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# Social Dominance, Moral Politics, and Gifted Education

Jennifer Riedl Cross  
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*Theories from social psychology and cognitive psychology can help move the field of gifted education forward in its search for consensus on the purpose of gifted education and its target population. From Social Dominance Theory (SDT; J. Sidanius & F. Pratto, 1999), a theory of intergroup relations, we can assume that there will be members of our society who will want all gifted children to receive equal opportunities even as others will want members of the dominant group to receive greater opportunities. Linguistic analysis of the cognitive underpinnings of conservatism and liberalism in the US (G. Lakoff, 2002) informs us that some members of society will prefer a competitive environment in schools while others will prefer a more nurturant environment. Only by recognizing these differences can acceptable definitions and goals be agreed upon.*

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There are wide ranging beliefs held by professionals working in the field of gifted education, but they can agree on one goal: schools should provide the best education possible for all students, including gifted students (Coleman & Cross, 2001). Determining what is best and what is possible, however, has not been a simple task. The launch of Sputnik made the definition of educational objectives easy during the late 1950s. This single event fueled the dialogue that led to the creation of special math and science programs. Schools were directed to produce students strong in math and science in order to surpass the Soviet Union in the technological race and thus win the Cold War. Today there is no similar event that so clearly defines how we should focus our schools. With the Cold War ended and a "New World Order" emerging, the race appears to have been won and our struggles today are internal (e.g., the 2004 presidential election) or against ill-defined adversaries (e.g., the war on terror). Gifted education reflects this lack of direction.

Besides the goal of a "best education," the field has no accepted conception of what this education might look like or even who should have access to it. Administrators and teachers can easily reject the necessity of services for gifted students when the field is unable to produce a consensus on its purpose and target population. Consensus in the field would help establish its identity and enhance its legitimacy (Coleman, 2004). In addition to improved identification of students and the possibility of more refined explorations (Gagné, 2004), consensus in the field on who we are serving and how best to do so will bring the field to a new level of "scientific maturity" (Coleman).

Understanding the cognitive underpinnings of our society, the tacit assumptions and beliefs that we hold and that motivate our behavior, may offer an opportunity to reassess the current lack of focus while setting the stage to forge a new conception of gifted education on which the vast majority of American families and gifted educators alike can agree. To begin, we will review Social Dominance Theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) and examine gifted education through its explanation of intergroup relations. We will take a closer look at individual thought processes through Lakoff's (2002) analysis of conservative and liberal reasoning. Considering these two fundamental differences in individual worldviews, we can predict what kind of education would be preferable to individuals holding these diverse orientations. Possible conceptions that will appeal to individuals across the continua are suggested.

## Deciding Who is Gifted

How do we decide who is gifted? Gifted students may be identified by their scores on tests of intelligence, by their achievements, by their special talents, by their creativity on tests or in activities that yield creative products, by any standardized ability or achievement test score, by the recommendation of parents or teachers, or by some combination of these. Some schools choose the gifted by a single measure (Coleman & Cross, 2001). Students who fail to meet that measure fail to receive services. Some schools use multiple measures in identifying the gifted, often resulting in a larger pool of identified gifted students (Coleman & Cross). As with any hypothetical construct, each of the approaches creates a particular pool of gifted students.

Because not all schools identify students in the same way, students may be considered gifted in one school but not in another. Services for gifted students are similarly varied, from self-contained classrooms to enrichment, from pull-out programs to differentiation in the regular classroom, from honors and Advanced Placement courses to dual credit for college courses. There is little agreement on the purpose of these efforts to serve the gifted. Should schools be providing a minimal service in order to claim that efforts were made? Should the role of schools be to help each child fulfill his or her academic potential? Gallagher (2000) warns us against giving a "nontherapeutic educational dosage" to gifted children, yet ironically, in 2005, we cannot say what an effective therapeutic dosage is.

Schools exist as institutions within our society, meaning that they reflect the values of our society. A lack of agreement regarding the purpose of schools indicates differences among the members of society who make these determinations. We see this polarization in other social institutions as well, particularly in American politics in this first decade of the 21st century. Understanding the motivations behind these differences is the first step in achieving a productive collaboration on behalf of gifted children. Sidanius and Pratto's (1999) theory of intergroup relations, along with Lakoff's (2002) analysis of political worldviews, offer powerful lenses through which to examine these differences.

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# Social Dominance Theory

Social Dominance Theory (SDT; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) has garnered wide appeal as an explanation of the acceptance of inequalities among groups in a society. SDT proposes that social stability is maintained through a complex relationship between dominant and subordinate groups whose members agree (consciously or not) that the dominant group is deserving of its disproportionately large share of *positive social value*, "all those material and symbolic things for which people strive" (Sidanius & Pratto, p. 31). In modern American society, the dominant group (the one controlling a disproportionately large share of positive social value) is male, high SES, and White. This group holds most of the land, the money, and the political power. According to SDT, the dominant status of the group is maintained because enough of the women, poor, and non-Whites agree (whether they know it or not) that this group at the top deserves to be there.

The key assumption underlying this view of society is that an *arbitrary-set* system will develop in any society that has an economic surplus. Arbitrary-set systems are "socially constructed and highly salient groups" (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, p. 33) that are based on any characteristic of the group that can be imagined—race, income or education level, religion, neighborhood, or any definable characteristic. Age and gender are the two other stratification systems in the *tri-morphic* structure of any group-based social hierarchy. In most societies, adult and middle-aged members of the society wield greater power than the children and younger adults, and males maintain greater social and political power than females. Compared to age and gender stratification systems, arbitrary-set systems are highly flexible and malleable, with group membership dependent on the cultural and situational context. Hunter-gatherer societies, which are typically nomadic and cannot maintain an economic surplus, do not allow for the specialized roles that can result in an arbitrary-set system. Hunter-gatherer societies are rarely seen today, meaning that a group-based social hierarchy exists in nearly every modern society (Sidanius & Pratto).

