published studies support the often-cited view that the topic of gifted adults is not well researched.

Summary of research interests. A key finding here is that the results of the literature survey do *not* support Rinn and Bishops (2015) conclusion that there is relatively little interest in the subjective experiences of gifted adults. The literature survey, which included qualitative research and used a different analytical lens, reveals that researchers show interest in a very wide range of topics (see Table 18 below), including the subjective experiences of gifted adults. Therefore, a more accurate characterization of the field, itself an important finding that helps answer both research questions, is that there is strong interest in achievement *and* subjective experiences. However, research on the latter appears to be under-represented in quantitative studies and some gifted-related academic journals.

Table 18*Summary of Themes and Sub themes Identified in the Literature Survey*

Theme	Sub-theme (if any)
Whether or not gifted children become gifted adults ^a	
Family of origin ^a	
Effects of early educational experiences ^a	Acceleration and advanced coursework Enrichment
Characteristics of gifted adults ^a	Emotional sensitivity and intensity Perceptions of giftedness
Career ^a	Educational and occupational success Satisfaction in chosen career
Career and family interaction ^a	Unique experiences of women
Life goals, satisfaction and well-being ^a	
Talent development of women	
Gifted university students	University and College students Gifted African American males at University
Psychology of gifted adults	Over-excitability
Mental health and well-being	Counselling ^a and therapy Non-clinical research
Gifted workers	
Psychometric assessment	
SMPY follow-up studies	

^a = theme or sub theme named in Rinn and Bishop (2015)

Lack of research framework and implications. On reflection, the results of the literature survey suggest that, both historically and currently, the ‘body’ of scholarly research related to the topic of gifted adults is both amorphous in the sense of being unformed, and rather nebulous or ill-defined. The historical and current paucity of published research on the topic, and the broad range of researcher interests together show that the study of gifted adults is not (yet) guided by identifiable central research questions or anything that resembles a solid research framework. Additionally, the published literature shows little evidence of collaboration between researchers studying gifted adults. With a few exceptions, these researchers appear to be working and publishing their results either individually or in isolated pockets. These findings are

not unexpected, and the sense of an undeveloped field or framework is in line with many of the responses offered by current experts who participated in the Delphi study and questionnaire (as discussed in Chapters Five and Six).

The lack of a research framework has important implications that appear to be unexamined in gifted adult literature. Below I discuss two somewhat related implications that are particularly relevant to the question of how to move forward with building knowledge about gifted adults:

- i) isolation of knowledge within specialized areas, and
- ii) unaddressed gaps in knowledge.

Isolation of knowledge. One implication of the absence of a research framework, lack of collaboration amongst published researchers, and the spread of interests is that knowledge about gifted adults does not accumulate and, instead, remains sequestered in individual research programs, discipline - specific journals and/or in various ‘camps’. This can be seen in the findings from the literature survey where, for example, there appears to be a chasm between talent development researchers and others interested in topics unrelated to achievement or eminence, with no evidence of attempts to bridge the gap. For example, as discussed in Chapter Four, historically, the bulk of published studies with gifted adults aligned with early intelligence research and the talent development approach, and the interest in factors related to high achievement in adulthood remains evident in many current studies with gifted adults. On the other hand, another group of researchers apply Dąbrowski’s (1964) TPD to gifted adults and are interested in the inner experiences of gifted adults. Studies using these two different approaches appear to be published in different journals, with little cross-over and dialogue.

The extent of this disconnection is surprising. After all, given the complexity of the topic of gifted adults, it seems unlikely that any one approach will provide answers to the myriad of

relevant research problems and questions. This is discussed further in the recommendations for moving forward in Section Three below.

Unaddressed gaps in knowledge. Another implication of the current spread of interests and lack of framework for research with gifted adults is that important gaps in knowledge remain unaddressed, and this is evident in the findings from the literature survey. An example from the findings is the dearth of information about gifted adults in universities. Results show that historic and current interest in the topic of gifted university students is spread thinly across several countries with different education systems and, importantly, that individual researchers appear to have very specialized interests and use distinct approaches. Hébert (2018), for example, is interested in minority gifted university students and the psychosocial factors that contribute to their resilience while attending university. Millward and colleagues (Millward et al., 2016) are also interested in gifted university students, and focus on factors, including psychosocial factors, that contribute to their academic success. As discussed in Chapter Four, a careful look at these studies shows no evidence of dialogue between the researchers, despite common interests. Hence, to some extent, opportunities for these studies to contribute to a growing body of knowledge about the topic may be lost. The problem of fragmentation of the field was acknowledged by the Delphi panel, and was addressed in their recommendations for action, as discussed below and in Chapter Five.

Methodological inconsistency in the published research. One of the principles of social justice is transparency and I apply that throughout the thesis by bringing to light important issues so that they are more clearly understood and, ideally, taken into account in future research with gifted adults. Here I identify and discuss some key findings from the literature survey related to questionable methodology in published gifted adult research.

As shown above and in Chapter Four, the literature survey revealed that researchers study gifted adults using a range of approaches, and their methods and analyses reflect multiple

conceptualizations of giftedness. While this diversity is found in most gifted-related fields and is therefore predictable, the more surprising finding from the literature survey is that few authors name their approaches to research with gifted adults, or clearly articulate their methodology. Related to that, another surprising finding is that many of the published studies appear to be either theoretically ungrounded, methodologically muddled or both, and researchers (and, it would seem, publishers) fail to identify and either address or discuss obvious methodological flaws and inconsistencies.

I realize that these are strong statements and acknowledge that many of the methodological inconsistencies described in this thesis are understandable. As argued in Chapters Four, Five and Six, the topic of gifted adults is new, and many of the tools, methods, and theories used are inherited from related fields of intelligence, talent development studies, and gifted education, and may not be suitable for studying adults in current contexts. Nevertheless, the findings from the literature survey reveal methodological flaws, and there are clear and important distinctions that need to be made if future research with gifted adults is to be valid and meaningful. For example, a psychometric approach relies on tools and methods that are based on normative assumptions, whereas a phenomenological approach does not infer beyond an individual. Therefore, scores on IQ or other normed psychometric tests (and related to that, membership in Mensa) are meaningful in relation to large populations only, not individuals. In studies of gifted adults, the almost universal use of IQ scores and the like, apparently regardless of the underlying approach and research method, is of concern.

Similarly, descriptive models of adult giftedness are appropriately used to examine subjective experiences, but it is methodologically inconsistent to use descriptive models to study or categorize groups, or to make predictions. In terms of validity, descriptive models may have face validity, but have not (yet) been shown to have construct validity, and therefore should not be used to categorize. This issue is important because, where tools and models are employed

outside of their intended use, and in ways that are inconsistent with the overall methodology of the study, researchers cannot draw conclusions or even make strong inferences. Additionally, and important here, unexamined use of tools and models may inadvertently obscure critical gaps in our knowledge and methods.

