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## Parenting the Gifted: Caregivers' Perspectives of Challenges and their Confidence to Support their Exceptional Children

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Parenting the Gifted: Caregivers' Perspectives of Challenges and their Confidence to Support  
their Exceptional Children

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction

by

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## **Abstract**

This phenomenological study uses Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (1977) to examine the lived experiences of eight parents of gifted children and how their experiences, both positive and negative, shape their perception of their confidence and may contribute to building future supports for gifted parents and caregivers. Qualitative data, collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed with an interpretive/hermeneutic lens, provides seven major themes derived from the voices of parents with children of varying ages and exceptionalities. In addition, this study concludes with a discussion surrounding the additional challenges associated with parenting the exceptional, frameworks for gifted parent support systems, as well as how research can support a holistic approach to meeting the mental, social, and emotional needs of gifted parents and caregivers.

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to my family, whose sacrifice has allowed me to pursue this goal. Whenever anyone asked me how I was able to get to this point, I had the answer readily available. To my husband, Doug, thank you for making dinners, shuttling the kids to practices, doing the laundry, and never discouraging my dreams. You have done the lion's share in many ways, and it has not gone unappreciated. To my daughter, Cambree, I hope that you dream big and realize that girls can do anything! To my son, Bentley, I hope you know that anything is possible with the support of others. To my parents and my other family members, this was possible because of your continued love, encouragement, and support. You have rallied around me and stepped in when my family needed you most. I love you all. Lastly, I thank God for his continual provision in my life. Thank you for helping me find my purpose in this world and for giving me grace I don't deserve.

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To my friends and colleagues who encouraged me to keep pushing, thank you for being a sounding board and great examples of human beings. Jeri, thank you for this idea in the first place; we will get through parenting! Lastly, thank you to the participants in this study who felt so passionately about this topic that they shared their innermost hopes and fears. You inspire me and your words will stay with me forever.

## Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction .....	1
Problem Statement .....	1
Study Purpose .....	4
Study Significance .....	4
Conceptual Framework .....	5
Specific Research Questions .....	6
Overview of Methods .....	7
Situation to Self .....	8
Assumptions .....	8
Limits on Generalizability .....	9
Delimitations .....	10
Summary .....	10
Chapter Two: Literature Review .....	11
Overview .....	11
Conceptual Framework .....	12
Theoretical Framework .....	12
Methodological Framework .....	13
Definition of Giftedness .....	14
Review of Related Literature .....	16
Confidence as an Early Identifier of Giftedness .....	16
Academic Needs of the Gifted .....	19
Affective Needs of the Gifted .....	23

The Lived Experiences of Parenting the Gifted .....	25
The Lived Experiences of Parenting Twice Exceptional Children .....	26
Confidence of 2E Parents Regarding Advocacy.....	29
The Lived Experiences of Parenting Diverse Gifted Children .....	32
Effects of Parenting Styles, Values, Culture, and Background .....	33
Importance of Advocacy and How it is Developed in Parents .....	36
Building Self-efficacy in Parents of the Gifted .....	38
Support Groups and Types of Socialization to Promote Confidence in Parents.....	39
Parenting Efficacy Using Established Parenting Programs .....	42
Summary .....	43
Chapter Three: Methodology .....	44
Overview .....	44
Design .....	46
Methodological Framework .....	46
Specific Research Questions .....	48
Instruments of the Study .....	48
Sample Size .....	51
Participants .....	51
Setting .....	52
Ethical Considerations .....	53
Procedure .....	54
Research Timeline .....	54
Recruitment .....	54



Data Collection .....	55
Data Reduction and Analysis .....	56
Position of the Researcher .....	59
Methodological Validity and Reliability .....	59
External Review of Interview Questions .....	60
Statement of Reflexivity .....	61
Summary .....	65
Chapter Four: Findings .....	65
Overview .....	65
Research Questions .....	66
Participants .....	66
Participant Profiles .....	67
Anne .....	67
Scarlett .....	67
Sandra .....	68
Ann .....	68
Molly .....	69
Carrie .....	69
Jessica .....	70
Megan .....	70
Findings .....	70
Major Themes .....	72
Advocacy .....	72

School .....	79
Need for Support .....	82
Specific Topics .....	89
Parenting Issues .....	89
Hopes and Fears .....	94
Social Perspectives .....	99
Unspoken Themes .....	105
Summary .....	107
Chapter Five: Discussion .....	108
Overview .....	108
Research Questions .....	109
Summary of Findings .....	110
Research Question One Findings .....	111
Research Question Two Findings .....	112
Research Question Three Findings .....	113
Research Question Four Findings .....	115
Conclusions .....	116
Practical Implications .....	117
Delimitations .....	119
Limitations .....	119
Recommendations for Gifted Programs .....	120
Parenting is Challenging in General, but Parenting Gifted Children Brings Specific Challenges That Require a More Individualized Approach to Support.....	120

Parents and Caregivers of Gifted Children Need More Information from Their Child’s School and/or Gifted Programming .....	122
Parents and Caregivers of Gifted Children Need More Social and Emotional Support from Their Child’s School and/or Gifted Programming .....	124
The Perspectives of Others Have a Great Impact, Positive or Negative, on the Confidence of Gifted Parents, and Should Always be Considered .....	125
Structured Gifted Parent Support Exists, Though Limited, and This Research Validates its Importance .....	127
Recommendations for Future Research .....	129
Summary .....	130
References .....	132
Appendices .....	152
Appendix A: Recruitment Letter .....	152
Appendix B: Informed Consent and Demographic Data Collection .....	153
Appendix C: Interview Protocol .....	156
Appendix D: IRB Approval .....	158

## **List of Tables**

Table 1 Family Contextual Factors of the Participants .....	52
Table 2 Research Timeline .....	54
Table 3 Example of Relationship Between Quotes and Themes .....	58
Table 4 Connection of Major Themes to Research Questions .....	71

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1 Three Purposes of Study .....	45
Figure 2 Major Themes and Connections .....	57
Figure 3 Relationship Between Unspoken Themes and Major Themes .....	107

## Chapter One: Introduction

### Problem Statement

Giftedness is a multifaceted identification that is often shrouded in mystery and misconception. For those who carry the identification, it can be a lifelong pursuit to try to understand one's individual exceptionalities within a world of typical peers and normative societal rules. For these individuals' parents and other caregivers, the same journey is realized every day. While there is yet a fully accepted handbook for any type of parenting, there is a particular paucity in resources and support for parents and caregivers of gifted children, especially those with additional contextual factors.

Compared with parents of typically developing children, parents and other caregivers of gifted children are more often met with additional and overwhelming challenges associated with child-rearing (Besnoy et. al, 2015; Guthrie, 2019; Morawska & Sanders, 2009; Wells, 2018), such as asynchronous development (uneven development of cognitive, emotional, and/or physical maturation), intense affective (socioemotional) needs, overexcitabilities (Neihart, Reis, Robinson, & Moon, 2002), the need for academic advocacy, and twice exceptionality. These day-to-day realities result in parents feeling exhaustion, frustration, and isolation, which can negatively affect their perception of efficacy as a parent.

In this study, I elicited and synthesized the shared experiences of gifted parents and caregivers with the intention of identifying the types of experiences and support that increase their confidence in parenting. This work focuses on the *perception of confidence* to "parent" gifted children, rather than evaluating parenting skills or child outcomes (child

performance, social adjustment, etc.). It is important for parents and caregivers to feel they have the needed support systems in place to positively contribute to their confidence, even when parenting outcomes are less than desirable. Also, I wanted this work to stand apart from other pieces of literature that focus on empowering parents for the sole purpose of increasing positive outcomes for children, without any consideration of the mental, social, and emotional needs of the caregivers themselves. Concluding inferences focus on which experiences and/or types of support empower parents to engage or disengage in best parenting practices with efficacy (Ballenski, 1982; Coleman & Karraker, 2000). Models, such as support groups, for parenting self-efficacy exist in other realms, such as in the medical and educational communities, but are poorly represented within the gifted community.

Here I note the specific definitions of important components of this study, such as *gifted*, *parent/caregiver*, and *parenting efficacy*. A fully agreed-upon definition of giftedness has been elusive, as experts argue it is near impossible to define an identification that is multifaceted and expressed so uniquely in each individual. What researchers, practitioners, and experts alike agree on is that exceptional individuals often carry additional burdens alongside expressions of giftedness. These issues may affect a gifted individual's ability to function academically, socially, and emotionally in the same ways as that of their non-gifted or typical peers (Bickley, 2002). Therefore, an evolution in terminology has taken place over the past several decades.

Over time, the meaning of giftedness has expanded to include a more comprehensive expression of diverse populations, varying behavioral manifestations, and an acknowledgment of challenges associated with the identification, especially within the academic and socioemotional domains (NAGC, 2019; Turkman, 2020). For the purpose of this study, I will be using the

definition for giftedness presented by the National Association of Gifted Children in a 2019 white paper.

Students with gifts and talents perform - or have the capability to perform - at higher levels compared to others of the same age, experience, and environment in one or more domains. They require modification(s) to their educational experience(s) to learn and realize their potential. Students with gifts and talents: 1) Come from all racial, ethnic, and cultural populations, as well as all economic strata. 2) Require sufficient access to appropriate learning opportunities to realize their potential. 3) Can have learning and processing disorders that require specialized intervention and accommodation. 4) Need support and guidance to develop socially and emotionally as well as in their areas of talent. 5) Require varied services based on their changing needs. NAGC (2019)

It is also important to note that within the constructs of this work, the term *parenting* is used synonymously with *caregiving* (verb), and does not imply a biological, or even nuclear family system (noun). To capture a more inclusive representation of modern family systems, I will refer to those assuming the primary responsibility of parenting as *parents and caregivers*.

Lastly, it is imperative that the terms *perception of efficacy* and *confidence* be understood synonymously. As mentioned, it is my intention to differentiate between child outcomes as a result of parenting *competency* and parenting efficacy as a result of *confidence*. Parental competency, as defined by Jones and Prinz (2005) and Sanders, Markie-Dadds and Turner (2003), focuses on parental capacity and efficiency to affect child outcomes. This is an external judgment of success, based on child outcomes, that is culturally and socially situated, as reflected by the views of the parents. Whereas, efficacy and confidence are the internal evaluation conducted by the parent or caregiver regarding the belief in their abilities to effectively manage tasks associated with parenting and their ability to meet the needs of their child(ren) (de Montigny & Lacharité, 2005; Teti & Gelfand, 1991; Ardel & Eccles, 2001).

This delineation in terms is not only imperative to the inferences made as a result of this study, but to the field by recommending parent-identified practices and/or experiences for



parents and caregivers of gifted children. Therefore, understanding parent perspectives regarding their confidence is paramount, as it is the main focus of this study.

### **Study Purpose**

The purpose of this study, with respect to parenting gifted children, is threefold. First, is to capture the expressed experiences of gifted parents and caregivers regarding the additional challenges associated with raising exceptional children. Secondly, this study aims to identify which types of experiences and/or supports have the ability to build a strong sense of parenting efficacy to face these challenges and best meet the needs of their gifted child(ren) with confidence. Lastly, I synthesize parent reports and established parenting efficacy models with the goal of recommendations for future parent support systems. To remind the reader, this work will focus on the *perception of confidence* (as a self-report) to parent gifted children, rather than evaluating the impact of parenting skills and styles on child outcomes (child performance, social adjustment, etc.).

### **Study Significance**

Though limited, some studies have captured the experiences of gifted parenting, especially studies that highlight associated challenges (Besnoy et. al, 2015; Bishop, 2012; Dare & Agnes, 2015; Guthrie, 2019; Morawska & Sanders, 2009; Wells, 2018) and best practices to support their child's giftedness (Jolly & Matthews, 2012; Weber & Stanley, 2009). However, to date, few contributions to the literature provide directionality or proven results, thus recommending which practices and/or models increase parenting self-efficacy throughout gifted parenting so they can apply that knowledge with confidence (Adler, 2006; Alsop, 2010)

regardless of skill or acquired knowledge. Therefore, this study uses parent feedback to identify experiences that may directly impact their perception of confidence.

Program models for parenting self-efficacy exist in other realms, such as the medical and educational communities, but are limitedly represented in the gifted community. These parenting resources also tend to focus on child outcomes, meaning, the purpose of the work is to help parents help their children reach their goals. It is my intention, as the researcher, to synthesize the shared experiences of parents and caregivers of gifted children so a productive discussion that promotes best practices for parental support may be realized.

### **Conceptual framework**

The purpose of this study, which is to examine the challenges and support that affect confidence and self-efficacy in parents and caregivers of gifted children, is derived from the self-efficacy theoretical framework of Bandura (1977). Self-efficacy is a person's particular set of beliefs that determine how well one can implement a plan of action in specific situations (Bandura, 1977). Additional researchers (de Montigny & Lacharité, 2005; Teti & Gelfand, 1991; Ardel & Eccles, 2001) have continued the work of Bandura with the specific goal of differentiating between parent efficacy, confidence, and competency.

As this study captures and synthesizes the realities of gifted parenting, I used phenomenology as the main framework. By definition, phenomenology seeks to better understand a shared experience through the individual perception or interpretation of others. As will be noted later in this work, the driving research questions of this study are rooted in experience, a hallmark of phenomenological research. Though the process of gifted identification and servicing is relatively similar for gifted individuals, the individualized perspectives provide

insight as to how these processes may be experienced differently with consideration of additional contextual factors, such as socioeconomic status, age of identification, family diversity, and/or additional exceptionalities/diagnoses. As a result, the perceptions and experiences of parents and caregivers are different.

We may conclude that a major contributor to parental success and child outcomes is the confidence each parent or caregiver brings into a situation, regardless of external factors. Through the lens of parenting giftedness, this may manifest in a variety of ways. For example, one may increase the likelihood of their child's success in school if a confidence to advocate for appropriate educational services is present. Once again, while this study is not designed to examine parenting success and/or child outcomes, connections from other fields in which parent efficacy is studied, such as new motherhood, child mental health disorders, and parenting children with special needs, can be drawn upon as examples of the powerful impact of efficacy.

### **Specific Research Questions**

Through the examination of the shared experiences of gifted parents and caregivers, this study is centered around the following research questions:

- RQ1: What are the mental, social, and emotional needs of gifted parents?
- RQ2: What social factors play a role in parents' feelings of self-efficacy regarding parenting their gifted children?
- RQ3: What are the main contributors to parents' reported feelings of empowerment, or lack thereof, with respect to meeting the needs of their exceptional child(ren)?

- RQ4: What shared experiences of gifted parents might suggest a framework for future support models with the goal of promoting parental self-efficacy in nurturing their gifted child(ren)?

### **Overview of Methods**

To meet the intended goals of this phenomenological study, I conducted semi-structured interviews with parents/caregivers of at least one formally identified (by a psychologist, psychiatrist, district gifted program, etc.) gifted child. This study is intended to identify and synthesize the shared experiences of participants with gifted children of various ages who may or may not also be twice exceptional and/or diverse individuals. To assist in the selection of diverse participants, I utilized personal acquaintances, as well as the recruitment efforts of local gifted education teachers with direct access to families. These teachers provided a recruitment letter to recommended families, which detailed the study, as well as next steps for participation.

Once participants expressed interest in participating, informed consent and demographic information was collected via electronic form. Upon receipt of these forms, individual interviews were scheduled and conducted according to the interview protocol detailed in Appendix C. As the researcher, I created individual participant profiles, transcribed and coded interview data, and synthesized salient responses that supported the four main research questions of the study. This synthesis aided in the third goal of this study, which was the ability to make recommendations for future parent support frameworks that increase parental confidence in gifted parents and caregivers.

## **Situation to Self**

My role as the researcher of this study began as a parent of high ability children with additional exceptionalities whose interest and empathy were piqued by the stories of others in my same situation. Even with an above-average knowledge base regarding giftedness, I often struggle on a daily basis to parent my children with confidence. In fact, the conception of this study began during a personal conversation with a colleague, who is also the parent of a twice-exceptional child. While this colleague was seeking advice from me as an expert in giftedness, I found my own anxiety rising knowing that her current struggles were most certainly my future ones. Ironically, I left the conversation feeling less confident than I had entered it. Even while researching and conducting this study, I experienced the ebb and flow of confidence as I listened to the experiences of others. As an educator, I believe information is power, however, a few years ago I began to ask myself *just how far does knowledge carry us?* Is it possible that it plays a much smaller role in confidence than previously believed? In addition, are there shared experiences throughout gifted parenting which confirm or negate the power of knowledge in regard to feelings of parental efficacy?

## **Assumptions**

As the researcher, I assumed that interviewees were forthcoming and honest regarding their experiences and needs as a gifted parent or caregiver. As the result of an external review of interview questions by a third party whose expertise is rooted in working with diverse families, it is also assumed that participants fully understood the questions, both on the demographic collection form and during the interview, despite their background and/or educational level. This assumption was supported by member checks at the end of the data collection phase. As the

researcher, I concluded appropriate inferences from the data and included them as recommendations for future models of promoting confidence in gifted parents.

### **Limits on Generalizability**

As the collection of participants were limited in number, as well as geographic location, there are limits to the generalizability of study outcomes. Participants mostly represented a viewpoint that is suburban, conservative, and lower to upper middle class due to the population from which the sample was drawn. Seeking participant recommendations from a local school district gifted program guaranteed representation of a lower age range, as most gifted programs are 2<sup>nd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade programs. This held the potential to over-represent a demographic, and therefore, limit the generalizability for caregivers who are not in this same stage of parenting as those participating in the study.

To combat this, I used personal acquaintances and “snowballing” recruitment to reach diversity in age range and to better balance the participant stories. While efforts were made to diversify the sample racially and linguistically, this was ultimately not achieved. It is also recognized that participant’s children may represent different gifted programs and servicing over different periods of time, which may result in different feelings of confidence as a result of the quality/availability of programming their child received(s). Additionally, the range in gifted parenting stages means some participants were reflecting on experiences very recent, while others had several years of reflection on the experience. The qualitative methodology of this study provided the researcher in-depth data, even with a small sample.

## **Delimitations**

As previously mentioned, this study used a relatively small sample. I, the researcher, am situated in the southwest corner of Missouri, just miles from the borders of Arkansas, Kansas, and Oklahoma. While the main sample was drawn from local school districts within Missouri, the close proximity of bordering states represents a regional perspective. While this was done in an effort to somewhat diversify the sample through limited travel, these states still represent a general geographic area (the four-state area), which historically demonstrates a commonality in political views, religious affiliations, and ethnic diversity. Due to contact restrictions surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face interviews were not always possible, which in turn, holds the possibility of impacting the subjects' transparency during interviews. However, no reticence was detected during any of these online interviews. As previously stated, there was a concerted effort to balance the age range of participant's children.

## **Summary**

In summary, the goals of this study were to capture the experiences of gifted parents and caregivers as they share their individual stories regarding their confidence to parent their exceptional children, as well as make positive contributions to conversations within the field regarding how to best support them holistically. As a secondary benefit, participants expressed this study as being a cathartic experience, as they often have felt isolated, frustrated, and anxious throughout their unique parenting journey.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### Overview

This review of literature regarding gifted parenting aims to identify additional challenges associated with the gifted diagnosis, analyze the expression of these challenges by parents and caregivers of various types of gifted children, and to examine which supports, specifically, contribute to a positive sense of parenting efficacy with consideration of diverse contextual factors and regardless of skill level. While there is limited research surrounding specific interventions (Adler, 2006; Saranli & Metin, 2014; Morawska & Sanders 2009; Prado, et al., 2018) that build confidence in gifted parents through knowledge acquisition and social camaraderie, inferences based on salient parent challenges and concerns can be made regarding what could potentially best meet the mental, emotional, and social needs of parents and other caregivers of the gifted to promote confidence in their ability to effectively meet the needs of their uniquely gifted child(ren).

This review also examines informal parenting programs created within the gifted community, as well as an external program outside the realm of gifted education (Lesniowska & Watson, 2016; Piehler, et. al, 2014; Zhou, et. al, 2019), which demonstrates the dearth of empirical research surrounding effective models for building confidence in gifted parents. As previously referenced in chapter one of this dissertation, it is important to note that within the constructs of this work, the term *parenting* is used synonymously with *caregiving* (verb), and does not imply a biological, or even nuclear family system (noun).



## Conceptual Framework

### Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this study, which is to examine the challenges and support that affect confidence and self-efficacy in parents and caregivers of gifted children, is derived from the self-efficacy theoretical framework of Bandura (1977). Self-efficacy is a person's particular set of beliefs that determine how well one can implement a plan of action in specific situations (Bandura, 1977). Additional researchers (de Montigny & Lacharité, 2005; Teti & Gelfand, 1991; Ardel & Eccles, 2001) have continued the work of Bandura with the specific goal of differentiating between parent efficacy, or confidence, and competency.

Parental competency, as defined by Jones and Prinz (2005) and Sanders, Cann and Markie-Dadds (2003), focuses on parental capacity and efficiency to affect child outcomes and family success. This is an external judgment of success, based on outcomes, that is culturally and socially situated, as reflected by the views of the parents. Whereas, efficacy and confidence are the internal evaluation conducted by the parent or caregiver regarding the belief in their abilities to effectively manage tasks associated with parenting and their ability to meet the needs of their child (Montigny & Lacharité, 2005; Teti & Gelfand, 1991; Ardel & Eccles, 2001).

Parenting efficacy, a term most often used to refer to the early years of parenting or parenting children with special needs, typically encompasses parental skill-building to increase one's ability to best meet the needs of their child(ren). It is often outcome-based (child performance, social adjustment, etc.), rather than focusing on the internal confidence that empowers parents to engage or disengage in best parenting practices with efficacy (Ballenski, 1982; Coleman & Karraker, 2000). Since this work focuses on the *perception of confidence* to

parent a gifted child, rather than the evaluation of parenting skills or child outcomes, a delineation between child outcomes, as a result of parenting *competency*, and parenting efficacy, as a result of *confidence*, is established. With this intentionality, this study uses a theoretical framework that primarily extends from the work of Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (1977, 1994).

### **Methodological Framework**

This study uses a qualitative methodology that is rooted in phenomenology. In essence, phenomenology seeks to better understand a shared experience through the individual perception, direct experience, or interpretation of others, while focusing on the human behavior that is the result of the phenomena (Coen et al., 2007; Gallagher, 2012, p. 7). This study uses driving research questions that are rooted in experience and offer first-person point of view, both hallmarks of phenomenological research. Though the process of gifted identification and servicing is relatively similar for gifted individuals, as well as parenting duties throughout a child's adolescence, individualized perspectives of parenting provide insight as to how these processes may be experienced differently with consideration of additional contextual factors, such as socioeconomic status, age of identification, family diversity, and/or additional exceptionalities/diagnoses. As a result, the perceptions of caregivers toward similar events, processes, experiences, etc. are inherently unique. While case study was originally considered for this work, it was my desire to understand what connects participants' lived experiences, in spite of differences in background.

The interpretive/hermeneutic analysis strategy in phenomenological research (Figal & George, 2010) is characterized as hypothesis-free and generates theory based on existing

relationship after-the-fact. Langdridge (2007) explains that the context of the phenomenon itself can dictate how the data are analyzed when an analytic method is delayed. Data collection for this study consisted of interviews and subsequent analysis, which is a common practice in phenomenological research, however the delineation between descriptive and interpretive approaches to analysis (Sloan & Bowe, 2014) drives this study's conclusions. During data analysis, the intention of the researcher is to determine if salient responses illustrate a connection among participants' stories, despite their differences in demographics. The purpose is not to simply describe, but to interpret. Since this study allows the researcher to glean inferences and determine themes represented in data, the interpretive/hermeneutic analysis is most appropriate.

### **Definition of Giftedness**

Giftedness manifests in a variety of ways. For this reason, a fully agreed-upon definition of giftedness has been elusive. While academic/cognitive exceptionality is typically the first characteristic to come to mind, researchers and advocates within the field have argued for a better representation of the multifacetedness of giftedness within any definition, as to provide credence to the variances in expression and additional attributes that so often accompany it. Experts continue to tease out these individual differences and their unique impacts on exceptional life.

For example, there are often overlooked differences between cognitive and creative giftedness (Kim, 2013; Zenasni et. al, 2016), how typical traits of giftedness may be suppressed in twice-exceptional individuals (Baldwin et al., 2015; Brody & Mills, 1997; Foley-Nicpon et al., 2013; Ronksley-Pavia, 2015), or how giftedness is uniquely cultivated in diverse populations (Grantham & Biddle, 2014). What *is* agreed upon by researchers, practitioners, and experts alike

is that exceptional individuals often carry additional burdens alongside any expression of giftedness. These issues may affect a gifted individual's ability to function academically, socially, and emotionally in the same ways as that of their non-gifted or typical peers (Allen, 2017; Greenspon, 2000; Honeck, 2012; Janos & Robinson, 1985; Kitano, 1990; Roedell, 2010). This is especially true for twice exceptional individuals (Assouline et al., 2010; Beckmann & Minneart, 2018; Bireley et al., 1992; Coleman, 1992; Dole, 2001; Ferri et al., 1997; Hannah & Shore, 1995/2008; King, 2005; Maddocks, 2019/2020; Montague, 1991; Reis et al., 1995/1997/2000; Vespi & Yewchuk, 1992; Waldron & Sapphire, 1990/1992). Therefore, an evolution in terminology has taken place over the past several decades.

