How to Charm Gifted Adults into Admitting Giftedness: Their Own and Somebody Else’s

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ABSTRACT: Many gifted adults are not aware of their giftedness or deny it for lack of adequate knowledge about the subject. They often carry the load of being different all alone and unaware of the true reasons for those differences. In 2001 we introduced the concept of Xi, eXtra intelligence, in the Netherlands, to charm gifted adults into learning more about giftedness and what it means to themselves. By comparing definitions of giftedness and Xi, it becomes apparent why it is not easy to admit to giftedness as an adult. The low threshold to acknowledgement of being Xi helps gifted adults to find new ways for personal expression and development of a well-balanced gifted identity.

The Loneliness of Being Misinformed about Giftedness

In my current experience and view, the biggest “social issue of the gifted” is the painful misfit between implicit beliefs about giftedness by the non-gifted and the gifted alike and the actual or perceived reality of very many gifted adults.

That misfit leads to utter loneliness: It impedes the sharing of one’s deep feelings and experiences related to giftedness with others because of the belief that these have nothing to do with being gifted. It also leads to avoiding calling oneself gifted – even if the direct question is asked – because of strong inner convictions about not qualifying for that seemingly outstanding state of being. I feel this is strongly connected to the dominant belief that for adults their giftedness is defined by actual eminent achievement, with the tacit assumption that only something like a Nobel Prize will be sufficient proof of eminence. This belief leaves
little room for differentiation between “what other people perceive you do” and “who you are” and obscures the relevance of well-established information about special personality characteristics of highly intelligent people, also called their “gifted identity.”

In the course of this article I will expand on some aspects of this gifted identity. The importance of being actively aware of such identity is explained in an article by Andrew Mahoney (1998), “In Search of the Gifted Identity.” In his article “identity” encompasses the complexity of all aspects of “who I am.”

In the summary of his article Mahoney states:

Knowing one’s giftedness and having a well-developed sense of identity as a gifted person are crucial for the development of the self. Many gifted people struggle with their giftedness, what it means to be gifted and how to develop that potential because there are few models available to assist in the identity development and counseling of gifted people (p.222).

In other words, it is essential for gifted people to be aware of their identity, of “who they are.” Additionally, their giftedness influences their identity; positive awareness of this influence is crucial for the development of their potential.

Mahoney introduces four constructs that influence the development of a gifted identity as a part of the whole self. They are:

- **Validation**, an acknowledgement that one’s giftedness exists as corroborated by others and oneself.
- **Affirmation**, the continual reinforcement of the nuances of an individual’s giftedness from learning, experiences, and environment through an interactive process between self and the world.
- **Affiliation**, an alliance or association with others of similar intensities, passions, desires, and abilities.
- **Affinity**, the attraction towards that which nourishes and resembles yourself, a mating of souls, spirit, and philosophy—not a yearning, but a calling.

He combines each of the four constructs with twelve “systems” (e.g., Self, Family, Family of Origin, Cultural, Vocational, Environmental, Educational, Social, Psychological, Political, Organic-Physiological, and Developmental) to illustrate the complexity of gifted identity and the identity formation process. Each combination of construct and system
can be a topic of an assessment or a counseling intervention on how the client’s giftedness influences the expression and development of identity. Each combination can be a trigger to get a closer look on that aspect of identity, if that is relevant to the current situation. As Mahoney remarks: “… development and integration of one’s giftedness must be accounted for as a variable in the healthy development of the self’s identity across the life span.”

**It is one thing to struggle with your giftedness and the development of your gifted identity when you have incomplete knowledge of the impact of your giftedness on your identity. But what about the effects of being convinced that you are NOT gifted, when you actually are?** Such gifted people will definitely not search for guidance on developing their gifted identity, and, indeed, guidance may not always be needed. However, in terms of Mahoney’s constructs, they may miss something: The absence of Validation and Affirmation, or the caricature of it (“of course I am not gifted, because…”) creates a missing link in the consistent explanation of their daily activities and experiences. Experiencing Affiliation and Affinity, while shying away from their intensity (because they have often been called too demanding, too sensitive, never satisfied, etcetera) offers them a life at half speed. Of course, these gifted adults do get somewhere, even at half speed, but feelings of “is that all there is, or did I miss something?” will often get stronger over time.