These and other methodological flaws in the gifted adult research are discussed elsewhere in the thesis, and are addressed in the considerations for moving forward in Section Two below. From a social justice perspective, the methodological flaws themselves are not as problematic as the apparent lack of reflexivity. That is, the inconsistencies are problematic if they remain unexamined. One of my contributions to the field is to bring these findings from the literature survey to light.

WEIRD bias. Another key finding from the literature survey is that published research with gifted adults is completely dominated by Western views of giftedness. As discussed in Chapter Four, historically, research with gifted adults appears to be strongly influenced by a few longitudinal and retrospective American studies. Ideologically, these studies align with the typically Western values related to individual effort and outstanding individual performance. Those values appear to permeate many of the approaches to giftedness used in published studies with gifted adults, as found in the literature survey. While research by Bonner (2001, 2010) and a few others shows that there is some history of multicultural perspectives being applied to research with gifted adults, this work has mainly been applied to minority groups living within westernized countries. The findings about the dominance of a single cultural lens in research with gifted adults leave three important questions unanswered:

- 1) Is there interest in studying gifted adults from other cultures?
- 2) Are researchers or others from non-western countries and cultures interested in the topic?
- 3) In what ways do people from different cultures conceptualize *gifted adult*?

What is also unknown is whether the lack of multicultural approaches to the topic in published studies reflects researcher bias, publication bias or both. The results of the literature survey show that all of the gifted adult studies published in scholarly journals come from predominantly WEIRD countries, and that the journals themselves are published in those countries. Therefore, it seems reasonable to think that the Western bias is systemic and the findings from the Delphi study, questionnaire and focus groups support this assumption.

Voices of experts: Key findings from the Delphi study and the questionnaire study.

The Delphi study (Chapter Five) and the questionnaire study (Chapter Six) were each designed to engage with the views and opinions of experts currently studying and working with gifted adults: the Delphi method engages with the views of the panel, whereas the questionnaire focuses on individual participants' views. The study participants included both published researchers and experts whose work with gifted adults may not be published for various reasons. The latter are voices that might otherwise remain unheard. These two studies also included voices of experts whose work is outside of the usual gifted-related academic circles (e.g., clinicians and those working in employment-related areas), and the conversation was not ring fenced within any discipline or set of disciplines. Therefore, the results more likely reflect the full range of lenses and priorities that exist within communities of experts interested in the topic now, and in upcoming years

Delphi study. The main aim of the Delphi study was to discover what the international and multidisciplinary panel of 76 experts had to say about the current state of research with gifted adults, and what is needed in the future. Therefore, the findings address the research problem directly, and in particular help answer the second research question, about how to continue to build knowledge about gifted adults that is meaningful to the various communities of interest. Findings from the Delphi study are uniquely important to that question, because the method itself is intended to build knowledge through multiples rounds of data collection,

feedback, and comments (Turoff & Hiltz, 1996). The results, including six recommendations, are the culmination of the efforts of a group of experts who critically engaged with questions and issues over many months, and in the process learned from one another and gained insight into differences and commonalities.

Identified obstacles: priorities and actions. An important result of the Delphi study is that the group identified current obstacles and priorities for research with gifted adults, and, related to that, actions needed (shown in detail in Table 10 in Chapter Five, and in an abridged form below in Table 19). These findings contribute to our understanding of current contexts within which the experts are working, and also give some direction for future studies, from the perspective of the experts likely to be involved in research.

Table 19

Summary of Themes Identified in the Delphi Study

Organizing idea	Themes
Obstacles	Fragmentation of the field Conceptual differences or confusion Problems with the word 'gifted'
Priorities	Understand that <i>gifted</i> is a contextually embedded phenomenon Understand lived experiences Acknowledge (don't reduce) complexity
Actions needed	Link research and practice Improve knowledge and build awareness Plan cross-disciplinary projects

Recommendations from the panel. The recommendations from the Delphi study (shown in Table 8, and discussed in detail in Chapter Five) and the extent to which they were endorsed by panel members are important findings, as they show areas of agreement and also shed light on important differences in views amongst panel members. I found, for example, that this group of experts is (now) aware of the potential complexity of the topic, and generally supports ecological approaches that capture rather than reduce that complexity. There was also agreement

amongst panel members that future research programs need to accommodate a variety of lenses and will likely require collaboration across disciplines. Related to that, while there was some difference of opinion on the value of proceeding with numerous definitions of *gifted adult*, this group generally appeared willing to acknowledge and engage with differences in order to, for example, build knowledge that informs clinical practise. Considering the interest in the mental health and well-being of gifted adults found in all of the studies, the willingness to build bridges between clinical work and academic research seems timely.

Importantly, the overall directions and emphases apparent in the recommendations from the panel do not seem to align well with historic and current approaches to research found in the literature survey. It therefore remains to be seen if the work can actually proceed within the traditional academic research environments. It may well be time for those interested in the subject to think outside the box, and build knowledge through, for example, communities of practise.

Notably, the particular method used - the Policy Delphi method - did not aim for consensus. Therefore, the findings from the Delphi study reflect a broad range of interests and approaches, and bring to light differences that may not have been apparent to the those interested in the topic (including some panel members) prior to this study. I hope that the three-round process itself moved knowledge about gifted adults forward by creating some synergy between the 76 panel members, and increasing their insights and awareness. To that end, I shared the final report and results with each panel member, and made the results available by publishing the study in a peer-reviewed academic journal. Ultimately, I believe the study and results, including the panel's recommendations for future direction, make an important, timely and original contribution to the field.

Questionnaire study. The latent-level analysis of individual responses to the questionnaire used in the first round of the Delphi study provided more detailed information on

the individual views and perspectives of the 76 experts who participated in the Delphi study, and how they approach the topic of gifted adults. Additionally, the questionnaire study extends the findings from the literature survey in two important ways:

- i) The study includes some different voices, and
- ii) The qualitative methods employed in the study, including the use of open-ended questions, yielded richer information about each expert's views than could be inferred from a review of published literature.

Findings from the questionnaire study contribute to answering both of the research questions. The results show what current experts are examining in their work with gifted adults, their aims, preferred methods and, where possible, any theoretical or conceptual frameworks they use. Hence, the findings (described in detail in Chapter Six) provide important information about what is currently driving interest in the topic of gifted adults. The results of the questionnaire study also contribute to answering the question of how to move forward with research on the topic in the future by providing new insight into some problems related to, for example, methodology and bias, and show some emerging ideas and interests related to the topic of gifted adults, as discussed below.

Summary of Experts' Interests. As discussed above and in Chapter Five, the Delphi panel recognized a plurality of interests and approaches to the topic of gifted adults. The results of the questionnaire study add to our knowledge about the plurality by providing much more detail about the different views and approaches of the 76 experts who participated in my research.

A key finding from the questionnaire study is the breadth of interests and research priorities amongst the 76 experts. While some of the topics of interest to these experts (summarized in Table 19 below, and discussed in detail in Chapter Six) are similar to those identified in the literature survey, others are new. Furthermore, the comprehensive analysis

revealed specific and detailed topics of interest and research questions, something that was not possible in the literature survey or the Delphi study.