## Maintaining Inequality

A second assumption of SDT is that group-based conflict is a result of this "basic human predisposition to form group-based hierarchies" (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, p. 38). Anti-Black racism is a powerful example of such group-based conflict. The third assumption underpinning SDT is that the degree of inequality in a group-based hierarchy is moderated by *hierarchy-enhancing* (HE) forces and *hierarchy-attenuating* (HA) forces. HE forces serve to increase the level of social inequality (generally through the unequal distribution of social value) while HA forces serve to increase the level of social equality. Individuals and institutions may behave in either HE or HA fashion, but inequality

is maintained by the *aggregated individual* and *institutional discrimination*. Funding schools through property taxes is an example of HE institutional discrimination. Wealthy districts have more valuable properties, resulting in higher property taxes. More income from property taxes means more funds available to the wealthy school district (Kozol, 1991). The hierarchy is enhanced by this institutional practice. The effect of the compounded behaviors of individuals and institutions is the maintenance of a power differential. Through this HE policy, the dominant group maintains its status.

One of the most important aspects of SDT is its identification of *legitimizing myths*. Both individuals and institutions are affected by these myths, which are "attitudes, values, beliefs, stereotypes, and ideologies that provide moral and intellectual justification for the social practices that distribute social value within the social system" (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, p. 45). These myths can be either HE or HA in nature and may or may not be true. Many Americans believe that those who live in poverty are poor because they are lazy (Kluegel & Smith, 1986) or because their own behavior perpetuates their poverty (Beck, Whitley, & Wolk, 1999). This belief ignores contextual or systemic reasons for poverty and places the blame on the individual for his or her condition. It is a HE legitimizing myth. On the other hand, some Americans believe that those who have more have a responsibility to share with those who have less. This *noblesse oblige* is an example of a HA legitimizing myth.

Working in concert with legitimizing myths, the mechanism of *behavioral asymmetry* also acts to preserve the hierarchy. An *asymmetrical in-group bias* is evidenced by greater in-group bias among dominants than subordinates, particularly when the dimension of group comparison is important to group status. For example, in Boldry and Kashy's (1999) study of cadets, more in-group favoritism was found among the lower status group (freshmen) on characteristics that were not relevant to the group's status. The high status group (juniors), however, showed less in-group favoritism on those characteristics and more in-group favoritism on leadership, which would have greater impact on the status of the group. *Out-group favoritism* or *deference* is another behavior that

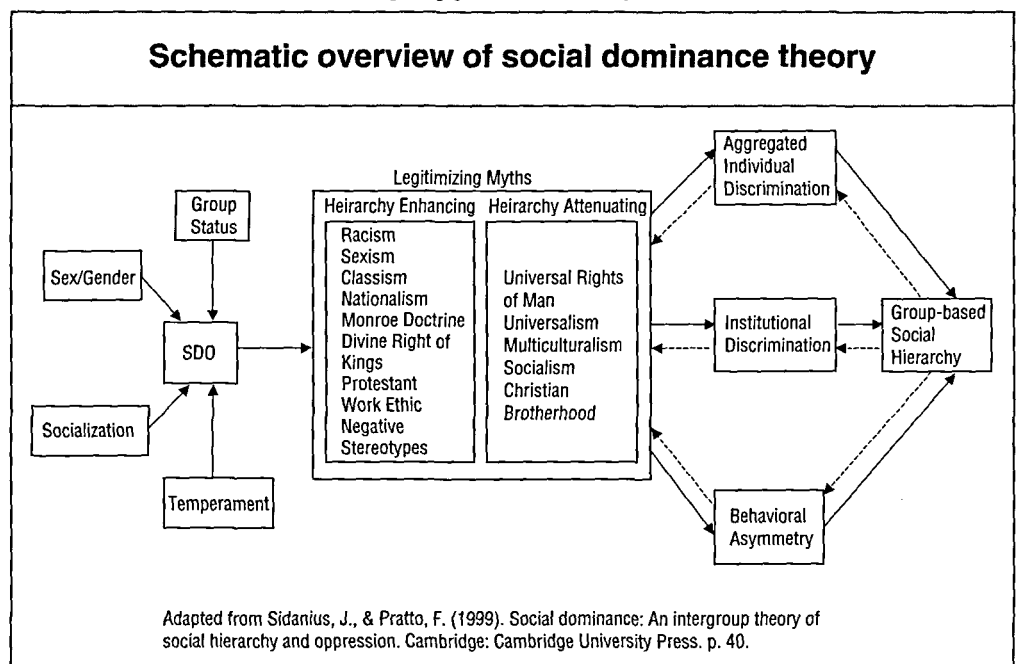


Figure 1

occurs asymmetrically, with subordinates exhibiting greater deference to dominants, an "Uncle Tom" attitude toward the dominant group. Clark and Clark's (1947) doll experiment, in which Black children given a choice preferred to play with a White doll, is often held up as an example of out-group favoritism, although more recent research indicates there are culturally dependent moderating factors in such favoritism (e.g., Branch & Newcomb, 1980).