Not being able to develop one’s sense of identity as a gifted person limits the possibilities for expression and satisfaction with both working and private life, it limits the development of one’s potential. So there is much to gain in the lessening of the misfit between the implicit beliefs about giftedness and the actual or perceived reality. It helps in coming to grips with one’s own giftedness, or somebody else’s – if that is the case.

But why are these implicit beliefs about giftedness so persistent? Before I elaborate on an answer to that question, it is helpful to introduce the concept of “eXtra intelligence” or “Xi” and to make a comparison between Xi and giftedness.
Extra Intelligence or “Xi,” an Easy and Accurate Trigger Tool

Since the discovery of our own giftedness in 2000 through IQ testing offered by Mensa Netherlands, my partner, Annelien van Kempen, and I have been exclusively working with gifted adults in our Dutch practice for career counseling and coaching. We had been triggered by the notable giftedness of our daughter and while studying the subject had become aware of possible hereditary aspects. Following that trail brought us to ourselves, which came as quite a shock, but also brought answers to many unsolved riddles in our biographies. Additionally, we happily assumed it would be less lonely for our daughter to have gifted company at home.

Many clients were not aware of their giftedness when they came to us: they were triggered by our website, www.xi2.nl, displaying our notion of “eXtra intelligence”—or “Xi”—and its description of five characteristics which fit them with alarming accuracy. Some did know that they had high IQs because they had been tested for a job, or earlier in their school years. All were at a loss as to how to go on with their job and their life and suspected that maybe, after all, just possibly, their intelligence might have something to do with it. Many, however, immediately stated that their obvious failure to comply with the standards of Madame Curie or Mr. Einstein clearly proved that their intelligence was not that special at all. So, could we please explain why they recognized themselves in these characteristics and many other topics on our site, describing Xi and giftedness, since they were quite sure that they were not, and never had been, gifted!

The good news was that their natural curiosity had driven them to read the entire website, safely in their own environment. Many told us they had been devouring the extensive information – more than 35 web pages plus downloadable articles on very many possible aspects of Xi and giftedness – with rising excitement and intense emotion. The good news was also that they were sufficiently curious and/or desperate to phone us – even though we were obviously working exclusively with “gifted” or “extra intelligent” adults – with an assumed risk of being told that they were unfortunately not in our target group, or of invoking reactions like “Who do you think you are?” As many authors in this field have indicated, the gifted are quite susceptible to the Impostor Syndrome (Bell, 1990; Clance, 1985), the inner conviction that you’re about to be
unmasked as a fraud because you are actually not as smart as other people (seem to) think you are.

We coined the concept “eXtra intelligence” or “Xi” in 2001, while preparing a workshop named “Recognition and Approach of the Extra Intelligent in Organizations” with our friend and psychologist, Karien Boosten. The title was meant to deal with that emotional barrier adults experience when they are considering their own or another’s giftedness: Since general belief assumes that gifted adults should be successful, this means that any degree of unsuccessfulness implies doubts about any actual giftedness. Even worse is the supposition that the adult in question has undertaken insufficient effort to bring the giftedness to its full expression, neglecting the implicit duty to society or a still higher authority.