New and/or highly specific areas of interest found in this study include the psychological effects of physical deterioration in elderly gifted adults, prevention of medical misdiagnosis of gifted adults, emotional and social responses of gifted adults within work teams, and differentiation of sub-populations of gifted adults, such as twice-exceptional and profoundly gifted adults. The findings also revealed some interest in gifted adults from different cultural backgrounds, as well as interest in examining the concept of *gifted adults* using different cultural lenses. As shown in the literature survey, these topics of interest are largely absent in academic publications. These findings, therefore, contribute directly to answering the question of what currently drives interest, and also highlight some pockets of interest that represent voices that need to be taken into account and included in conversations about moving forward.

Another key finding from the questionnaire study relates to where these experts have interests in common. The use of open-ended questions and a detailed, latent level analysis of individual responses allowed me to identify where individual experts might have multiple areas of interest, and where experts' use of different terms might otherwise obscure common areas of interest. As a result, the findings reveal some areas of common interest that were likely previously unknown, given the current fragmentation of the field. For example, Table 20 shows that over half of the experts are interested in topics related to mental health, including provision of mental health services to gifted adults, and that well over a third of them are interested in occupation or employment-related topics. The latter is particularly interesting, given the job-related difficulties described in the focus groups and lack of published literature about gifted adults in employment -related contexts.

Table 20*Summary of Areas of Interest to the Experts*

Area of interest	Number of experts interested
Mental health or related service provision	36
Self-awareness or gifted identity	30
Relationships	25
Occupation/work contexts	25
Public awareness	23
Domain-related achievement	17
Age-related issues	16
Neurological factors	9

Approaches and conceptual muddles. The latent-level analysis of the questionnaire data also brought to light details about the range of approaches used by experts in the field. Consistent with the literature survey and the results of the Delphi study, results of the questionnaire show that the 76 experts used a variety of conceptual and operational definitions of key concepts, and that many different theories, disciplines and subjective experiences influence their work (these are all discussed in detail in Chapter Six). A key finding from the questionnaire study is that, while experts might name particular definitions, theories, or models, a close look at the data shows that most combine various characteristics, test scores, behaviours and achievements as they talk about gifted adults.

These findings raise important questions about the relevance of models, definitions and theories typically used in gifted-related studies (and used by many of the experts here) to the complex topic of gifted adults. As discussed in Chapter Six, it seems possible that the conceptual muddiness found in the published literature and in the questionnaire study data signals an emerging field, where existing models and theories may not be adequate or relevant, and where new ideas are needed.

Related to that, the results of the questionnaire study support the findings from the literature survey, that many experts working with gifted adults have backgrounds in gifted education and talent development studies, and with research with children in educational environments. As discussed in Chapter Six, with a few exceptions, the approaches, methods, theories, and definitions presented by the experts were developed for studying gifted children, and many are linked to policies, practise and pedagogy of gifted education, particularly in American education systems. These findings help us understand the history of some of the taken-for-granted methods and theories currently being used in research with gifted adults, and raise important issues regarding relevance, as well as bias and other problematic legacies (discussed below as implicit influences).

However, an important finding from the questionnaire study is that there are also experts working with gifted adults who have backgrounds in adult-related areas such as counselling and other wellness-related professions, occupational health, employment-related coaching, tertiary education, human resource management and even sociology. This information is new and not fully evident in the literature. It therefore contributes to answering the question of what drives interest in gifted adults by revealing the diversity and range of current expertise and interest in gifted adults. In terms of future directions, while these findings only relate to the 76 experts who participated in the study and may not generalize beyond this group, the range and nature of the experts' backgrounds raises the possibility that new adult-focused approaches to the study of gifted adults can emerge, but that publication or other scholarly biases may need to be made transparent.

Implicit influences. Clearly, the experts' stated research aims and questions, and their approaches provide information about what is driving interest in the topic of gifted adults, and also give an indication of likely future research directions. Additionally, the latent-level analysis employed in this study reveals some *implicit* influences on researchers' interests and approaches

to the topic of gifted adults, including discipline-specific rhetoric, unexamined biases including a predominantly WEIRD perspective, and legacies from early research in other gifted-related areas, including intelligence research and gifted education. A notable example is the finding that, despite no consensus and considerable diversity in opinion on the definition of gifted adults, almost all of the experts imposed an intelligence-based concept of giftedness, either directly in their research aims and the variables and factors they study, or indirectly in the recruitment methods they use in their research. These results align with the findings from the literature survey. In simple terms, this is an example of the ‘tail wagging the dog’, where taken-for-granted ideas and methods implicitly shape the research, including what can and cannot be inferred from the findings, *sometimes in complete contrast to the stated research aims and interests.*

These and similar results from the questionnaire study make implicit influences more explicit, and available for reflection and for consideration in future conversations about research with gifted adults, thereby contributing to answering the question of how to move forward with research. More generally, the findings expose issues and problems that have been discussed for years in other gifted-related fields, and without examination, may well lead to intransigent problems in research with gifted adults. On the other hand, this study brought them to light, presented an interpretation, and, I hope, will open a larger conversation once published.

Voices of gifted adults: The focus group study. The focus groups added to the conversation the voices of 15 adults who self-identify as gifted. As discussed in Chapter Seven, I did not impose either IQ or performance-based definitions as part of my recruitment and selection methods. Rather, consistent with my social justice approach and exploratory qualitative methodology, I avoided imposing any conceptual understanding of *gifted adult*. Participants’ self-identification remained grounded in their own understanding of the concept,

and their subjective experiences. Hence (and unusually in gifted-related research) the findings reflect perspectives that are not limited to specific conceptual understandings of key concepts.

Summary of the theme and sub themes. I consider the focus group study, which includes and engages with the views and opinions of gifted adults, to be an essential part of the overall methodology employed in the research, and the findings to be of considerable importance to the thesis. In keeping with the principles of social justice, if future research is going to be meaningful, researchers and others involved must understand what is relevant and of benefit to gifted adults themselves, and what is not.

Unfortunately, as the literature survey results show, the voices and opinions of gifted adults are not well represented in published research on the topic. Hence, it has not been possible to know if historic and current research is meaningful to the community ‘being studied’. Nor, to my knowledge, have gifted adults come together to discuss research, including how (and why) to build knowledge. This focus group study therefore makes an important and original contribution to the field by including previously excluded voices from conversations about ‘them’. The findings (discussed in detail in Chapter Seven) contribute to answering my research questions by challenging many taken-for-granted assumptions in gifted-related studies and publications, and by introducing new perspectives into the conversation about how to move forward.

Key findings from the focus group study are summed up by the single theme: *We are not that! Our experiences tell different stories*, and by the three sub themes:

Sub theme 1: Trapped by the usual narratives.

Sub theme 2: Othering: out of place and somehow ‘wrong’.

Sub theme 3: Values are being imposed.

As the theme and sub themes show, the results of the focus group study explicitly name and confront some of the conceptual confusion and differences found in the literature survey,

and in the Delphi and questionnaire studies. For example, the findings clearly bring to light the differences between constructs of *gifted adults* that emphasize achievement versus those that focus on internal experiences, and the apparent lack of bridge between the two. This is perhaps seen most clearly in the first sub theme: ‘Trapped by the usual narratives’, where participants struggled with a mismatch between the narrowness and emphases of stereotypes of giftedness, and the breadth of their lived experiences.