“Gifted” is a multifaceted identification which continues to mature in its definition state by state (Stephens & Karnes, 2000), as well as around the world (Gagne, 2004; Carman, 2013; NAGC, 2019; Turkman, 2020). Over time, its meaning has expanded to include a more comprehensive expression of diverse populations, varying behavioral manifestations, and an acknowledgment of challenges associated with the identification, especially within the academic and socioemotional domains (NAGC, 2019; Turkman, 2020). For the purpose of this review of literature, the author will synthesize research through the contextualized definition of giftedness, as established by the National Association of Gifted Children in its 2019 white paper:

Students with gifts and talents perform - or have the capability to perform - at higher levels compared to others of the same age, experience, and environment in one or more domains. They require modification(s) to their educational experience(s) to learn and realize their potential. Students with gifts and talents: 1) Come from all racial, ethnic, and cultural populations, as well as all economic strata. 2) Require sufficient access to appropriate learning opportunities to realize their potential. 3) Can have learning and processing disorders that require specialized intervention and accommodation. 4) Need support and guidance to develop socially and emotionally as well as in their areas of talent. 5) Require varied services based on their changing needs. NAGC (2019)

## **Review of Related Literature**

### **Confidence as an Early Identifier of Giftedness**

Many parents and caregivers of gifted children can recall early experiences in gifted child rearing that signified exceptionality long before official identification (Gross, 1999; Guthrie, 2019; Harrison, 2004; Neihart et al., 2002). These experiences may or may not be in conjunction with early childhood education, such as academic performance or social behavior during preschool or pre-kindergarten (Wright & Ford, 2017). Whether experienced in the home or in the early years classrooms these diverse observations often transcend high cognitive ability to include intense affective characteristics compared to same-age peers (Fish, 2016; Gross, 1999). A creatively gifted child may appear defiant, indecisive, and disruptive in a mainstream classroom which focuses on traditional, “set and get” teaching, when their parent fails to see the same “behaviors” at home (Haydon, 2016). A 2E child may express such dichotomous behaviors, that their asynchrony impedes social, emotional, and academic nurturing from teachers (Morrison & Rizza, 2007; Nielsen, 2002). This may be the first opportunity for parent and caregiver perspectives of giftedness to conflict with that of educators’ (Wilson, 2015), and therefore, set the tone for confident parenting and advocacy.

A longstanding perception of teacher bias (McBee, 2016; Moon & Brighton, 2008; O’Guinn, 2014; Ottwein, 2020; Siegel, 2004) continues to play a major role in initial nomination for gifted identification. As previously mentioned, for twice exceptional students, this is an even greater discrepancy (Gilman, 2013) and has led to suggested guidelines to help mitigate issues surrounding 2E identification (Dare & Nowicki, 2015; Morrison & Riza, 2007; Silverman & Gillman, 2020). However, despite advancements in assessment guidelines, parents are often the

initial identifiers and faced with the challenge of advocating for their child(ren), in spite of teacher perspectives (Besnoy et al., 2015; Dare & Nowicki, 2015). One study in particular aimed to examine the effects positive and negative behavioral manifestations had on teacher referrals for gifted programming and found that students displaying positive attributes were three times more likely to be referred than those displaying negative traits (Hollyhand, 2013). Another, noted the lower likelihood of teachers referring students for gifted programming due to “atypical” gifted behaviors and overexcitabilities (Strohm, 2017). Given the probability of twice exceptional students displaying an array of behavioral manifestations, including intense overexcitabilities, it is understandable how they continue to be one of the most at-risk gifted subpopulations.

When conflicts arise, it is paramount that parents feel empowered to share their personal experiences and advocate for what they feel best meets the needs of the potential gifted child. As noted by Lee and Olszewski-Kubilius (2006), parents play an important role in the nomination process, as they are “most knowledgeable about strengths and weaknesses of their children” (p. 165). However, extenuating variables, such as background knowledge of giftedness and a mutual understanding of the potentially gifted child, can create a dynamic in which parents acquiesce to the teacher as the “educational expert”. There is also a consideration of confidence that is culturally situated, as research suggests Black and Hispanic parents are less likely to engage in parent referrals for gifted programming, as compared to White, Asian, and Native American parents (McBee, 2016). Therefore, if teacher referral bias exists alongside a lack of advocacy confidence in diverse parents, many gifted individuals are left unidentified and underserved.

One of the most stereotypically recognizable features of giftedness is an individual’s exceptional cognitive intellect, as compared to same-age peers. Perspectives surrounding high

intellect can perplex educators and parents regarding appropriate educational settings and services. Some parents become so exasperated with this struggle, they opt for non-traditional school settings, such as homeschooling, that allow for more control over curriculum and pace. Though these caregivers are the ultimate makers of this decision, it is derived from feelings of exhausted options, and therefore, not accompanied with any more confidence than before. Even parents with advanced educational backgrounds question their ability to fully meet their child's academic needs through homeschooling (Olmstead, 2015).

While there is a large body of research supporting the importance of identification in early childhood years, very little is available that reflects the parental perspective in the referral process or the on-going system of support needed to be a confident parent of the gifted. In other words, there remains a gap detailing the ongoing mental, emotional, and social journey of gifted parents regarding their self-efficacy, regardless of knowledge or skill. Most parents would agree the identification process alone is confusing and complex (Lammons, 2016) and that the additional needs of gifted children, especially twice exceptional ones, often demand parents and caregivers explore unconventional methods to help their child reach their full potential in school and in life outside the classroom. This “village” approach to 2E child rearing can be overwhelming when one feels excluded from any semblance of a village, as “nothing fits exactly” (Park et al., 2018). The result tends to be complete isolation or an attempt to assemble a medley of siloed supports. It stands to reason that if gifted interventions benefit gifted students, they have the potential to positively affect outcomes for confident parenting as well. Hopefully, a continuance of parents sharing their stories will lead to much needed empirical research to determine which types of supports best build confidence in gifted, diverse, and 2E parents.

## **Academic Needs of the Gifted**

Typically, the psychological construct of high cognitive ability is the first attribute to come to mind when one thinks of giftedness (Brown et al., 2005; Carman, 2011; Mackel et al., 2015). However, those with simplified views regarding giftedness may be surprised to learn that high ability comes with unique challenges. Underachievement (Hoover-Schultz, 2005; Grobman, 2006; Neihart et al., 2002; Siegle & McCoach, 2009), perfectionism (Guignard et al., 2012; Mofield & Parker Peters, 2019; Ogurlu, 2020; Stricker et al., 2019) and insufficient learning environments (Adams-Byers et al., 2004; Davidson & Davidson, 2004; DeLisle, 2014; McCollister & Saylor, 2010) are just some of these unique academic-related challenges. Though they may seem dichotomous at first glance, underachievement and perfectionism are often hand in hand (Adderholt-Elliott, 1989; Arazzini Stewart & De George-Walker, 2014; Mofield et al., 2016; Mofield & Parker Peters, 2018).

For example, individuals struggling with perfectionism, which can be a debilitating manifestation in an academic setting, may opt out of engaging in curriculum for fear of failure (Whitmore & Maker, 1985). This aversion to risk taking stems from years of insufficient challenge in which failure and growth could have been interwoven into daily learning experiences in a safe and appropriately challenging learning environment (Reis & McCoach, 2016; 2000). Not surprisingly, middle schoolers are one subgroup that is reported to be most at risk for underperformance, due to insufficient challenge throughout the elementary years (Ritchotte et al., 2015). Without early advocacy and intervention, elementary students are set upon a path for future disillusionment and potential underperformance in later academic years.

Other types of underperformance may be linked to inadequate access to challenging



curriculum and gifted programming. In these cases, these “under the radar” gifted students are chronically underperforming, by no fault of their own, simply because the infrastructure for challenging curriculum and learning experiences is not present. This is quite common in rural (Lewis & Boswell, 2020) and urban (Coleman, 2016) settings, which contributes to the service gap for culturally and/or economically diverse students. The lack of adequate educational opportunity for diverse students is a paradoxical issue in which individuals are not recommended for gifted programming due to implicit biases, yet have little to no opportunity to demonstrate their ability through challenging curriculum. Specifically, students of poverty have fewer choices in schools, less access to advanced classes, and less qualified teachers (Aaronson et al., 2007; Rivkin et al., 2005). Even with the assumption that CLED students have equitable *availability* to programming, equitable *access* is an entirely different concept, as identification bias is pervasively documented by identifying many different challenges.

Such discrepancies in identification may be the result of culturally insensitive assessment protocols, implicit teacher bias, and/or language barriers (Allen, 2017; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Ford et al., 2014; McBee, 2006; Naglieri, 2003; Olszewski-Kubilius & Thomson, 2003). Unfortunately, the effects of these biases extend beyond K-12, as students of color and poverty often do not have the coursework required for elite college entry (Ford & Whiting, 2016). The ongoing underrepresentation of diverse students in gifted programming, as well as lack of quality educational opportunity, are ethical issues that have transcended education to become ones of social justice. It is important to note that without proper gifted services, gifted students do not reach their academic potential and are at high risk for underperformance (Subotnik et al., 2011).

Academic-related issues to giftedness have also been found to be culturally situated, as culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students may underperform for different

reasons than discussed above. Recent examination of CLED students, especially African American, Hispanic, and low SES ones, has revealed there are additional cultural components that exacerbate their academic and affective journey of giftedness. For these individuals, there is a tug of war between two worlds in which many individuals feel caught between (Ford, 2004). For instance, African American students often wrestle with the “two-edged sword” of giftedness, such as being the only of their kind in gifted programs, as gifted identification protocols continue to promote bias toward students of color (Luckey Goude-lock, 2019). The result is diverse gifted students struggling to find their identity between academia and community (Hoover & Schultz, 2005) and often opting out of services. In recent years, there has been a greater focus placed on recruitment *and* retention of gifted students of color, as the voices of diverse individuals have consistently demonstrated they have additional needs that need to be met even after the identification hurdle (Ford, 2012; Ford et al., 2008; Ford & Whiting, 2010; Grantham, 2004). The attrition of diverse students within gifted programs is a less commonly studied phenomenon, yet equally important, component of educational equity.

Another subgroup of the gifted community that feels torn between two worlds is the twice exceptional (Park et al., 2018). Possessing both giftedness and learning disabilities/differences, this group continues to be one of the most at-risk. Gifted individuals identified (or unidentified) as twice exceptional face significant risks in academic settings, as they require both enrichment and specific intervention for learning differences. This binary definition of giftedness often perplexes parents and teachers, which results in misidentification and/or inappropriate intervention (Cohen & Vaughn, 1994; Lovett & Lewandowski, 2006). Students may go through years of schooling before either exceptionality is acknowledged, compounding the years of missed opportunity. While giftedness may mask a disability, it is more

common for the disability to mask giftedness in the eyes of educators (Brody & Mills, 2007; Dare & Agnes Nowicki, 2015).

A twice exceptional students' apparent "underperformance" may be the result of a learning disability/difference that has gone undetected. For example, a student may excel in mathematics, while reading well below grade level. Eventually, as curriculum subjects become less siloed, a disability may begin affecting other areas, such as math word problems requiring grade level reading. Though some individuals are able to stay under the radar and complete their K-12 education, and may even go on to complete post-secondary education, these "masking" tactics are emotionally exhausting and mentally draining. These students may also become selective underperformers in which they pick and choose which subject to excel and which to avoid due to insecurity and/or ability. Sadly, these individuals are often met with a "wasted potential" mindset in which parents and teachers view their select ability as laziness, discounting the individual academic and affective struggle that is a part of daily life.

Alongside learning disabilities within certain academic domains (Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, etc.), twice exceptional students often share salient issues with organization and working memory (Yssel et al., 2010), making day-to-day life in a classroom more difficult than that of their gifted and/or non-gifted peers. These struggles can make it difficult to find an appropriate learning setting, as each student can present significant and dichotomous needs. For example, a student may possess the cognitive aptitude for advanced classes, yet lack the organizational skills to be successful in daily coursework that so often accompanies rigorous courses. This is very common for twice exceptional individuals who have been identified as 2E/ADHD, a controversial diagnosis considering the overlap of behavioral manifestations of giftedness and attention-related intensities (Antshel, 2008).

## **Affective Needs of the Gifted**

In addition to specific academic needs, gifted individuals often carry affective intensities, such as overexcitabilities (Dabrowski, 1977) and asynchronous development (Silverman, 1997). This “unevenness” in skill development may result in physical or socioemotional skills lagging behind those related to cognition and/or over sensitivities in one or more of the following domains: psychomotor, imaginal, intellectual, sensual, and emotional. Many gifted individuals express feelings of ostracization by their peers and the constant pressure to live up to the gifted label is exhausting, as giftedness is still shrouded in mystery and misconception (Bickley, 2002; Cross et al., 1993; Kerr, 1991; Silverman, 2002). Making and maintaining friendships, understanding the gifted label, as well as the emotional contributions to perfectionism and underachievement are daily challenges for many gifted students. For these reasons alone, it is crucial that gifted individuals receive the mental, social, and emotional support required to be successful, both in the classroom and outside of it.

As previously mentioned, affective needs for diverse students may be unique to the individual and their cultural and/or socioeconomic background. These needs may express themselves in an academic manner, or go silently undetected in social settings. “Acting White”, a phenomenon explored by Grantham & Biddle (2014) in regard to the pressures Black students feel to conform to both the gifted community (which is disproportionately White) and their cultural community, is just one example. While in the past success for one Black individual was viewed as an advancement for the Black community as a whole, the cultural tide has shifted, resulting in more Black gifted students feeling they are “selling out” by joining predominantly White academic groups (Ford et al., 1993). This is one example of the importance of retention

measures for any gifted program, as it is simply not enough to get students of color through the gate of gifted identification (Ford et al., 2008).

In addition to the pressures felt within one's cultural community, microaggressions demonstrated by peers, teachers, and administrators plague Black, Hispanic, and low SES gifted students. While all gifted students are subject to microaggressions, the likelihood rises exponentially with each additional contextual factor (Stambaugh & Ford, 2015). Over time, these subtle messages erode diverse students' sense of self and desire to remain in gifted programming. Such micro-aggressive comments like, "*You*, are in gifted?" or "How are you in gifted and not know that?" deteriorates the belief that only certain individuals belong within the gifted community. It is important to note that not all microaggressions are verbal or behavioral and may be present within content delivery. For example, gifted students of poverty often require more scaffolding and hands-on types of learning experiences, which may not be readily available in some learning settings (Stambaugh & Chandler, 2012). This discounting of their intelligence sends the message that "there is one correct way to learn".

The expressed affective needs of twice exceptional students are quite often similar to those of culturally or economically diverse gifted students, as they share similar concerns regarding limited understanding from teachers and peers, as well as feelings of being caught between two worlds (Leggett et al., 2010; Park et al., 2018). Their affective needs may seem exaggerated compared to their already sensitive gifted peers, while their academic and/or organizational skills may be asynchronously lagging in one or more domain. Since 2E students require interventions from both ends of the special education spectrum, they may find it hard to find a cognitively suitable, yet emotionally tolerant social group (Foley-Nicpon & Assouline 2015). Like other diverse gifted subgroups, they too may feel isolated and hyper aware that they

are the only of their kind in both intervention settings. Not surprisingly, twice exceptionals also require greater emotional support to combat attrition in gifted programs (Baldwin et al., 2015).

### **The Lived Experiences of Parenting the Gifted**

Alongside physical and cognitive asynchrony in gifted children, affective needs and other behavioral manifestations, such as overexcitabilities (Dabrowski, 1977), are at the forefront of day-to-day life for parents and caregivers of gifted children. The manifestation of OE's, which are over-intensities or sensitivities of one or more of the following domains: psychomotor, imaginal, intellectual, sensual, and emotional, provides credence to the complexity of giftedness. The acknowledgement of OE's has provided support to expand the definition of giftedness to be more inclusive and laid the groundwork for advocacy for all types of gifted students. However, while these intensities have become more widely accepted, the question of how parents are left to confidently manage the extreme highs and lows of parenting gifted children, especially twice exceptional ones, remains unanswered. There continues to be greater focus on emotional coaching for gifted kids (Fonseca, 2011) without a consideration of the specific mental and emotional needs of gifted parents.

Intense affective needs (Neihart et al., 2002), in conjunction with extraordinary cognitive and/or academic needs of a gifted child, often contribute to parents' feelings of being overwhelmed (Besnoy et. al, 2015; Guthrie, 2019; Morawska & Sanders, 2009; Wells, 2018), unheard (Dare & Nowicki, 2015), and/or unsupported (Bishop, 2012; Guthrie, 2019), which in turn may negatively impact their perception of parenting efficacy. Feelings of guilt, inadequacy, ignorance, and sheer frustration are often conveyed by parents and caregivers of all types of exceptional children (Guthrie, 2019; Zatchey, 2019), but especially by those who battle

misconceptions surrounding cultural and/or linguistic diversity and giftedness (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Goings & Ford, 2018; Park et al., 2018) and children considered twice exceptional (Hayes, 2014; Hidalgo, 2018; Nielsen & Higgins, 2015; O'brien & Giovacco-Johnson, 2007).

### **The Lived Experiences of Parenting Twice Exceptional Children**

Twice exceptionality has received long overdue attention within recent years. As included in the previously referenced NAGC definition, twice exceptional students are gifted individuals who may also *have learning and processing disorders that require specialized intervention and accommodation* (NAGC, 2019). In an attempt to create a more inclusive understanding of the many shades of giftedness, 2E experts, gifted educators, and parents have advocated for more research, better protections for individuals, and more complete definitions of giftedness (Baldwin et al., 2015; Leggett et al., 2010). These efforts have been made based on the misunderstood duality of 2E identity, which is not only challenging for twice exceptional individuals, but for the caretakers in charge of their mental, emotional, social, and academic success.

In their 2010 article, Leggett, Shae and Wilson so eloquently capture the misperception still surrounding 2E's by stating, "as a consequence of their complex situation, [2E's] tend to be either not recognized or to be recognized in terms of only one of their particular needs". As discussed earlier in this review, parents of 2E individuals are continually stuck between two worlds in which they are fighting for both enrichment/talent development and accommodations for special needs. They, too, long for their unique needs to be holistically recognized, as they

most often transcend stereotypical ideas of what it is like to be a gifted parent. With the words of James Bishop, they may sometimes agree, “If this is a gift, can I send it back?” (2013).

Also, previously discussed in this work is the idea that all gifted parenting comes with additional challenges compared to that of parenting typically developing children, however, parenting twice exceptional children creates a secondary layer of stress and confusion (Wells, 2018), as most parents would agree they are on a never-ending quest for knowledge and acceptance, just as their children are. In fact, parents and their 2E children often share the same feelings of “not fitting in” to any construct, be they special education, gifted education, or general education subgroups (Dare & Nowicki, 2015; Park et al., 2018; Trail, 2006). Though it is unknown how many 2E individuals exist, studies conducted in the early 2010’s suggest about 3 million who had a disability were also gifted (Kena et al., 2015). While this population is small in comparison, it is important to note that this results in millions of underserved children and “society cannot afford the consequences of losing those talents” (Lee & Ritchotte, 2018, p. 69). This reality is all too common for 2E parents as they struggle to find appropriate supports for their children.

While twice exceptionality can present itself in a myriad of ways, the most commonly researched diagnoses continue to be gifted students with Autism, ADHD, and other specific learning disorders, such as Dyslexia or sensory processing disorder (Foley Nicpon et al., 2011). One leading concern for parents with children who are identified as 2E/ADHD, 2E/Autistic, and/or 2E/SPD (sensory processing disorder) is the prevalence of overdiagnosis or misdiagnosis due to overlapping behavioral expressions with overexcitabilities (Antshel, 2008) and social impairments (Cash, 1999, Assouline & Whiteman, 2011; Neihart, 2000). For instance, a 2009 study examining two profoundly gifted girls, one identified as gifted and the other identified with



2E/Autism, found only slight discrepancies in most skills. In regard to social skills, the researchers were required to utilize specific measurements for Autism to determine if the deficits were “more a consequence of a mismatch between high cognitive ability and an under stimulating academic environment, or more likely an impairment that is internally based and the result of a disability” (Assouline et al., 2009). This appropriately identified discrepancy required researchers to be both adept in giftedness and the specific learning difference, Autism, which is often reported to be a rare find by 2E parents.

Many parents and caregivers of these “alphabet children” have reservations and experience exasperation when seeking professional advice from stakeholders. Furthermore, the continual struggle to find professionals who possess the required knowledge regarding twice exceptionality can be overwhelming and discouraging (Shive, 2013). These parents’ mistrust in professionals stems from a feeling that no one accurately sees their child for the holistic person he or she is. Seeking acceptance and assistance from stakeholders most often begins with parents’ interactions with teachers. As well as the ongoing concern of poor preparation for teachers regarding giftedness in general, an even greater concern regarding their competency to appropriately identify and serve 2E children (Bechard, 2019; Bianco & Leech, 2010; Moore, 2019; Troxclair, 2013) remains at the forefront of 2E parents’ minds (Hayes, 2014; Rubenstein et al., 2015; Sexton, 2016).

This means that in addition to the daily social and emotional needs of 2E children and their parents, the identification and programming process is often fraught with turmoil. More often than not, stereotypical definitions of achievement-related giftedness promote bias in the identification of twice-exceptional learners (Reis et al., 2014). One example of this construct is the low likelihood of gifted students with ADHD performing in the top 2% using the WISC,

which requires working memory skills and sustained attention, both issues associated with an ADHD diagnosis (Fugate et al., 2013). In the past, high intelligence was believed to be a global construct, leaving the possibility that individuals with both high intellect and learning disabilities were beyond belief (Dare & Agnes Nowicki, 2015; Brody & Mills, 1997). Even today, it is quite common that the gift is overshadowed by the disability and the disability overshadowed by the gift (Baldwin, Omdal & Pereles, 2015; Brody & Mills, 1997; Foley-Nicpon et al., 2013).

These “masking effects” naturally sort unidentified 2E individuals into three categories: a) high ability with no diagnosed disability, b) diagnosed disability with no recognition of high ability, or c) no diagnosis or recognition of either disability or high ability (Brody & Mills, 2007; Dare & Agnes Nowicki, 2015). Unfortunately, misconceptions and stereotypical thinking surrounding twice exceptionality are still pervasive (Ronksley-Pavia et al., 2019) and one of the most noted struggles for gifted parents. For a parent or caregiver, this results in feelings of invalidation and confusion about the overall identification process, eroding the confidence to advocate for their gifted learner (Hayes, 2016; Hidalgo, 2018; Nielsen & Higgins, 2015).

### **Confidence of 2E Parents Regarding Advocacy**

In recent years, an advocacy call from gifted experts and parents alike has resulted in better identification procedures in many settings (Bees, 2009; Brody & Mills, 1997; King et al., 2015; Morrison & Rizza, 2007; Trail, 2011), though it will take some time to expand to meet the needs of all. An appropriate educational setting for 2E students is a fluid and complex concept. Some students, depending on their coexisting disability, may struggle more socially, organizationally, or academically. However, regardless of type of disability, notable features are salient among 2E children within academic settings. For example, Yssel, Prater and Smith (2010)

found that “regardless of the disability, problems with organizational skills, attention, and low academic self-esteem are very common” (p. 56). Similarly, Beckmann and Minnaert (2018) found salient non-cognitive features of 2E’s, noting their “high levels of negative emotions, low self-perception, and adverse interpersonal relationships”.

These statements are not to dishonor the unique road of each 2E individual and their family, but to support the idea that, regardless of diagnosis, it is a common occurrence for the general education system to be unsupportive and liable in the compounding issues 2E’s face each day. Experts Leggett, Shae and Wilson (2010), as many others, have long posed the idea that appropriate educational settings for these exceptional students are not only legal considerations, but ethical ones as well. Some studies have echoed the same sentiment that once identified as 2E, educators focus on academic support in weak areas and managing inappropriate behaviors in the classroom, rather than supporting areas of strength (Baum & Owen, 2004; Dare & Nowicki, 2015). All too often, parents feel they must sit by and watch their child’s deficits be highlighted over their unique strengths and talents and not know how to be an agent of change.

Twice exceptional parents often complain of support team meetings that focus, harshly, on only negatives and not positive attributes, leaving the parent feeling “beat up” and like a “bad” parent (O’Brien & Giovacco-Johnson, 2007). It requires great resolve and empowerment for a parent to avoid the slide into acquiescence to educational professionals. When this seems insurmountable, guilt and insecurity creep in. In fact, one study on 2E advocacy found that parents “feared that one advocacy error on the parents’ part could potentially impede their child’s future” (Besnoy et al., 2015). In the captured words of one 2E parent, “I wish then I would have forced them to take her into the gifted and talented program because she tested into it.” However, she accepted the district’s policy because “at the time [Christine] was so behind on reading that I

was more focused on [getting her to read and write].” (Hidalgo, 2018, p. 44). Typically, these salient stories capture the regret that either fuels or discourages confidence to advocate for their child in the future.

Cases in which these negative experiences promote a sense of determination in parents suggests it is common for their next steps to be an attempt to become experts themselves, as they connect knowledge to power (Brownstein, 2015; Hidalgo, 2018) and seek a global network of support (Zatchey, 2019). One study even examined the connection between the loss of faith in the school system and increased parent advocacy efforts and found that as parents “became more experienced with the advocacy process, their loss of confidence transformed from a source of discouragement to a catalyst for active participation” (Besnoy et al., 2015, p. 119). This phenomenon confirms the idea that confident parenting is connected to knowledge acquisition, yet still does not answer to what degree or which specific experiences promote or negate confidence regardless of knowledge or skill, as this last quote originated from the same study in which parents shared their fear regarding fatal mistakes in advocacy.

It is apparent, that despite the increased awareness of twice exceptionality and an intentional examination of the lived experiences of 2E individuals and their parents, very little has been accomplished to systematically promote confidence in parents of 2E’s. In their work, Neumeister, Yssel and Burney (2013) suggest it is simply not enough to heighten the awareness of twice exceptionality, but for supportive resources to be readily available to stakeholders. “Perhaps state and national groups that advocate on behalf of gifted children could create and/or customize guides for parents of twice-exceptional students, explaining the relevant laws, their rights, strategies, and sample role-playing scenarios for talking with teachers and administrators” (p. 269). While these types of support may equip parents to feel confident regarding their child’s

educational rights, it is also important to note that advocacy efforts for identification and programming are only some of the mental and emotional challenges 2E parents face. This acknowledgment has produced grassroots literature in the voices of parents sharing their experiences and advice as a way to encourage others (Hayes, 2014; Mall, 2019; Reber, 2018).

### **The Lived Experiences of Parenting Diverse Gifted Children**

Students of cultural and linguistic diversity are often viewed with a deficit before development mindset, which can lead to issues, such as under-identification (Allen, 2017; de Wet & Gubbins, 2011; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Frasier, 1991; Milner & Ford, 2007; Neumeister et al., 2016; 2007; Ricciardi et al., 2020). Those on the front line of identification may not be able to see beyond a student's language barrier to note the salient behavioral features of giftedness, or how the student performs in areas in which language acquisition is not a factor. Additionally, implicit bias toward certain racial or cultural groups of people continues to play a major role in not only identification, but retention and support of culturally diverse students. This means that the battle for equity will not be over once there is a demographic balance in gifted programming. As previously suggested in this work, the additional needs of diverse gifted students are great and require sensitivity and expertise in many areas. Research has repeatedly demonstrated the importance of parent advocacy and teacher training in mitigating equity and inclusion issues for the diverse gifted.

