

You Don't Outgrow It! Giftedness Across the Lifespan

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ABSTRACT: *Gifted adults often deny their abilities, believing they couldn't possibly be "gifted" even if they were identified at earlier ages. Some believe they "outgrew" giftedness. Even those who recognize their true nature as gifted individuals spend much of their lives masking their giftedness and concealing who they really are. Complex issues of giftedness manifest themselves at various stages of life for gifted adults—from young adulthood, through the middle years, and on through the remainder of their lives. These issues transcend standard expectations such as those described by Erikson, Sheehy, Jacobsen, Streznewski, Armstrong, and others. Experiences commonly shared by gifted adults are worth examining at each stage of life, as well as considering how, throughout their lives, these individuals might explore and discover their giftedness.*

Walking out of class one evening with one of her brightest graduate students, the professor of gifted education candidly said to him, "Why is it so easy for me to acknowledge your giftedness and so difficult to acknowledge my own?" He turned to her and said, "It's just the same for me. I don't have any trouble recognizing how gifted you are, but I just don't see myself as gifted." That same professor acknowledged that she never considered that she might be gifted until she surprised herself by scoring in the 95th percentile on the Graduate Record Exam, even though throughout her life she had heard, "You're so bright; why don't you... (do better in school, get better grades, etc.—i.e., accomplish more)?"

Linda Silverman often asks audiences in her presentations to parents of the gifted, "How many of you are gifted?" Very few hands go up. And yet, when she says, "How many of you have gifted children?" virtually every hand is raised. Similarly, if she asks about their spouses, their own parents, their siblings, and their friends, they readily acknowledge the giftedness in others, even though it is highly