The findings also contribute important new information by shining light on two interrelated blind spots in research with gifted adults:

- i. unexamined assumptions about gifted adults’ aspirations for achievement-related eminence, and
- ii. the potentially cumulative negative impact on gifted adults of some of the usual rhetoric in gifted-related fields including gifted education.

To my knowledge, these issues, perspectives and problems have not previously been identified, or published and discussed in scholarly literature. The findings therefore represent an important and timely contribution to knowledge and, in terms of this thesis, add unique and relevant perspectives that help answer both research questions.

Some challenges for the field. Concerning the question of what drives current interest in the topic of gifted adults, one implication of the focus group findings is that scholars in gifted-related fields may need to reflect on the topics historically of interest, not only in terms of relevance to gifted adults but also keeping in mind potential benefits and harm. For example, the results of this study suggest that the pervasive discourse in gifted-related studies around academic and occupational achievement and public recognition (and related ideas about underachievement) may negatively impact some gifted adults. This seems a fruitful and important area of research, especially considering the interest in mental health and well-being of gifted adults found in the relatively current literature, and the Delphi study results.

As for the question of how to move forward, it will be important to consider the extent to which research foci are responsive to issues that are meaningful to gifted adults themselves. The findings from the four focus groups present some strong challenges to what appears to be a historically top-down approach to research with gifted adults. The challenges and specific issues presented by participants in this study point to the need to include bottom-up grassroots approaches, where the voices, and specific needs and priorities of gifted adults are foregrounded. As I discovered, such approaches are not the norm in published studies.

More generally, the findings raise important questions about who determines the research aims in this area of study, including the variables and outcomes of interest and, related to that, which populations are included in current and future conversations and research with gifted adults, and which are excluded.

For those of us who have led relatively privileged lives, to be of use...we must be sceptical of the wisdom and limits of our own situated knowledges; we must begin with critical interrogation of how privilege shapes what we know and more so what we don't. And if we dare to venture into policy or research in "other people's communities," we must build knowledge, community, and public science with others, never in a comfortable, homogeneous gated community of self-appointed 'experts'. (Fine, 2012, p. 116)

I do not wish to overstate the findings from this study and their implications, as this is exploratory research and inferences beyond these fifteen participants cannot be made. On the other hand, the consensus amongst participants, and between the four groups, is noteworthy, particularly in light of the biases and gaps reported in the literature survey. It seems that the views of these 15 gifted adults and those most strongly represented in scholarly publications are very much at odds. It also seems both fair and important to suggest that the results of this study should encourage anyone interested in gifted-related topics, including those interested in adults,

to reflexively consider the aims and assumptions inherent in their work, and fully engage with the communities they study and serve.

Section Two: Three Considerations for Moving Forward

Social justice emphasizes deliberation and (in terms of outcomes) trusts the power of dialogue. (Frederking, 2013, p. 27)

In this section, I return to the overall aim of the thesis, which is to find ways forward for research in this complex and under-researched field. As discussed throughout this thesis, the paradigm within which I address this topic is exploratory and discovery-oriented, and framed by a process-oriented social justice approach. The overall aim of exploratory research is to gain insight, and I do not believe there is a ‘one size fits all’ answer to the many questions raised in this thesis. Rather, I wanted to catalyse a process of engagement and debate around the topic of research with gifted adults, and I hope that the thesis and the considerations offered here will continue to stimulate reflection and dialogue within and between the various communities interested in gifted adults. Taking into account the results from the literature survey and all of the studies, I offer three interrelated considerations for moving forward with research with gifted adults.

Consideration One: This is an emerging field. Throughout this thesis, and particularly in Chapter Six, I described how many of the findings can be understood as signs of an emerging field of study where little is known about the topic. Viewed through that lens, the diverse and even conflicting views found here reveal breadth and variation in factors of interest, and expose conceptual and other gaps that will eventually need to be filled. In an emerging field, the differences and even disagreements about, for example, definition and terminology, are expected, and can be valuable *if* the lack of common ground helps us discover philosophical differences and make important conceptual distinctions. Over time, and with careful attention,

differences and convergences can begin to generate new lines of inquiry and research programs (Booth, 2008; Lakatos, 1978).

We need to recognise that, as an emerging area of interest, research with gifted adults is exploratory rather than theory-driven, and the emphasis is on discovery rather than explanation or confirmation. Related to that, the focus is on description, and any modelling for explanation, prediction or even categorization is premature (Reiter, 2013). On the other hand, the findings here show a preponderance of theories, concepts and models inherited from areas of study such as intelligence research and gifted education, where there are strong emphases on prediction, measurement, and categorization, for example within education systems. Therefore, thinking of the topic of *gifted adults* as an emerging field means that researchers need to carefully consider how they view their work, including their research aims and intended outcomes, and be willing to critically reflect on and, perhaps, move on from the methods employed in what might be their more familiar disciplines.

Of course, this may not be palatable and perhaps will feel a bit like ‘throwing the baby out with the bath water’ to some stakeholders, including authors and publishers. However, given the findings here, including the paucity of research, breadth of interests, plurality of views and problematic legacies, it seems important to reflect on *what kind of knowledge researchers are able to achieve* about gifted adults, now and in the upcoming few years, and to consider taking a fresh discovery-oriented approach that opens space for new insights, and potentially bypasses problematic dogma from other gifted-related fields.

Consideration Two: Research with gifted adults needs to be ‘fit for purpose’. The results of the literature survey and studies show that experts working with gifted adults tend to be influenced by, and operate within, their respective disciplines, and that many have backgrounds in gifted education and other child-oriented fields. It seems inevitable that there will be a repositioning of ideas and practises as researchers and practitioners focus on new

problems and issues within contexts relevant to gifted *adults*, and it appears that this is beginning to happen. It is, therefore, important to highlight the need for caution when considering applying concepts or methods developed in child-oriented fields to gifted adults. Their meaning and value may well differ. Put simply, there is an immediate opportunity and need to examine the ‘fit’ between issues that are relevant to gifted adults and some taken-for-granted discourses, conceptual tools, and methods developed for understanding gifted children that may not ‘fit’ so well. While this issue of ‘fit’ was raised in all of the studies, I note that the conversation is virtually absent in the published literature, again pointing to the need to make any biases transparent.

This is a time for critical reflexivity, where responsiveness and relevance need to be kept in mind. One of the challenges for moving forward with ‘fit for purpose’ research on this topic is that scholars will need to consider the heterogeneity of any ‘population’ of gifted adults, and the possibility that there are multiple populations and sub-populations, including gifted adults of various ages. Similarly, the lack of culturally sensitive perspectives found here shows that there is important work to be done to understand the experiences of gifted adults from non-western cultures. Therefore, research will need to be responsive to the needs, issues, and priorities of populations that likely differ in important ways, and are similar in others.