The various factors of SDT combine to maintain a group-based hierarchy. See Figure 1 for a schematic overview.

### ***Social Dominance Orientation***

Individuals within a group-based hierarchical society have varying commitments to the dominance of the "superior" group over the "inferior" group—their *social dominance orientation* (SDO). The desire to maintain the "social order" of the group-based hierarchy will depend on an individual's membership in and identification with their group. Members of the dominant group tend to have a greater desire to maintain their position, resulting in a higher SDO (Pratto & Choudhury, 1998; Levin, 1996). Background factors such as education, religion, and experience also have an effect on an individual's level of SDO. Worldwide, males have higher levels of SDO than females (see Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, p. 267).

SDO will differ among members of a society. Not all members of a group will share the same dominance orientation. Pratto and her colleagues (1994) view SDO as a general attitudinal orientation toward intergroup relations, reflecting whether one generally prefers such relations to be equal, versus hierarchical.... [It is] the central individual-difference variable that predicts a person's acceptance or rejection of numerous ideologies and policies relevant to group relations. (p. 742)

These ideologies and policies include those developed in the field of gifted education.

## **Social Dominance in Gifted Education**

Social dominance has an undeniable effect on the education of children around the world, with members of the group with highest status also being those who enjoy the greatest academic success. For example, the Australian Whites have higher status and higher academic success than the Aborigines; the Czechoslovakian Slovaks than the Gypsies; the Native French than French Portuguese and immigrants; in Japan, the non-Burakumins and Japanese than the Burakumins and Koreans; the Protestants of Northern Ireland than the Catholics (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). We would like to believe that SDO plays no role in the education of our gifted children, but there is clear evidence to the contrary (see Cross, 2003).

**A**frican American and low socioeconomic status students are disproportionately underrepresented among identified gifted students (Ford, Harris, Tyson & Trotman, 2002; Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1993). The practice of identification through the use of IQ scores has been challenged as culturally biased, with Whites scoring significantly higher than their African American peers (Jensen, 1980, 1985), yet the practice persists in many school districts across the country. The legitimizing myth that an IQ test is a true measure of natural ability has enabled the practice to survive, yet its HE properties are evident in the underrepresentation of minorities in programs that rely on the IQ score.

As long as we believe that an IQ is unbiased and we continue to use IQ scores for identification, the inequity will be maintained. The same is true for other standardized tests. All things being equal, we can assume that standardized test scores are equal as well. When schools are poorly funded in minority and low SES neighborhoods or when a disproportionate amount must be spent on subpar facilities (Kozol, 1991), the educational foundation these students receive is not comparable to their wealthier, dominant White counterparts across town.

**A**ll things have not been equal in their education. Performance on a standardized test will only be equivalent with an equivalent education. When advantages are conferred to some students over others based on performance on standardized achievement tests, it is like a comparison of apples and oranges. Rather than seeing the apples as a different fruit, it is assumed that only the weight differentiates them from the oranges. The standardized achievement test scores from low-SES and high-SES schools are like the weight – two different things are being measured with the same scale. Yet the legitimizing myth is that these scores are equivalent – that all things *are* equal. Members of both the dominant and subordinate group subscribe to this myth, upholding its ability to maintain the hierarchy. Seeing through the myth, Mary Frasier shares her list of prerequisites to being identified as gifted: "You must have two parents; they must be college educated. You must be White. You must be in the suburbs" (Grantham, 2002, p. 50). The relationship of socioeconomic status and achievement is ignored to maintain the popular myth that all students play on a level field. In fact, a U.S. Department of Education (1991) study of programs for gifted 8th grade students found that students whose families are in the highest socioeconomic status quartile are five times more likely to be in a gifted program than those in the bottom quartile.

There has been a movement towards using multiple criteria in identifying gifted students (Coleman & Cross, 2001). Along with test scores, students can also be evaluated on the basis of products they have created or other academic achievements. Such a change in practice is hierarchy attenuating, allowing exceptional ability to show in a less restricted fashion. Those in the dominant group in the US (Whites, especially wealthy, conservative Whites) may have difficulty accepting the notion that there is inequity (see Sue, 2004), preferring to view group differences as the result of a lack of effort or discipline on the part of minority students or their families. This legitimizing myth reflects the worldview of the dominant group. Opposing worldviews cause dissension among those who wish to create greater equity and those who desire greater distance – physically and economically – between the dominant and subordinate groups.

Members of the dominant group may not all have the same worldview. They may not all be high in SDO. These differences are evidenced by those in the dominant group who work in hierarchy-attenuating professions (e.g., social workers, counselors and others whose work "benefits the oppressed more than elites," Pratto, et al., 1994, p. 747) and those who work in hierarchy-enhancing professions (e.g., law, law enforcement, politics, business, and others whose work "is primarily aimed at protecting, serving, or benefiting elite members of society more than oppressed members of society," p. 747). Worldview cannot be assessed simply by an analysis of occupation, however. A worldview is a complex ideology of which most people are unaware. Individuals may know that they believe public schools are a necessary evil or good in a

democratic society but have no idea what effect that belief has on their other attitudes or their behaviors. It is the role of cognitive scientists to figure that out.

## Liberal and Conservative Morality

The purpose of cognitive linguistics is “to study how we conceptualize our everyday lives and how we think and talk about them” (Lakoff, 2002, p. 3). A social dominance orientation is a conception of everyday life. The legitimizing myths that maintain the group-based hierarchy are conceptions that make up an individual’s worldview. According to Lakoff, these conceptions are metaphoric. Our language offers insight into the metaphors by which we live our lives. By analyzing the words we use to express our thoughts, the underlying metaphors can be explicated. In his analysis of American political conservatives and liberals, Lakoff has identified some of the differences that are at the root of our inability to agree on the purpose of gifted education.