Our Five Characteristics of Extra Intelligence

We were at the time inspired by a Dutch book written by Hans de Vries (1999), who introduced a “general psychological profile of an intelligent human being” using five characteristics somewhat similar to our choice below: intensity, intellectual abilities, inquisitiveness and curiosity, self-confidence, independence. Our concept of eXtra intelligence (Xi) is marked by five characteristics, as follows:

1. **Intellectually able**: grasps complicated issues relatively easily, takes leaps in the thinking process, has a low tolerance for stupidities, and may become careless when asked to do simple tasks.
2. **Incurably inquisitive**: always curious about what’s beyond the horizon, fascinated as long as something is new, easily pursuing manifold interests. Has a low tolerance for boredom and may be slow in bringing an already-solved problem to a conclusion.
3. **Need for autonomy**: Can work on one’s own and prefers to schedule tasks oneself. Will respond adversely to absolute power and formalities, and react allergically to bosses or others who exercise tight control. Will utilize fight or flight when autonomy is threatened.
4. **Excessive zeal in pursuit of interests**: Can be inexhaustible and keyed-up as long as a problem is interesting and still unsolved. But will drop it readily when the specific curiosity has been
satisfied. Can put too much energy into the wrong projects. Does not like others to perform according to low standards.

5. *Emotionally insecure, intellectually self-confident:* Knows in the head that he or she is right, but fears in the stomach that he or she will not win the case. This can easily lead to perfectionism, fear of failing, or escalating know-it-all-ness and arrogance to mask the uncertainty. Is vulnerable to a stupid or blunt display of power.

We state that if someone recognizes him- or herself strongly or emotionally in a minimal three out of five characteristics, it proves to be worthwhile for that person to investigate the subject of Xi or giftedness further, to personally verify the hypothesis that this subject may have something to do with that someone.

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**Xi and Giftedness Compared**

There are four main differences between Xi and giftedness.

1. Xi is connected to recognition of personal characteristics, while giftedness is officially connected to a sufficiently high IQ score. Therefore, one can consider oneself or somebody else Xi, just because of personal recognition and experience, where giftedness can only be assessed through a third party: an explicit investigation and measurement by expert professionals.

2. Giftedness has become heavily connected to children and their need for proper education. It appeals mostly to the professionals in education and mental health and is a trigger word for parents. Xi was introduced to appeal directly to adults and their work environment, and to provide guidance on how to reach personal excellence and life fulfillment.

3. All people with a very high IQ score are also Xi, but not all people with Xi will obtain a very high IQ score. Firstly, some will have emotional or practical barriers to being tested by IQ tests and score too low. Secondly, IQ tests measure specific kinds of intelligence, and people who are outstanding in other kinds will not obtain a high IQ score, but will still show typical gifted behavior: Consider very talented sportspeople, musicians, architects, artists, charismatic leaders, etc.

4. Xi is a neutral concept, and an accurate description: the owner of Xi *does* have “extra” intelligence, that is: more than normal, a
kind of surplus. It is a recognizable practical experience. Giftedness is an emotionally loaded concept, conveying something about expectations for special feats, due to special grants somehow received at birth.

“Gifted behavior” has been described in many books and articles, for instance Jacobsen (1999), Streznewski (1999), and Tolan (1994) on gifted adults, Powell and Haden (1984) on extreme giftedness. All clients that came to us because of their recognition of Xi demonstrated the behavioral characteristics, life themes etc., that are connected to giftedness. Some insisted on not being called gifted, even after the explanation about all the evident similarities and after the emotional acceptance of various aspects of their Xi. And others only did really believe us when they afterwards had passed the admission test for Mensa (in the Netherlands an often-practiced way to obtain a formal IQ score).

Can You Believe You Belong to an Unusual and Most Diverse Population?

We find it to be a very rewarding experience that many people who do not allow themselves to be considered gifted find a way to acquire knowledge on the subject through the concept of Xi. It has proved to provide a low but robust threshold that can charm individuals into investigating their own giftedness, to investigate how they are gifted. More specifically, clients get to understand in the process, that Xi (or giftedness) is more than the intellectual power for solving puzzles or a sufficiently high IQ score. The Xi concept is highly effective in the various aspects of the gifted identity-formation process.