Gifted students of poverty also suffer at the hand of misguided perceptions, as they are met with stereotypical views regarding performance and home support (Lockhart & Mun, 2020). Teachers may undervalue knowledge and life skills that are attributed to lower socioeconomic living or highlight a student's lack of academic schema that is often associated with early

intervention and experiences associated with more affluent social classes. Additionally, the pedagogical style of some teachers may not align with the unique learning styles of students of poverty, which exacerbated a deficit mindset (Stambaugh & Chandler, 2012). Students of poverty and/or culturally and linguistically diverse families, may have teachers who view their families as unsupportive of or uncommitted to their child's academic success simply because families are not as forthcoming with needs or concerns. This may be the result of language barriers, lack of education, time and work commitments, and beliefs about their child's intelligence (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Trotman, 2001). For years, research has demonstrated the importance of home-school relationships for positive student outcomes (Davidson & Case, 2018; Dikkers, 2013), therefore, when equity and inclusion are discussed, it is important to note that they surpass the gifted child to include holistic support of families as well.

### **Effects of Parenting Styles, Values, Culture, and Background**

Just as parent involvement in school advocacy efforts is individually situated, so is parenting practice. Long standing literature suggests that parents play a major role in the development of talent as initial identifiers and later as supporters through involvement with their gifted children (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1997; Cornell & Grossberg, 1987; Karnes et al., 1984; Olszewski-Kubilius, 2008; Rudasill et al., 2013; Snowden & Christian, 1999). Each parent or caregiver brings their own personal style, background, values, and culture into daily interactions with their child. These interactions play a major role in each child's academic journey, social competence, and overall sense of self (Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2014; Pilarinos & Solomon, 2017; Whiting, 2006), so much so, that literature suggests there are fitting and unfitting styles of parenting for gifted children. In fact, Robinson, Reis, Neihart and Moon (2002) found that

authoritative parenting, which centers around warmth and high expectations, is best, while authoritarian parenting is least conducive.

This westernized view of appropriate parenting practice may conflict with other cultural expectations, as parents shape their parenting practices within their sociocultural contexts. Such contexts may include race, ethnicity, social class, and community (Kotchick & Forehand, 2002). For example, for Asian American families, student success may be tied to family success, which can equate to demanding and unyielding approaches to educational achievement (Zhou, 2014). For African American families, community affiliation may be a top priority and affect the relationship and involvement between home and academia (Hoover & Schultz, 2005), though a strong commitment to success for self and community remains. For Hispanic families, a mixture of permissive, authoritative, and authoritarian parenting styles has been reported (Julian et al., 1994), which disagrees with the westernized “correct” way to parent gifted children with an authoritative style. These differences in child rearing and parenting style may be just some of the reasons Black and Hispanic students generally experience fewer parent referral rates in comparison with White, Asian, and Native American parents (McBee, 2006; 2010).

For parents of diverse backgrounds, there may be other influential factors that affect views on academics, as more than one culture collides with another in its expectations. As previously mentioned, this could be the result of a diverse parent emotionally and socially shielding their child from ostracization from their community by not allowing participation in gifted programming. Or, diverse parents may feel insecure about their ability to understand and support their identified gifted child due to a lack of educational opportunity themselves (Lovett, 2011). Ultimately, the perceptions of minority parents and students impact access to gifted programs in addition to the present identification gap (Ford & Whiting, 2009).

For diverse, twice exceptional families, very few attempts have been made to understand their unique journey (Park et al., 2018). This is surprising due to the overrepresentation of diverse students in special education and the underrepresentation of them in gifted education (Ford, 2013; Ford et al., 2008; Owens et al., 2016; Sausner, 2005). Just as risk increases for gifted individuals with each additional contextual factor, so do differences in parenting practice by their caregivers. For example, Asian-American parents must juxtapose native, cultural expectations against westernized stereotypical thinking to advocate for their child to receive special education services, as bias typically promotes an overestimate of the ability of the entire Asian race and leads to underrepresentation in special education programming (Ford, 2012). In addition to this overestimate, Asian American parents must balance their approach to advocacy, as stereotypical views promote the idea that all parents of Asian descent are controlling and overemphasize academic achievement (Choi et al., 2013).

While identification of giftedness is often a welcomed explanation for parents of the gifted, it may lead to conflict between parents and teachers, as some teachers believe the label is detrimental to positive parenting (Klimecká, 2020). These findings are in direct contradiction with other studies which found high intellectual ability actually increasing the likelihood of authoritative parenting styles (Abelman, 1991; Cornell & Grossberg, 1987; Rudasill et al., 2013). Some teachers also express a concern that parents' overestimates of their child's abilities create a need for control in all academic settings, thus stressing the parent-student and parent-teacher relationships (Hodge & Kemp, 2006). However, gifted individuals continually report that warmth and high expectations from their parents help them not only succeed academically and socially, but emotionally as they discover who they are amongst the gifted label (Garn et al., 2010; Rudasill et al., 2013; Pilarinos & Solomon, 2016).



## **Importance of Advocacy and How it is Developed in Parents**

Parent involvement has been found to be a positive contributor to the academic achievement of K-12 students (Epstein, 1995; Heyman & Earle, 2000; Hung, 2005), as well as their social and emotional wellbeing (Pomerantz et al., 2007). For diverse gifted students, parent involvement may be the deciding factor which tips the scales toward identification (Grantham et al., 2005), appropriate services, and/or retention (Ford et al., 2011) in gifted programming. Park, Foley-Nicpon, Choate and Bolenbaugh (2018) suggest examples that “cultural influences often present unique advocacy and educational concerns for students of color that potentially could be ignored or misunderstood.” (p. 307). While parent involvement is imperative for the success of all high-ability learners (Jolly & Matthews, 2012), parent *advocacy* takes one step further to ensure student needs are met in spite of opposition or challenge.

In the words of Grantham, Frasier, Roberts and Bridges (2005) parent advocacy has the potential to “hold gifted programs accountable for promoting excellence and equity in terms of program policies and services” (p. 138). As equity in gifted education continues to be a large focus in research, it is imperative that literature provides a clear and guided path to move forward. A 2003 study by Robinson & Moon noted salient features of successful advocacy stories, including motivation, self-education in pursuit of knowledge regarding giftedness and advocacy efforts, and skills in leadership, problem-solving skills, communication, and public relations. While these successful advocacy events demonstrate possibility, it is important to recognize that parent involvement is culturally situated and requires additional considerations. The Gifted Program Advocacy Model (G-PAM) was created to provide a framework for diverse parents to appropriately and confidently advocate for their gifted child. The model includes four phases in which gifted programs can help guide parents in their advocacy efforts. The phases are

as follows: 1) needs assessment, 2) development of advocacy plan, 3) implementation, and 4) follow-up and evaluation (Grantham, 2003).

For parents to truly understand the importance of advocacy, they must be equipped with the knowledge that leads to confidence. Grantham (2005) also discusses the importance of getting parents off to the right start by helping them understand the main components and issues surrounding gifted education, including identification barriers, underachievement, and core attributes of giftedness. As previously discussed, these main components are unique to culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students, as well as those identified (or unidentified) as twice exceptional. For example, a parent may be empowered to recognize their child's potential as gifted when they are cognizant of salient features, such as humor, inquiry, and reasoning that are not adequately captured in mainstream classroom work. Or, a parent may understand the need for alternative assessment measures when they are made aware of testing bias in learning disabled/different or linguistically diverse students.

Similar to parent advocacy for diverse students, twice exceptional parent advocacy often begins with struggles for appropriate identification and programming (Rubenstein et al., 2015). Due to the lack of specific knowledge regarding all diagnoses, parents often feel frustrated, intimidated, and stressed when advocating for their child (Wells, 2018). Not surprisingly, and in support of Grantham's work with diverse parent advocacy, 2E parent advocacy increases as parents acquire the knowledge needed to feel confident. One study suggested this knowledge can be as limited as terminology and policy (Besnoy et al., 2015) related to giftedness, disabilities, and twice exceptionality. Better representation and servicing of culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students is truly a social justice issue, just as recent examinations of twice exceptionality have morphed from legal issues, to that of ethical ones (Leggett et al., 2010).

While most would agree gifted parents and students benefit most from advocacy, a secondary benefit contributes to the field as a whole. This benefit is the future strengthening of schools and programs. When parents of diverse students advocate for their children, it equips low-confidence teachers and administrators to better meet the needs of their students, who are often a mystery to them. Not only are the students better understood as unique individuals, but teaching personnel grow in their knowledge regarding the expression of giftedness in diverse learners. Additionally, expectations are strengthened and more consistent when a team approach is presented during parent advocacy. “When values are shared and reinforced by home and school, culturally diverse gifted students are more likely to display achievement-oriented attitudes and behaviors across contexts. In addition, they will be more strongly encouraged to reach their full potential.” (Grantham et al., 2005). Lastly, parent advocacy can spark grassroots change that cannot be achieved by anyone other than nonpartisan individuals, as school personnel often have legal restraints due to their affiliation with the school or program.

### **Building Self-efficacy in Parents of the Gifted**

Though parenting the gifted is commonly associated with additional challenges, very little research is available regarding interventions (Adler, 2006; Saranli & Metin, 2014; Prado et al., 2018) and other supportive practices that are holistically effective for building confidence in caregivers of the gifted. Additional challenges associated with gifted parenting, such as obtaining access to school and community support resources and having to flex advocacy muscles (Besnoy et al., 2015; Zatchey, 2019) for qualification, accommodations, and/or modifications within educational programming with confidence are, at best, poorly represented in literature. Still, what is available shifts focus to spotlight parental understanding of the gifted identification and best practices to support their child’s giftedness (Jolly & Matthews, 2012; Weber & Stanley, 2012),

rather than how best to support the caregiver(s) so they can apply that knowledge with confidence (Adler, 2006; Alsop, 1997). In fact, the majority of the literature in which parents convey their feelings is reactive in nature (*this negative event happened that contributed to my feelings*), rather than proactive or positive (*this really helped me be confident as a parent of my gifted child*).

Though powerful to hear, these negative-based advocacy stories in which parents battle through confidence-shattering experiences, do not provide a framework for what works. Rather, a miscellany of “do nots” is scattered among the literature without any verifiable data to support research-based practices. Parents are left to claw their way through their own individual journey, using past experience as their guide. Some parents may even feel the need to overcompensate for past disappointments with teachers and begin the school year demanding this year’s teacher be prepped and ready with all things gifted from day one (McGee, 2012). The dichotomy of acquiescence and overzealousness is a tightrope on which many gifted parents walk every day. Therefore, there is a great need for partnership among parents and other stakeholders, such as teachers, administrators, counselors (Elijah, 2011), community members, and specialists due to a wealth of “parenting” literature that does not specifically address gifted parenting.

### **Support Groups and Other Types of Socialization to Promote Confidence in Parents**

It is important to also note how social factors play a role in the likelihood of gifted parents and caregivers connecting with others and, in turn, feeling supported. Parents who have experienced negative responses from administrators, educators (Geake & Miraca, 2008) and/or other parents (Gross, 1999) while sharing celebrations of their child’s accomplishments may shy away from discussing their child’s giftedness and additional attributes with others in the future.

For example, teachers who have limited views on twice exceptionality or creative giftedness may downplay a child's ability (Haydon, 2016) and advocacy for appropriate programming (Moon & Brighton, 2008; Weber & Kovalski, 2006). This focus on deficits before talents discourages parents from seeking advice from educators, as mistrust has been established within the relationship.

“Tall poppy” syndrome, which includes the disparagement of an individual's achievements by others due to their personal insecurity or lack of value placed on individual differences, may account for some of this phenomenon, while other parental criticisms, such as “snowplowing” or “hothousing” parenting styles, have come under recent scrutiny by society. There is even evidence to support teachers viewing giftedness identification as a detriment to positive parenting behaviors and parent-teacher relationships (Klimecká, 2020), as many teachers feel the parents have an “overestimate” of their child's ability (Hodge & Kemp, 2006). In this case, teachers feel parents become exaggerated and demanding for their child to succeed in all aspects of life, thus negating their partnership.

Some parents have learned to “read the room” regarding which gifts and talents to share with others, such as success in sports as compared to academics (Gross, 1999). Very rarely do parents have an established network to share, with like-kind, the daily struggles and challenges associated with the “positives” of giftedness and twice exceptionality. The result is often complete isolation through silence. Failure to have these important and validating conversations with more knowledgeable others or those with similar experiences in gifted parenting has the power to impede necessary transmission of knowledge, and in turn, confidence-building in parents (Fish, 2016).

As many parents and caregivers of gifted children express salient experiences and needs regarding child rearing, it is recommended that they seek support either through resources provided by their child's gifted program or through parent support groups. Some experts within the field have even encouraged parents to think creatively in regard to their opportunities to connect with information and with others, such as networking through Twitter (Mersino, 2010) or other social media, like gifted parent forums on Facebook (Hoagie's Gifted, 2020). In recent years, online-only forums and workshops (Reber, 2016; Steinberg Kuntz, 2020) have also emerged to share the same mission of educating parents so they may be informed advocates and skilled partners with their children. These online support communities are alternatives for parents who cannot readily find or need more support than local groups. They may also positively contribute to the future field of gifted parenting research, as well as provide a framework for which gifted programs can provide support to its parents and caregivers.

While technology has connected us in new and expansive ways there is still literature (though not empirical studies) which advocates for traditional support groups for building confidence and skills for gifted parents and caregivers. Successful parent programs, such as WSGT2e in Washington and a university-sponsored gifted parent book club in Texas retain the traditional face-to-face method to provide a foundation of understanding of giftedness and offer camaraderie to caregivers (Franklin & Collins, 2018; Parent Group Spotlight, 2014). While social support is intentional in these programs, the main agenda continues to be confidence building through the transfer of knowledge. Some parent supports even extract the element of camaraderie and take on an information-based workshop approach (Weber & Stanley, 2012) and may even hyper focus on specific areas of giftedness, such as underperformance or affective needs (Seidel Applebaum, 1998). For parents seeking information as empowerment, these

models work. For those seeking mental, emotional, and social encouragement, they may only be helpful to a degree.

### **Parenting Efficacy Using Established Parenting Programs**

Established parenting efficacy programs, such as Triple P-Positive Parenting Program, have been used to support a variety of families with present situational, emotional, and/or behavioral issues. Such programs have even been applied to the gifted realm to examine their effectiveness on the unique aspects of exceptional parenting, as “parents of gifted children often experience additional challenges in their role as parents, however; these challenges are not well-understood and described” (Morawska & Sanders, 2009). While building parental confidence is a benefit of this model, its main goal remains to be positive child and family outcomes, not holistic social or emotional support for parents. Similarly, the SENG parenting model has been empirically studied in different countries and found that it is “proven effective in supporting the psychological adaptation of gifted children by changing the perspective of their parents” (Saranli & Metin, 2014).

As mentioned previously in this literature review, positive experiences regarding gifted parent confidence is present, though limited. In recent years, more programs for gifted parenting support have become more readily available (TiLT, Bright & Quirky, etc.), however with the exception of the Triple-P study and SENG model, have not been empirically researched. It is not the aim of this work to evaluate such programs, however they may provide evidence that can be drawn upon in regard to meeting the holistic needs of gifted parents and building confidence throughout gifted parenting. For example, TiLT’s website captures potential subscribers by asking the initial question, “Are you feeling lost, overwhelmed, or isolated as you parent your

differently wired child?” (Reber, 2016). However, for the integrity of this analysis, it is important to remember the investigation of confidence regardless of the level of skill or knowledge of the parent. Both the empirical studies for Triple-P and SENG highly focus on parental support through knowledge and skill acquisition.

### **Summary**

Though interest in gifted parenting began in the mid-19th century, very little research has moved the field in a forward direction. What has been established is that parents and caregivers of gifted children, especially diverse and/or twice exceptional ones, often face additional challenges to child rearing that are not common in parenting typically-developing children. These exceptionalities may include high affective needs, overexcitabilities, twice exceptionality, inappropriate educational settings, cultural discontinuity, and the need for daily advocacy. All of these additional burdens to parenting require great mental and emotional resolve to face with confidence, and the literature, though limited, clearly represents parental feelings of exhaustion, frustration, and isolation.

Another concept that is clearly represented in the limited research regarding the gifted parent experience is the use of knowledge acquisition as a method to build self-efficacy in gifted parents. However, to date, there is no found research that examines what types of support and/or experiences affect a parent’s confidence regardless of parenting skill or knowledge of giftedness. In other words, equipping parents with knowledge, though powerful, may only affect their confidence to a degree. Parent stories suggest they face so many challenges it is difficult to remain confident all of the time and that confidence may vacillate when facing different types of challenges.



Though support systems exist within the gifted parenting community, they are mostly geared toward knowledge/skill acquisition for child outcomes, with an additional acknowledgement that positive socialization among gifted parents is also important. Based on the lived experiences of gifted parents, it may be possible that positive social interactions and/or experiences (or the lack thereof) with peers, teachers, administrators, etc. may hold an important key to feeling like a confident parent. This confidence is not necessarily tied to skill, knowledge, or child outcomes. The significance of this understanding, and this study, has the potential to create gifted parenting support systems that are more holistic to include the mental, emotional, and social needs of parents, which affect confident parenting outcomes separate from child success outcomes.

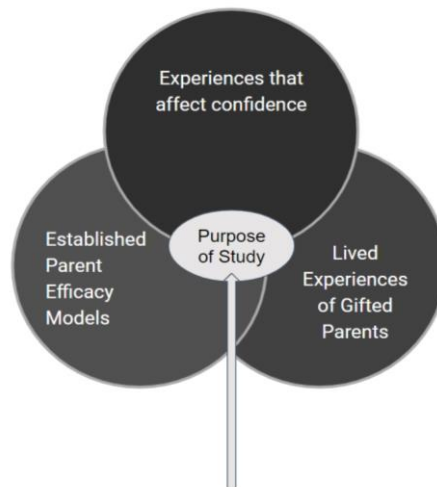
## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **Overview**

The additional attributes that accompany giftedness often present additional day-to-day challenges for the identified individual and respective caregiver(s). Compared to parents of typically developing children, parents and caregivers of gifted children are more often met with additional and overwhelming challenges associated with child-rearing (Besnoy et. al, 2015; Guthrie, 2019; Morawska & Sanders, 2009; Wells, 2018), such as asynchronous development (uneven development of cognitive, emotional, and/or physical development), intense affective (socioemotional) needs, overexcitabilities, the need for academic advocacy, and twice exceptionality.

As detailed in Figure 1, the purpose of this study, with respect to parenting gifted children, is threefold. First, is to capture the expressed experiences of gifted parents and

caregivers regarding the additional challenges associated with raising exceptional children. Secondly, this study identifies which types of experiences and/or supports build a strong sense of parenting efficacy to face these challenges and best meet the needs of their gifted child(ren) with confidence. Lastly, this study synthesizes parent reports and established parenting efficacy models with the goal of recommendations for future parent support systems. To remind the reader, this work will focus on the *perception of confidence* (as a self-report) to parent gifted children, rather than an evaluation of the impact of parenting skills and styles on child outcomes (child performance, social adjustment, etc.).



*Figure 1 Three Purposes of Study*

This chapter will provide detail regarding the nature of the study, the participants, instruments, research procedures, timeline, data reduction and analysis procedures, and the methodological validity and reliability used to answer the questions this study seeks to address. All appendices are referenced in this chapter.

## Design

### Methodological Framework

This study uses a qualitative methodology rooted in phenomenology. Phenomenology seeks to better understand a shared experience through the individual perception, direct experience, or interpretation of others, while focusing on the human behavior that is the result of the phenomena (Coen et al., 2007; Gallagher, 2012, p. 7). This study utilizes four driving research questions that are rooted in experience and offers first-person point of view, both hallmarks of phenomenological research. Semi-structured interview questions were derived from these four research questions and are outlined in Appendix C.

I used the interpretive/hermeneutic analysis approach in phenomenological research (Figal & George, 2010), as it is characterized as hypothesis-free and generates theory based on existing relationship after-the-fact. Data collection for this study consisted of demographic information, interviews, and subsequent analysis of qualitative data, which is a common practice in phenomenological research, however, the delineation between descriptive and interpretive approaches to analysis (Sloan & Bowe, 2014) drives this study's conclusions. During data analysis, my intention was to determine if salient responses illustrate a connection among participants' stories, despite their differences in demographics. The purpose was not to simply describe the participants' experiences, but to interpret them.

Fuster Guillen (2019) synthesizes the work of Van Manen (2003) and Ayala (2008) to demonstrate how to correctly describe a lived experience through anecdotal data, which includes avoiding generalizations, detailing a situation as if it were a feeling or mood, providing a description of specific events, focusing on an event that stands out with intensity, and avoiding

narration to include bombastic language. Using the interpretive/hermeneutic lens during analysis, there is a search to understand the *other*, not just through conversations, but also between what isn't said (Fuster Guillen, 2019). In relation to confidence, there were a few themes that were interpreted from "what was not said" as participants described their lived experiences in response to the semi-structured interview questions. These themes are discussed in-depth in Chapter Four.

Since perceptions regarding shared experiences can vary greatly, it was important for this study to be intentional about recruitment and how diversity in experience may play a role in each participant's story. The design consists of an intentional selection of eight Missouri parents and/or caregivers of at least one gifted child. In order to address some of the variables that may separate the stories of each participant, interview questions were positioned to highlight how their individual demographics might play a role in their confidence to meet the needs of their gifted child(ren). For example, a parent, who is also identified as gifted, expressed understanding with some of the challenges possessed by their gifted children. Several of the participants spoke to how their family dynamic with other children (identified and unidentified) played a large role in their feelings of overall confidence. Others noted their profession and level of education playing a crucial role in their confidence to advocate.

Analytical memoing throughout the data collection process also assisted in interpreting these salient connections and unspoken themes. Once data collection was complete, I used the qualitative coding method, axial coding, for transcriptions and made a recommendation for supports that have the potential to build confidence in parents and other caregivers of gifted children.

## Specific Research Questions

Through the examination of the shared experiences of gifted parents and caregivers, this study is guided by the following research questions:

- RQ1: What are the mental, social, and emotional needs of gifted parents?
- RQ2: What social factors play a role in parents' feelings of self-efficacy regarding parenting their gifted children?
- RQ3: What are the main contributors to parents' reported feelings of empowerment, or lack thereof, with respect to meeting the needs of their exceptional child(ren)?
- RQ4: What shared experiences of gifted parents might suggest a framework for future support models with the goal of promoting parental self-efficacy in nurturing their gifted child(ren)?

In order to glean personal experiences from each participant, the semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix C) addressed these main research questions in an inviting manner, such as *tell me about a time* or *why do you feel?*.

## Instruments of the Study

Once potential subjects expressed willingness to participate in the study, I obtained consent and demographic information and began to schedule interviews. Since the consent form (see Appendix B) also collected demographic data, it is considered an additional instrument to this study. Appendix B details the information collected, however, it was delivered to participants electronically via an emailed Google Form. Collected demographic data consisted of: the number and ages of formally identified gifted children, parent's gifted identification

status, partner parenting support, race/ethnicity, primary language, household income, household setting, as well as highest level of educational attainment and employment status of the participants.

Semi-structured interview questions (Appendix C) were derived from the four main research questions. Since I have a personal connection with this research topic, an introductory statement at the beginning of each interview connected my own personal experiences to the purpose of this study. This practice is in alignment with the hermeneutic approach to data analysis, as the researchers' opinions are important to the interpretation of the descriptions and to the construction of meaning. The researcher's personal connection to the topic is not bracketed for objectivity, as it is in transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). The semi-structured interview questions consisted of:

- *Tell me about your child. What are their strengths, passions, challenges, and so on?*
- *How do these strengths, passions and challenges impact the way you feel about your parenting?*
- *How and when did you first notice something was different/unique about your child?*
- *Talk me through the identification process for your child. What was it like? What happened first, next...*
- *What did [specific experience shared] make you feel about your parenting?*
- *What role did you feel like you played in this process? In what ways if any did your confidence, or lack of confidence, affect the process and/or outcome?*
- *What did you need right away in this process that you either got or didn't to help you feel good about your parenting?*

- *Thinking about those who are closest to you, such as your family and friends, who did you include in your conversations about your child's giftedness early on? Why these people? What was their reaction? Were any of these reactions unexpected or challenging?*
- *In what ways did/do these views make you feel more or less confident about parenting your gifted child?*
- *Tell me about a time when someone else's ideas of giftedness shaped the way you supported your child. How did that feel? What did you choose to do or not do?*
- *Tell me about a time, positive or negative, you recall impacting your confidence as a gifted parent?*
- *What have been the most helpful experiences you have had specific to parenting a gifted child? What experiences do you wish you'd have more of as a gifted parent? (ex. informal contact with parents; my child's teacher, workshops, books, etc.) Is there anything that you haven't found helpful?*
- *Has there ever been a time in which the opinions of or interactions with others impacted your confidence as a gifted parent?*
- *Who or what holds the ability to shake your day-to-day confidence in parenting?*
- *If you were placed in charge of a committee to create supportive resources/experiences for gifted parents, what would you create? Why these?*
- *What would you definitely leave out?*
- *What are your worries or hopes about your child's future? How confident do you feel to support them through these experiences?*

- *Is there anything else about your experience that I should know, but haven't asked you about?*

### **Sample Size**

This study consisted of eight Missouri parents and/or caregivers with at least one gifted child. I identified eight as a strong sample size for this type of phenomenological study, as some literature suggests a credible number of participants can be as few as six while allowing the researcher to draw inferences and themes from qualitative data (Guest et al., 2006). It was my desire to have as much diversity in participants as possible, and therefore, used demographics to guide her determination of eight total participants.

### **Participants**

This study consisted of eight parents and/or caregivers with at least one gifted child. At the time of this study, three participants had gifted children in the age range of teenager/young adult, one participant had a gifted child in Junior High, and four participants had gifted children in elementary school. Three participants stated an official gifted identification for either themselves or their partner, however, some others noted discussions regarding their high abilities or their partner's when they were students. Four participants completed education on the graduate level, one on the undergraduate level, one with some college coursework, and two have completed vocational or technical schooling.

Two participants parent only one child, while the remaining six have multiple children. Of these six, all have a combination of identified and unidentified children. All participants reflect a lower to upper middle class, suburban demographic. Seven consider themselves and their gifted children to be White, with the exception of one participant who identifies their gifted



child as Black/African American. Of the eight participants, five disclosed at least one additional diagnosis for their child(ren), however some of the challenges to parenting did not always result in an official diagnosis. For example, one participant’s son portrayed many behaviors associated with Autism, however, he was never given an official diagnosis and seemed to “outgrow” these behaviors as he aged. All participants identified as “mother” to their child(ren). Detailed participant profiles are found in Chapter Four.