### Radial Categories

Human conceptions of the world can be understood through the theory of radial categories (Lakoff, 1987; Rosch & Lloyd, 1978). The elements of a category include *prototypes* that can be of different kinds. “*All prototypes are cognitive constructions used to perform a certain kind of reasoning; they are not objective features of the world [italics in original]*” (Lakoff, 2002, p. 9). For example, a *typical case* prototype is what we would consider to be characteristic of members of a category. A typical “bird,” for example, might be a robin or a sparrow. A typical “gifted child” might be male, White, good in math. An *ideal* prototype would be the standard against which others are measured. An *essential* prototype is a “collection of properties” that makes a thing the kind of thing it is. Birds must have feathers, wings and a beak to be considered birds in our conceptual system.

Lakoff focuses his discussion of political morality on the *central prototype*. This central subcategory is the basis from which we can extend the category or define variations on it. The central model of a conservative or a liberal will be a “coherent ideology,” from which there can be extensions and variations. People with the same central model may hold different opinions on certain issues, but because of the category’s radial structure, the variations that occur will be systematic and can only be within certain parameters. “As a result, two conservatives such as Robert Dole and Phil Gramm may have very different positions on a certain range of issues yet still be conservatives” (Lakoff, 2002, p. 14). Lakoff (2003) estimates that 35-39% of voters favor the liberal worldview, 35-38% prefer the conservative worldview, and 25-30% have *both* worldviews and can be persuaded from either point of view. In the discussion that follows, the conservatives and liberals described are of the central model, and variations would be natural in our society.

### Nation as Family

At the heart of Lakoff’s (2002) model is the notion that we conceptualize our nation as a family. The government serves as the parent and the citizens are the children. Political conservatives tend to have a different ideal family model than liberals. The ideal family among conservatives is based on the *Strict Father* model. Liberals have as their ideal the *Nurturant Par-*

*ent* model. These models of the family affect much more than just the parent-child relationship. They have an effect on individual and group interactions as well.

### The Strict Father

The basic assumption of the Strict Father is that “life is a struggle for survival” (Lakoff, 2002, p. 67). In order to survive in this difficult world, one must be able to compete successfully. This competition can only be won with strong discipline and “character.” An adult is expected to be sufficiently self-disciplined to act as his or her own authority, meaning that obedience is a lifelong characteristic. “Being self-disciplined is being obedient to your own authority, that is, being able to carry out the plans you make and the commitments you undertake” (p. 68). Raising a child to be such a self-disciplined adult requires rewards for competition and punishment for a lack of obedience (a lack of self-discipline). In such a competitive world, the successful people will necessarily be better off than others, and this differential between those who have competed successfully and those who have not is fair. The authority of those at the top of this hierarchy (the dominant group) is considered legitimate by those viewing it through the Strict Father model. This legitimate authority has the responsibility of:

- 1) Maintaining order; that is, sustaining and defending the system of authority itself.
- 2) Using that authority for the protection of those under one’s authority.
- 3) Working for the benefit of those under one’s authority, especially helping them through proper discipline to become the right kind of people.
- 4) Exercising one’s authority to help create more self-disciplined people, that is, the right kind of people, for their own benefit, the benefit of others, and because it is the right thing to do. (p. 70)

The metaphor given the highest priority in Strict Father morality is *Moral Strength*. Evil is an internal (e.g., desires, self-indulgence) or external force that must be overcome through self-discipline and self-denial. A morally weak person is unlikely to overcome evil and will, thereby, commit evil. “The metaphor of Moral Strength sees the world in terms of a war of good against the forces of evil, which must be fought ruthlessly” (p. 74). In this battle, moral weakness must be attacked as evil. It is important not to empathize with evil or to “accord evil some truth of its own” (p. 74). Evil must be fought. When evil is conceptualized as the forces that will bring about a lack of self-discipline or self-denial, there are countless opportunities to engage this foe, particularly in modern America. We see this engagement in the halls of Congress and in the halls of our schools.

Other significant metaphors that affect Strict Father reasoning are *Moral Authority*, the authority of a parent to set standards of behavior and enforce them and the responsibility of a child to be obedient; *Moral Order*, the natural hierarchy of power relations (God over people, people over nature, adults over children, and men over women) and the responsibility that each higher power has to each lower power; *Moral Boundaries*, based on the “Life is a Journey” metaphor, the accepted paths that can be taken and should not be deviated from (“Someone who moves off of sanctioned paths or out of sanctioned territory is doing more than merely acting immorally. He is rejecting the purposes, the goals, the very mode of life of the society he is in” [Lakoff, 2002, pp. 84-5].); and *Rights as Paths*, within moral boundaries, the right to move freely, with-

out interference, towards the desired goal. These metaphors, along with several others Lakoff describes, create a worldview that can be seen among many political conservatives. This worldview affects choices and behavior. For those in positions of authority, it forms the basis of policies that move these abstractions into the real world.

