

The Workplace Mobbing of Highly Gifted Adults: An Unremarked Barbarism

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ABSTRACT: *Workplace mobbing leads to severe health consequences, both physical and psychological. It can result in the destruction of an individual’s personality and his effective expulsion from the labor force. The distinctive traits of highly gifted adults put them at increased risk of workplace mobbing. These traits may include their difference from others and others’ misunderstanding of that difference, a distinct moral sense, drivenness and strength of feeling, perfectionism and estheticism, overwhelming perceptiveness, overwhelming multifacetedness, and the need for solitude and search for meaning. Paradoxically, however, the sensitivities and overexcitabilities of highly gifted adults may diminish their ability to interpret and confront the experience of being mobbed. Highly gifted adults who have been mobbed in the workplace may require differential therapeutic intervention, for the same reason that gifted children who are tormented by schoolyard bullies do.*

THIS ARTICLE IS DEDICATED TO CANDICE LLOYD.

The Ephesians would do well to hang themselves, every grown person of them, and leave the city to beardless lads; for they have cast out Hermodorus, the best person among them, saying, “We will have none who is best among us; if there be any such, let him be so elsewhere and among others.”

Heraclitus

The purpose of this article is to draw attention to an issue that appears to be unrecognized in studies of highly gifted ex-children. The

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issue is “mobbing,” a phenomenon of “psychological terror ... in working life [that] involves hostile and unethical communication, which is directed in a systematic way by one or a few individuals mainly towards one individual who is pushed into a helpless and defenseless position, being held there by means of continuing mobbing activities” (Leymann, 1996, p. 168). Only relatively recently have researchers and therapeutic workers given attention to the workplace mobbing of adults in general. I wish to offer the proposition that *highly gifted ex-children are likely to suffer mobbing in the workplace out of proportion to their presence in the general workforce*. Whether or not empirical study validates this proposition, I further assert that *highly gifted ex-children who suffer mobbing in the workplace may require differential therapeutic intervention, for the same reason that gifted children who are tormented by bullies do*.

“Mobbing” or “Bullying”?

Research on mobbing has so far been most advanced in Scandinavia, Germany, and Austria. The phenomenon is rather less well recognized in the United States (but see Davenport, Schwartz & Elliot, 2005). Although the term “bullying” (sometimes “workplace bullying”) is used in Australia and the United Kingdom, in fact bullying and mobbing are behaviorally distinct and analytically different. Bullying is defined by the behavior of the instigator, mobbing by its effects on the target. Leymann’s path-breaking studies of mobbing arose from the context and discipline of industrial psychology, focusing on such questions as how intense mobbing had to be to produce psychological stress or psychosomatic illness. This disciplinary background and focus also distinguish the study of mobbing from that of bullying.

Still more important, mobbing is a work conflict “in which one person [is] singled out, harassed, and ostracized over a long period of time, ... not a short episode but a long-lasting wearing-down process, often lasting much longer than one year” (Zapf & Einarsen, 2005, pp. 243, 248; compare Leymann, 1996, p. 167). The systematic and long-term nature of the aggression effectively distinguishes mobbing from normal interpersonal conflict. Leymann and Gustafsson (1996, p. 273) explain how mobbing victims find their trauma “constantly renewed” as “new sources of anxiety occur in a constant stream” while continuing violations of the individual’s rights “further undermine his or her self-confidence and psychological health.”

Also, “*mobbing* ... often refers to subtle, less direct forms of aggression as opposed to the more physical forms of aggression commonly identified with *bullying*” (Zapf & Einarsen, 2005). Its key elements include “powerlessness, power differences, and loss of control,” (p.168) which are absent from the other concepts of workplace of interpersonal conflict. It is, rather, characterized by “severe and highly interpersonal conflict in which a power difference exists between the parties,” indeed by “an almost complete lack,” on the part of the target, of such resources as energy, coping strategies, control, and social support (Zapf & Einarsen, 2005, pp. 261, 238, 255).

For purposes of case reporting, Leymann (1996) defined mobbing as “a social interaction through which one individual (seldom more) is attacked by one or more (seldom more than four) individuals almost on a daily basis and for periods of many months, bringing the person into an almost helpless position with potentially high risk of expulsion” (p. 168). In fact, it is often the case that the mob is more than four. Westhues (2002) better captures the tenor of mobbing by describing it as “an impassioned, collective campaign by co-workers to exclude, punish, and humiliate a targeted worker, ... a desperate urge to crush and eliminate the target [that] travels through the workplace like a virus, infecting one person after another” (pp. 31-32).

A classic example of such behavior was depicted in Alfred Hitchcock’s film *The Birds*. The sense of psychological terror from unrelenting assault on all sides – portrayed in Tippi Hedren’s character as the birds batter through the cabin walls and exhaust her through the incessant sharp onslaught tearing her skin and attacking her eyes – is not at all far from the experience of mobbing targets as they are repeatedly over time attacked in the workplace by their swarming colleagues. In fact, the term translated into English as “mobbing” originated in ethology, with the study of bird behavior. Westhues (2007) remarks that Lorenz’s original German term was the one “used in old German hunting language for collective attack by birds: *hassen auf*, which means ‘to hate after’ or ‘to put a hate on’ [and] ... emphasizes the depth of antipathy with which the attack is made, ... an important connotation that the English word lacks.”