**Table 1**  
*Family Contextual Factors of Participants*

Participant	Total Number of Children	Number of Identified Children	Additional Diagnoses	Current Age of Child(ren)	Age of Identification of Child(ren)	Parental Gifted Identification
Anne	5	1	ADHD	18	9	None
Scarlett	1	1	Autism	10	8	None
Sandra	3	2	Eating Disorder	18, 19	6, 10	Spouse
Ann	1	1	ADHD, ODD, PTSD, Anxiety, Depression	9	8	Self
Molly	3	1	Neuro-cognitive Disorder	17	5	None
Carrie	3	2	None	12, 24	8, 7	Self
Jessica	4	1	None	10	6	None
Megan	3	1	None	10	6	None

**Setting**

This study was conducted using families from Missouri, primarily the Southwest region.

The recruitment efforts of two elementary gifted teachers in Southwest Missouri were elicited to diversify the sample as much as possible through criterion-based recommendations. In addition, personal acquaintances of the researcher and the acquaintances of other participants were used for the same purpose. Public schools within Southwest Missouri predominantly represent a lower to middle class socioeconomic status and conservative political and religious views. While classrooms in this area have steadily increased in diversity in recent years, they are still mostly White and English-speaking.

All interviews were conducted solely by the researcher. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, some interviews were conducted via ZOOM at the request of the participant. In total, four interviews were conducted via ZOOM, and four were face-to-face. I did not note any reticence from any participant, regardless of interview setting. In fact, I was confident in the transparency and honesty of the participants. As a design note, I credit this openness to the inviting style of questioning and the personal connection statement delivered at the beginning of each interview. Each interview lasted between 1 ½ -2 hours in length.

### **Ethical Considerations**

To ensure ethical procedures and practices within this study, ethical considerations were used to protect its participants. Prior to data collection, a study proposal was sent through the University of Arkansas IRB approval committee to grant approval (see Appendix D) for working with human subjects. Additionally, participant consent was obtained, as detailed in Appendix B. Consent was captured electronically by a statement of agreement. While there was minimal risk associated for the participants of this study, they were provided the option to discontinue their participation at any point during the research process.

For coding purposes, confidential video recordings of interviews were/are kept according to the extent allowed by law and university policy. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for all subjects and their children were not named in any written component. Secured responses were kept on a password-protected computer, accessible to only the researcher, the dissertation committee, as well as each participant for review. Once used for the intended purposes of this study, the audio recordings, transcriptions, and codes will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study in accordance with IRB and university policy. There was no deception associated with this study.

## Procedure

### Research Timeline

Table 2 details a timeline for this study, including the vetting of interview questions, IRB approval, data collection, and data analysis.

**Table 2**  
*Research Timeline*

Task	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.
External questions review									
IRB									
Recruitment from Gifted program teachers/other participants									
Interviews									
Analysis of data									
Conclusions									

### Recruitment

A recruitment letter (Appendix A) was created at the beginning of this study, which

served as a recruitment tool for gifted teachers to distribute, as well as for me to use during personal recruitment. To achieve some diverse representation in this small study, I used criterion-based recommendations from gifted teachers within a local, Southwest Missouri school district's gifted program, as well as utilized personal acquaintances and their recommendations (snowball sampling) of participants with children who have been identified as gifted by some formal process (by a psychologist, psychiatrist, district gifted program, etc.).

Appreciating the location of the study, I anticipated a difficulty in recruitment of racially and/or linguistically diverse participants. To combat a homogeneous sample, I intensified my efforts to intentionally identify participants with certain criteria, such as varied educational levels, children of varied ages, children considered twice exceptional with a variety of diagnoses, families with more than one gifted child, and families from economically-diverse backgrounds. A short overview of the purpose and requirements of this study was included in the recruitment letter (see Appendix A) and was provided to all interested participants. This overview contained my email address and phone number for families to use to initially express interest in participating in the study. I recruited a Spanish translator for interviews, however, their services were not needed.

## **Data Collection**

This study consisted of two primary data collection tools, including demographic information and personal interviews. Once willing participants were identified, they were provided a consent form that also collected basic demographic information. Collected demographic data consisted of the number and ages of formally identified gifted children, parent's gifted identification status, partner parenting support, race/ethnicity, primary language,

household income, household setting, as well as highest level of educational attainment and employment status of the participants. Once participants provided informed consent and demographic information, they were asked to provide a suggested time and format (ZOOM or face-to-face) via email or text. Participants were informed to plan on at least one interview lasting approximately 1 ½ hours.

Once scheduled, individual interviews were conducted with the eight participants who best represented the goals of the study, including diverse representation in family type, additional diagnoses, and level of parent education. Interviews followed a semi-structured format, in which formal questions were asked, as well as follow-up questions that arose organically during the interview time (Creswell, 2013). This interview protocol can be found as Appendix C. Four interviews were conducted via ZOOM, and four were face-to-face. The individual interviews were recorded for the purpose of transcription (see data analysis). As the researcher, I also used anecdotal memoing to identify unique responses and increase the reliability during data analysis.

### **Data Reduction and Analysis**

In alignment with the interpretive/hermeneutic analysis approach to data, I delayed data analysis until all interviews were conducted. As previously mentioned, analytical memoing throughout the entire data collection process also played a key role in analysis and conclusions. With the four primary research questions and analytical memoing as guides, I allowed salient themes to organically arise from the raw response data. Video recorded participant responses were reviewed in full a minimum three times before transcriptions were created. Once I, the researcher, had conducted these reviews, I transcribed the recordings using a Google Doc and, later, a Google Sheet to create a color-coded code book. Then, in circular fashion, an analysis of

transcriptions was conducted, confirming the themes identified during initial data reviews, as well as their relationship to others.

It was important to me that I heard and read the stories of participants multiple times during analysis. Since I used a hermeneutic analysis approach, there was a circular process since a researcher’s understanding of the data becomes enriched from the numerous readings of the study data (Oerther, 2020, p. 294). I was able to note common challenges, specific topics, and even shared phrases among the participants. This in-depth understanding of the participants’ responses allowed me to connect themes that were spoken and unspoken (Fuster Guillen, 2019). These inferences are outlined in Chapter Four. The main themes and overall connections derived from data analysis are illustrated in Figure 2. A separate illustration demonstrating the relationship between major (spoken) themes and unspoken themes is found in Figure 3 in Chapter Four.

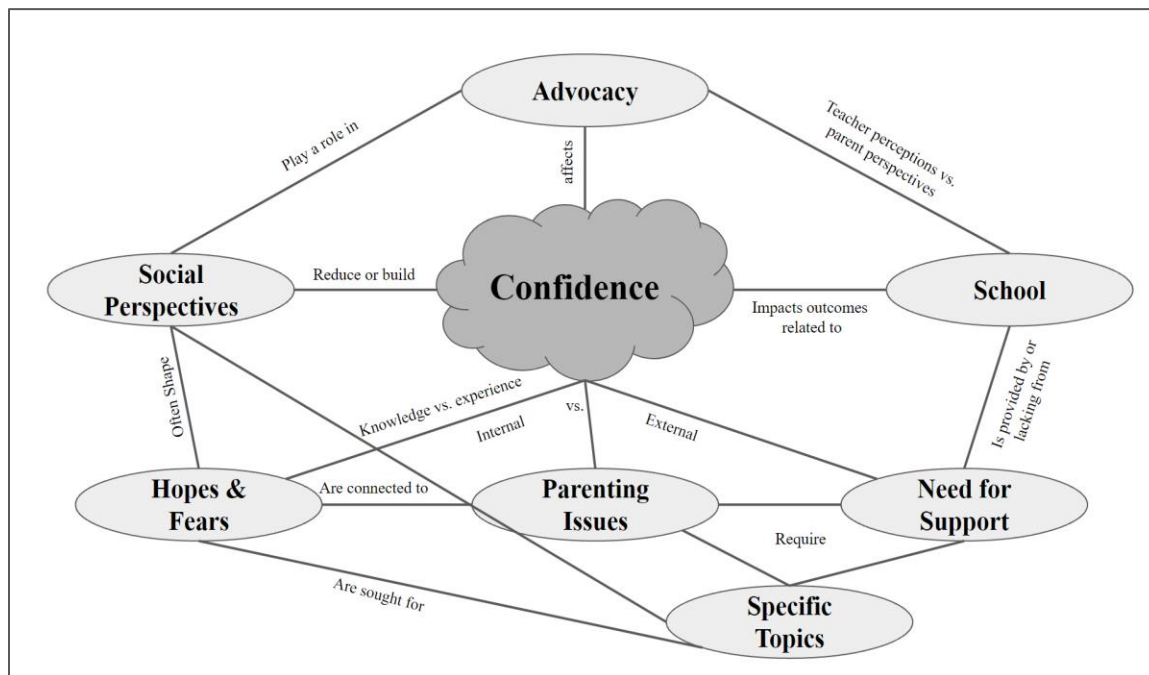


Figure 2 Major Themes and Connections

This figure was designed as a result of multiple reviews of recordings and multiple “reads” of the transcribed data, as well as served as the basis for which direct quotes were categorized. After its creation, I re-read each individual transcription with the purpose of finding direct quotes that supported each individual theme that was established earlier during the data analysis. The same color coding was applied from the figure themes to the quotes of each individual participant. Most importantly, throughout this procedure, I was able to view overlapping connections between the main themes. For example, a participant’s confidence may have been negatively impacted during a school advocacy event in which social relationship and professional knowledge about a specific issue collided. An example of the axial coding procedure is illustrated in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
*Example of Relationship Between Quotes & Themes*

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<b>Main Theme</b>	School
<b>Quote</b>	“I totally accepted the [teacher’s] perceptions because I worked for the school district and I guess I just trusted the ones making the decisions, when, in reality, I should’ve never. I was new to public school. I just didn’t know my own confidence to say, ‘I know something’s going on differently’. And we just took it. Intimidation probably. Mostly because I worked for the district, but even if I hadn’t, I probably would’ve accepted it anyway. Now, as an educated person, I understand intelligence. I didn’t have the information.”
<b>Related Themes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Advocacy</li> <li>● Social Perspectives</li> <li>● Specific Topics</li> <li>● Need for Support</li> </ul>
<b>Representation of Research Questions</b>	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4

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To achieve the third goal of this study, which is to make recommendations as to which types of support increase parenting confidence for gifted parents and caregivers, I synthesized the shared experiences of subjects and their responses to direct questions, such as *Who or what holds the greatest potential to affect your day-to-day confidence as a gifted parent?*, *What have been the most helpful experiences you have had specific to parenting a gifted child?*, and *What experiences do you wish you'd have more of as a gifted parent?*

### **Position of the Researcher**

Since this study was approached with a hermeneutic lens, I did not begin with an epoche (Moustakas, 1994). Rather, I specifically chose not to bracket my personal experience or suspend my judgment during the data collection or analysis stages. Since I have a personal connection with this research topic, an introductory statement at the beginning of each interview connected my own personal experiences to the purpose of this study. This practice is in alignment with the hermeneutic approach to data analysis, as the researchers' opinions are important to the interpretation of the descriptions and to the construction of meaning. The researcher's personal connection to the topic is not bracketed for objectivity, as it is in transcendental phenomenology, where the practice of epoche is strongly encouraged (Moustakas, 1994). A statement of reflexivity is also included within this chapter.

### **Methodological Validity and Reliability**

The validity and reliability of this study were established according to the diligence of the researcher to produce a quality qualitative study (Creswell, 2018). The external review of the structured interview questions played a key role in the establishment of validity, so that I gathered data that accurately addressed the guiding research questions of the study. As with any



qualitative study, interpretation bias is a risk, however, I utilized methods, such as analytical memoing, recordings, and transcriptions to support reliability during data analysis. A statement of reflexivity is also included in this work.

In addition, member checks were used to support the reliability of the data as well. In this case each individual participant was provided the opportunity, before finalization of this study, to review the accuracy and resonance of their experiences shared while interviewing. This opportunity allowed participants to confirm and modify responses, if needed. Interview-based member checks in qualitative research align with the epistemological stance of interpretivism by validating researcher interpretations with a hermeneutical approach (Iivari, 2018). In this case, participants were encouraged to affirm or deny my interpretation of their stories in relation to the study's goals. Participants were able to provide this feedback by email or phone. No revisions were provided by participants.

### **External Review of Interview Questions**

Before participants were gathered, I contacted two external reviewers to identify strengths and weaknesses of the interview questions as data collection tools, specifically to identify any unclear language or expectations, as well as any culturally-biased formatting. Feedback derived from this informal review allowed the opportunity to make corrections, additions, and/or deletions, but also provided the opportunity to anticipate possible responses and practice crafting follow-up interview questions accordingly. For example, it was noted that some of the interview questions may flow better in sets for parents/caregivers of multiple identified children. This way a participant could follow one train of thought (first noticing something

different about their child, the identification process, their role in the process, etc.) before switching mindsets to speak of a completely different individual.

Once slight adjustments were made, I applied for IRB approval of all study instruments. Appendix D details the committee's approval of my study. The external reviewers consisted of two college professors, one of whom specializes in working with diverse families and who also parents a gifted child. No major structural changes to the interview protocol were made as the result of this external review, however, I made small adjustments to the flow of compounded questions, as well as better understood the perspective of an interviewee.

### **Statement of Reflexivity**

Behavior, learning, and exceptionalities have always been a fascination of mine. While it was not my original plan to become an educator, it proved to be a perfect match for my life goals. Education has been a pathway that has opened my eyes to many social injustices, as well as shaped many facets of my personal life. As an incoming undergraduate Freshman, I had a clear path of how I was going to impact my community as a Psychology major and Sociology minor. The pairing of these degrees would, I thought, satisfy my quest to understand human behavior and affect social change. Originally planning to work as a counselor with struggling families trapped within the system, I realized through a variety of field experiences that my ability to change the world could best be achieved through the proactivity of education. This revelation came as a result of a personal mentor relationship at a local youth-treatment facility, in which young people progressed through a program in an attempt to break the social and emotional bondage which enslaved their families for generations.

Drug abuse, crime, neglect, extreme poverty, homelessness, social services, mental illness, and incarceration were all salient features among these life stories. Not surprisingly, so was a lack of education, which held the greatest power of both oppression and opportunity. These same themes were observed as I concurrently worked as a paraprofessional in a low socioeconomic school, as well as several years later when I became a foster parent. As an individual who was raised in the middle class, my eyes were opened and I grew increasingly frustrated with society's acceptance of cyclical patterns and misunderstanding of people living outside the box of what was considered "normal". This was the birth of my love for phenomenological and case study research.

It was incredibly evident to me that if others took the time to holistically invest in at-risk populations, both emotionally and educationally, the responsibility of damage control placed on the social system later on in life could be dramatically reduced. It became my life's work to level the playing field for at-risk families and subgroups of learners by providing equitable access for educational needs.

As a result, I officially changed my major to Education my Senior year of college. I continued my work in the community and maintained minor degrees in both Psychology and Sociology, which have both proved useful in my understanding of human behavior and the pursuit of social justice. After graduation and certification in Elementary and Early Childhood Education, I immediately began teaching full-time and pursuing an M.Ed. in Gifted Education. I had found, rather quickly into my teaching career, yet another at-risk population: the gifted community.

Further into my studies and teaching experience, I came to understand the grave injustices present in servicing students in gifted programming. As pervasively evidenced

throughout the U.S, high-ability students of cultural, linguistic, economic, and cognitive diversity were (and continue to be) among the most underserved in their educational needs. What continued to surprise me was learning that *all* gifted students, regardless of their demographics, suffer at the hands of misunderstanding. These conclusions were confirmed on a personal level as I began to raise two exceptional children of my own.

This study, which examines the parent perspective of these phenomena, aims to contribute to the field of research regarding gifted parenting, as well as serve as a cathartic experience for gifted parents like or different from me. Even with an above-average knowledge base regarding giftedness, I often struggle on a daily basis to parent my children with confidence. In fact, the conception of this study began during a personal conversation with a colleague, who is also the parent of a twice-exceptional child. While this colleague was seeking advice from me as an expert in giftedness, I found my own anxiety rising knowing that her current struggles were most certainly my future ones. Ironically, I left the conversation feeling less confident than I had entered it. Even while researching and conducting this study, I experienced the ebb and flow of confidence as I listened to the experiences of others.

I, like so many others, have experienced the sting of *but* that accompanies every compliment about my children. I've struggled to advocate for my children's needs to be met, experienced the dismissive responses of others when seeking social support, and had many tear-filled conversations with my kids that ended with the reassurance, "I know it's hard that they just don't understand". As an educator, I believe information is power, however, a few years ago I began to ask myself *just how far does knowledge carry us?* Is it possible that it plays a much smaller role in confidence than previously believed? In addition, are there shared experiences

throughout gifted parenting which confirm or negate the power of knowledge in regard to feelings of parental efficacy?

This study is rooted in the interpretivist phenomenological approach to qualitative research, as it seeks to understand the shared experiences and behaviors of gifted parents from a variety of backgrounds and knowledge levels over time. Presented with individual profiles, my desire is to share the perspective of parents, as a standalone construct, which is overlooked in gifted literature. Though not included as outcomes of this study, I strongly believe that understanding the parental perspective regarding giftedness has the potential to strengthen outcomes for gifted students and parent-teacher relationships. It also holds the potential to positively impact current issues, such as identification bias, as there is an intentional examination of confidence associated with advocacy embedded within the study.

As a gifted parent and an experienced gifted teacher, I understand the role my personal feelings and experiences may play in all future qualitative research in which I am involved. It may be tempting to editorialize parent responses or, while coding, apply inferences that may not actually exist. I also have appreciation for the limitations of my own experiences, as a parent without particular challenges to gifted parenting, such as poverty, language barriers, or cultural discontinuity. However, diligence in research design for this study, such as using member checks, ensures my conclusions are accurate and contain limited implicit bias. The nature of qualitative design allows researchers to explore personally-relevant constructs and to tell the stories of others. I consider this study both a privilege and a responsibility to holistically represent the voices of parents of gifted children who are similar and different than myself.

## **Summary**

This chapter presented the methodological approach to the study's design, the analysis of data, as well as the researcher's role and procedures. Chapter Four outlines the findings of this phenomenological study.

## **Chapter Four: Findings**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this phenomenological study, with respect to parenting gifted children, was threefold. First, was to capture the expressed experiences of gifted parents and caregivers regarding the additional challenges associated with raising exceptional children. Secondly, this study aimed to identify which types of experiences and/or supports build a strong sense of parenting efficacy to face these challenges and best meet the needs of their gifted child(ren) with confidence. Lastly, I aimed to synthesize parent reports and established parenting efficacy models with the goal of recommendations for future parent support systems.

Upon conception of this study's guiding research questions, a review of literature regarding gifted parenting was conducted and is presented in Chapter Two of this work. An immediate deficit was noted in the area of research surrounding gifted parenting, especially with consideration to models of support. Since the first two goals of this study required capturing parental experience, the use of semi-structured interview questions allowed caregivers to openly express their thoughts and feelings in a manner in which connections could be made among their own experiences and those of others. The procedures for data collection and data analysis of this interpretive phenomenological study can be found in Chapter Three. Chapter Four presents the findings of this study, including the qualitative interview data, which was analyzed with an interpretive/hermeneutic analysis lens (Figal & George, 2010).

## **Research Questions**

Through the examination of the shared experiences of gifted parents and caregivers, this study is guided by the following research questions:

- RQ1: What are the mental, social, and emotional needs of gifted parents?
- RQ2: What social factors play a role in parents' feelings of self-efficacy regarding parenting their gifted children?
- RQ3: What are the main contributors to parents' reported feelings of empowerment, or lack thereof, with respect to meeting the needs of their exceptional child(ren)?
- RQ4: What shared experiences of gifted parents might suggest a framework for future support models with the goal of promoting parental self-efficacy in nurturing their gifted child(ren)?

## **Participants**

This study consisted of eight parents and/or caregivers with at least one gifted child. All participants identified as “mother” to their child(ren). Three participants represented gifted children in the age range of teenager/young adult, one participant represented a gifted child in Junior High, and four participants represented elementary-aged gifted children. Three participants stated an official gifted identification for either themselves or their partner, however, some others noted discussions regarding their high abilities or their partner's when they were students. In addition, four participants have completed education on the graduate level, one on the undergraduate level, one with some college coursework, and two have completed vocational or technical schooling.

Two participants parent only one child, while the remaining six have multiple children. Of these six, all have a combination of identified and unidentified children. All participants reflect a lower to upper middle class, suburban demographic. Seven consider themselves and their gifted children to be White, with the exception of one participant who identifies their gifted child as Black/African American. Of the eight participants, five disclosed at least one additional diagnosis for their child(ren). Since diversity in family contextual factors was an intentionality while seeking participants for this study, they are outlined in Table 1. Additionally, narrative profiles for each participant are included in this chapter.

### **Participant Profiles**

#### **Anne**

Ann is a mother of multiple children, including one formally identified gifted son. At the time of participation in this study, her son had just graduated high school and was making plans to attend college out of state. Her son was identified as gifted at age 9 by school personnel and carries an additional diagnosis of ADHD. Anne has achieved a graduate-level education, is employed full-time within the field of education, and equally shares parental responsibilities with her spouse. Neither she, nor her spouse, identifies as gifted. She is considered upper middle class and lives in a suburban setting. Anne and her son consider themselves White, native English-speaking individuals.

#### **Scarlett**

Scarlett is a mother of one child, who is a formally identified gifted son. At the time of participation in this study, her son had just completed the 4th grade. Her son was identified as gifted at age 8 by his school and carried a previous diagnosis of Autism since age 3. This diagnosis was provided by an external psychologist and Autism specialty team. Scarlett has



achieved a technical education, is employed full-time at an Autism treatment facility, and equally shares parental responsibilities with her son's stepfather. Neither she, nor her spouse, identifies as gifted. She is considered middle class and lives in a rural setting. Scarlett and her son consider themselves White, native English-speaking individuals.

### **Sandra**

Sandra is a mother of multiple children, including one formally identified gifted daughter and one gifted son, who is the twin of an unidentified sister. At the time of participation in this study, Sandra's gifted daughter had just completed her first year of college and her son had just graduated high school. Her daughter was identified at age 10 and her son was identified as gifted at age 6, both by school personnel. Her daughter manages an eating disorder derived from a significant struggle with perfectionism. Her son does not carry any additional diagnoses. Sandra has achieved a graduate-level education, is employed full-time within the field of education, and equally shares parental responsibilities with her spouse. Her spouse, the father of her children, identifies as twice exceptional, but she does not carry any identification related to giftedness. She is considered middle to upper middle class and lives in a suburban setting. Sandra and her children consider themselves White, native English-speaking individuals.

### **Ann**

Ann is a mother of one child, who is a formally identified gifted son. At the time of participation in this study, her son had just completed 3rd grade. Her son was identified as gifted at age 8 by school personnel and he carries additional diagnoses of ADHD, ODD, Depression, Anxiety, and PTSD. Ann is a single mother, has achieved a technical education, and is employed full-time as a pediatric nurse. She reports she was identified as gifted as a child, but did not take part in any services. She reports she is the primary caretaker of her son and does not receive parental support

from her son's father. She is considered lower middle class and lives in a suburban setting. Ann considers herself White and her son Black/African American. Both are considered native English-speaking individuals.

### **Molly**

Molly is a mother of multiple children, including one formally identified gifted daughter. At the time of participation in this study, her daughter had just completed 11th grade. Her daughter was identified as gifted at age 5 by school personnel and carries an additional diagnosis of a neurocognitive disorder that affects her spatial reasoning. Molly has achieved an undergraduate-level education, is employed part-time within the field of education, and equally shares parental responsibilities with her spouse. Neither she, nor her spouse, identifies as gifted. She is considered upper middle class and lives in a suburban setting. Molly and her daughter consider themselves White, native English-speaking individuals.

### **Carrie**

Carrie is a mother of multiple children, including two formally identified daughters. At the time of participation in this study, her eldest daughter was working as a young, post-college professional and her youngest had just begun her first year of Junior High. Since this study was designed to capture the parental experience throughout adolescence, Carrie's interview focused on her youngest daughter, who was identified as gifted by school personnel at age 8. This daughter does not carry any formal diagnoses in addition to giftedness, however, she displays characteristics of high-functioning ADHD. Carrie has achieved a graduate-level education, is employed full-time within the field of education, and equally shares parental responsibilities of her youngest daughter with her spouse. She identifies as gifted, but her husband does not. She is

considered upper middle class and lives in a suburban setting. Carrie and her daughter consider themselves White, native English-speaking individuals.

### **Jessica**

Jessica is a mother of multiple children, including one formally identified gifted son. At the time of participation in this study, her son had just begun 5th grade. Her son was identified as gifted at age 6 by school personnel and does not carry any additional diagnoses. Jessica has achieved some college coursework, is employed full-time at a local church, and equally shares parental responsibilities with her spouse. Neither she, nor her spouse, identifies as gifted. She is considered middle class and lives in a suburban setting. Jessica and her son consider themselves White, native English-speaking individuals.

### **Megan**

Megan is a mother of multiple children, including one formally identified gifted son. At the time of participation in this study, her son attended 5th grade. Her son was identified as gifted at age 6 by school personnel and does not carry any additional diagnoses. Megan has achieved a graduate-level education, is employed full-time within the field of education, and equally shares parental responsibilities with her spouse. Neither she, nor her spouse, identifies as gifted. She is considered middle class and lives in a suburban setting. Megan and her son consider themselves White, native English-speaking individuals.

## **Findings**

The approach to data analysis for this phenomenological study was through an interpretive/hermeneutic lens, which is characterized as hypothesis-free and by generating theory based on existing relationship after-the-fact (Figal & George, 2010). Langdrige (2007) explains that the context of the phenomenon itself can dictate how data are analyzed when an analytic

method is delayed. This analysis approach remained at the heart of my methodology, as evidenced by procedure, such as delaying the review of data until all interviews were concluded.

The data consisted of stories and shared experiences of eight Missouri parents/caregivers of gifted children reflecting on raising their child(ren), some as far as the end of adolescence. After multiple reviews of video recorded interviews, as well as several readings of transcribed participant responses, seven themes organically emerged from the data, despite the diversity within the population. These seven themes all require, or are affected by, levels of parental confidence and are related, either directly or indirectly, to each other. In addition, two unspoken themes were derived from the data and play an important role when discussing the purposes of this study, especially with consideration to the study’s third goal of making recommendations for future parent/caregiver support systems. These nine related themes are detailed within this chapter, using direct participant responses as supporting evidence. Table 4 notes how each major theme represents the four guiding research questions of this study.