### *The Nurturant Parent*

The principal goal of the Nurturant Parent is for children to be “fulfilled and happy in their lives and to become nurturant themselves” (Lakoff, 2002, p. 109). This goal can only be achieved through caring for, respecting, openly communicating with, and protecting the child. The Nurturant Parent does not use reward or punishment to teach the child, depending instead on developing a secure attachment with the child who will then look to the parent to learn what is valued. Children’s interactions with others reflect their interactions with their parents. They grow to respect their parents as they become self-conscious. Obedience comes from a mutual respect and is a result of the child’s attachment to the parents. Questioning, self-examination, and openness are encouraged as children learn how to be more nurturant of themselves (a requirement if they are to model this for their own children) and of other members of society. Empathy with others is highly valued, as is a recognition of the interdependence of all people. In an interdependent society there is no hierarchy. Mastery and cooperation are valued over competition, and authority is only legitimate if it developed through an ability to nurture. The Nurturant Parent is responsible for protecting the child from the evils of the world, which include crime, drugs, cigarettes, pollution, dangerous toys and other external threats to wellbeing. Protection is a form of caring and necessary to a nurturant upbringing.

The highest priority in Nurturant Parent morality is given to the metaphor of *Morality as Empathy*. In this metaphor, you can only behave morally if you want others to experience the same wellbeing that you would want to experience. Acting morally is acting to promote a sense of wellbeing in others. *Morality as Nurturance* requires empathy. To nurture children, one must have empathy – constant empathy – with them, and be willing to make sacrifices for them. Moral behavior must be empathetic and nurturing and may require sacrifice. *Moral Self-Nurturance* is imperative to the Nurturant Parent. It is necessary to take care of one’s own needs in order to be nurturing to others. This differs from self-interest, in which one puts self-interest (as opposed to needs) ahead of those he is responsible for nurturing. Selflessness puts the needs of others ahead of self-nurturance, possibly leading to a need to be cared for and becoming a burden to others – the opposite of nurturing them.

**M**orality for the Nurturant Parent depends on *Social Nurturance*, maintaining social relationships; *Happiness*, because being happy will encourage nurturance of others; *Self-Development*, the development of abilities that serve nurturance; and *Fair Distribution*, although the distribution that is fair depends on the family conditions. *Moral Strength* is important to the Nurturant Parent, but only in the service of having the strength to nurture. It does not have priority over empathy or nurturance. In fact, placing Empathy ahead of Moral Strength requires that others are not seen as unidimensional evil characters. External evils are not met through self-discipline or self-denial, but through “the regular exercise of nurturance, which takes strength and hence builds strength” (Lakoff, 2002, p. 127). In the same way, the internal evils to be battled are those that interfere with empathy, nurturance, and the other

characteristics that are seen as moral from the Nurturant Parent perspective (e.g., “the lack of social responsibility, selfishness, self-righteousness, narrow-mindedness...”[p. 127], etc.).

## **A Morally Dichotomous Nation**

Lakoff formulated his models of conservative and liberal cognition in an analysis of our political system. Both conservatives and liberals make use of the metaphors of morality, but they assign different priorities to them, resulting in different reasoning and, therefore, outcomes. If individuals moralize through such differing worldviews in their politics, it is certain that such differences exist in many other areas of social interaction, including education. Lakoff stresses that these are central models of conservatism and liberalism and do not describe all members of these political groups. Human variation plays a role. Some people moralize with the Nurturant Parent worldview in their family life, but use elements of the Strict Father worldview in their politics. Even though our nation appears to be split down the middle with the two extremes of the continuum receiving most of the attention, in actuality, Lakoff’s model does not indicate that the 48% Democrat and 52% Republican voters in the 2004 presidential election would find agreement or disagreement with all members of their respective parties. On individual issues of the election, there was considerable variation between voters in both parties (e.g., Cable News Network, 2004). Although the central prototype of a conservative or liberal may be the same among all members, there can be wide variation in the opinions of those with moderate and radical views.

**T**o the extent that both dominant and subordinate groups believe in and give priority to the metaphors of the Strict Father model, these metaphors serve as HE legitimizing myths. When those at the bottom of the economic ladder support the notion that the “competition of life” can only be “won” through self-discipline, self-denial, rewards, and punishment, they serve the longevity and the distance between groups in the hierarchy. Strict Father morality provides legitimacy to HE activities and policies. The view that we live in a competitive world where some people lose and others win is a HE legitimizing myth. The world is competitive because we choose for it to be so. Maintaining order by offering rewards for dominance in competition preserves the distance between dominant and subordinate groups in the social structure. When individuals moralize with the Strict Father view, their aggregated behaviors will lead to maintenance of the hierarchy.

On the other hand, HA activities and policies are strongly supported by a Nurturant Parent morality. In the strictest sense (the central model), the Nurturant Parent worldview is incompatible with a hierarchical society. High SDO has been negatively correlated with “concern for others [ $r = -.46$ ], communality [ $r = .33$ ], tolerance [ $r = .30$ ], and altruism [ $r = .28$ ]” (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994, p. 755), all qualities that will be highly valued by the Nurturant Parent. The goal of personal fulfillment is not so different from the goal of being a successful competitor, but the metaphors attendant to being nurturant versus strict will lead to support of different practices.

Schools, as institutions of a nation with an ideologically divided populace, are subject to these HA and HE forces. For the most part, hierarchy enhancement prevails. Schools are organized in a hierarchy by age (enhancing the age hierarchy). They reflect the success of their communities in the competi-



tion; wealthier schools get more resources and their students receive a better education than their counterparts in poor communities. Funding schools through property taxes is a public policy (institutional discrimination) that enhances the hierarchy. Legacy programs in the finest colleges ensure the maintenance of the hierarchy, delegitimizing any notion of a meritocracy (Larew, 2003). The power of the legitimizing myth, however, is clearly seen in the results of a 1997 Gallup poll that asked Blacks and Whites to what degree they believe that "Blacks in your community have as good a chance as Whites" to get an education (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Sixty-three percent of Blacks and 79% of Whites agreed that Blacks have "as good a chance" for an education as Whites, even when studies have shown that how "good" one's chances are depends a great deal on being in the dominant group (Sidanius & Pratto).