Consideration Three: Working with complexity. Advancing knowledge in this complex area will require us to be open to multiple perspectives and approaches, and perhaps to a degree of confusion. In both new and transforming phases of research, the evolution of ideas and methods is expected, but this does not necessarily imply movement toward a single unified perspective or even the integration of several perspectives (Morgan, 2014). Given the complexity of the topic of *gifted adults*, the disciplinary spread of those entering the field, and the diversity of research aims and factors of interest reported here, I suggest that a single perspective is not only unlikely now, but would be unsuccessful in the future.

While the results here show that published research with gifted adults has historically been dominated by a few approaches and methodologies, the Delphi panel recommended that research with gifted adults embrace multiple approaches and methodologies to build knowledge about gifted adults. It appears useful and timely to consider the benefits of the multiple perspectives and different levels of analysis (Ambrose, 2005, Ambrose et al., 2010, Dai, 2005) with a view to embrace rather than reduce the complexity inherent in the topic.

The question for researchers and others working with gifted adults then becomes how to view and work with the current diversity. For example, the concept of *giftedness*, and therefore *gifted adults*, currently has a multiplicity of meanings and it seems likely that will continue. Viewed through a complexity lens, the diversity allows for a richness of different emphases. Practically, where the different meanings are at variance with one another, specificity and clear communication are essential. Similarly, silos of interest or differences of opinions may exist for reasons that can build knowledge by focussing on important heterogeneity and distinctions, including different populations or sub-groups of gifted adults. Again, synchrony will require specification, precision in communication, and methodological rigour, but not a 'one size fits all' approach. As Johnson (2005) wrote years ago (about gifted education):

Clinging too tightly to a particular perception affects what we look at, how we look at it, what we see, what we represent, and how we represent it. In this sense, we become the person who loses a key in the shadows, but looks for it under the streetlight because there is more light there. (p.71)

In general, acknowledging complexity in this emerging area of study will mean that researchers, editors, peer reviewers, gifted adults, and others interested in the topic need to find new approaches to building knowledge, and new ways to work together and to share information, often in the face of historical differences. I have found Frederking's (2013) process-oriented social justice approach to be a useful way to frame my own exploration of the

topic, and one that others interested in building knowledge about gifted adults may also find useful going forward. As Frederking points out:

[S]ocial justice does not anticipate consensus as an outcome nor does it refuse conflict as part of its process. However, it does require that individuals rid themselves of the competitive orientation ... While disagreement will exist and may prevail, the expectation to win some particular outcome in the social justice arena is absent. (2013, p. 41)

Section Three: Conclusions

To my knowledge, this thesis provides the first comprehensive exploration of research with gifted adults, and is the first research project on the topic of gifted adults to take into account the views of multiple stakeholders, including a large number of current experts and four groups of gifted adults. The work therefore makes several significant and original contributions to building knowledge about gifted adults, and these are identified and discussed in more detail below. Nonetheless, the contributions and findings of this thesis and research need to be understood in light of some major limitations. Therefore, before discussing the contributions and implications, I identify some limitations and recommend further research to address each.

Limitations and further research. The main weakness in all of the studies was the lack of cultural diversity within the participant groups. Since the participants in the Delphi and questionnaire studies were from primarily WEIRD countries, it is not possible to say anything about the views, priorities, and approaches of experts working with gifted adults in non-Western countries. Further research is needed to establish whether there *are* researchers working with gifted adults outside of Western countries, and if so, another Delphi study could add to the literature by telling us where they are, their interests, and how they approach the topic. Similarly, the findings from the focus group study tell us nothing about the views of gifted adults from non-Western countries, and further focus groups could be carried out with

participants from a broad range of countries, cultures and backgrounds. It would be interesting and important to compare results, and to examine any differences and commonalities.

Another limitation is the general paucity of literature and research on the topic. It seems there has been little reflection on research with gifted adults. Therefore, my findings and interpretations are not able to be compared to similar studies. This is qualitative research and I have made my subjectivity and positionality clear, including my disciplinary backgrounds and what brought me to this research. However, other perspectives will be needed to build on these findings and move forward with this complex area of study. Further exploratory work needs to be done by experts with different backgrounds, and by gifted adults themselves, to clearly identify priorities and methods that are meaningful and relevant to all stakeholders.

An issue that was not directly addressed in this thesis or my studies was whether my use of the term *gifted* limited the research, despite the explanation I gave about using the term heuristically. It is possible that my language choice could have prefigured a category (Lefrance & Wigginton, 2019) and, therefore, affected both recruitment and responses by including participants who in some way identify with that term and how I used it, and by excluding those who do not. In hindsight, that is a question I could have asked directly. Future researchers could explore if or how their use of the term *gifted* impacts recruitment. Given the many definitions, and the general squeamishness about the word amongst participants in my studies, such transparency seems important.

Finally, this is exploratory, discovery-oriented research focussed on bringing clarity to the topic and to the research problem. Therefore, while the findings increase our knowledge about the topic of research with gifted adults, and provide considerable insight including ideas for future research, they do not provide answers, nor are the findings meant to contribute to theory. Further studies are needed to examine and potentially demonstrate the value of the ideas and pragmatic recommendations, explanations and considerations presented here.

Contributions. This thesis and research make several original and significant contributions to the field. Some have been identified and discussed in the previous section. Here, I identify and discuss five key contributions:

One: Introduces a new perspective. This thesis provides a new perspective on research with gifted adults – namely the study of gifted adults is positioned as a new and emerging field of interest. This perspective begins to uncouple the topic from gifted education, gifted children, and to some extent from intelligence research, a reorientation that is in line with the priorities and views of the communities of interest, as found in my research. Positioning the topic as an emerging field also reflects the findings from the literature and contemporary experts, about the current state of research and knowledge in the field.

This new perspective offers researchers and others interested in gifted adults a useful framework for considering the existing gaps in understanding and, given that, the types of knowledge we are currently able to build, where more work is needed to build a solid foundation for future study, and relevant methods for different stages. Hence, the thesis also contributes to the gifted adult literature by providing both a baseline for current research and highlighting some key areas for future study.

Two: Provides an updated and extended review of published literature. The findings contribute directly to the literature by updating the only published review of the gifted adults literature, and extending that review by including previously excluded qualitative research. Findings from the literature survey bring to light historic and current influences on thinking and research methods. These reveal biases and other challenges facing researchers in other gifted-related fields that, prior to this thesis, have not been made explicit and examined in relation to the study of gifted adults. I hope that, by opening the conversation now, researchers and others interested in gifted adults will find new ways forward, and leave behind the more problematic legacies.

Three: Brings challenges to light. The thesis presents some challenges to the field that I consider significant and original contributions to the study of gifted adults, and to gifted studies more generally. From a social justice perspective, this thesis contributes what, to my knowledge, is the first research on the topic to specifically include the views and recommendations of gifted adults, together with those of experts in the field. The findings from the focus groups particularly challenge many taken-for-granted assumptions about gifted adults, bring to light issues that have real-world implications for gifted adults and their families, and, by doing so, make a meaningful contribution to all gifted related fields.