In her “dots and spaces” article, Tolan (1999) explains how diverse the gifted population is: how we tend to see our own deficits (spaces) but others’ gifts (dots) because we take our own excellent gifts for granted. That leads to thinking that since the other one is gifted in ways we are not, we are consequently not gifted.
This situation inspired me to make the illustration of Figure 1:

![Figure 1](image)

It shows how the customary IQ-curve conveys the idea that gifted people are a well-defined, compact group at the high end of the spectrum. But that is only true if we define giftedness through the single dimension of IQ score. In reality, the situation looks more like the scattergram next to it: The gifted are represented by the dots that lie outside of the concentric circle segments. The graph shows their relative loneliness and the precious little chance that they will encounter someone with similar gifts. And what about when they are highly gifted? These dots would lie beyond the frame of this scattergram.

These kinds of examples, this “inner experience” of Xi, offers our clients and readers the key at last to understanding why they differ from their “regular” environment. They feel strengthened and empowered to use their qualities, talents, and the like, without the nagging doubt that they are some kind of impostor. Their memories gain new perspective when they consider that many personal events that could not formerly be understood suddenly become more “logical,” given that “eXtra intelligence” was already theirs for all these years. They obtain a new perspective on their parents, siblings, partners, children, and dear friends,

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1 This scattergram illustrates the diversity for a combination of two relevant characteristics only. A multidimensional sphere would be a more accurate description. The relative loneliness increases accordingly, illustrating Tolan's “dots and spaces” article.
because some of their unusual qualities and “failings” can suddenly be explained as their expression of, or their struggle with, their own variety of eXtra intelligence. They unearth unused qualities and talents, because they suddenly understand why they have chosen to hide them. Some clients had buried their artistic self, because it seemed improper in the fulfillment of expectations of academic excellence. Others never took their own theoretic approach to solving problems seriously. Their schoolteachers had made it quite clear that they were due to become blue collar workers, since they were not able to follow the teachers’ mode of thinking. The acceptance of their specific and unusual combination of talents gave these Xi adults inspiration for a portfolio of activities with mutual benefits and enduring satisfaction in their working life.

Usually, clients recognize the feeling of their own typical gifted characteristics of “intensity, complexity, and drive” (Jacobsen, 1999) and decide to finally accept and express their uncommon urge to find things out thoroughly, to care for and use their strong sensitivity and intuition, or to learn how to vary their own tenacity without losing its advantages. For them, it is like living life in a higher gear and enjoying the fresh wind on your face.

I can heartily agree with Mary Rocamora (Rocamora School, n.d.), coach to gifted and talented adults, when she states on her website along with a Giftedness Self-test:

Even if you have doubts about the extent of your giftedness, you will really bring your talents to life if you will embrace your drive to become, serve, create, achieve, and contribute. (Retrieved from http://www.rocamora.org 12/12/06)

Self-recognition is not to fuel egotism or elitism, but to align with a more powerful, creative part of you that will let your heart, your knowledge, your talent loose on the world.

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**That Awful Word Called “Gifted”**

It is kind of funny that we are successful in our approach to help people recognize their own (or somebody else’s) gifted abilities by not using the word “gifted” to start with. Why are so many adults and even adolescents so dead sure that they certainly are not gifted and do not want to be called by that term?
I can recognize my own experiences with the subject quite easily in an article by Andrew Mahoney (1995) “It’s All About Identity.” He “is saddened” when almost no one in a group of masters- and doctoral-degree students dares to react to the question as to whether he or she is gifted. Or when gifted persons dare not succeed for fear of being seen as a nerd and having no friends. Or when professionals use people like Einstein of Van Gogh as role models: highly revered, long dead masters.

Consider asking the teachers of a special school for the gifted whether they consider themselves gifted: expect embarrassment and tentative answers that, of course, some of the colleagues might be… and a remark that most kids hate the word “gifted.” I recently asked a group of members of the Dutch Mensa whether they did consider themselves gifted. One third raised their hand. I explained the concept of Xi, and asked whether they considered themselves eXtra intelligent. Almost all raised their hands.