There is evidence of hierarchy attenuating policies in schools as well. Public education makes some opportunity available to all children, although the disparity between schools in different communities can be mind-boggling (see Kozol, 1991). Civil rights legislation has forced schools to monitor the equity of their offerings. The inclusion movement has brought more children into the classroom. Cooperative learning is one approach to teaching that reduces competition in the classroom.

## Gifted Education: Hierarchy Enhancing or Attenuating?

Charges of elitism in gifted education sting those with a Nurturant Parent worldview. Elitism is anti-nurturant and implies the existence of a hierarchy, which the central model Nurturant Parent does not value and even opposes. The high SDO central model Strict Father is likely to see elitism as part of the competition in life and key to maintaining order. Identification procedures that favor the dominant group (or students from any group who have successfully applied Strict Father values of self-discipline and self-denial) will serve to maintain the hierarchy. Changing identification procedures to benefit the disadvantaged is likely to be seen as a violation of the Moral Strength metaphor. The disadvantaged are presumed to be in their position because they were morally weak. Had they been morally strong – self-disciplined and self-denying – they would not be disadvantaged.

There is a fear among some Nurturant Parent moralizers that gifted education will receive support among conservatives for just these reasons – as a means of maintaining the hierarchy. Many of these parents would prefer to see *no* services for gifted students rather than services that have this HE effect. Efforts to eliminate gifted services in the public schools may have the opposite effect, however, as Baker and Richards (1998) found in their study of such efforts in North-eastern states. Rather than leveling the playing field for all students (a nurturant approach), eliminating gifted programming spurred the creation of expensive, fee-based private programs for wealthy gifted children.

The Nurturant Parent approach to an ideal gifted education would be based on a noncompetitive, cooperative environment that allows all students to engage in the academic experiences that they most enjoy. There would be no need for identification, because all students would be in an atmosphere where they could thrive and attain their full potential. The gifted stu-

dents would achieve fulfillment through more complex and challenging work than their less able counterparts, but all would be engaged in this pursuit of fulfillment.

The No Child Left Behind (P.L. 107-110, Elementary and Secondary Education Amendments of 2001) legislation of the Bush administration attempts to place more Strict Father demands on schools. Without the necessary funding, students in low SES schools are destined to fail in this effort to "equalize" education, maintaining and even *widening* the gap between the dominant and subordinate groups in this country. Teaching to a standardized test creates a purely competitive environment, one that does not allow for questioning and openness. Testing the bare minimum will restrict the ability of gifted students to achieve their potential and does not celebrate mastery. This legislation is a nod from Strict Father moralizers to Nurturant Parent moralizers, appearing to benefit all students equally. Without the appropriate funding, it gives "*plausible deniability*, or the ability to practice discrimination, while at the same time denying that any discrimination is actually taking place" (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, p. 43).

## Finding Common Ground

Since Terman's (1930) studies of gifted children in the 1920s, the field of gifted education has experienced many growing pains. Like a phantom moving through the schools over the years, gifted education has taken shape, albeit a gelatinous one, with no clear definition of its borders or concepts. Even the skeleton within is weak, with disagreement on all sides over what it should look like. Researchers, administrators, teachers, parents, and even students have become invested in gifted education, attempting to strengthen and give form to their beliefs about the best education for gifted children. Yet no definition of who gifted children are can be agreed upon. Is giftedness a "fixed, nonmalleable trait-like entity" (Dweck, Chiu & Hong, 1995, p. 267) that some students have or do not have (what Lakoff [2002] calls "essence"), or is it a "malleable quality that can be changed and developed" (Dweck, et al., p. 267) either through nurturance or self-discipline? Borland (2003) argues that giftedness is a social construct, "invented, not discovered" (p. 107). Even so, we have all known exceptional children who can work at a level far beyond that of their peers. There is no denying that some children have abilities, obtained either through inheritance or environment, whose needs for fulfillment will not be met in a classroom focused on the abilities of an average student of their same age. Peine's (2003) study of waiting was inspired by gifted students who frequently asked her, "Why do we have to sit and wait in the regular classroom for other kids to learn stuff?" (p. 184). Can our knowledge of social stability and worldview inform any changes to gifted education?

## Gifted Education Through the Lenses of SDT and Moral Politics

We can infer from SDT that those with a high SDO will prefer identification practices that serve to maintain or enhance the hierarchy. Culturally biased intelligence or achievement tests are not likely to raise many eyebrows among those with a high SDO. Likewise, they will not challenge better programs for children of the dominant group or greater access for family members to elite schools. Those with low SDO are less likely to accept such inequities.

From Lakoff's (2002) analysis, we can propose what gifted education looks like through the central model Strict Father lens. This worldview lends itself to the most structured of definitions: performance on standardized test scores. High scores prove that the child has been obedient (attended to the teacher/authority), followed the rules (learning what the test requires), and can be rewarded (labeled gifted). If the child is from an impoverished environment and cannot pass the test, he or she must not have been obedient or followed the rules and does not deserve to be rewarded. The creatively gifted must operate within the *moral boundaries* of the Strict Father morality. Deviation from accepted paths is seen as immoral and encouraging exploration off these paths is intolerable. Creatively gifted individuals should not expect support from the central model Strict Father moralizer unless there are clear restrictions on the creativity (an oxymoron: restricted creativity). A gifted program should include rewards (e.g., good grades, certificates, recognition, opportunities) for competitive exercises, with a clear hierarchy of those who have done best in the competition (e.g., GPA, class rank, awards to the top performer). Punishment is acceptable for those who do not conform (e.g., ADHD label, poor grades, discipline).