The studies reveal the almost universal prevalence of Western ideology, and, related to that, the absence of multicultural lenses in current and historical research with gifted adults. While these and other biases found here may be ‘uncomfortable truths’, the thesis and the published studies make them transparent and available for examination, something that seems particularly important and meaningful in the contexts of 2020 and beyond. I hope that the findings, together with the social justice approach I use and recommend, will ensure that current and future research with gifted adults avoids the intransigent problems and biases found in other gifted-related fields.

Four: Builds knowledge by bringing people together. The studies themselves contributed directly to building knowledge in the field by bringing people together to exchange views, identify commonalities and differences, and develop an understanding about what we need to tackle in the future. One of the intended aims of the Delphi process was to catalyse interest and collaboration amongst experts who otherwise may not have connected. Results of the study were disseminated to all panel members, and more widely, via the published journal article and conference presentations. COVID-19 lockdowns globally have meant that several meetings have been postponed, but my hope is that this exploratory work will continue to

catalyze action, connection and dialogue, and form a basis for the early stages of a global research programme with gifted adults.

Five: Explores and demonstrates innovative methodology. Finally, the thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge in the social sciences by exploring and demonstrating the value of a unique combination of qualitative methods. Specifically, the combination of the three research methods I used – the iterative Policy Delphi, the questionnaire, and the semi-structured focus groups - brought fragmented stakeholder groups together, and generated rich data to answer the research questions from multiple and relevant perspectives. The different levels of TA - semantic and latent – yielded new insights about both explicit and implicit influences on approaches to the topic of gifted adults. The process-oriented social justice approach that frames my work has not, to my knowledge, been applied directly to a research project of this nature before. Frederikings' (2013) process and principles provided relevant and robust scaffolding for this iterative, qualitative, multi-method research project. Hence, the overall methodology of the thesis demonstrates an original and useful option for researchers interested in this and other topics that require multidisciplinary and inclusive conversations in order to move forward.

A lesson, a reflection, a disappointment, and the gifts. As I complete this project and the thesis, I laugh at what I thought I 'knew' setting out – and that tells me some learning has taken place! There have been some lessons along the way, and many unforeseen ups and downs.

An important lesson has to do with the unanticipated and somewhat overwhelming response to the Delphi study recruitment. Given the lack of published literature on the topic of gifted adults, I did not anticipate managing a Delphi process with 76 panel members. My supervisors and I had agreed in advance that I could proceed with a minimum of eight panel members, and we were hopeful that it would stretch to an even dozen. I had no plans in place to limit the numbers. I leave the reader to imagine our reactions as the numbers gradually climbed to 76. The volume of data collected over three rounds was staggering. In retrospect, would I do

something different? Actually, no. The lesson I learned was that there are many experts working hard, and with passion, in support of gifted adults, and that much of the work is not reflected in the academic literature.

Something I would do differently is to combine the voices of the experts and the gifted adults in a single study. Conversations in the focus groups provide important insights that some experts hinted at, or perhaps had wondered about, but that are not generally found in the gifted literature. On reflection, I believe a carefully facilitated set of focus groups (or similar) including, for example, researchers, clinicians and gifted adults, would increase knowledge amongst all of those key communities of interest and, in keeping with a socially just research, reposition ideas about ‘expert’ and ‘subject’.

The impact of COVID-19 on my work was, and continues to be, the only disappointment. This year –2020– was to be the year for bringing people together to catalyse some collaborations that are clearly needed to move the field forward. The feedback I received over the past few years tells me that my research, presentations, and publications generated interest around the world, and that people were readying to meet to share ideas and begin working together. This came to a sudden halt in March 2020. I can only say (to myself): “Watch this space”.

Response to my work has been overwhelmingly positive. Participants in the studies were energetic, enthusiastic, and willing to engage with the questions and processes. Conference organizers embraced this somewhat new topic of *research with gifted adults* and welcomed my presentations. For the most part (but not always), editors and peer reviewers were kind and helpful, and where my ideas presented challenges that triggered defensiveness – I hope that some reflection also took place. This sort of research project, which includes various stakeholders, multiple methods, fine-grained analyses, publications, and presentations, offers,

above all else, the gift of meaningful connections between many passionate and well-intentioned people. In 2020 and going forward, perhaps that is what matters most.

Compartmentalizing complexity is a common challenge around social justice today.

Perhaps most generally, we lobby for peace at the macro political level but malign others or escalate hostility in our more pedestrian one-on-one daily interactions. Too often, social justice becomes compartmentalized around the set of issues that suits our own purposes. So, in a peculiar trend, social justice has become both ubiquitous and strategic, ... it has lost its calling as a way of viewing the world and acting in the world. Social justice needs to return to its roots of affecting society's values ... not policies, but rather a way of being together that makes us more accountable to each other, more connected to each other, and more deeply tolerant of each other. (Frederking, 2013, p. 6)

Appendices

Appendix A: PIS Delphi



SCIENCE
SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY

Level 2, Building 302
Science Centre
23 Symonds Street
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand
Telephone 64 9 373 7599 ext. 89693
Email: maggie.brown@auckland.ac.nz

Participant Information Sheet

Project Title: **Using an International Multidisciplinary Delphi Process to Develop a Research Framework for Understanding Giftedness in Adults**

Names of researcher: Maggie Brown

Names of Supervisors: Dr. Elizabeth Peterson; Dr. Catherine Rawlinson

Dear Participant

I am Maggie Brown and I am a PhD student at the University of Auckland, Department of Psychology working under the supervision of Dr. Elizabeth Peterson and Dr. Catherine Rawlinson. I have also worked as a counsellor with gifted adults for over ten years and I present internationally about counselling and coaching gifted adults.

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study which aims to find out what experts in the gifted adults area think is needed to develop the research field. In doing this research I hope to develop a multidisciplinary research framework to enable us to better understand giftedness in adults.

What is involved?

The study uses a Delphi process to solicit and pool the ideas and judgements of experts in giftedness in adults. The Delphi process consists of a series of three electronically administered questionnaires, and the systematic analysis and feedback of results to participants for further comment, with the aims of reaching consensus on some issues and gaining insight into differing views.

The overall objective of this project is to make a substantial contribution to the development of a research framework for the emerging study of giftedness in adults. This includes:

1. identifying and shedding light on current methodological problems and preferences;
2. generating solutions and new ideas; and
3. establishing priorities and actions for future research globally.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete three electronically based questionnaires over an eight-month period.

- Questionnaire One will require between 30 and 45 minutes
 - This will include questions about your specific interests in the field, definitions, constructs, research methodology, current knowledge and knowledge gaps.
- Questionnaires Two and Three will require between 45 and 60 minutes
 - Information obtained in the previous round(s) will be analysed and fed back to you. Depending on the data, you will be requested to vote, rank, agree or disagree, and/or comment.

Autonomy is an important aspect of the Delphi method, and you will be free to choose which questions you respond to. You will have four weeks to complete each questionnaire. After that time data will be analysed to be presented in the next questionnaire.