Has the mainstream definition of giftedness unintentionally created a monstrosity of unattainable ideals that few adults dare to identify with? And is that the resulting role model we offer to our children, students, adolescents, etc., about dealing with their own giftedness—that we so astutely have labeled them with as part of their education? Isn’t it a social issue of astronomical proportions, that gifted people cannot share their experiences of being gifted with other people, because to speak about one’s own giftedness simply is not done? And because the gifted who know that they are gifted cannot share their “secret,” the gifted that do not yet know it are not given the clue to their own riddle.

Are gifted adults meant to bear the load of being different alone in silence? To be silent, just being grateful for the possible contributions they can make to society’s progress? Yet also receiving in real life reactions like “Who do you think you are?”

Giftedness as Performance and as Process

There is much evidence that the mainstream definition of giftedness is linked to achievement. Consider the U.S. federal definition of “gifted and talented students,” which is located in the definitions section of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Title IX, Part A, Section 9101 [22], Page 544) and which has also been used in the Javits Act of 1988.
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Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities.

An important recipient of the Javits Act is the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRCGT), which provides a forum for researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and others in which to work together to design and conduct research and ensure that it informs educational policy and practice. The director of the NRCGT, Joseph Renzulli, has achieved international recognition for his Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness, stating that the interaction of three clusters consisting of above average, though not necessarily superior, ability; task commitment; and creativity has shown to be the necessary ingredient for creative-productive accomplishment (Renzulli, 1978).

In his article about a 25-year perspective on giftedness (Renzulli, 1999), he explains that:

…there are two generally accepted purposes for providing special education for high potential youth. The first purpose is to provide young people with opportunities for maximum cognitive growth and self-fulfillment through the development and expression of one or a combination of performance areas where superior potential may be present.
The second purpose is to increase society's reservoir of persons who will help to solve the problems of contemporary civilization by becoming producers of knowledge and art rather than mere consumers of existing information. This second purpose, sometimes referred to as the “cure-for-cancer argument,” was especially useful in gaining legislative and financial support. (p. 7)

Since the “cure for cancer argument” is indeed effective in gaining legislative and financial support for that purpose, it is not surprising that many people assume that the gifted have a moral obligation to their country to work hard and be successful in the application of their talents. And it is certainly one of the reasons why this view on giftedness is very persistent and dominant. However one may wonder whether the sincere intention of providing optimal education for children must unfortunately result in really negative side effects for adults.
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In the Netherlands, as in many parts of the U.S. and other countries, the Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness is widely considered to be the description for defining giftedness. This assumption has the effect that when gifted adults consider their own task commitment or creativity to fall below their own high standards (typical gifted behavior), they will deny that they are gifted, even though their IQ score is well within the 98th percentile. Is it not a pity that the model is used that way?

The Columbus Group (1991) suggested an alternative definition for giftedness:

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. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counseling in order for them to develop optimally (unpublished transcript).

Giftedness is defined here as a special kind of process – asynchronous development – instead of being defined as an outcome – eminent achievement. There is a new aspect added: heightened intensity. And the combination of that intensity with the advanced cognitive abilities leads to something qualitatively different from normal. This asynchronous development, or rather, the qualitatively different inner experiences and awareness, are for life. Giftedness does not stop at age 18, or when finishing regular education. Our early experiences—actually all our experiences— influence our daily perception and processing. In fact, it is a quality of the gifted to remember well, and many can never get accustomed to the “poor” memory of the people around them. The more gifted they are, the more different events are cumulatively integrated into their actual reaction to new events.

Consider the case of the highly gifted 10-year old Greg who was punished for beating up his schoolmate, Joe. Joe’s explanation was: “Greg hit me and then I hit him back and he kept hitting me.” Greg’s explanation was more complex. It went back to various incidents from the last two years, carefully and accurately analyzed, until he concluded that the argument of the day was simply “the straw that broke the camel’s back” and acted accordingly (Morelock, 1992, p. 11).