**Table 4**  
*Connection of Major Themes to Research Questions*

	RQ1	RQ2	RQ3	RQ4
Advocacy	X	X	X	X
School	X	X	X	X
Need for Support	X	X	X	X
Specific Topics	X	X	X	X
Parenting Issues	X	X	X	X
Hopes and Fears	X		X	X
Social Perspectives	X	X	X	X

## Major Themes

After review of the data, seven major themes related to confidence emerged from the data. These themes were consistently discussed among all participants. In other words, all participants “spoke” to these topics explicitly when sharing about their parental confidence. They include *advocacy*, *school*, *need for support*, *parenting issues*, *specific topics*, *hopes and fears*, and *social perspectives*. Most participant responses represented an overlapping of multiple themes, providing evidence to the complexity of parenting exceptional children and the need for support systems that match this level of specificity and complexity. Sandra’s words captured this complexity well,

I feel like it [parenting] was a whack-a-mole. You feel like you have this one under control and then this one pops up. *This* issue pops up. I just felt like it was hard. It was a challenge, but a challenge that paid off.

The seven major themes and their relationship to one another are represented in Figure 2 and are discussed in detail in this chapter.

### Advocacy

The concept of advocacy was a popular discussion for all participants to some degree or another. Participants understood the concept of advocacy in relation to what they have had to do to best meet the needs of their exceptional child(ren). For some, this was strongly evidenced as a source of frustration and discouragement. For others, it was an opportunity for them to justify their feelings of confidence that they brought into a given situation. Not surprisingly, as most gifted children are identified and served through the school system, a strong connection was made between the themes of *advocacy* and *school*, which will be discussed as the next section of this data analysis. School may be the first opportunity for parent and caregiver perspectives of giftedness to conflict with that of educators’ (Wilson, 2015), and therefore, set the tone for

confident parenting and advocacy. One study focusing on 2E advocacy found that parents “feared that one advocacy error on the parents’ part could potentially impede their child’s future” (Besnoy et al., 2015). This was definitely evidenced by the participant responses of Anne, Scarlett, Sandra, Molly, and Carrie.

I feel guilty that I should've fought for him. I should've said, “I know the law” even though I didn't at the time. I should've questioned. We could not even be sitting here today because *I* didn't push the issue.

I had just never been exposed to anything like this. I started asking myself, “Should I have already known this?” What if the teacher had never said anything? I felt like I could've missed something just not paying enough attention.

At that time, everything he did, I was watching. I wanted to know if I was sleeping at the wheel. I didn't want to be the parent who's naive.

There's plenty of times that we've wondered, “Are we missing the boat?”. Should we have had her in the pull-out? Should we have focused her more toward things and we were too concerned with making her normal?

...having conversations with my first child saying, “I wish you would have done this” and then realizing I did her a disservice. I had to apologize to her and tell her, “I'm sorry I allowed you to sit and play sudoku because your teacher didn't know what to do with you.”.

In this discussion of advocacy, two dichotomous views related to confidence were presented through participant voices. These polarized feelings were categorized as negative feelings and positive feelings associated with advocacy for their gifted child(ren), as well as for their unidentified children whom they feel should be tested for giftedness.

### ***Negative Feelings Associated with Advocacy***

Six of the eight participants shared at least one anecdote relating to confidence that had a negative connotation. All were school-related. The six who shared a negative story related to advocacy confidence expressed at least one conflict with teachers who were not equipped to adequately handle the exceptionalities (overexcitabilities, extreme honesty, behavioral

manifestations, academic needs, etc.) of their gifted student(s). Anne shared, “It was very obvious she [the 2nd-grade teacher] liked the student that fit in the box. It was a brutal year. I must've cried 10 or 15 times in the parking lot that year.”

Molly, Carrie, and Jessica shared similar concerns about teachers, though their advocacy actions, as a result, varied. It is important to note here that Molly and Jessica also revealed that since their identified child was their first child, they had less knowledge and experience in which to rely. Ann shared a similar feeling regarding confidence to advocate for her child qualifying for gifted programming, “I always felt like he belonged in one [a gifted program], but never wanted to push it unless the teachers agreed.”. However, Carrie, though she shared the same feelings as Molly, Ann, and Jessica with her first identified child, shared that her confidence had grown significantly by the time her third child (spoken of below) had qualified for gifted services.

I didn't advocate for my oldest so I learned how to advocate for her [my youngest]. I often have to remind [the teachers] *this* is giftedness, especially her shutting down. I have to stick up for her. Usually, the teacher takes her behavior personally. I've sent articles to the teachers before because they don't have a lot of training. When she starts something new, we talk to [those in charge]. We don't always say “she's gifted”, but “here's some strategies to work with her”.

One specific experience of Carrie's is captured below, and then juxtaposed by the words of Molly, then Jessica.

She had a 4th grade teacher who was a first-year teacher and didn't first seek to understand. It felt like she had a bullseye on her from the beginning. It just wasn't a good combination. We were offered to move her, but I didn't feel like that was the best thing. She has to get along with all teachers. We probably had 4 or 5 meetings that year. It was not a good feeling for me, but I had to do it. It was an uncomfortable conversation to have with the principal. I don't hold a grudge, I was advocating for my child. It was hard because I know so many people in that district. I didn't want to get the teacher in trouble because I was hoping the teacher would grow from the experience. It's always been my conflict. I know what's supposed to take place in a classroom and it's not [happening]. But, in that moment, I'm a parent. I have to defer to those in charge and say, “I trust you”. My confidence in those moments comes from *I know my stuff*. I don't think the average parent has the confidence to go in and say, “this is what I want or need”. I think

some parents still carry that mindset that they don't advocate because they don't know they *can* advocate.

Fourth grade was particularly challenging. The teacher was not equipped to handle a student like her. She would frequently make mistakes on the board and spell things wrong. [My daughter] was very quick to call those out. I actually got a phone call, as the parent, about her making too many corrections. It was difficult to figure out because she wasn't wrong, but likewise, she had to be respectful and handle things appropriately. There was nothing we could do about it, that was her teacher. That 4th grade year, looking back, knowing now what I know, I would have handled her [my child] the same way, but would have demanded more from the teacher or administration for support. I didn't really know that I could. [I would have] even asked administration for support. I was more putting out the fire. Looking back, I would've set up a meeting. I didn't think I knew I could have that conversation because of age or feeling comfortable with myself. As a young parent and you haven't gone through it, you don't necessarily know that you can ask the questions or disagree. You just think the teacher knows. We could've had some dialogue.

Kindergarten was a terrible experience. It was a big letdown for us. It was a first-year teacher and she was overwhelmed. I remember going to the first Parent-Teacher conference and feeling like she didn't even know which kid she was talking about. Honestly, it was so disappointing. My confidence was lacking because you go into this conference because you see all these wonderful things at home and then feel like, "Do you even know my kid?". The 1st-grade teacher wasn't really doing anything extra for him and we didn't really know what to do for him. There wasn't really much communication back and forth between us about what we could be doing. She liked him and was pushing him toward getting in this program, but not much else to encourage him. I really don't feel like we had a huge role in getting this started. It was really about understanding how *can we best serve you*. I think that was an internal struggle for us when we didn't know what to do [about his behavior].

Anne, Sandra, and Ann shared similar struggles concerning negative experiences related to their children's' additional exceptionalities and how it affected the confidence of their next actions as parents. This focus on disability over ability is not new to gifted literature surrounding twice-exceptionality (Hollyhand, 2013; Strohm, 2017). In each story, the participants felt as if their child's disability and/or exceptional behaviors were overshadowing their abilities in the eyes of at least one teacher. Anne shared about her son diagnosed with ADHD, Sandra shared about a presumptuous conversation with a preschool teacher regarding characteristics of Autism,



as well as a bullying incident in middle school, and Ann shared about after-school care personnel not understanding her child's multiple behavioral diagnoses.

In 2nd grade he had a lot of behaviors. I think ADHD was part of it, but I think gifted was another part of it that the teacher just wasn't recognizing. I felt like he wasn't validated for what he had to offer. There were teachers in his life who really missed the boat. Who missed the opportunity to pour into him. I just wanted someone to battle for my kid. They just dismiss you because sometimes he would disrupt *their* agenda. I started to question myself, like, "Is he really gifted or is this just a fluke?". That's what happens when you don't feel supported. I should have fought for him more.

He would do all these things that normal four-year-olds don't do. We just thought he's so bright and likes all this stuff. When he went to preschool, the teacher told us he should be tested for Autism on the first day. That sent me in a tailspin. He was definitely the one through elementary school who we were worried about. From, I would say, K-8, he was our focus. Middle school was definitely the hardest. It was when we had to really look at our parenting. Knowing when to help him change and when to let him be him was hard. We knew he would have to fit into this world. He would have to fit the mold. He had always finished first in History Day [academic competition]. His 8th-grade year, he went to ask [the teacher] a question and when he returned to his desk, someone had erased his entire project and written the word *Autistic* across his screen. That was the hardest parenting moment of my life. That was the only meeting we ever had [to advocate] and we were really considering sending him to [private schools]. We took the weekend and thought about it, prayed about it, and ultimately decided that this was his line in the sand. What can we do? We can't change the people around him, but how can we help him and help him become a better person? As a special ed teacher, I felt good about knowing how to teach social skills. I did it all of the time.

He's butt heads with several different staff members [at the after-school program] because they don't understand his *why* isn't always confrontational. He's just trying to see the logic in it. They see it as him arguing and they write him up. It erodes my confidence in how they see me as a parent. I guess I value how they see me as a parent because it's like, "I'm doing my best". They look at him like he's some out of control mess and I'm just over here allowing him to do whatever he wants. And, I'm not. I feel like I'm holding the reins so tight they're about to break. Talking in therapy about social skills and how giftedness can affect him has helped us meet goals.

In addition, two of these six participants who associated confidence and advocacy also negatively referred to the process of identification of giftedness for either their identified child(ren) or their unidentified child(ren) whom they felt required advocacy efforts to be

considered for gifted testing and services. Anne described the frustration she felt when she asked for her son to be tested,

And she [the teacher] just said, “I don't see any evidence that he needed to be tested” and, unfortunately, I listened to her and shouldn't have. I totally accepted [the 2nd grade teacher's perceptions] because I worked for the school district and I guess I just trusted the ones making the decisions when, in reality, I should've never trusted it. I just didn't know my own confidence to say, “I know something's going on differently”. And plus, I didn't know a lot about gifted. It's not something I had ever explored. And we just took it. Intimidation probably. Mostly because I worked for the district, but even if I hadn't, I probably would've accepted it anyway. Finally, in 4th grade they tested him by his request. He said, “I just want to know”. We petitioned and asked to test him. You do, what a 90-question survey for ADHD? You should do a 90-question survey for gifted. It's the same sort of thing. It brings its own challenges. It just didn't feel like an open conversation to talk about the whole child. Not being willing to test him in 2nd grade really reduced my confidence as a parent for what I knew about my kid. He was my 3rd child, I knew something was different. I needed more information to help him be successful. My confidence was diminished early on and I didn't push the issue. Then, he pushed the issue. We could not even be sitting here today because *I* didn't push the issue.

Jessica, a mother of four children, one of whom is formally identified as gifted, expressed much concern for the overall identification process as she has had to advocate for two of her younger children whom she feels are gifted, but are denied services.

With the other two, I've had to advocate so much more because the intelligence is different. Advocating for them has been a completely different level. My confidence has been affected super negatively. We see this and know there's a difference. I can see there's something going on in there, but when we bring that up we get, “no, he's just a normal student”. I feel like the people making those decisions just aren't listening or the system is set up to where it doesn't matter. That definitely feels defeating. Not being heard. Why is it not worth the time to dig into this? The comparison [between identified and unidentified children] has been so strong that we actually started requesting different teachers. With [2nd child], when we would go to conferences, we would feel like he was a letdown for teachers after having [first child].

### ***Positive Feelings Associated with Advocacy***

Two participants shared a story that highlighted their confidence to advocate in a positive light. It is important to note that while Carrie and Sandra both shared negative experiences that required advocacy, they were able to also note positive feelings of confidence within those same

situations. In Carrie's situation, her understanding of quality classroom practices and a better grasp on giftedness with her third child gave her the confidence to hold her child's teacher accountable. For Sandra, her expertise in teaching specific skills that her son needed to better bully-proof himself gave her the confidence to move forward with a solution-based mindset. Though these experiences negatively affected their confidence to advocate initially, they were able to, in the end, rely on their own confidence to do what they felt was right. These situations note an important idea regarding the intersectionality of experience and knowledge.

Though Anne had shared many moments that negatively impacted her confidence to advocate, she also reflected on how a few teachers during her son's high school years, as well as her own growth in understanding of ADHD and giftedness, provided the confidence she needed to stay the course of how she felt was the best way to parent her son.

The teachers were the catalyst for how I felt. I remember an ELA teacher telling me he asked good questions. He started gaining positive attention and won awards. It made me feel good that we were doing the right things by supporting his interests and who he was. When teachers say, "This is exceptional ability and you should be proud!", it gave me confidence.

When he started using the excuse of ADHD that he couldn't do anything, I put in front of him [resources about] what is ADHD and what is gifted. In fact, it wasn't ADHD at all, but the gifted piece of perfectionism that was stopping him. Stuff like that gives us both confidence because he knows I'm working for him. I'm on his side.

Scarlett shared how communication between classroom teachers, gifted teachers, special education teachers, and herself empowered her to advocate. Her response is a direct contrast from the voices of Molly and Jessica, who felt they didn't have the confidence to ask questions of school personnel.

Communication was key for me. It made me feel like I could advocate for my child. Parents should always feel like they can ask those questions. I remember one time where it just felt like I wasn't getting all the information I needed and it wasn't connecting. I

was like, “Hold on, we need to all get in a room together and get on the same page.”. We did and everything was fine. I knew that’s what I needed to move forward.

Megan, the only other participant within this study to not have an experience that negatively impacted her confidence to advocate, stated her confidence was so high she would have immediately pursued other channels for services if her son had not qualified for gifted programming. She also alludes to a strong relationship with an important stakeholder, the school counselor.

I had high confidence that he was meeting all of those things [attributes of giftedness] and that he was going to qualify. I would have pushed [if he didn’t qualify] because I was that confident. I had other outside people asking me if he had been tested. I would have used my circle of people to see what we could do. My teacher brain would have clicked in and I had a good enough relationship with the school counselor to ask what was next.

What makes these last two participants’ experiences interesting is the underlying theme of relationships with school personnel. Clearly, both Scarlett and Megan felt as if their relationship with the other stakeholders was strong enough to support challenge and/or questioning. Even Carrie, who shared about a challenging situation, suggested that relationships with school personnel can affect the confidence to advocate in both positive and negative ways. This idea will be explored more deeply in the other major theme of *social perspectives*, as five of the eight participants were or are currently employed in the district that qualified and serves/ed their children for gifted education.

## **School**

As mentioned previously in the *advocacy* portion of this chapter, school played a large role in parents' feelings of confidence. Many participants contextualized their most challenging times, for both their children and themselves, in relation to grade level. Many parents look to schools as a support with expertise, and when that support is not received, it can be devastating

to confidence. This idea will be explored deeper in the sections regarding *parenting issues, need for support, and specific topics*. In addition, some participants also discussed how their professional and personal connections to the school in which their child(ren) attended affected their confidence and comfortability to advocate, which was explored in *advocacy* and will be discussed further in *social perspectives* as well.

While many of the stories detailed above dealt with negative advocacy experiences associated with school, some participants conveyed positive experiences for their child that felt like support and/or confidence boosters to them as the parent. These experiences took place both inside and outside the specific gifted programming.

### ***School Personnel Going Above and Beyond***

Two parents shared experiences related to school that were affirming to who their children were and the unique needs they possessed. These experiences represented a supportive approach in which school personnel were active participants alongside the parents. Sadly, only two participants in this study volunteered such experiences. Both Carrie and Sandra shared anecdotes related to school personnel going above and beyond basic requirements.

We were approached by administration to accelerate my oldest in kindergarten. She was just way advanced and that was a way to provide for her needs. Because of her older sister, and because she had a late birthday, we were asked if we wanted to do the same for [my youngest].

When lunch was such a hard time in middle school, he had a teacher who held a philosophy club during lunch time. That saved his life. It was like a village of [parent] support.

### ***Gifted Programming***

While most parents did not speak directly to the effectiveness of the gifted program in which their child attended, those who did had mixed feelings regarding how it, as a resource,

affected their confidence as a parent. These same participants also shared about their child's program being a solid intervention for their child(ren), but a missed opportunity for sharing supportive resources and experiences to them as caregivers. This will be explored deeper in the next three major themes. However, Scarlett specifically noted her decision to pursue gifted programming for her son as a direct reflection on her confidence, "That first day, I got a confidence booster that we were on the right path because I could already see results from one day."

This statement was in direct contrast to that of Anne, who felt her child's gifted programming reinforced misconceptions about giftedness that negatively affected both her son's experiences in school, as well as her overall confidence as a parent. She stated, "The gifted program was a waste. If you are presenting a narrow mindset of what giftedness is, it does more damage than good."

Aside from the affirmation of a giftedness identification and the positive actions of a few school personnel who went above and beyond their classroom roles, parents did not go out of their way to discuss how school impacted their confidence in a positive way. However, Jessica noted how one small glimpse into what was taking place in gifted programming had an impact on her confidence when she was going through a particularly challenging time with her gifted son.

The newsletters we receive from gifted [class] each week have been really helpful. They would show pictures of what they're working on. When he was having really strong emotions and he would say things like, "I just want to die"...that was his response to everything and we're feeling like, "what is happening?". I remember we got a newsletter shortly after that had a picture of the board that had different emotions and one of the emotions written [was the same one] and it was from another student, not him. We've seen other things kids are struggling with and been able to relate to it and think, "It's ok, my kid isn't suicidal.". These are strong emotions they are working through and because they're gifted it comes out a different way.

As previously mentioned, the theme of *school* was a concept that was consistently related to other major themes in this data analysis, just as Jessica's experience is also layered in the other major themes of *social perspectives*, *need for support*, *parenting issues*, and *specific topics*, as well as the subtopic of *information and communication*.

Through their responses, participants contextualized *school* as the physical location in which children were identified, a time period in which parents felt advocacy was crucial, and the source they looked to for expertise and support that was often unmet. Carrie noted, "It would be helpful to have an IEP and a plan to get through school.", which was similarly resonated by Anne,

I don't think you should just test a kid and go on. Even with kids with special needs, you meet annually to set goals, ask what are their interests, what are they struggling in. I feel like that would've helped me. I feel like you are left on your own and school is just something to get through.

### **Need for Support**

As mentioned in the previous section, parents and caregivers often look to schools as sources of expertise and support. Since many parents express feelings of uncertainty related to the giftedness identification and all it encompasses, it can be inferred that their need for additional and specialized support can be greater than the typical parent. This section explores the types of support participants wished they had received from their child's school and/or gifted program, what they *did* receive that worked, as well as who they looked to outside of school personnel for support.

### ***Information and Communication***

A common need that was unmet for parents in this study was basic, continued, communication and/or information from their child's school and/or gifted program. Several

parents expressed an initial complete lack of understanding of what giftedness is and how programming would impact their child's success. Since these participants expressed a lack of knowledge regarding giftedness to begin with, many shared that being unfamiliar with what programming entailed just added one more item to the list of stressful unknowns. The parents who shared about this topic conveyed an *outsider looking in* perspective that affected their confidence in either themselves or the program itself. Molly shared these feelings as one of the reasons why she and her spouse ultimately pulled their child from her gifted program.

I talked to some other friends whose kids were in the program. I talked with the counselor about the program and seeing if it made sense for her. I was torn because some of the things they pulled out for that were cool and fun, but it may have been something that I could take her on a non-school day because I could [as a stay at home parent]. I needed more explanation about the *why*. You say you want to test and do this, but why? How did it fit in the big picture outside of filling her time? I could have probably gotten more on board if I had more information. I wanted to know what she was working on. I don't think there was any working collaboratively. There's this thing [the gifted program] and she's a smart kid. I knew the stuff about her, it was more about understanding the things they were trying to do. I would create an explanation, because the word gifted carries a lot of connotations, positive and negative. I would definitely want parents to understand what that is for *parents*. Explaining the process, not just "we're going to test your child and pull them out of class". That naivety of what is a gifted program...so I can understand and explain that to someone else. So you could explain it to others and not feel like you're saying [arrogantly] "I'm up here". Basically, what giftedness is and what the program looks like.

Anne, another parent who chose to remove her child from the gifted program due to feelings of lack of support, added similar sentiments about feeling disconnected to her child's gifted program and what it had to offer.

The gifted program wasn't a positive experience for my child at all. The most benefit was just my own research. Going on YouTube, reading articles, learning more about bright vs. gifted, learning more about ADHD, and gifted characteristics. I've never had an experience of connectivity. I don't even know where the door is. It was never made available to me. I feel like because there was no connectivity, I had to do it on my own. Read my own books. I would definitely create opportunities for parents to come work on projects with their kids. We want to interact with our kids and share their interests, but we don't have the resources. So, we had to try and do it on our own.



Scarlett and Carrie shared similar feelings regarding their children's gifted programming. Carrie, who ultimately opted out her daughter from gifted programming when she started Junior High, expressed these feelings, which are later echoed by Scarlett and Megan reflecting on a different district's programming:

If I weren't an educated parent who is an educator, I wouldn't have understood all of that [ID process]. I didn't have a post-conference or qualification meeting, just a letter. That would've been helpful. I wasn't super excited because I don't see a lot of value to the program. Information was lacking. There was no "this is what this looks like in our district". There's been a couple teachers over the years that sent a newsletter, which is more like, "this is what we did in class". Not resources for parents, like a parent support group or materials. If I approached them they were good to provide resources, but there was no systematic support for parents. I would definitely say we need more parent information, meetings, workshops, PD for teachers. There's nothing. We have training as teachers for every other qualification of student. It would be helpful to have an IEP and a plan to get through school. I would advocate for more parental support. Think about the parent who doesn't have a background in education. I think we need both information about the program and information about what this [giftedness] is.

I wasn't even aware there was a gifted program. It would have helped early on to get more about the program, not just "I think your child would be good for the program". It would've saved me a lot of stress because I know what it takes for him, his schedule and things. I only had like a week to plan all of this with him. It would've helped for someone to ask me, "Do you have any experience with this? Are you gifted? Is anyone else in your family gifted?". I was at zero and I had all of these different teachers to work with. The gifted teacher communication, like her newsletter emails, helped me tremendously because I could *see* what he was doing and learning. It was definitely gradual...confidence, stress, all of it. I loved Parent-Teacher conferences because that was the only key I had to keep my confidence level. I would have brochures, a detailed plan of what the gifted program looks like, and make sure there's open lines of communication. I wish parents could be more involved in it and feel included in all stuff going on.

I would like both more on the program and more on giftedness. I'm sure there are some parents who are like, "What do we do now?". I feel like I have a good base, but I'm sure some parents don't. I think it would be beneficial for parents of gifted kiddos to have more information about what test results mean. I'm sure some parents think, "What does it mean when my kid is two standard deviations away from the norm?". I remember I was given a sheet of gifted characteristics that was like a checklist. And I was like, "this, this, this!". All these things we see or struggle with. It was a validation and it just made sense. The gifted teacher reached out [after qualification] and said they were so excited to have him come. She was right there at the qualification meeting.

While the responses above would suggest that having a gifted teacher share information

would be a positive experience that boosted confidence, it is important to note that individualized information, and the clarity in which information is communicated to parents, still play a role in confidence for parents who have a limited knowledge base regarding giftedness. The idea of *specific topics* will be discussed later in this chapter. Jessica shared such an experience about her son's qualification meeting with the counselor and gifted teacher present,

There was some excitement in knowing that he was intelligent. I remember conversations in a gifted meeting with the teacher and asking myself, "Have I been parenting him wrong?". She was talking about kids who had to put blinders over their eyes and lay down [from sensory overload]. And I was like, "Have I been doing this wrong?". I remember the counselor then saying, "...but not all gifted kids are like that...".

### ***Personal Support Systems***

Within this study, participants also shared with whom they confided regarding their child's giftedness and related challenges. All eight participants were able to identify individuals in their lives who provided a supportive presence. All were individuals outside of school and included family and close friends. When asked why these individuals were selected, all shared a similar response of including people who 1) loved their child(ren) and had a vested interest in them, and 2) who knew their children on a deep level, not just on an academic one. This complexity in relationships is a key element in understanding parents' confidence while interacting with others in an academic versus a social setting, which will be explored in the *social perspectives* section of this chapter. In addition, all participants reported receiving feelings of affirmation from these individuals. In fact, not one participant was able to identify a negative reaction regarding sharing their child's giftedness identification with those close to them.

Interestingly, some participants also shared feelings about self-consciousness related to confiding in other parents whose children do not share the same identifications/challenges. This

is explored deeper in the discussion of other major themes, but is introduced now in relation to gifted parent support groups, which was widely represented in this data.

### ***Parent Support Groups***

Out of the eight participants of this study, only one parent stated that a gifted parent support group was made available for them. Molly, who had reservations regarding the social stigma of gifted programming chose not to participate for this reason. However, it is important to note that while she did not participate in this formalized parent support group, she independently reached out to other parents with whom she had a personal relationship and whom she knew had gifted children. Her concerns regarding perceptions of giftedness will be explored through the context of *social perspectives* as well.

I was heavily involved in MOPS with a significant network of other moms who had kids like this and were going through this. I asked one in particular questions about, “Are you going through this?”. Our district started a gifted support group. I never went. I struggled with the whole thing, probably a chip on my shoulder, that I didn’t want to be identified as that group of parents. I never took advantage of that resource. I think that goes back to that same place of worrying about what it looked like.

Unlike Molly, no other participants in this study were provided the opportunity to participate in a gifted parent support group. Interestingly, all seven noted it was an experience they wished they were offered and that held the potential to positively affect their confidence as a gifted parent, especially during difficult times. Since there were no participants with experience participating in a gifted parent support group, these were their assumptions. Anne and Sandra both have gifted children who are now young adults, while Scarlett, Ann, Jessica, and Megan shared a perspective of being *in the thick of* gifted parenting with younger children. Carrie was the only participant to have both perspectives, as she is parenting a gifted Junior Higher and gifted young adult.