The Nurturant Parent (low SDO) would prefer that the identification procedure mirrors Coleman and Cross's (2001) suggestion that a large sign be constructed asking anyone who is interested in the gifted program to sign up for it. To learn empathy for others and how to be nurturant, children should not be excluded from a program that would help them to be fulfilled. All students should be embraced in a cooperative environment, much like the one Sapon-Shevin (1994) imagines in her challenge to gifted education, *Playing Favorites: Gifted Education and the Disruption of Community*. The program should be open, flexible, allowing for exploration in areas that each child is interested in. Children of nurturant parents will want to do well in school because of the parents' encouragement to do well for themselves, as the following passage explains:

Parents, by being empathetic and attuned to what a child can do at various stages, gradually encourage the child to do things for himself and for the family at large. Children do this not out of fear of punishment or obedience to authority, but out of a desire to display their mastery, please their parents, and gain respect. Children gradually become self-conscious, that is, conscious of whether their behavior is earning the respect of their parents. Parents must show enthusiasm at their children's display of mastery. Parents become respected because they respect their children. Children come to respect themselves and others through this mechanism. (Lakoff, 2002, p. 111)

Children of Nurturant Parents and their peers who are children of Strict Fathers can do equally well in school. Excellence may be the desire of both types of parents, although their approach to encouraging it will differ. Test scores, grades, awards and recognition may not have a high priority for the children of Nurturant Parents. Does this mean they cannot perform at the level of fellow students who received these rewards? Or is it representative of different values? Cornel West, speaking at the "State of the Black Union: Strengthening the Black Family" conference in Miami, Florida on February 28, 2004, exhorted young people to desire being "great, not successful," reminding listeners that the accoutrements of success are not greatness. Nurturant Parents and Strict Fathers may value success of different natures.

## Changing World Views

In their call for more child-centered gifted education, Grant and Piechowski (1999) express concern that a movement towards an emphasis on achievement and productivity "[push] the gifted away from self-actualization" (p. 10). Reframing this argument, Dai and Renzulli (2000) suggest that "dissociation occurs when integrity of knowledge inquiry and skill perfection is compromised by ulterior motives to gain fame, status, or money" (p. 248). They describe the tension that we see between education designed to promote a Strict Father morality and one designed to promote a Nurturant Parent morality. Dai and Renzulli believe that:

the dissociation can be prevented to some degree if our educators convey the message, implicitly and explicitly, that enjoyment of what they are doing and personal satisfaction drawn from learning and productive activities are always a primary source of happiness and that the social status, fame, and financial gains that accompany their success are secondary. (p. 248)

In other words, teachers should tell their students to believe in the nurturant priorities. This may be an effective message for students who grew up in Nurturant Parent households, but those who grew up in Strict Father homes may not easily alter their priorities, nor will they necessarily want to. Worldviews are persistent in part because they are unconscious. Modeling and even cajoling may not be effective in changing a person's deeply embedded beliefs about how the world operates.

Lakoff (2002) believes that a Strict Father worldview should be considered problematic, citing research on child development that challenges parenting with a basis in Strict Father morality. Research by Bowlby (1958), Ainsworth (1969, 1984), and more recently Karen (1994) on attachment in children supports the view that self-reliance and responsibility develop from nurturing in childhood (leading to a secure attachment), not from the "tough love" prescribed by a Strict Father worldview. Lakoff sees similarities between the Strict Father worldview and Baumrind's (1971) *authoritarian* parenting style and between the Nurturant Parent and Baumrind's *authoritative* style. Maccoby and Martin's (1983) survey of research on these parenting styles found that

Children of authoritarian parents tend to lack social competence with peers: They tend to withdraw, not to take social initiative, to lack spontaneity. Although they do not behave differently from children of other types of parents on contrived measures of resistance to temptation, on projective tests and parent reports they do show lesser evidence of "conscience" and are more likely to have external, rather than internal moral orientation in discussing what is the "right" behavior in situations of moral conflict. In boys there is evidence that motivation for intellectual performance is low. Several studies link authoritarian parenting with low self-esteem and external locus of control. (p. 44)

Maintaining Strict Father morality in parenting may not be as successful as its adherents believe at producing strong leaders who have high self-esteem and are able to resist temptation. Children of authoritative parents (likely to have a Nurturant worldview), on the other hand, were found to be "independent, 'agentic' in both the cognitive and social spheres, socially responsible, able to control aggression, self-confident, and high in self-esteem" (Maccoby & Martin, 1983, p. 48). Even with this research, there is not a clear cause and



effect of parenting style and ultimate success or failure in life, making it difficult to identify problems resulting from a Strict Father worldview, particularly among those who hold that view. It is unlikely that any problems that are a result of parents' worldview, either Strict Father or Nurturant Parent, will be recognized as such. Without recognition, why would either attempt to change their tacit beliefs?