The process-oriented view on giftedness is much less known, and I am aware of many experts and “ordinary people” outside the field of gifted education who do not agree that “heightened intensity” and
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“qualitative different awareness” are essential to characterizing giftedness. I feel this is a sad example of a limited perspective on the subject.

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**Xi as a Logical Tool in the Development of a Gifted Identity**

Both “performance” and “process” definitions are still the expression of an observer about the object of study. That is understandable, considering that the observers are adults writing about children, whom they consider to be somehow their responsibility.

When gifted adults are under consideration, it is still possible to conceive of experts of some discipline, who study these remarkable people and who write about their theories and interactions with such adults. But strengthening one’s self-confidence and development of one’s identity is essentially a personal affair and is linked for adults with their private and working life. Adults need adequate information to sort things out for themselves. This is especially true for gifted adults, since “autonomy” is one of their most important values. Depending on their character and on their current state of personal development and intuitive perception, they may want access to relevant literature, coaching and counseling, or some kind of interaction with like minds, to address their need for Validation, Affirmation, Affiliation and Affinity.

The book *The Gifted Adult: A Revolutionary Guide for Liberating Everyday Genius*, by Mary-Elaine Jacobsen (1999) definitely aims to fulfill that purpose. On its cover are questions like, “Are You a Gifted Adult?” and “Recognize Yourself or Someone You Know?” The book is a goldmine of information on the psychology of the gifted adult, a view from within. Jacobsen’s key description of a gifted adult: *Intensity, Complexity, and Drive* is very powerful, both in describing gifted strengths and pitfalls. The many widely accessible, excellent websites like [www.hoagiesgifted.com](http://www.hoagiesgifted.com), [www.talentdevelop.com](http://www.talentdevelop.com), or [www.gifteddevelopment.com](http://www.gifteddevelopment.com), have a similar important role in making information on (adult) giftedness accessible. However, everything still remains centered around that word “giftedness,” implying those well-known expectations and pigeonholing definitions. But what about the many gifted adults that do not ever consider the idea of being gifted?

If we accept the fact that many gifted individuals *do* have those overexcitabilities—those natural sensitivities and intensities—that Dabrowski, and Piechowski in his long-awaited book (2006), have so
eminently written about, could we also accept that “being gifted” has become at some point in their personal history a too-illogical and, therefore, inappropriate concept for many gifted adults to connect with their own development? For the same reason—it may be too emotionally loaded.

When we are willing to accept that people need to strengthen their gifted identity through Validation, Affirmation, Affiliation and Affinity—by building on their own positive experiences—it becomes very logical that the concept of “eXtra intelligence” (Xi) provides safe and stable ground for discovering the “extra” features in all their diversity. Xi can be easily validated by the adults themselves or by their own environment, without invasive formal IQ testing. They will find more easily the needed Affirmation and Affiliation, because the concept is less invasive for those in their environment, too. Xi triggers individuals’ own recognition, and is in line with their own experiences. It does not impose any expectation of future exploits, so they can find their true Affinity without moral mortgage.

If we want to empower our gifted, let us offer them freedom to find and define themselves in their own space and time, and provide support only if needed. As they manage to build their self-confidence and strengthen their gifted identity, you can bet that they will pick up speed in the use of their eXtra intelligence: They cannot do otherwise, but they can only do it of their own accord.

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The Importance of Positive Labeling and Maintenance

The concept of Xi helps to make giftedness palatable—that is, open to experience, both to the owner and to his or her public. Many clients tell us stories like: “My friend/my husband/my employer suggested to me that I have a look at your website; while I was reading it, I understood they had a special purpose in mind. I can see now that I need to know more about me and this extra intelligence thing and put that knowledge into practice.”

There are lots of articles on giftedness on the Internet, although many have a slight handicap: They are written for a (semi-) professional audience about gifted people, mostly because some problem has been diagnosed, studied, and a possible remedy proposed. After reading seven articles about problems with “the gifted,” none of which are about the many positive possibilities, recognizing one’s own giftedness may feel
like joining a Patients Association—not so stimulating, and only one part of the truth.