Anne stated, “I think a parent support group is a great idea. I probably would have participated in a parent support group, especially in middle school. We do it for everyone else.”, and Sandra concurred by stating, “I would have loved a parent support group. I would still love that. It should be a Kindergarten and up requirement.”. Carrie, who offers both perspectives of a seasoned gifted parent, as well as one with a program-eligible aged child said,

I think having a parent group session that you can come together and talk about giftedness [is needed]. You see these groups for Autism and other things, but never for gifted. You can get that affirmation of other people’s stories.

Interestingly, these same exact feelings are echoed by parents who are newer to the gifted-identified parenting realm. These are the voices of Scarlett, Ann, Megan, and Jessica.

A support group would be great. Some sort of thing where you can hear stories from other parents, especially those who have been through it at least one year. I remember I went to a [gifted program] Parent-Teacher conference one year and there happened to be like three groups of parents waiting and we kind of all merged together and started having this group session comparing, and talking, and bragging, and I feel like I learned a lot from that. It’s great to hear from the teacher, but seeing other parents and seeing how they approach this, or dealt with that, or what their kid does...I was like, “Oh, he does that and how did that work out?”.

For me [I want] to have more contact with gifted parents. Something like a support group or like if he was friends with a gifted kid and I could become friends with their parent... just where we could discuss our kids. Like a support group, but more like a friendship. Like we could have that parenting side of friendship, but also the educational side of help. Being around another parent who deals with that. Like strategy share, “Hey, what do you do?”. Even with my best friend, it’s still not the same. It’d be nice to be friends with a parent that understands and can help me and we can help each other. That would help me feel like I’m not alone in it. Like I’m maybe doing something right. I would create some type of support group.

...having other parents to bounce stuff off of. There was some validation with some of the things those kids went through. I wish there was more of a gifted parent thing. I think a parent support group would be interesting.

...it could be a parent support group so I could hear other stories from parents. I know I’ve had times where I’ve experienced something earlier than another parent and vice versa. Or, things we haven’t dealt with yet but can totally see us dealing with it at some point. I like the idea of open conversation and sharing things back and forth. Like, “Oh ya, I’ve dealt with that!”.

As an extension on the basic parent support group format, many participants alluded to using this time with others to discuss and problem-solve specific issues associated with child rearing gifted kids. This will be discussed further in the next major theme of this chapter.

### ***Advocacy and Identifying Giftedness***

Many parents in this study stated they needed more help in meeting the needs of their gifted child(ren) and looked to school professionals for help. Many were disappointed in the responses and/or lack of resources as a result. This was especially true for Anne, who struggled to get her son services, as well as Jessica, who is actively advocating for the identification of her 2nd and 3rd children, whose intelligences are not as academically obvious.

For [2nd child], because of people seeing intelligence as being outward, it felt like defeat in the sense of how can one kid be so intellectual and the other one over here. It made it really hard to support him and encourage him because it was like, *we see this*, but trying to still encourage him was really, really tough. We even probably overdid it because *we* felt discouraged. I remember having conversations with the teacher about how [2nd child] felt. I tried to make people witness what was going on, what we saw. It was lonely because I felt like, “I don't know what I'm doing and you're supposed to be the expert in this”. I felt frustrated and ill-equipped. I ended up talking to the counselor and he was really encouraging. I was still trying to contact someone at the school to help with that and talking with family and friends to ask how they would go about it.

Due to her unique perspective, Jessica also provided a different take on the traditional parent support model to include an extended, yet more intimate group of stakeholders as well. In this unique design, she noted that having additional stakeholders, such as the counselor, an educational advocate, and even a family representative present during group times would provide her the confidence and resources she needed to feel successful. Interestingly, Sandra, a mother of identified and unidentified children, as well as the spouse of an identified parent, shared similar ideas, “...even a caseworker or advocate. Sometimes, parents just don't know, especially when they might be gifted themselves. They may be the same problems that they can't see how to solve.”.

Jessica also noted that her uniquely designed system would be incredibly useful as she advocates for her unidentified children, as she feels a more comprehensive assessment of their abilities would be presented. In addition, it would provide her the tools to address their needs, regardless of identification status. This is important to note while connecting other major themes of this study, as well as specific questions, such as who parents confide in regarding their child's giftedness. To remind the reader from a previous section, all participants were able to identify confidants in their lives who 1) loved their child(ren) and were personally vested in them, and 2) knew them on a deeper level than just academic. Jessica explained her idea using these words,

...having someone who truly cares about your kid, like the stakeholder part, and want to see him strive and grow and prosper, that feels huge. Family can overreact because they don't understand. So, people who care and understand, but knows what to do. People who have similar parenting values would help as well. I would include the school counselor or someone else who works in the school, but actually knows your kid. Maybe even people from a church setting that can speak to our values and help with that parenting piece. Maybe like a family advocate that represents a family value system, plus an academic advocate. It would be helpful to have some family present for *their* benefit to understand better. So they know how to support us. Of course, the gifted teacher would be a big thing as well. Having an advocate that can speak up when you don't know how to. They need to be in the gifted perspective to better articulate. That way I don't have to have the right words. I think if it was beneficial for me it would need to be someone who goes with you throughout the entire process. They can go to meetings and give you resources that are specific. It's almost like the advocate needs to be the identifier at the beginning of the process. With [my 1st child] we didn't really need that, but with my other two they can help see that giftedness. They would stay with the family, but each child needs their own. Because there's that expectation and comparison between kids. I would like to say that it would be possible to have the same one, but I don't think that's actually possible for most people, to see them differently. It would be easy to miss. The advocate needs to come when kids first get on the radar. Even if the kid doesn't qualify for gifted, I'm still dealing with these issues at home. I still need help.

### **Specific Topics and Parenting Issues**

While these next two major themes are independently represented in Figure 2, their interconnectivity throughout participant responses demand a synchronous summary of findings. Participants conveyed many parenting issues specific to giftedness, such as perfectionism, child suicidal ideations, social issues, and compulsive behaviors. Not surprisingly, when asked what

they needed as parents to build or maintain their confidence, their responses were directly related to the unique issues they were facing in parenthood.

These themes are represented separately from each other within Figure 2 due to their independent relationship with other major themes. For example, the theme of *parenting issues* has an independent relationship with *social perspectives*. The related themes of *specific topics* and *parenting issues* also have a strong connection to the overwhelming representation of parent voices stating a need for parent support groups and more individualized information, both specifically addressing certain topics.

### ***Specialized Resources***

All the participants of this study stated they wanted specific resources regarding how giftedness either affects normal developmental stages, such as puberty, and/or how their child(ren)'s additional exceptionalities, such as Autism, ADHD, eating disorders, etc. can be affected by or rooted in giftedness. It is evident through this analysis that even narrowed topics, such as perfectionism, still require an understanding from the information provider, as to how the issue may be specifically manifesting within a certain child. Jessica explains,

We lacked that communication back and forth about how to deal with specifically the things we were dealing with. Ok, you're recognizing there's a difference, but the material isn't exactly what we needed. It was too generic. It was a lot of information where it was like, "I don't even know what to do with this." Talking with the gifted teacher we really didn't talk deeply because there were all these other kids to worry about. So, there wasn't anyone that really knew him and knew what was going on. It was helpful to have conversations with a family member [with expertise of giftedness]. She knew them on a personal, home level, as well as being an expert. The general things just aren't helpful. What are we going to do with that? I had gotten an article the other day about perfectionism and was excited and then realized it wasn't at all how it manifests with him. I like knowing these are stories [that are given to me are] close to me, from our school and community. I also need more open-ended conversation to work through things in a safe environment. Like a counseling aspect.

Sandra, the parent of two gifted children, one who manages an eating disorder manifested by extreme perfectionism, and one who significantly struggled with social skills throughout school, shared,

During her eating disorder, it was very difficult. There were times when we were just like, “We just can’t do this.” This is when you get outside help. We really struggled as parents when my daughter was a Sophomore and going through high school. She got to where she didn’t care about anything. The *not caring* is really hard to parent. Perfection is hard to parent. It’s hard to get to their heart and we really do want to parent to her heart. Not everything is completely right or wrong. Sometimes there is gray. And sometimes *they* are gray. It’s really difficult when there is, for both my children, gray. There was *one* book I read that was really helpful. Most of them are just about “this is what giftedness is”. I knew what giftedness was, I lived with it every day. I read a book with like six scenarios and could see my kids *in* it. It was like different case studies and I was constantly underlining. People relate to stories and people can put their own kids in those stories. Sometimes you’re like, “I don’t want my kids in that story.” It was so helpful. I think taking out assumptions would be helpful to gifted kids. I think parents need materials that coach them to know the balance between expectations and grace. Things like, “if this happens, here’s what you can do”. You have to think down the road for them to be successful in life. We do it with learning disabled kids, but then when we get to gifted, we don’t think about it. We don’t have a plan for their futures.

Similarly, Anne, a parent of a 2E son with ADHD shared about existential depression when her son was young,

I needed more about ADHD and gifted characteristics. Especially, when things hit a roadblock, like when depression sets in. Specifically, learning more about that. I lost confidence in the *why am I here?* part. We raised our family with a religious base. Do we keep pushing this family practice or do we back off? Religion was an important piece for our family. I feel like I have to help him help himself and remember who he is, but I need help.

Ann, the mother of a gifted child with multiple behavioral diagnoses, shared her anxiety regarding her son’s teenage years, specifically going through puberty, “We’ve got that coming up...so ya...that’s gonna be great...just one more thing to worry about.” Scarlett, a parent of a 2E son with Autism shared very similar concerns regarding some of the more difficult parts of adolescence that were on her own parental horizon,

I am very anxious to talk about all of the body stuff and all that that comes with



adolescence. I know it needs to happen and I'm researching. I'm like, "Give me a book about this!". But, I know that there's not going to be one that's Autism and gifted. I just know *I'm* going to have to put it all together.

This reticence to feel confident on the topic of puberty was also shared by two other participants, Jessica and Megan, both parents of young gifted children without additional diagnoses. Megan shared,

As he gets older, I don't think it will get easier, especially as he goes through puberty and stuff. I would love to see if there's any research or anything about gifted kids going through puberty. I've gone through it with my [unidentified] stepson and I want to know if it will be different.

In addition to specific topics related to developmental stages and/or additional diagnoses, two other participants shared a need for specific information surrounding academics. Molly reflected on her daughter's voracious appetite for reading as a very young child by stating, "We needed help with the books she could read because there was no way I could keep up." and Carrie shared about needing more information on acceleration before making a confident decision,

I did a lot of research on acceleration and there's a really great website with lots of resources. I wanted [information about] a *specific* topic. I feel like I was confident with [my youngest], but I did read a lot with my oldest because I didn't know then. It was always topic-based.

Lastly, seven participants in this study also alluded to needing support to better equip their confidence to find balance between high ability and high expectations. This "push/pull" of parenting is not unique to only gifted parenting, however, the added layers of high ability and underachievement risk hold the potential to shake or affirm confidence in daily decisions. Megan shared,

I don't feel really confident to know what to do when he's 16 and he becomes complacent. I worry about what life will be like and what we will do and say as parents. I worry about us having the right conversations and language. The fear of the unknown. I think this is a general parenting thing, but it's intensified with a gifted kid.

Sandra, Carrie, and Ann shared similar statements,

Parenting was a rollercoaster ride. There were so many great moments, but our main focus was always to do the hard stuff now, so it's easier later. I felt like it's always a balancing act between expectations and grace. That *tension* between expectations and grace. You want to have high expectations for them, but at the same time you want to say, 'It's ok to make a B.'"

I'm a lot more lenient with my last child compared to my oldest, because I've learned. Asking myself, "Did I make the right decision?". You don't want to fail, but I also want her to be the best version of herself. The fear of failure. If I push her too hard is she going to shut down, if I don't push her will she be a slacker who lives in the basement? It's that balance. I have more confidence because I've done this successfully twice before. Push them and then pull back. I'm probably more confident with her than I was with the first one. I think both knowledge and experience is why. Because with that first one I had less knowledge and experience and read more and talked to teachers more to network more. Pushing her [my oldest] to do things, I do hold some regret.

There're some people I know who think you have to play instruments and get straight A's and just be exceptional at everything to be gifted. That helps reassure me that I'm doing a good job, that I'm not being overbearing on my child. I see these people who want their kids to get straight A's and all these extracurricular activities and they don't want to. I know he's not always going to get straight A's, I just want him to try his best. Seeing other people's expectations of being exceptional and gifted helps me, not necessarily lower mine, but keep mine realistic. You can be exceptional and get a B.

### ***Parent Support Groups, Parental Issues, and Specific Topics***

As discussed in previous major themes, all but one participant noted a desire for parent support groups. Of these seven, all participants expressed the importance of having such an opportunity to bring forth parenting issues/specific topics in a non-judgmental setting. These feelings are captured in the words of Anne, "I would want them to be specific, guided topics.", as well as Ann, "I'd like to be able to say, 'I'm really struggling here. What would you do?'".

Jessica also spoke to how such groups would affect her confidence,

I like knowing these are stories close to me, from our school and community. I also need more of open-ended conversation to work through things in a safe environment. Like a counseling aspect. In an environment that doesn't feel judged.

To remind the reader, all participants, regardless of views on parent support groups,

shared a need for connectivity to others who understood their unique situation of gifted parenting, and sought advice and/or camaraderie with others in which they could relate. Therefore, regardless of the availability of a structured support group, parents/caregivers voiced a need for social and emotional support from others, especially when dealing with specific parenting issues related to giftedness.

### **Hopes and Fears**

Similar to the connection between the two major themes discussed above, all participants shared hopes and fears regarding their child(ren)'s unique journey moving forward with life. Some of these concerns were rooted in the specific parenting issues that challenged them in the past or present. For instance, Sandra, shared about how her worries of suicide when her children were younger can still crop up as a fear even today.

I can't always solve all the problems, but at the same time, we don't want him to kill himself. That's a thing. In both their lives, there were things I read a lot on how to parent when we were going through hard times. I would try and read books and I would do a lot of praying. There were times that I thought during middle school that I was worried he would try and harm himself. There was one time in high school when [my daughter] felt she wasn't perfect enough and she slept with us three and four nights because we were worried she was going to harm herself. She's never cut or anything like that because she knows that's not ok. But there's still times as a parent that your guard is up and you think they put so much pressure on themselves that they could say, "this is it."

Out of the eight participants of this study, seven specifically noted their child's unique exceptionalities as a concern for the future. These exceptionalities were related to academic success and/or underachievement, ability to self-advocate, functionality in life, as well as unique behavioral manifestations, such compulsions. Molly, Jessica, and Carrie shared concerns related to academics and/or self-advocacy,

I worry about her neurocognitive stuff and that she can self-advocate. That there's provisions [for her] in college that don't follow you from K-12. I know she's capable and hope that she's successful.

One of my biggest worries for [my 1st child] is to not speak up for what he needs and

what he's feeling. Another is him not trying things because he knows or thinks he won't succeed. Figuring out how to give him the tools to know how to fail. I want him to know, most of all, that his value is not defined by how smart he is.

My biggest worry is that she's not academic. She absolutely hates school. She doesn't want to go to college. She's not a hoop-jumper, never has been. Getting her through these next years will be interesting. I'm hoping she finds something she's excited about in school. It's both a fear and hope.

Anne, Megan, and Ann shared concerns related to specific behavioral manifestations that could potentially impede their children's ability to be successful in life,

I am 100% confident to support him when he is here. Going away to college, I worry about him hitting bottom without support. I also worry about his open mindset can, down the road, cause harm. I worry he might go down some paths he shouldn't.

I'm fearful he'll be a hoarder in the future. I'm worried about middle school in terms of little fish, big pond. I worry about him being able to make up his mind about where he's going to go after college. I'm worried he won't use all of his potential skills for something great. When he becomes a teenager, it's hard to keep that going. I just want to make sure he does good things. I want him to always be using his brain and not complacent in life.

I'm worried about how he'll make it as an adult because he doesn't handle authority. That's part of the ODD. I worry how he'll treat other people and how people will treat him. He already struggles so much socially and doesn't hardly have any friends. And I know there's only so much I can do as his mother and I *really* know there's not much I can do when he's an adult. I just don't want him to have that kind of life. And I know if I can't get him to change his ways now, I definitely won't be able to get him to when he's older. I hope that he can succeed in being a good person.

In addition to Ann, three other participants specifically mentioned concerns about their child(ren)'s ability to find and maintain social relationships in the future. These responses were derived from participants' direct experiences and their recognition that gifted children often have more difficulties in the social realm. Molly, Scarlett, and Sandra shared,

I hope that she continues to grow collaboratively. I hope that socially she finds her spot. That she's able to establish relationships that last. She's capable of being such a good friend. I hope she finds people who are more than just the fill-in-the-blank time of life. That she can find balance. Not too social, not too academic.

Is he even going to be able to find friends his same age? Socially, I worry daily. I think any parent has worries, but because of the diagnoses he has, I worry twice. Is this always

going to be a struggle? Is he only going to have gifted friends? All I can do is encourage him and go out of my way. Being prepared for those [social] moments is a battle, sometimes mentally and emotionally and, sometimes, physically.

There were definite times in high school that were harder for her [daughter] than compared to him [son]. She was a great athlete and smart, but struggled with relationships. She still really doesn't have those friends she lets get close to her. He has a lot of friends, but he never does anything with them. His very best friend is his dad. We feel like we are still coaching [our kids]. I feel like we are going to coach the rest of our lives.

Many participants had high hopes for their children and some credited their confidence as an underlying factor that would help them help their children to be successful, despite their challenges. The participants who were parents of young adults and/or multiple children (identified and unidentified) mostly credited their wisdom and parental experience as the factors determining their confidence. Anne, Sandra, Molly, and Carrie, all parents/caregivers of adult children shared.

Oh, I still question *did we do the right thing?* But, I think as a parent you know *this is what's best for my child and I know my child.* I have to push through. I have the confidence because I can see past what he can't. I've got confidence because [speaking to son] I've raised other children, I've lived longer than you have. I have wisdom. [Speaking of son] It's funny, but now I know who he is and he's turned out ok, but when he was doing [concerning] things in 4th grade, it was really hard. My perspective now is because he's turned out to be such a great kid. But, in 4th grade I didn't know that's how he would turn out. We realized he was better than we could ever make him ourselves. [Speaking of both son and daughter] Knowing what I know now, I would tell my former self that it's going to be ok. They're going to turn out just fine, no matter what decision you make. I needed to hear that then, but you just can't see it then.

Knowing that so many days I didn't have it or know the answer, but trusting that the right person would be placed in my path or the information would be presented to me. As we've gotten older, and had all three kids, and gone through more experientially...that ability to ask questions and advocate. Especially going through her neurocognitive diagnosis. That taught us that we can advocate. But, in general, even though we had blips and will continue to have blips, I think she'll be ok.

I have more confidence because I've done this successfully twice before. Push them and then pull back. I'm probably more confident with her than I was with the first one. I think both knowledge and experience is why. [Later reiterated] I think seeing my older two succeed that gives me confidence now. I would tie the outcome to my confidence. The

other two have seen success, but knowing she's [youngest identified child] not motivated like they are, I still have my questions. I think I'm mature enough in my parenting now to know that I can do everything I can and it's still an individual choice. I've seen that with some of my other friends who were parents. I've done it for so long now. I always tell my kids I do the best I can with what I have and what I know. I'm not the perfect parent, never will be. While the other two are doing well, you still have your doubts. Experience plays a major role in my day-to-day confidence. Even on a bad day. You know you've survived it with another child. You tend to give more grace and know things are going to happen.

Those participants with younger children and less longitudinal parenting experience expressed varied responses regarding how their confidence played a role in their ability to see their hopes and fears through. These four parents presented more of a *we will just push through and rely on what we know now* mentality. This posed an interesting idea, as this study aimed to identify what affects the daily confidence of gifted parents/caregivers, despite knowledge and experience. It can be stated that while all participants did not have equitable experience in terms of years of parenting, they all had very similar experiences in regard to the additional challenges associated with raising exceptional children.

It can also be stated that while parents of all age groups stated they wished they had been given more opportunity to build their knowledge surrounding giftedness early on, they all had a pretty firm grasp on it as it related to their individual child(ren). In other words, participants positioned themselves as the experts of *their* gifted child(ren) and "experience" was not associated with the length of the parenting journey, but the intensity of it. For example, Molly, the mother of multiple children, including a gifted child getting ready to start college, shared similar words to that of Scarlett, a mother of one young gifted child. Molly stated, "We've learned by trial and error what's the best way to approach her." and "But, in general, even though we had blips and will continue to have blips, I think she'll be ok.". Scarlett's sentiments were not much different, as she stated,

I've found what works and we hit a wall, I just have to remind myself that this is ok and it's fine. Things can't be perfect all of the time. This is a learning experience. I know how to get us back on track. I just have to get up and redo the schedule...figure out how to pull him out of this. I know what we're capable of because I know where we've been. I know how to get us back there. I just have to put the work in. It's just putting the work in and knowing what you're capable of, both me as a parent and him as a kid. The alternative is that he will never do all of these things. I've had to learn to adapt and give up some of the control. Even though it worked last time, it may not work every time, but it's buckling down.

The words of Molly and Scarlett are echoed by another parent of a young gifted child, Megan, who said, "I feel pretty confident to get him there [to success in the future] because I'm always questioning and encouraging him. Always asking, "Where can we go from there?"".

Examining responses from some of the other remaining parents of young gifted children who did not benefit from years of parental experience at the time of this study, it is clear a strong support system affects their perception of confidence during challenging times both now and in the future. Jessica, a mother of multiple children, which included her eldest child who is gifted, said,

...knowing that I don't have an option not to take care of my kids affects my ability to say, "I can do this.". My spouse plays a huge role; we're in it together. Today I might have the most energy for this, and tomorrow it might be him.

Interestingly, all other participants, regardless of age of children, also credited the support of a family member and/or spouse, with the exception of Ann. Ann, a single mom of one young gifted child with multiple diagnoses, shared that most of her confidence lies, not from within, but in the abilities of outside supportive resources for her child. She shared her ability to be confident in herself is not strong, stating,

It's a challenge. I often wonder if I'm missing something. If there's something I could be doing more. I get him to his evaluations and therapy. Sometimes I just wonder if I'm on the right path. It's a struggle to know if he's getting the right support. And *he's* a challenge. Sometimes I just don't have the patience and I become angry quickly. Sometimes I'm so exhausted I become tearful. Other days, I feel like I'm able to manage it well and use those coping skills. It just kind of depends on the day. I do feel like, more

often than not, I do find myself apologizing because I blow up. Even when I'm feeling overwhelmed, because my problem is I'm a single parent and I don't have anyone to turn to. I always question if I did things the right way. If I was too hard on him or too easy on him. I always worry if I'm doing a good job or not. Am I doing something wrong because of all of these diagnoses? So much of it depends on how my day has been. If it's been a more trying day at work or the weekend and I've been with him all day. I just get to the point that, like, *I can't do this anymore*. I'm just so tired of trying. I think [the anger] is more toward myself. Because I feel like I should be more patient with him than I am. Because I know he's struggling, but I am too. It's a daily thing. He makes me question my parenting every day. Some people get it and some don't. Just finding people who understand him [is a challenge].

Though Ann's confidence rests outside of her own hands, as well as those of a family member or spouse, she still acknowledged the power of an outside support system (therapeutic team) in her ability to meet the needs of her gifted son. To remind the reader, Ann also noted a strong desire for both formalized parent support groups, as well as a more intimate friendship with other gifted parents.

### **Social Perspectives**

Many parents shared how the perspectives of others affected their confidence in a variety of ways. From their reticence to confide in others, to the blurred line separating professional and personal relationships with school personnel, it was evident that parents/caregivers are continually analyzing the perspectives of others throughout their parenting journey. Some parents noted how social stigmas surrounding the many misconceptions of giftedness stopped them from sharing with and seeking advice from others. Others noted specific instances in which the unique manifestations of their child's gifted qualities were negatively perceived as parental permissiveness. Another shared how the school's limited views on ability questioned her commitment to parenting and left her feeling judged while her children succeeded at different rates and in different areas. One participant shared such strong feelings surrounding social stigma, it was the ultimate reason for removing her child from gifted programming.



## *Social Stigmas*

Due to a limited view of giftedness and all it may encompass, misconceptions surrounding giftedness are rampant. This idea was explored deeper in Chapter two of this work. Since parents/caregivers are left to grapple with many extremities, they often feel isolated and judged by others who do not understand the daily challenges associated with exceptional life.

Anne shared,

We shared [his gifted identification] with immediate family. We didn't talk about it much, because you know, who wants to hear, "oh, my child's gifted"? We knew that they knew him and could recognize, yes, this kid has talents, but he's still just a kid. I like to brag on my kids to a certain extent, but I just feel embarrassed because of the perception. I'm just like, "I'm just a parent here struggling to raise a child who also happens to be a very easy learner who has some unique gifts and talents that I don't have.". Do people talk about their kids' giftedness? Who do you share that with and who cares? Even after I've shared with other gifted parents, I've asked myself, "Should I have even shared that?". In my mind, I have others' negative perceptions all of the time. I personally feel like others are always looking at him negatively. I wish there was a different name for gifted. I like "differently wired". I would choose that term over anything. That's the thing. You can be gifted and be a train wreck.

Scarlett and Carrie also shared about associating themselves or their children with their gifted label when feeling like they needed to,

It's not like I introduced myself as, "Hi, I'm an Autism mom or I'm a gifted mom.". I didn't ever want it to be him getting labeled. People who needed to know, I told. Everyone I told, they had already seen it. Some people are just ignorant. It's not easy. It's fun, it's exhilarating, it's challenging, it's rewarding, but it's not easy. I think some people think that it's so easy because you don't have to worry about some things. "You're so lucky you don't have to help him with homework."

We always have to talk to her teachers about what she's like. Like, this is a *gifted* trait. I didn't advocate for my oldest so I learned how to advocate for her [my youngest]. I often have to remind them this is giftedness, especially her shutting down. I have to stick up for her. Usually the teacher takes her behavior personally. I've sent articles to the teachers before because they don't have a lot of training. When she starts something new, we talk to [those in charge]. We don't always say, "she's gifted", but "here's some strategies to work with her".

In addition, Sandra shared about the misconception of what gifted parenting is really like, compared to society's perception.