Privacy and Confidentiality

The preservation of your confidentiality is paramount to us. In order to protect your privacy and ensure confidentiality, before analysis all identifying information will be removed by a research assistant who is not directly involved in the project and who has signed a confidentiality agreement.

The information you share with the researcher will also remain confidential to myself and my supervisors. However, if English is not your preferred language you may request that your responses are translated, using a translator who will sign a confidentiality agreement.

Your name and contact details are required to link your responses across the three waves of the study, and to enter you in the prize draws. This identifying information will be removed and stored separately from the data sets, and will not be used as part of analysis or in any reports or publications.

Benefits

By participating in this study, you will have an opportunity to engage with ideas from other experts in the field of gifted adults and help contribute to the further development of the field.

As a participant, on completion of each questionnaire we will also enter you into a draw to win an Amazon gift voucher valued at \$100 for Questionnaire One, \$200 for Questionnaire Two, and \$300 for Questionnaire Three.

Potential risks

There is no personal risk or discomfort directly involved with this research. However, because participants share a common research interest, it is possible you will know, or know of, each other. Your privacy will be protected by de-identifying all data. The audience for any publications or presentations may also know, or know of, you. All identifying information will be removed from the results.

Data storage

The data will be collected electronically and held in a password protected file. On completion of the survey, data will be downloaded and stored in digital files in a secure facility at the Department of

Psychology, Faculty of Science, University of Auckland. All information and data stored on the computer will be password protected and held for six years, after which all digital files will be permanently deleted.

Withdrawing from the study

Participation in the study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. Withdrawal of data already analysed is not possible, but data which has not yet been analysed can be withdrawn on request, via an email to the researcher.

Further information

If you require any further information, please contact me (Maggie Brown) or my supervisors:

Maggie Brown: maggie.brown@auckland.ac.nz

Dr. Elizabeth Peterson: e.peterson@auckland.ac.nz

Dr. Catherine Rawlinson: c.rawlinson@auckland.ac.nz

For any queries regarding ethical concerns, you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland, New Zealand 1142. Telephone +64 9 373-7599 ext 83711. Email: ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz.

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on Nov. 3, 2017 For three years. Reference Number 020162

Appendix B: PIS Focus Groups



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Telephone 64 9 373 7599 ext. 89693
Email: maggie.brown@auckland.ac.nz

Participant Information Sheet

Project Title: **We Live This: Giving Voice to Gifted Adults**

Names of researcher: Maggie Brown

Names of Supervisors: Dr. Elizabeth Peterson; Dr. Catherine Rawlinson

I am Maggie Brown and I am a PhD student at the University of Auckland, Department of Psychology working under the supervision of Dr. Elizabeth Peterson and Dr. Catherine Rawlinson.

I have worked as a counsellor with gifted adults for over ten years and I present internationally about counselling and coaching gifted adults. I am also an experienced group facilitator.

The overall purpose of this study is to add the voice of gifted adults to key conversations emerging within the study of adult giftedness. We want to explore how you define and experience your giftedness, and what you feel needs to be better understood about gifted adults.

The research will be used as partial completion of the requirements of a PhD, and possibly for academic publication and conference presentations. A summary report of findings will be available to participants on request.

What is involved?

This is an online focus group interview using web-based video conferencing. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to join four or five others in a semi-structured focus group for 60 minutes. I will moderate the group by prompting discussion about these research questions:

1. What criteria do you, as gifted adults, use to self-identify as being gifted?
2. How do experience your giftedness?
3. What do you believe are the priorities for study and research in the field of adult giftedness?
Why?

You do not have to have strong opinions on these questions or any well-established thoughts, you also do not have to answer all these questions.

I will send you instructions on how to use the video conferencing app ZOOM, and offer you an opportunity to trial it with me prior to the focus group session.

The focus group will be video and audio recorded and I will transcribe the data. I will ask for your permission to record and transcribe the data as part of the Informed Consent process.

As a way of showing our appreciation, we will send each focus group participant a \$30US online book voucher.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Due to the nature of video recorded focus group research, your responses will not be confidential during the focus group sessions. However beyond that, and once the focus group session has ended, responses will be transcribed, and a research assistant who is not directly involved in the focus group and who has signed a confidentiality agreement will assign a pseudonym to de-identify your responses. This pseudonym will be used during analysis, and in reports and publications. Your name and contact details will be extracted from the data set and stored separately by the research assistant. On registering your interest in participating you will be asked to provide some demographic information. This will be used to compose the groups, and for analysis of the study data. All care will be taken to ensure that where demographic information is reported, it is presented in a way that does not personally identify you.

Due to the nature of focus group research, participants in your group may recognize your contributions in reports and publications. Every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality in reporting by using pseudonyms and de-identifying information.

Entry to the focus group is password protected. In order to further protect privacy, we require participants to be alone in a private space during the session. In the event of interruption, you will be given information in advance on how to quickly disable your participation, and I will be able to disable individual participants' recording if needed to protect privacy.

Benefits of Participating

By participating in this study, you will have a unique opportunity to share ideas, experiences and views with other gifted adults from around the world, and to contribute your voice to this field of study.

Potential risks

This is not an anonymous study because your name will be used during the focus group session. You will therefore be asked to give your informed consent to participate. Questions are welcome, and contact details are provided below.

Because we recruited participants from social media sites that are of interest to gifted adults, it is possible you will connect with each other through online activity. In order to protect your privacy and maintain confidentiality, all participants will be asked to agree to not name or discuss other group members or their responses outside of the focus group session. If you feel uncomfortable for any reason, you can withdraw, and I can follow up with you individually.

Data storage

During the focus group session video data will be securely stored on a hard drive on a password-protected University of Auckland computer. I will also have a digital voice recorder as a backup. At the end of the session the audio file from my digital voice recorder will be downloaded to that secure computer, and permanently removed from the device. All information and data stored on the computer will be password protected and held for six years, after which all digital files will be permanently deleted.

Withdrawing from the study

Participation in the study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason, by emailing me, Maggie Brown. You can also withdraw during the focus group

if you feel unable to continue, and you do not have to answer questions. However, once video recording of the focus group has commenced withdrawal of your data is not possible.

Further information

If, as a participant in this study, you would like to receive a copy of the summary of findings, please email me (Maggie Brown) at the address below.

If you require any further information, please contact me or my supervisors:

- Maggie Brown: maggie.brown@auckland.ac.nz +64 9 373 7599 ext 88413
- Dr. Elizabeth Peterson: e.peterson@auckland.ac.nz +64 9 923 9693
- Dr. Catherine Rawlinson: c.rawlinson@auckland.ac.nz +64 9 373 7999 ext 48736
- Dr. Ian Kirk (Head of Department): i.kirk@auckland.ac.nz +64 9 373-7599 ext 88524

For any queries regarding ethical concerns, you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland, New Zealand 1142. Telephone +64 9 373-7599 ext 83711. Email: ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz.

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 26 Feb, 2018 for three years. Reference Number 020764

Appendix C: Delphi Announcement

Announcement Post:

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN GIFTED ADULTS?