That is why articles or stories by someone like Stephanie Tolan (1994, 1999, 2006) are such an asset, offering information and empowerment. We need more professional writers like her who can write clearly and positively framed pieces about giftedness. We can also suggest titles of various works of fiction where the main characters are typically gifted people. These can serve as role models to keep our eyes open for positive characteristics of giftedness that are less depressing than “eminent achievers like Mr. Einstein.” Consider for example, the Earth Children series by Jean M. Auel (1984-2001). The main character, Ayla, is obviously an exceptionally gifted woman, and her loneliness, her struggle for autonomy, and the expression of her talents are totally recognizable as themes that many gifted people share with her. Consider Jo Rowling’s Harry Potter series, too (1997-2007). Although Hermione Granger is the “traditional” know-it-all (no offense meant, I like her), Harry himself also shows the typical characteristics of Xi, or giftedness. Many more Xi characters appear in the seven books, and let’s not forget to mention Jo Rowling herself: just one of many illustrations of the diversity of the gifted population.

Even so, a website with a careful selection of articles designed for the gifted themselves, offering information to aid recognition of giftedness in all its variety and deepen knowledge and understanding of the subject, is a wonderful tool to spread the word and increase acceptance. We started a Dutch linking page www.hoogbegaafd-en-werk.nl (gifted-at-work) with links to Dutch and American sites and articles. My partner, Annelien van Kempen, put together a Reader (Kempen, 2006) with articles by the participants of a workshop with Linda Silverman on “Unrecognized Giftedness in Women,” supplemented with Dutch articles on adult giftedness that had appeared in the media during the last five years.

We find that people who come as clients, or people attending our presentations or workshops, now come much better prepared than three years ago. The information is really taken in and digested. We started half-day workshops called “Birds of a Feather Flock Together” to help people to discover and acknowledge their Xi in a small group. It is remarkable what Xi Affirmation power, by bringing together these birds of a feather, can do!

Many of our clients find Dabrowski’s “overexcitabilities” very helpful in getting a feeling about their own intensities and triggers for excellence. But the word “overexcitable” translates rather negatively in
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Dutch: “overprikkeldbaar” usually means “too easily irritated.”
Piechowski (2006) acknowledges that the first impression of the word is
almost always negative. He proposes “heightened excitability and
aliveness” (p. 17) wherever these substitute terms will serve. We have
named it “eXtra ontvankelijkheid” or Xo, meaning something like “eXtra
receptivity.” Again, there is a distinct advantage that the people with
whom this resonates from within can connect to a positively framed
concept. When they have done so, they can then appreciate the
biologically and psychologically more precise concept of overexcitability
or superstimulatability. In the same vein, we have noted that most people
react quite cautiously to the fourth characteristic of Xi, Excessiveness,
but are relieved when they can tell their excessive stories to us and get
reassuring feedback.

We often compare Xi with a precision tool, for instance, a chisel.
One can decide to use a chisel for screw driving, but afterwards the
instrument is unfit for cutting thin chips from a wooden log (unless the
damage was not too extensive). Likewise, eXtra intelligence is a sharp
tool for excellent performance, but it is essential to use the instrument
with respect and to treat it well. Only then will it deliver what it was
meant to do.

In her still-fresh article, “Discovering the Gifted Ex-Child,”
Stephanie Tolan (1994) points out: “‘Who am I?’ is a question gifted
adults may need to ask themselves all over again, because the answers
devised in childhood and adolescence were inaccurate or incomplete” (p.
134). Even answers obtained during adulthood may have gotten far
beyond their expiration date, and the precision tool will be found blunt or
dent. When gifted adults can share their maintenance needs and
experiences they will thrive and keep sharp—for their own benefit and
for society as a whole. So let’s work together and get our gifted (selves)
out of the closet.

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