Giftedness is completely different. I've had so many parents think it's like a badge on your chest. People don't really get it. For us, this was *sacrifice*. It was so hard for us. There were times I would feel very frustrated.

In contrast to Sandra's statements, Ann spoke of giftedness as a reassurance that she was doing something right as a parent. That, in spite of her child's behavioral and social issues, he was credited with the positive association of being an intelligent individual. This is an interesting concept, as Ann represented the participant with the most child diagnoses, all which affect her son socially and emotionally.

It made me feel more confident feeling like I was teaching him the things he should know. It made me feel like I'm doing a good job. We struggle so much socially and emotionally, that sometimes knowing that he's gifted, sometimes that side balances that out for me. Helps me think, "well, at least I'm doing something decent.". When I think about his future, being in the gifted program looks good. And obviously as a parent, it feels good to know your kid is gifted.

Molly, the only participant who stated she did not want to participate in a parent support group, shared a series of comments regarding the social stigma surrounding the gifted identification for her identified daughter, her unidentified other children, as well as her and her spouse as parents.

We declined the [additional] testing in 5th grade that placed her in gifted middle school classes. She did not have any interest in that because, like it or not, you become the "smart kid". We had concerns about her being called out. Both of our experiences growing up the stigma was that those kids got to do field trips and fun things that the rest of us didn't get to do. We want her to have the extra learning opportunities, but never wanted other kids to look at her and ask, "Why don't I get to?". And, I guess, we were also worried about the pridefulness that would come along with it. The issue of keeping her grounded, but at the same time, she needed more. We didn't want her to have an *I'm better than you* mentality. A challenge in finding the balance there. I'm sure a lot of people thought we were crazy. I remember her 2nd-grade teacher thought we were crazy for worrying about her thinking she's better than other people. And our other kids...how it affected the other kids in our house. You always worry about what other people think, even though you shouldn't.

She further shared about the option to participate in her district's gifted parent support group,

Our district started a gifted support group. I never went. I struggled with the whole thing, probably a chip on my shoulder, that I didn't want to be identified as that group of parents. I never took advantage of that resource. I think that goes back to that same place of worrying about what it looked like.

### ***Feeling Judged***

Similar to how these parents felt regarding the perceptions of giftedness others hold in general, many others shared specific instances in which the feelings of judgment played a role in their confidence. For Anne and Sandra, both parents of young adult gifted children, they felt that the risk of judgment associated with some of the tougher issues that came along with adolescence was the reason they sought professional counseling in place of widespread social support from others. Anne and Sandra shared,

As they get older, problems get bigger and people don't want to talk about problems. I think we're embarrassed to say, "I'm struggling and I don't know how to help my kid and I feel like a failure.". When we realized some of these things were a really big deal, we took it to counseling. It's a safe place for all of us to share our perspectives and we're forced to see things through each other's'.

We do all these things when the kids are little. All moms get together and talk about parenting. But, when they get to High School, we stop talking about parenting. There's so many skeletons in the closets and nobody wants to have honest conversations about their kids. I love having honest conversations about my kids. I have about two parents [who I share with], but I think this is a rarity. I think this is one of the hardest things. There's such a taboo on having perfect kids. You have to have someone to talk to or you'll need therapy. And it's ok if your kids need therapy and you too if you need it. You know, you want people to think you have it all together.

Jessica, a mom of a young gifted child, shared these same feelings of shame while her child was still in elementary school.

I also need more open-ended conversation to work through things in a safe environment. Like a counseling aspect. I remember thinking about the *I just wanna die* thing [her son's response to stress] and feeling almost ashamed and not knowing who I could talk to about it because of not knowing their response. I remember my mom's reaction being totally different than the counselor's. I need a safe person who knows them, but isn't going to overreact and know how to respond appropriately. It could be a parent support group, so I could hear other stories from parents.

In addition to feeling judged if seeking help with a specific issue, other participants shared experiences in which their parental choices were misunderstood. For example, two parents shared embarrassment in the unique way they had to discipline their gifted children who did not respond to traditional consequences, such as grounding or timeout. Instead, they as parents had to analyze the specific interests of their children, such as removing books or filming equipment. Also, four other participants noted specific times in which their child's behavioral manifestations were viewed by others as "bratty" or "disrespectful", when, in reality, they were representations of how differently their child thinks and responds to social situations. Ann and Sandra shared,

Like he's some out of control mess and I'm just over here allowing him to do whatever he wants. I feel like I'm holding the reins so tight they're about to break. That makes me feel like I'm not doing a good job, when people think I'm raising a butthead. I'm like, 'I swear I don't let him do that'.

I definitely think sometimes people thought we were too hard on our kids...but then from the outside looking in, some people thought she was disrespectful at times and I let her get away with being disrespectful. It's especially hard with a gifted kid, who no one knows is a gifted kid and just thinks she's a snot-nosed kid. With [my son] I think a lot of people admired our parenting, and I mean this humbly, just because, looking back, they see how successful he is now.

Lastly, one other parent shared how the perception of differences in her identified and unidentified children have felt like a direct attack on her commitment to parenting all her children equally. Jessica shared how others perceived her parenting skills while comparing her first child, an identified gifted child, and her second, who is not identified as gifted.

I almost had a defensive mindset of like, not just for my kid, but how we are choosing to parent. We've had to take some feedback with a grain of salt. I've felt judged because people almost thought that we were not taking care of [my 2nd child] in the same way and all we were focusing on was [my 1st child] and his intelligence and not spending time on [my 2nd child]. You're acting like I'm not letting him live up to this expectation, when I didn't really do that [much intervention] with [my 1st child] because he was doing it himself. Like we were letting the ball drop over here [with 2nd child]. Actually, [my 1st child] probably gets *less* attention [because he's able to do so much on his own]. I

think that perspective hurts my confidence when thinking of the other two [unidentified children]. I know there's been guilt with working full time and going back to school and feeling like I need to be the mom that gets them home and do all these things with them. There's a struggle there when I feel like I'm not doing enough, when really I feel like I'm working even harder there [with my unidentified children].

### ***Professional Relationships with School Personnel***

At the time of this study, five participants were either currently working for the school district which identified and served their gifted child(ren), or had in the past. This additional layer of professional relationship with school personnel had both positive and negative effects with regard to parental confidence. For example, Megan and Jessica provided examples of how their relationship with the school counselor increased their confidence to advocate and/or ask specific questions on behalf of their child(ren). Sandra noted her personal trust in a few school administrators helped her decision-making when her son was being bullied and she and her husband were considering private school for him. She also shared about her working relationship with her daughter's 5th-grade teacher, when her daughter began to demonstrate anxiety related to extreme perfectionism and needed additional support.

Carrie shared both positive and negative feelings, as she had the utmost confidence in the psychometrist identifying her third child, but felt conflicted when needing to address teacher issues when her child was in 4th grade. She acknowledged her transition out of K-12 teaching played a large role in her confidence to advocate for her last child.

It was two things that allowed my confidence to change from my first [child], when I didn't advocate, to my last [child]. First, I don't work in the district anymore and didn't have to see these people on a daily basis. The social piece is gone. Secondly, was having conversations with my first child saying, "I wish you would have done this."

As shared earlier in this work, Anne felt her recentness to K-12 teaching created "intimidation" while advocating for the identification and appropriateness of services for her son. While these stories demonstrate a significant connection between relationships with school

personnel and parental confidence to meet the needs of their child(ren), greater implications may be realized when considering parents who are not privy to such opportunities.

### **Unspoken Themes**

In addition to the seven major themes, two unspoken themes specific to this set of participants were inferred, and play a key role in the third purpose of this study, which is to make recommendations for future parent support systems. Using the interpretive/hermeneutic lens during analysis, there is a search to understand the *other*, not just through conversations, but also between what isn't said (Fuster Guillen, 2019). These unspoken themes were gleaned from multiple reviews of the data and provide insight as to the limitations of standardized parent support programs, however well-informed by research and parent perspective. Their relationship with the seven major themes is illustrated in Figure 3 and explained within this chapter, as well as Chapter Five's *practical implications*.

#### ***Abstract Contributing Factors***

The first unspoken theme surfaced as a result of analysis of the interview question: *who or what holds the greatest ability to affect your day-to-day confidence?* While all parents/caregivers were able to articulate a response, most were abstract concepts that most likely cannot be replicated or adequately reproduced by a gifted parenting support system. These include concepts such as control over life circumstances, fear of the unknown, behaviors of their child, strong partnership with a spouse, and religious faith. Why this is considered an unspoken theme and not a major theme, is the possibility of this abstraction existing in all other types of parenting outside of gifted parenting.

This abstraction does not directly speak to the additional challenges associated with parenting exceptional children *specifically*, which was evidenced in abundance in participants'

other responses. In other words, it can be said that there are supports needed to be a more confident gifted parent/caregiver, specifically, but confidence can always be affected by life itself. This unspoken inference of abstraction does not diminish the outcomes of this study, as parents/caregivers were also able to specifically identify several types of concrete supports they feel would boost their confidence, which provides actionable data as a result. However, it is still important to note that even the best gifted support system may not be able to account for all factors that affect parental confidence in general.

### *Family Value Systems*

The second unspoken theme of this study was derived from participants unintentionally contextualizing their specific challenges related to their child(ren)'s exceptionalities with that of what is socially and morally acceptable within their unique family value system. In other words, the reason behind or degree to which a parent/caregiver needed support for a topic was specific to them, even if it were the same topic. For example, four out of the eight parents/caregivers of this study spoke to parental fears of child suicide and/or suicidal ideations of their child(ren). While this was a shared topic for needed support, it is possible that their perspectives regarding suicide, as a construct, is influenced by layers of religious views and their community's social acceptance of mental health issues, not just the fear of losing a child alone. Therefore, an added layer of specificity needs to be considered when providing support for gifted parents/caregivers attending a workshop or parent support group about the specific topic of child suicide.

Another example of how family value systems play a role is how participants' own parental expectations for their child(ren) are governed by the social constructs of their socioeconomic class, profession/level of education, and even religious views. Similar to the above-mentioned example, challenges associated with finding parental balance, or "push/pull"

for children with perfectionism is contextualized by the standard of what success looks like for each family value system. There will never be one socially and/or culturally accepted definition of success, therefore, while parents may be empowered by coping strategies for parenting perfectionism, confidence may ultimately be affected when expectations and outcomes collide. While this study had very limited cultural diversity represented, the idea of family value systems in relation to the major themes of this study applies greatly when considering the transferability and needs of diverse gifted families.

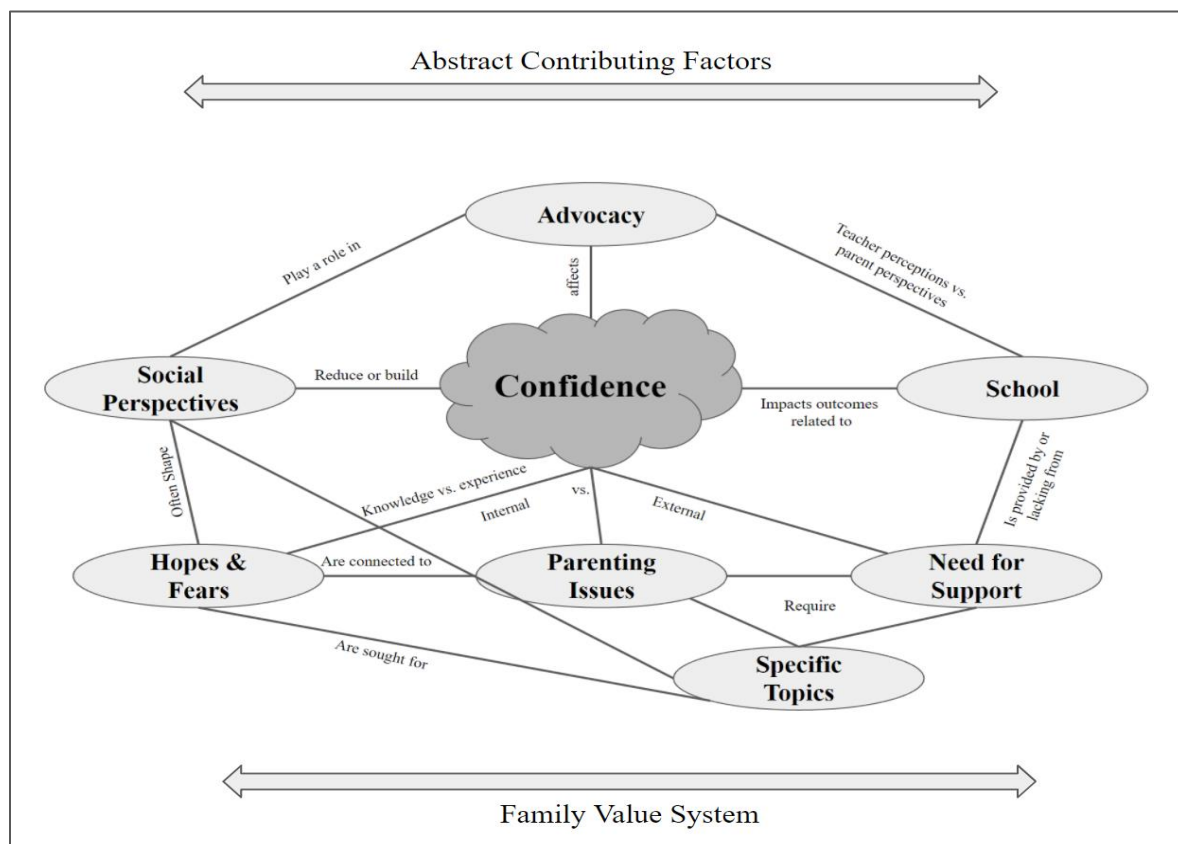


Figure 3 Relationship Between Unspoken Themes and Major Themes

### Summary

In summary, the data analysis of this study revealed seven major themes, including *advocacy, school, need for support, parenting issues, specific topics, hopes and fears, and social*



*perspectives*. These seven major themes represented topics participants explicitly addressed through responses to semi-structured interview questions. In addition, I was able to uncover two unspoken themes using the hermeneutical analysis approach, which included *abstract contributing factors* and *family value systems*, which played a large role in the contextualization of the seven major themes, as well as the conclusions of this work. Chapter Five will provide discussion as to how this data has actionable outcomes within the field of gifted education, as well as suggestions for support for gifted parents/caregivers.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

### **Overview**

In general, parenthood is considered to be a time in life that is full of challenges that test a caregiver's self-efficacy. For parents and caregivers of gifted children, day-to-day challenges are heightened as the uniqueness of exceptional life, including twice-exceptional life, is more complex in nature (Besnoy et. al, 2015; Guthrie, 2019; Morawska & Sanders, 2009; Wells, 2018). With regard to parental self-efficacy, participants of this phenomenological study shared their feelings of confidence, or the lack thereof, to meet these heightened challenges with confidence. Some of these stated challenges that set gifted parenting apart from typical parenting consisted of advocating for services, social issues, unique behavioral manifestations, and access to individualized support systems.

This study of eight gifted parents from Missouri sought to understand the lived experiences of gifted parents, including those experiences that have affected their confidence, both positively and negatively. Participants shared through in-depth interviews that asked parents/caregivers to speak to the nature of exceptional parenting. In addition, it was a goal to

examine existing support models for gifted parents and to synthesize them with participant responses. All participants noted specific challenges associated with raising gifted children, regardless of their child's additional diagnoses, the number of children in the home, the level of education and/or experience of the parent, and the level of personal support each parent had available to them. Some parents noted their feelings of confidence changing as their child progressed through adolescence and/or as new challenges arose.

As many parents of gifted children have feelings of isolation (Dare & Nowicki, 2015; Park et al., 2018; Trail, 2006), the need for social and emotional support was overwhelmingly represented in the findings of this study. In addition, many participants yearned for a greater understanding of the giftedness identification, especially when their children were younger. Often, this was a missed opportunity by school personnel to provide materials and resources to better educate families. In this study, participants shared their lived experiences, as well as situated themselves as experts of the needs of gifted parents and caregivers. Their recommendations are included in this chapter.

### **Research Questions**

The following four research questions guided this study:

- RQ1: What are the mental, social, and emotional needs of gifted parents?
- RQ2: What social factors play a role in parents' feelings of self-efficacy regarding parenting their gifted children?
- RQ3: What are the main contributors to parents' reported feelings of empowerment, or lack thereof, with respect to meeting the needs of their exceptional child(ren)?

- RQ4: What shared experiences of gifted parents might suggest a framework for future support models with the goal of promoting parental self-efficacy in nurturing their gifted child(ren)?

These guiding questions were addressed in this study through semi-structured interviews with participants representing gifted children of varying ages, genders, and additional diagnoses. Qualitative data for this phenomenological study was collected from these in-depth interviews and was analyzed with an interpretive/hermeneutic approach. Analysis yielded seven major spoken themes and two unspoken themes that were related to each other, either explicitly or implicitly through participant responses. The seven major themes consisted of *advocacy*, *school*, *need for support*, *parenting issues*, *specific topics*, *hopes and fears*, and *social perspectives*. The two unspoken themes were *abstract contributing factors* and *family value systems*. A summary of these findings is presented next.

### **Summary of Findings**

Chapter Three of this work details the research procedures for this qualitative phenomenological study that examined the lived experiences of eight gifted parents and caregivers living in Missouri. In-depth interviews of these parents yielded a large amount of data that was later analyzed with an interpretive/hermeneutic approach. As it was important for me to find organic themes that arose from the raw data, analysis was postponed until all interviews were conducted and all data were collected. Then, multiple reviews of the recorded and transcribed data resulted in seven major themes and two unspoken themes, which were supported by participant quotes. These themes supported the four guiding research questions that bracketed this study's conception, as well as the literature review in Chapter Two.

## Research Question One Findings

The first research question of this study, which examined the mental, social, and emotional needs of gifted parents, was universally represented within all seven themes. Participants affirmed existing literature regarding how parents often look to schools to provide the educational materials and supports to better equip them as parents of non-typical children (Neumeister, Yssel & Burney 2013; Shive, 2013). This was expressed in the connection between the two major themes, *need for support* and *school*. For some, lack of support thrust them into actions of *advocacy*, but for most, it eroded their confidence to effectively meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of their children. Just as it is presented in existing literature, parents left to deal with all of these complexities felt overwhelmed (Besnoy et. al, 2015; Guthrie, 2019; Morawska & Sanders, 2009; Wells, 2018), unheard (Dare & Nowicki, 2015), and/or unsupported (Bishop, 2012; Guthrie, 2019). In relationship with these connected themes was the need for schools to recognize that parents desired, and sometimes required, support regarding *specific topics* and *parenting issues* (Seidel Applebaum, 1998) knowing that parental involvement affects academic outcomes (Epstein, 1995; Heyman & Earle, 2000; Hung, 2005) and socioemotional (Pomerantz et al., 2007) wellbeing for children. Within this study, these specific topics ranged from suicidal ideations, perfectionism, developmental stages like puberty, and unique needs associated with twice exceptionality.

In addition, many participants spoke about how their social and emotional needs were unmet, as they were often reluctant to share *parenting issues*, as well as *hopes and fears* with others whom they felt did not understand exceptional life. Once again, these feelings were validated in literature noting that parents are less likely to share with others whom they feel are judgmental (Gross, 1999), including school personnel (Geake & Miraca, 2008). The *Social*

*perspectives* involved in these scenarios limited the confidence of parents to seek help from other parents outside of the gifted realm, as well as fueled the desire for specific interventions, such as parent support groups. The *social perspectives* of school personnel also sometimes impeded the confidence of this study's parents to advocate, especially for those for which there was a professional/collegial relationship. An uneasiness knowing how far to "push" a request with a teacher stemmed from the potentiality of parents and teachers disagreeing on the child's ability, in which teachers felt the parent was being overbearing and overestimating (Hodge & Kemp, 2006; Klimecká, 2020).

### **Research Question Two Findings**

The second research question, which focused on the social factors that play a role in parents' feelings of self-efficacy regarding parenting their gifted children, was captured by six out of the seven major themes. As previously mentioned in the summary findings of the first research question, *social perspectives* played a large role in the attitudes and confidence of participants, especially when engaging in *advocacy* and/or seeking support for *specific topics* and *parenting issues*. For some participants, their professional/collegial relationships within their child(ren)'s *school* affected when and how far they advocated.

The participants with older children were able to reflect on how age and stage of their children affected the social stigma of *parenting issues*, noting that some of the issues that came along with adolescence tended to become hidden out of shame. Avoiding such validating conversations with others, especially those with relatable circumstances, impeded the ability to transmit knowledge and build confidence in a social setting (Fish, 2016). Due to this stigma and unmet needs from their child's *school*, some parents looked to professional support systems

outside of *school* and personal social circles. Contrasting suggestions within literature (Elijah, 2011), the procurement of these stakeholders was the result of failed attempts to gain support from schools or others, rather than a collaborative effort for schools, families, and mental health professionals to holistically meet the needs of the child and family.

In addition, participants of all aged children noted that the specific and complex needs of their children transcended typical parenting issues, and therefore, it was difficult to find “like kind” for which to share these difficulties, which is evidenced in gifted literature (Park et al., 2018). Even those with strong personal support systems were sometimes ashamed to share their unique *parenting issues* with others unlike them. Therefore, almost all participants suggested that their *need for* [social and emotional] *support* would be satisfied through more information from the school regarding contributing facets giftedness, as well as parent support groups. Such support systems with dual purposes are sprinkled throughout gifted literature (Franklin & Collins, 2018; Parent Group Spotlight, 2014).

### **Research Question Three Findings**

The third research question, which analyzed the main contributors to parents’ reported feelings of empowerment, or lack thereof, with respect to meeting the needs of their exceptional child(ren), was also concordant with all seven major themes derived from the data. First, participants who engaged or disengaged in *advocacy* at *school* clearly noted the powerful effect teachers and other school personnel had on their confidence as parents, which is supported in gifted literature (Geake & Miraca, 2008; Wilson, 2015). Many told stories of accepting the perceptions of teachers because they did not have the confidence to debate an “expert”. Some reported leaving meetings with school personnel feeling deflated and discouraged, which is not

uncommon for 2E parents (O'brien & Giovacco-Johnson, 2007). This idea of schools and teachers being seen as experts was represented in a different way as participants frequently noted how they looked to *school* to be a source for information and support for *specific topics* and *parenting issues*.

Unfortunately, this *need for support* was often unmet, which left participants feeling like they had nowhere to turn. Participants noted how they assumed the responsibility of becoming experts themselves and piecemealed support in different ways (Brownstein, 2015; Hidalgo, 2018; Zatchey, 2019). In some instances, feelings of isolation led some participants to feel as if the task of parenthood was overwhelming and they feared that one failure to act on their part would have disastrous consequences for their child's future, which was also affirmed by literature (Besnoy et al., 2015; Hidalgo, 2018). In other instances, confidence was increased as participants had felt proud of the work they had done to be their best for their child(ren). This was especially true for parents of older children who had the benefit of experience and wisdom to share (Hayes, 2014; Mall, 2019; Reber, 2018). With regard to *hopes and fears*, many participants noted that the confidence they hold now, as a result of past experiences, will carry them through what lies in the future, as they "know what works" for their child(ren).

Overwhelmingly, participants suggested that more information from the school and more specific support from others who shared the same *social perspectives* regarding giftedness would have/did have a direct influence on their confidence. In addition, some participants shared experiences in which sharing their feelings with others who did not share their same *social perspectives* was disempowering and awkward. Once again, a strong recommendation for gifted parent support groups was made evident.

## Research Question Four Findings

The fourth research question, investigating which shared experiences of gifted parents might suggest a framework for future support models with the goal of promoting parental self-efficacy in nurturing their gifted child(ren), was consistently represented by all seven major themes. In regard to *advocacy*, multiple participants mentioned the need for a family advocate as they went through the gifted identification and serving process. It was suggested these advocates work as *school* personnel and have multiple duties, including championing evaluations when parent and school perspectives disagree on giftedness, counseling through *parenting issues*, and providing expert support on *specific topics*. It was noted that finding someone with the required experience and credentials would be difficult (Shive, 2013), but paramount. It was suggested by participants that this advocate would partially meet the *need for support* that parents have regarding information on giftedness, as well as their other mental, social, and emotional needs as exceptional parents.

Alongside providing an advocate, participants also noted a strong desire for more individualized information to be provided to them by their child's school and/or gifted program, as giftedness is such a large spectrum and can manifest in varying degrees. Most felt that "generalized gifted" information was often useless when it didn't apply to their child's unique abilities and behaviors, as they can vary in manifestation greatly (NAGC, 2019). Others noted that there was no such thing as too much information and that they were happy to tease through the literature, if it were only provided to them. Due to this unmet need of quality resources, all participants noted it required them to situate themselves as experts by conducting their own reviews of research. As an extension, a large majority of participants implied that their lack of basic information regarding their child's gifted program itself added to their anxiety and overall



understanding of the identification (Lammons, 2016). For some, this lack of “buy in” was the ultimate reason for removing their child from gifted programming, which is also evidenced in gifted research surrounding the retention of diverse families engaged in gifted programming (Hoover & Schultz, 2005).

Lastly, participants overwhelmingly recognized the lack of parent support to meet their own mental, social, and emotional needs. All but one participant expressed a great interest in gifted parent support groups in which they could learn more about the gifted identification, share *hopes and fears*, seek advice on *specific topics*, and be coached on *parenting issues* from others who shared their same *social perspectives* on giftedness. To summarize, participants stated they would design a parent support framework that provided more information on giftedness, specific issues, and the gifted program itself (Adler, 2006; Alsop, 1997; Prado et al., 2018; Saranli & Metin, 2014; Seidel Applebaum, 1998). In addition, they would have opportunities, such as parent support groups and/or having an advocate, for which parents could have their own mental, social, and emotional needs met in a safe environment.

## **Conclusions**

Based on the responses of participants and the analysis of major themes, it is evident that parents and caregivers of gifted children have intense and multifaceted needs that affect their confidence and require intentional and holistic support. This is especially true for parents of twice-exceptional children and/or more than one child, regardless of identification. These domain-specific needs, such as mental, social, and emotional needs, often overlap and are affected by the others, leaving parents and caregivers with layered levels of stress, isolation, and confusion. For example, the confidence to advocate in an academic setting or the reticence to

confide in another parent are socially contextualized within the perspectives of others. Parents and caregivers of gifted children carry additional burdens, such as advocacy and lack of social connectivity, as they feel they are unable to share their needs with others without judgment.