## Achieving Equilibrium

Critical to understanding what these theories have to offer the discussion of the purpose of gifted education is the point of *hierarchical equilibrium*. Sidanius and Pratto (1999) suggest that

Given the historical record of both human and hominoid social structure, it seems most reasonable to assume that hominoid social systems are predisposed to organize themselves within some range of group-based inequality. Furthermore, the historical record also seems to suggest that under normal circumstances and everything else being equal, the degree of this group-based social hierarchy will tend to stabilize around a given level that we can refer to as the *point of hierarchical equilibrium* [italics in original]. In broad terms, we suggest that this point is established at the fulcrum between HE forces and HA forces. (p. 51)

In other words, there *will* be a hierarchy in our society, regardless of the successes of hierarchy attenuators.

There is not a question of whether or not there will be a hierarchy, but only a question of the differing amounts of positive social value allocated to the dominant and subordinate groups. A stable society requires a balance between the HA and HE forces. We tend to think of the arbitrary set in this country along racial lines, but there can be many arbitrary sets and Lakoff clearly shows us that ideological differences can result in an arbitrary set of a different kind. Perhaps our democracy is unique in creating a hierarchy that is divided by those who support the hierarchy and those who oppose it. Or perhaps all hierarchies have such ideological differences at their core. By analyzing human belief at the level of cognition, we come to recognize that our most intimate social group – the family – holds a key to understanding the inequities within our society.

HA Nurturant Parents should recognize that there will be competition in our society. In this country economic resources, a positive social value, are at present largely controlled by conservatives. Although we are not yet ready to concede that the liberal Nurturant Parent group is a subordinate group in our society, this may well be the arbitrary set of our time. The delicate balance required for a stable society is affected by the weight at either end of the structure. As the distance grows greater between the groups, the balance shifts, leading to social instability. Democracy allows for a correction to this destabilizing shift, but it will require society to view the unbalanced distribution of positive social value as morally offensive.

Progress in gifted education has been stalled as different groups have argued on behalf of their conceptions of giftedness. How do we conceptualize giftedness in a way that will satisfy high SDO, Strict Fathers and low SDO, Nurturant Parents? Private schools are free to structure their programs in accordance with the ideal of their choosing, with an emphasis on competition or on nurturance, but the balance required for a stable society suggests that public schools should find a blend that is fair, with elements of competition *and* nurturance.

In their School-Based Conception of Giftedness (SCG;

Coleman & Cross, 2001; Cross & Coleman, in press), giftedness is viewed as potential in the young child, but success in an academic domain is a requirement for a child to be considered gifted in later grades. Nurturing occurs in the elementary grades, when early identification could be as simple as asking students to sign up for the opportunity, while testing for potential would continue to ensure that all children have an equal chance to receive the services they need in order to thrive. As the children move into the middle grades, opportunities are tied to manifestation of the accelerated learning and extraordinary accomplishments within the academic domain of school. These opportunities based on performance would appeal to the Strict Father even as they encourage only those students who have chosen to pursue the academic domain with fervor – the enjoyment Nurturant Parents would like to see. The SCG was espoused as a means to foster talent development within the curriculum of schools, moving from a vague curriculum in elementary to a domain-specific curriculum in high school. Recognizing giftedness as a phenomenon limited to the realm of the school helps to focus the definition and clarify what is and is not possible for schools to accomplish in nurturing the gifted. This conception represents an integration of both worldviews.

Borland (2003) recommends eliminating identification of gifted students altogether, allowing acceleration to provide all the differentiation that is needed, while differentiation in the classroom becomes the norm rather than the exception. Acceleration is one of the few practices that has received a great deal of empirical support, but it has not been accepted on a wide scale (see Borland, et al., 2002 for a perspective on the research on acceleration). A reconceptualization of gifted education around the ability to work at an accelerated pace could please both Nurturant Parents and Strict Fathers. We should, however, expect challenges to the success of any such programs that threaten the hierarchy. To allow students to achieve their full potential, it would be important not to place limits on the acceleration possible.

Differentiation allows for achievement in the schools as they are currently structured. When implemented fully, differentiation is nurturant to all students, but it is relatively simple for a school to claim differentiation is occurring when, in reality, nothing different is being done (Cassady, et al., 2004). Maintaining the current competitive structure within schools while differentiating education for every student according to his or her abilities could be a satisfactory compromise if implemented in a dedicated, comprehensive way.

Cooperative learning is often challenged as unfair to gifted students (e.g., Robinson, 1990), but it has been shown to be effective in reducing the competitive atmosphere in schools that can have such a debilitating effect on minorities (Aronson & Bridgeman, 1979). Stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995), the effect of reduced performance caused by the effort required to *not* “behave in ways that confirm stereotypes about one’s group” (Nelson, 2002, p. 132), can also be reduced by nurturant practices in the classroom. The value to society may be greater than the annoyance of gifted students at having to work with those less capable. In her study, Peine (2003) found that students do not always mind waiting for others in their regular classrooms:

These gifted students express dissatisfaction with the pace of their schooling; yet, they have a sense of some broader social context about school – that waiting places them within a framework of general achievement for all – and a personal context that waiting has some personal value. (p. 198)

This appreciation for others can be fostered or dispelled, and the determination of which will happen is likely to be made by educators or administrators influenced by some variation of a Strict Father or Nurturant Parent worldview with some degree of a dominance orientation.

## Conclusion

Gifted education must be viewed in its context as a social institution, influenced by these multifaceted forces. If, as SDT predicts, there must be a balance between HA and HE forces for social stability, perhaps this is an important criterion for achieving agreement on the purpose and target population of our field. Balancing educational objectives between nurturant and competitive ideals may enable us to finally reach consensus on the most important issues in gifted education.

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