Announcing an exciting new study aimed at developing a global research framework for this emerging field:

Using an International Multidisciplinary Delphi Process to Develop a Research Framework for Understanding Giftedness in Adults

Are you currently doing research related to gifted adults (in any discipline)?

or

Do you have experience as a researcher, and a current interest in gifted adults?

or

Do you work professionally with gifted adults, and have done so for more than five years?

If so, we are interested in hearing from you!

This is an opportunity for you, as someone with expertise in adult giftedness, to add your voice to those of other international experts.

The Delphi process consists of 3 electronically administered questionnaires spread over an eight-month period. Information from each questionnaire is analysed and fed back to participants in subsequent rounds. This means that in addition to having a voice, you will gain insight into the ideas of others working in a variety of disciplines around the world, without leaving your desk!

To read the participant information sheet, please go to: (insert URL)

To let me know you are interested in participating, or request information, contact me:
maggie.brown@auckland.ac.nz

Please share this with others who have an interest in gifted adults and who may be eligible.

THANK YOU.

Appendix D: Delphi Invitation



INVITATION TO JOIN THE PANEL: DELPHI STUDY GIFTED ADULTS

Hello from New Zealand!

My name is Maggie Brown. I am a PhD student at the University of Auckland studying gifted adults. Having worked professionally with gifted adults for many years, I know there is much to be gained by increasing our knowledge in this important area. I find the research field rather muddled, and I believe that a collective effort is needed to gain clarity and move the field forward. Those are the aims of my current study.

I am inviting you to participate as a Panel Member in a Delphi Process:

An International Multidisciplinary Delphi Study: Researching Gifted Adults

I extend this invitation knowing that your time is precious, and also hoping that you will participate. Your voice is important to this conversation.

The project seeks to shed light on what experts like you think is happening in the study of gifted adults now, and what is needed going forward. It is an opportunity for you to present your views and to engage with ideas from other international experts who share your interest in gifted adults. Your identity will remain confidential.

If you decide to participate in this iterative multi-phase study, you will be asked to complete three electronically administered questionnaires over an eight-month period. Each requires about 30 minutes, depending on how much you write. You can choose to complete a questionnaire in one sitting, or to respond at times that suit you over a four-week period.

Details about the project and the Delphi process are available on the study website:

<http://www.delphistudy.auckland.ac.nz/>

This invitation marks the start of Round One. The URL link below is **your personal link** to the first Questionnaire, instructions and consent form. Using this link, you can access and re-access your Questionnaire anytime during the next four weeks – until and including March 5, 2018.

Please contact me if you have any questions. I am very grateful for your interest and time.
Best wishes,

Maggie Brown
Department of Psychology
University of Auckland
maggie.brown@auckland.ac.nz

Appendix E: Q2 Example Section 1

Questionnaire 2 example of item from Section One where panel members tended to disagree with each other.

Statement: Gifted adults are best understood using a developmental framework that includes childhood and adolescence.

For	Against
<p>Giftedness can be identified early & continues to develop throughout the lifespan. Aspects of development of gifted children, both idiosyncratic and more universal, must inform our study and work.</p>	<p>Adults who are gifted have specific needs and issues related to adult contexts. Research should focus specifically on gifted adults in adult contexts.</p>
<p>It is important to understand how early developmental experiences impact on gifted adults, particularly in clinical work.</p>	<p>Research with children and adolescents is being done in other fields including gifted education. Research with adults will have different questions, methods and models.</p>

Gifted adults are best understood using a developmental framework that includes childhood and adolescence:

Strongly Agree	Agree	Mildly Agree	Mildly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<input type="radio"/>					

Appendix F: Q2 Example Section 2

Questionnaire 2 example of item from Section Two where panel members mostly seemed to agree with each other.

Most panel members want to create opportunities to collaborate and share knowledge with others:

Research on giftedness in adults does not sit neatly within traditional disciplinary boundaries. This means that the usual methods of sharing knowledge - conferences, journals, collaborative research projects, databases, shared discourse - are not (yet) available. There is little cross-pollination of ideas between clinicians and researchers, countries, cultures, languages and disciplines (academic and professional).

Some progress has been made in coming together but, apart from activity in the Netherlands, this tends to be under the umbrella of 'gifted education'. Many panel members recommend a conference or symposium, and one member offered to host a 'Special Issue' in an existing journal.

How well does this match your current view?

Clearly

Mostly

Moderately

Slightly

Not at all

Can you suggest ways we can move forward on this?

Appendix G: Thought Provoker

Questionnaire 3 example of a thought provoker where panel members were asked to comment on controversial and/or challenging issues raised in previous rounds.

Many Panel Members see an immediate and urgent need for increased public awareness about giftedness in adults, and for evidence of best practice in applied settings. However, currently, it seems there is insufficient research evidence on which to base either public education or practice.

(How) can this dilemma provide direction for research in the next 5 years?

Please comment:

Appendix H: Sample of Items from Questionnaire One

1. How did you first become interested in gifted adults?
2. In your work related to gifted adults, what are the priority issues? For example, these might be questions you most want to answer, problems you most want to solve, or what you feel most inspired to change.
3. The Gifted Adult field is not without its challenges. In your work, what are currently the biggest hurdles?
4. The debate about defining 'gifted' is not new. How do YOU currently define 'gifted'? (note: if you currently use a term other than 'gifted' please say what it is, and provide your definition)
5. In your work, how do you currently identify gifted adults? Please provide as much detail as possible. (For researchers: How do you currently identify and select gifted adults for your studies?).

Appendix I: Reminder from Round 1



This is a quick and friendly reminder of the final submission date for Questionnaire One:
March 5, 2018.

Remember – you are welcome to submit a fully OR partially completed questionnaire. We invite you respond to questions that are most meaningful to you right now.

We'll include your data in our analyses, and in Round Two you'll learn about and engage with what other experts have said. The conversation will continue.

On behalf of the research team, thank you for your interest and your time!
Kind regards,

Maggie Brown
School of Psychology
University of Auckland

Appendix J: Focus Group Announcement



DO YOU IDENTIFY AS BEING GIFTED?

ARE YOU 18 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER?

ARE YOU FLUENT IN CONVERSATIONAL ENGLISH?

I am looking for participants for an exciting new study!

We Live This: Giving Voice to Gifted Adults

By participating in an online focus group, you will have a unique opportunity to:
Share ideas and views with other gifted adults from around the world

AND

Contribute your voice to research on adult giftedness

The online focus group will include between 4-6 participants, and will be carefully moderated. It will require approximately one hour of your time.

The focus group will be conducted and video recorded using ZOOM – an online platform, using your own computer wherever you are. If you're not familiar with ZOOM don't worry. It's easy and I'll provide instructions in advance if needed.

To show appreciation, if you participate you will receive an online book voucher valued at \$30US.

If you are interested and meet the eligibility criteria above, please contact me by email to learn more. The study starts on _____ (insert date).

maggie.brown@auckland.ac.nz

Please share this with others who have an interest and who may be eligible.

THANK YOU!

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on Feb. 26, 2018 for three years,
Reference Number 020764

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