It is also concluded that while parents first look to schools and gifted programs for resources and support, they are often disappointed in the availability, willingness, and/or structured systems provided. All parents and caregivers felt that it was the role and responsibility of the gifted program to provide such services, specifically, parent support groups and resources on specific topics within parenting gifted children. As an extension, parents reported that lack of communication on the part of the school/gifted program reduced their confidence in the intervention itself as a means to best meet the needs of their child(ren), which sometimes resulted in disengagement from the program.

Regardless of parent education, profession, gifted identification of self, or stage of parenting, caregivers are vulnerable in the area of confidence due to the intense and relentless presence of issues associated with giftedness. In addition, parents and caregivers specifically noted that teachers and other school personnel held a great amount of power over how they felt about their parenting and their child's giftedness. Most caregivers noted at least one time in which a conflict with a teacher had a significant impact on their ability to meet their child's needs with confidence.

### **Practical Implications**

The purpose of this phenomenological study, with respect to parenting gifted children, was threefold. First, was to capture the expressed experiences of gifted parents and caregivers regarding the additional challenges associated with raising exceptional children. Secondly, this

study identified which types of experiences and/or supports built a strong sense of parenting efficacy to face these challenges and best meet the needs of participant's gifted child(ren) with confidence. Lastly, this study synthesized parent reports and established parenting efficacy models with the goal of recommendations for future parent support systems.

Qualitative data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews of eight Missouri parents/caregivers of at least one gifted child. Despite differences in contextual factors of participants, seven major themes organically arose from the data to include *advocacy, school, need for support, specific topics, parenting issues, hopes and fears, and social perspectives*. Two unspoken themes consisted of *abstract contributing factors* and *family value systems*, which have implications on the third purpose of this study. This qualitative study rooted in phenomenology produced implications for the field of gifted education, specifically the support of gifted parents. The implications of this study are derived directly from the voices of participants.

One such implication of this study is the presence of parent and caregiver voices to direct programmatic changes. The data of this work points to a major area of lack in which schools and/or gifted programs could improve and increase their parent buy-in, student retention, and overall satisfaction with the service. In addition, these voices guide program directors and teachers to reimagine family engagement and support to include the holistic social and emotional needs of the parent, without a main focus on student success and outcomes. It is also important that this study notes that information only takes caregivers so far in regard to their confidence. Many participants were educators and scholars with deep academic backgrounds, yet still felt emotionally isolated and/or wounded by the actions of others, thus maintaining high social and emotional needs. Workshop approaches to understanding gifted topics may not be enough.

This study also provides evidence that gifted programs need to provide support groups and resources that are tailored to the needs of individuals, while avoiding generalized or surface-type supports that are deemed useless by parents and other caregivers struggling to maintain day-to-day confidence. It is important to note here that these supports may be outside of a teacher's or administrator's depth of knowledge, credentials, and/or area of expertise. Therefore, it remains the responsibility of these stakeholders to serve as advocates and liaisons for caregivers who may need professional expertise within the medical or mental health field, but they should not assume the role of provider if it is not appropriate. Lastly, this work opens discussion regarding the application of self-efficacy theories in specialized populations, such as the gifted community, with regard to promoting confidence in parents without a focus on child outcomes.

### **Delimitations**

As with any study, there were limitations and delimitations that affected the data results of this study. Given different delimitations, data results may have varied. The delimitations of this study were geographical area and the need to conduct some interviews via ZOOM, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Limitations**

An obvious limitation of this study is the lack of racial and cultural diversity. All participants were White, English-speaking individuals. With the exception of one participant, this was the same for their children. In addition, all participants identified as "mother" to their children, which limited gender diversity, however, many participants spoke on behalf of their spouse as well. Lastly, the limited geographic area of Missouri historically demonstrates a commonality in political views, religious affiliations, and ethnic diversity.

## **Recommendations for Gifted Programs**

As this study captured the expressed needs of parents and caregivers of gifted children, it is only appropriate that these needs be presented as suggestions to further strengthen district gifted programs in the area of family support. The following five truths, presented as recommendations, were yielded from this study's data analysis.

### **Parenting is Challenging in General, but Parenting Gifted Children Brings Specific Challenges That Require a More Individualized Approach to Support**

As schools and gifted programs design their family engagement and support for parents of gifted children, it would behoove them to have a deep understanding of the complexity of exceptional parenting and how needs individually manifest. While parents of this study expressed parenting fears and challenges associated with any type of parenting, such as fear of the unknown, or the inability to control life circumstances, the true value of this implication is derived from participant's ability to readily identify challenges specifically associated with the gifted identification. Parents of gifted children express complex needs that are often not understood by others and are not easily satisfied by traditional parenting resources. These needs may be intensified by the intersectionality of additional diagnoses, number of identified children in the home, as well as gifted status of the parent(s). These layers to exceptional parenting require an intentionality to tease out specific topics, as well as provide holistic support.

Individual needs may also carry social stigma, leaving parents unsure of who they can confide in and what steps need to be taken. For example, the topics of suicidal ideations, compulsive behaviors (such as hoarding), and existential depression, which were discussed by parents in this study, aren't commonly associated with typical parenting, but are not uncommon

in the gifted parenting realm. Their presence in everyday life demands specific support for parents who are left to deal with them, often in private. Some bypass the school and/or social relationships with others directly by seeking professional counseling as the only logical step, as they dread the judgment and shame that would be attached otherwise. It is important to note that these feelings of shame are contextualized according to each family's unique value system, which is influenced by social and even religious views. Gifted parent support systems may not be able to easily account for all of these variances on one specific topic, however, maintaining an individualized approach will ensure that each family's needs are met to the best of the program's ability.

In addition, outside of the realm of special education, most parents do not have the additional burden of advocacy for their child's academic progress. Due to teacher bias (McBee, 2016; Moon & Brighton, 2008; O'Guinn, 2014; Ottwein, 2020; Siegel, 2004) and societal misconceptions surrounding giftedness and twice exceptionality (Ronksley-Pavia et al., 2019), many parents must advocate for their "out of the box" child to even be considered for a gifted evaluation. This was true for a few of the participants in this study who shared the emotionally draining experience of advocacy. Advocating against "experts" requires a great deal of confidence and knowledge derived from informative resources, which is examined in the next practical implication discussed in this chapter.

For students who do not demonstrate "typical" academic characteristics of giftedness, such as those who are twice exceptional and/or creatively gifted, there is a great need for school personnel to examine each case with a focus on the whole child. This is best achieved when school personnel have a relationship with the child and their family, and are able to have open

discussions. It is also prudent to remember that while the parent may not be an expert on giftedness, they are the expert on their child.

Furthermore, many parents of gifted children must advocate for appropriate services, even after identification. For example, one parent in this study felt her child's gifted programming did more harm than good, as he had significant affective and academic needs that were not being met. For another parent, advocating on behalf of her unidentified children to be considered for gifted services has been an experience fraught with discouragement and frustration. She has been left on her own to meet the needs of her unidentified children, who possess many of the same emotional and behavioral issues as her identified child receiving helpful services. In this case, the refusal to recognize the multiple and diverse ways giftedness can be expressed negates any kind of individualized approach to support.

### **Parents and Caregivers of Gifted Children Need More Information from Their Child's School and/or Gifted Programming**

Once a child is recommended (by any stakeholder) for gifted identification, the need for information is great and does not end. Initially, parents need materials and conversations that explain giftedness as holistic identification. This includes a thorough walk through of the testing procedures, results, and an open conversation regarding the whole child. This equips parents to better understand their child's unique abilities and behavioral characteristics, as well as empowers them to advocate when the perspectives of others may disagree with their own. As many parents have a surface understanding of giftedness at best, this will also allow them the opportunity to expand their knowledge beyond common misconceptions and incorrect definitions

of giftedness. Even parents within this study with a more advanced understanding of the education system desired this information.

Additionally, specific information regarding the purpose and structure of the gifted program will enable parents to make well-informed decisions for their child's academic career. Lack of this type of information decreases "buy in" and can affect a parent's decision to take advantage of available services, as was evident for three participants in this study. Even if a parent has a firm grasp on giftedness as an identification, they need to know how services will play a role in their child's overall development. While this study had very limited cultural/racial diversity, it can be assumed that this concept of "buy in" through understanding holds the potential to positively affect gifted program attrition (Ford, 2012; Ford et al., 2008; Ford & Whiting, 2010; Grantham, 2004) for diverse families.

Beyond the initial stages of identification, the need for information is continued, but becomes more specific. As mentioned in the previous implication, this study confirmed that gifted parenting presents unique challenges not usually experienced during typical parenting (Besnoy et. al, 2015; Guthrie, 2019; Morawska & Sanders, 2009; Wells, 2018). Parents and caregivers of gifted children desire information on specific topics and how they are specifically related to their child. This double specificity adds complexity, as some of the materials and/or research may not even exist. For example, a parent in this study who expressed a need for supportive materials to support their 2E child through puberty accepted that it would ultimately fall on her shoulders to synthesize literature on both giftedness and Autism. Another parent noted that too much generalized information discouraged her from pursuing literature from her child's school. How schools and gifted programs can play a role in this problem is by providing a wide



array of applicable materials and by helping parents evaluate what might be useful to their unique parenting journey and what is off the mark.

### **Parents and Caregivers of Gifted Children Need More Social and Emotional Support from Their Child’s School and/or Gifted Programming**

In addition to educationally supportive information and materials, parents of exceptional children desire more social and emotional support from others and look to their child’s school and/or gifted program as a potential source. This is due to the uniqueness of gifted parenting and the struggle to find opportunities in which to share challenges and to ask for advice. Just as their children may find it difficult to find “like kind” in social settings, so do their parents, as was evidenced by participant voices. Parents of gifted children sometimes do not share with or seek advice from parents of typical children, as they feel their understanding would be low and it may introduce a stigma of “bragging” into the relationship. This is often perplexing to parents, as they feel they are humbling themselves to discuss issues, not successes. These concepts are present in gifted literature (Gross, 1999) and were demonstrated often within the stories of parents in this study.

Parents of gifted children need avenues for appropriate and valuable connectivity coordinated *for* them. As one parent of this study said, they often do not even know where the “door” is to do it themselves. Just as support systems are in place for other facets of special education, so should there be for gifted parents. Parents of gifted children need a safe place in which they can express their challenges and concerns to relieve their emotional stress, as well as to seek educated and experienced advice from others similar to themselves. In its most comprehensive form, parents want this to be realized as structured, gifted parent support groups

that are regular, organized by the school, free of judgment, and are guided by specific topics and a gifted expert.

Included in or separate from this support group model is the desire for family advocates. Such advocates would, ideally, be assigned at the first discussion of giftedness so that the family receives support, regardless of identification status. Also, such advocates should demonstrate a deep knowledge base regarding giftedness, as well as have a personal relationship with the child and their family. Once again, this understanding of the whole child would assist in advocacy efforts, as well as supporting parents through specific times of parental challenge, while still honoring the family's value system. This advocate may be the main source of information and materials, a confidant, and/or an emotional coach to the parents.

**The Perspectives of Others Have a Great Impact, Positive or Negative, on the Confidence of Gifted Parents, and Should Always be Considered**

The understanding that the perspectives of others matter, especially to a parent with reduced confidence, should be an underpinning idea for all parent support models. Many parents, even those with backgrounds in education, respect teachers and other school personnel as experts who should be "in their corner". When their opinions and/or perceptions surrounding giftedness conflict, it positions gifted parents to either challenge or acquiesce. Their ultimate decision lies within the confidence they hold. Almost all participants of this study noted an experience with a teacher that diminished their confidence as a parent. This phenomenon is reflected in gifted literature as well (Geake & Miraca, 2008). For some, this weighs as feelings of guilt and regret, as parents must live with the decisions they made out of intimidation and/or a lack of firm foundation of understanding.

In contrast, some of the parents who were most discouraged as a result of teachers noted that there were school personnel throughout their parenting journey who were the catalyst for confidence. These were personnel who encouraged the parent to stay the course, recognized the individual strengths of their child(ren), or provided timely information. As teachers are most often the initial identifiers, these implications are incredibly powerful, as it sets the tone for school-family partnership and meeting the social and emotional needs of gifted parents. As was presented by three of the participants of this study, many teachers do not have a comprehensive background in giftedness, and therefore, their perceptions may be incorrect and undermine what parents feel they know.

Acknowledging this, it is paramount for schools and gifted programs to train teachers in the areas of giftedness identification and parent partnership. Teachers and other school personnel must validate the lived experiences of gifted parents by listening to their concerns, judgment-free, and by creating a culture that does not suggest they are alone. Just over half of the participants in this study were currently or previously employed by the district that identified and served their gifted child. This social piece had both a positive and negative effect on their confidence to advocate. This means that despite professional knowledge, social perspectives play a role in parent confidence.

With regard to peer relationships, parents need the validation that comes with connectivity. Parents of gifted children want to know they are not the only one experiencing a specific situation, and that there is help found in the non-judgmental relationships with others like them. Several participants noted that the realization that others had gone through some of the same challenges as them had a significant impact on their confidence to meet that challenge. Furthermore, the opportunity to confide in those with similar experiences, like through a parent

support group, was noted as something that would help meet each parent's mental, social, and emotional needs, as they were often embarrassed to confide in others outside of the gifted realm due to the nature of the issue and/or the potential perception of the individual in which they confided.

### **Structured Gifted Parent Support Exists, Though Limited, and This Research Validates its Importance**

As stated in the above-mentioned implications, there is a great need for schools and gifted programs to provide intentional parent support to gifted parents and caregivers. These interventions are scarcely found in gifted literature (Adler, 2006; Saranli & Metin, 2014; Morawska & Sanders 2009; Prado, et al., 2018) and lack large scale empirical study. What is found, mostly represents a two-pronged approach of equipping parents through the transfer of knowledge and social camaraderie. Other times, interventions only focus on one or the other. Sometimes, the social/emotional piece is completely removed, focusing on parent education on specific topics (Seidel Applebaum, 1998) and presentation of information through a workshop model (Weber & Stanley, 2012). This work both validates and shines a deficit on these approaches to parent support.

First, parents need information regarding a myriad of gifted topics. It is not enough to simply provide generalized material regarding how giftedness “looks” when, in reality, it is a spectrum influenced by many additional factors. This information must be organized and systematic to provide timely and beneficial resources to parents and caregivers at different stages of need. Overwhelmingly in this study, parents wanted more information at all stages. Specifically, materials and opportunities to learn more about the giftedness identification,

different behavioral manifestations, the process of identification, program services, as well as specific topics, such as suicidal ideations, eating disorders, etc. A parent support model that digs deeper into specific issues through coaching and other types of transfer of knowledge is strongly desired, but must be counterweighted with trusting relationships with others who share similar experience.

Secondly, parents need intentional social and emotional support systems that are developed by schools/gifted programs. While many parents enjoy the “friendship” aspect of social camaraderie, they also desire deeper relationships that are rooted in trust. Parents feel these relationships can best be established with other parents of similar background and experience, as well as school personnel who have taken the time to know them and their child(ren) on a deep level. This could be the role of a family advocate as well. Parents want these relationships to serve as more than just a social placeholder, but a place in which they can seek advice for even their most private parenting issues.

However, confidence to seek out such relationships with others varies as many gifted parents have experienced some type of uncomfortable social experience when seeking advice from parents of typical children. Sometimes, parents are reluctant to share with other gifted parents if they feel their specific parenting challenges will be judged. Therefore, it should be the responsibility of schools and gifted programs to develop such supports, such as gifted parent support groups, to holistically meet the mental, social, and emotional needs of exceptional parents. Ideally, these supports should have a balance of socialization for connectivity and networking for coaching and problem-solving.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

This small qualitative study attempted to remedy the gap in research surrounding holistic support for gifted parents. While this study focused on Missouri parents representing three separate gifted programs/school districts, their feelings were validated through the limited literature that exists to date. In order to move the field forward in providing quality and impactful parent support, more research needs to be conducted on the needs of gifted parents, as well as empirical studies regarding support system effectiveness. Replicating this study on a larger scale or using participants who represented a different set of demographics would expand on works such as this.

In addition, more research needs to be conducted in the area of parent/family support for racially and linguistically diverse parents. While it can be inferred that some of the feelings of isolation, confusion, and frustration felt by all gifted parents is a salient experience, they may be magnified or experienced uniquely with different contextual factors. Therefore, the effectiveness of universal parent support systems may be unique to certain people groups and settings.

Most importantly, the topic of building confidence in parents of gifted children through intentional support must be further discussed in the literature in general. There needs to be a focus on parent needs as a standalone concept that is separate from the outcomes of their children. In other words, parents need coaching to help their children be successful, but they also need it for themselves as an individual with additional mental, social, and emotional needs. Lastly, a holistic gifted parent support framework, reinforced by evidence, must be established, tested, and endorsed on a national scale. To date, resources and program standards provide information and endorse practices, such as parent support groups, but are not framed in a

comprehensive model that specifically focuses on parent confidence (outside of child outcomes) and can be adopted and easily implemented by gifted programs across the country. It is my hope that works such as these can serve as contributing research to the realization of this goal.

### **Summary**

Using Bandura's Theory of Self-Efficacy (1977) and a phenomenological methodology, this study examined the lived experiences of gifted parents and caregivers with regard to what additional challenges were associated with exceptional parenting, what experiences affected their confidence, and how a comprehensive support for gifted parents could be realized. The qualitative design of this study captured the lived experiences of eight gifted parents and caregivers representing three different gifted programs/school districts in Missouri.

Credible data from semi-structured interviews was collected and analyzed with an interpretive/hermeneutic lens, which produced seven major themes and two unspoken themes. Major themes consisted of *advocacy, school, need for support, specific topics, parenting issues, hopes and fears, and social perspectives*. The unspoken themes of *abstract contributing factors* and *family value systems* contextualized the limitations of future gifted parent support models, noting that there are factors contributing to confidence in all types of parenting and that some of the issues gifted parents struggle with are interpreted through their unique family value system.

Major themes and unspoken themes, all evidenced by participant responses, yielded five practical implications for the holistic support of gifted parents and caregivers. They centered around the need for more knowledge, more social and emotional support, the perspectives of others that affect parental confidence, a recognition that gifted parenting brings with it additional challenges compared to that of parenting typical children, and an acknowledgment that this work

supports what is limitedly represented in gifted literature.

In conclusion, this study provides evidence to the need for holistic support of gifted parents, as well as a call to action to increase discussion, research, and framework development for models that can be empirically studied, endorsed on a national level, and adopted by gifted programs and schools nationwide.



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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

Dear Parent/Guardian of a Gifted Child,

My name is Kristi Mascher, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Arkansas. As part of the requirements to complete my Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction, with a focus in Gifted Education, I am conducting a research study for my doctoral dissertation. As a former gifted teacher, and parent of two high-ability children of my own, the topic of gifted parent support is very important to me. I understand the additional challenges and required support often needed to have successful school years, and even day-to-day life.

**You have been recommended by one of your child’s gifted teachers as someone who might be interested in participating in this study by providing your unique perspective on the topic of confidence in gifted parenting and gifted parent support.**

By participating in this study, you will be asked to participate in at least one individual interview. Your participation is completely voluntary. You will provide a pseudonym that will indicate your identity in any published materials. You may withdraw from this study at any time. There are no anticipated risks or benefits associated with your participation in this study.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please email, call, or text, using the contact information below. Please include your name and child’s age in your response.

Kristi Mascher



Thank you for your consideration and commitment to furthering the field of gifted education so we may better serve gifted students and their families in the future.

With appreciation,

Kristi A. Mascher

## **Appendix B: Informed Consent (Sent Electronically)**

### **Invitation to participate**

You have been recommended and selected as a subject for a study aimed at examining the additional challenges associated with gifted parenting/caregiving and to understand which experiences and/or types of support affect parental confidence to meet the needs of their gifted children.

### **What you will be asked to do**

By participating in this study, you will be asked to disclose the demographic information requested below, as well as participate in at least one individual interview. The anticipated time commitment is 1-2 hours in interview sessions.

### **Risks, benefits and confidentiality**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from this study at any time. You will provide a pseudonym that will indicate your identity on any transcribed or published materials. Your responses will be recorded via audio/video, as well as typed or handwritten notes. These materials will be stored on a password-protected computer and/or in a locked office. Original recordings will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study, while any transcriptions and coding sheets will be held for the required 3 years post-study. Prior to final submission to the university, your responses will be sent back to you via email as a measure of assuring accuracy. All information collected will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy. There are no anticipated risks or benefits associated with your participation in this study. You must be 18 years or older to participate.

You have the right to contact the primary researcher, Kristi Mascher, with any additional questions or concerns, by using the following contact information: [REDACTED]. You have the right to contact the faculty supervisor, Marcia Imbeau, with additional questions or concerns, by using the following contact information: [REDACTED]. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact Ro Windwalker, the University's IRB Compliance Coordinator, at 479-575-2208 or [irb@uark.edu](mailto:irb@uark.edu).

### **Consent**

I am at least 18 years old      YES    NO

I understand my participation in this study is completely voluntary and that I can withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. I UNDERSTAND    I DO NOT UNDERSTAND

I understand its purpose and agree to be a part of the following study conducted by Kristi Mascher, a doctoral candidate at the University of Arkansas, and I give full permission for my anonymous responses to be used for the purposes of this study.

I AGREE      I DO NOT AGREE

**DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

Participant(s') name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Provided Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

I have \_\_\_ **formally identified** (by a psychologist, psychiatrist, district gifted program, etc.) gifted children for which I am a parent/caregiver.

I **evenly** share parental responsibilities with another person (spouse, partner, other family member, etc.) YES NO

If yes, who and what role do they play in parenting your gifted child(ren)?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I or the person in which I share parenting responsibilities are also identified as gifted.

YES, I AM YES, THEY ARE YES, WE BOTH ARE

I consider my gifted child(ren)'s race/ethnicity to be: \_\_\_\_\_

My primary language is English. YES NO

My gifted child(ren)'s primary language is English. YES NO

My current, yearly household income range:

- \_\_\_\_\_ \$0
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$1 - \$14,999
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$15,000 - \$29,999
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$30,000 - \$44,999
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$45,000 - \$59,999
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$60,000 - \$74,999
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$75,000 or over

I consider where I live to be:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Urban
- \_\_\_\_\_ Suburban
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rural

The age(s) of my gifted child(ren) is/are: \_\_\_\_\_

In the same respective order, they were **formally identified** (by a psychologist, psychiatrist,

district gifted program, etc.) at age(s):

\_\_\_\_\_

My highest level of education attained:

- Less than high school (Please add the highest grade completed \_\_\_\_\_)
- High school
- Some vocational, trade or technical school beyond high school
- Completed vocational or technical school
- Some college
- Undergraduate college degree
- Some graduate or professional work
- Graduate or professional degree

My current employment status:

- Employed full-time
- Employed part-time
- Underemployed (meaning employed but at a salary or rate that is less than what your education, trade or skills demand)
- Disabled
- Retired
- Seeking Employment
- Unemployed, not seeking employment
- Full-time Stay at Home Parent



## Appendix C

### Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to talk with me today. As you know, I am interested in what affects the confidence of gifted parents. This is a professional and personal interest of mine, as I am the parent of two exceptional kids myself. I understand how hard it can be to raise gifted kids, especially when they have additional challenges and diagnoses. I know there have been times when my confidence as a parent has waned for one reason or another. I appreciate your willingness to share your story. Hopefully, these kinds of stories will help build future supports for gifted parents.

For our discussion, I want to define *confidence* as the degree to which you feel “good” about your ability to do something, not necessarily your ability to be successful. In other words, what makes you say to yourself “I’ve got this”, regardless of the outcome?

*Tell me about your child. What are their strengths, passions, challenges, and so on?*

*How do these strengths, passions and challenges impact the way you feel about your parenting?*

*How and when did you first notice something was different/unique about your child?*

*Talk me through the identification process for your child. What was it like?*

*What happened first, next...*

*What did [specific experience shared] make you feel about your parenting?*

*What role did you feel like you played in this process? In what ways if any did your confidence, or lack of confidence, affect the process and/or outcome?*

*What did you need right away in this process that you either got or didn’t to help you feel good about your parenting?*

*Thinking about those who are closest to you, such as your family and friends, who did you include in your conversations about your child’s giftedness early on?*

*Why these people?*

*What was their reaction?*

*Were any of these reactions unexpected or challenging?*

*In what ways did/do these views make you feel more or less confident about parenting your gifted child?*

*Tell me about a time when someone else's ideas of giftedness shaped the way you supported your child. How did that feel? What did you choose to do or not do?*

*Tell me about a time, positive or negative, you recall impacting your confidence as a gifted parent?*

*What have been the most helpful experiences you have had specific to parenting a gifted child? What experiences do you wish you'd have more of as a gifted parent? (ex. informal contact with parents; my child's teacher, workshops, books, etc.) Is there anything that you haven't found helpful?*

*Has there ever been a time in which the opinions of or interactions with others impacted your confidence as a gifted parent?*

*Who or what holds the ability to shake your day-to-day confidence in parenting?*

*If you were placed in charge of a committee to create supportive resources/experiences for gifted parents, what would you create? Why these?*

*What would you definitely leave out?*

*What are your worries or hopes about your child's future? How confident do you feel to support them through these experiences?*

*Is there anything else about your experience that I should know, but haven't asked you about?*

## Appendix D

### IRB Approval



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**To:** Kristi Ann Mascher  
**From:** Douglas J Adams, Chair  
IRB Expedited Review  
**Date:** 06/16/2021  
**Action:** **Expedited Approval**  
**Action Date:** 06/16/2021  
**Protocol #:** 2104328002  
**Study Title:** Parenting the Gifted: Caregivers' Perspectives of Challenges and their Confidence to Support their Exceptional Children  
**Expiration Date:** 05/20/2022  
**Last Approval Date:**

The above-referenced protocol has been approved following expedited review by the IRB Committee that oversees research with human subjects.

If the research involves collaboration with another institution then the research cannot commence until the Committee receives written notification of approval from the collaborating institution's IRB.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without Committee approval. Please submit continuation requests early enough to allow sufficient time for review. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study closure.

Adverse Events: Any serious or unexpected adverse event must be reported to the IRB Committee within 48 hours. All other adverse events should be reported within 10 working days.

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, study personnel, or number of participants, please submit an amendment to the IRB. All changes must be approved by the IRB Committee before they can be initiated.

You must maintain a research file for at least 3 years after completion of the study. This file should include all correspondence with the IRB Committee, original signed consent forms, and study data.

cc: Marcia B Imbeau, Investigator