How severe is mobbing? Mobbing leads to such severe health consequences that “*even health professionals such as physicians and psychologists* may not believe that the health damages they observed could be due to conditions in the workplace” (Zapf & Einarsen, 2005, p. 243, emphasis added). Leymann discovered in the early 1990s that persons who have been mobbed may “in their reactions be compared with those accounted for in a Norwegian study concerning raped

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women,” i.e., that “post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is probably the correct psychiatric and psychological diagnosis for approximately 95% of the subjected individuals” (Leymann & Gustafsson, 1996, pp. 272, 252). Between 10% and 20% of annual suicides in Sweden “have mobbing processes at work in the background” (Leymann, 1996, p. 173). Having overcome the trauma of a series of physical assaults culminating in a near-rape during late childhood, and then decades later been mobbed in professional life, I can affirm experientially that mobbing “develops a destructive power that can equal the severe forms of physical violence or sexual harassment” (Zapf & Einarsen, 2005, p. 262).

Examples of Mobbing Behavior

Leymann (1996) intuited that mobbing behaviors might vary from culture to culture. My experience bears this out. It was constructed within an institution where the particular cultural characteristics of its own social and political milieu were intensified. I was almost totally socially shunned from the start simply because I did not “belong.” Even before any mobbing started, some colleagues passing me in the hall would avert their eyes, casting them downward in the direction opposite to my approach. In over five years no colleague ever invited me to his or her home, and I can count the invitations to restaurants, bars, or just coffee on one hand and still have a few fingers left over.

In this social vacuum, the mobbing was very highly administratively organized, which style also expressed the social culture of the organization where I worked. This I can describe only by synthesizing, from out of Weber’s sociological work, the category of “bureaucratized sultanism” (compare Parsons, 1947, p. 62; Weber, 1946, p. 442). By this I designate an exaggerated deference at all levels to an institutional authority that has inherited or assumed the aura of sacral law, where the only restraint upon a bureaucrat’s full arbitrariness is his anticipation of the arbitrariness countervailed by administrative superiors.

The dysfunctional synergy of bureaucracy with sultanism manifests striking characteristics. First, the sultanized bureaucrat is a subject of absolutized authority who fetishizes his superiors as nonroutinized bearers of institutional charisma (compare Ashforth, 1994). Second, the sultanized bureaucracy generates self-contradictory rules and regulations so prolifically as to render claims to rational authority circular. Gifted individuals will see through such hypocrisy, and their distinct moral sense will be ever more keenly offended as the

legitimacy of over-proliferated rules and regulations comes to repose upon the very arbitrariness and selectivity of their application. Their intense drive for achievement and accomplishment come to be denigrated and even punished as invocations of traditional sources of authority tribalize the institution. Finally, as bureaucratized-sultanistic norms metastasize among the constituent administrative sub-units, the whole organizational culture ends by putting highly gifted adults at great risk for all these reasons, including their being singled out by the majority for their visible discomfort with the order of things.

Zapf and Einarsen (2005) synthesize the literature to list four potential causes of mobbing: the organization, the perpetrator, the social work group, and the target. “The perpetrator as a cause usually overlaps with causes found in the social group and the organization if supervisors as perpetrators are involved” (p. 250) as they were in my case. Leymann devised the Leymann Inventory of Psychological Terror (LIPT, translated in Appendix 1), an inventory of 45 objective behaviors that factor analysis groups into five categories (Leymann, 1996, p. 170; compare Zapf & Einarsen, 2005):

1. Attacks on communication opportunities.
2. Attacks on social relationships.
3. Implications on social reputation.
4. Attacks on the quality of the professional and life situation.
5. Attacks on health.

In my own case, the two principal modalities of mobbing were the first and second of these categories. Also present, but to a slightly lesser degree, were the third and fourth. The fifth, which means such things as being forced to perform physically dangerous work, was absent although fallout from the other harassments did cumulatively endanger my health.

Although the full inventory of more general behaviors appears in Appendix 1, it is useful to give here an idea how specific exemplars of their categories are experienced by the target. I take examples from my own experience.

Attacks on communication opportunities, means being denied opportunities to express oneself. These attacks not only occur in informal settings but also include, for example, being cut off by the chairman when attempting to speak in formal workgroup meetings or speaking only to have one’s words ignored by all subsequent speakers. It also includes being told that certain issues either could not be discussed or could be discussed only in a highly artificial, administratively formalized manner preventing expression of one’s real concerns. One of

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the more notable examples of the subcategory “denial of contact by means of degrading looks or gestures” occurred when the workgroup supervisor, passing me in the hallway with no one else around, looked me straight in the eye and made repeated spitting noises and gestures in my face from a distance of about a yard. The admonition that “whether we terminate you for cause or just let your contract renewal lapse is a mere detail” falls in the subcategory of “oral threats.”

Attacks on social relationships, beyond shunning (such as the systematic failure even to acknowledge one’s presence in a hallway or elevator), included overt incitements to subordinates to avoid all contact. Another form of this was demonstratively and on a regular basis to leave seats on either side of me unoccupied during workgroup meetings, while nearly every other chair was occupied. A culturally specific variation of this form of psychological assault occurred when one person in authority acted very warm and concerned in one-on-one unofficial situations while deathly cold and impersonally menacing when others were present or in one-on-one official meetings. If attacks on social relationships were not more numerous, then this was only because I was excluded from every social relationship from the start.

Implications on social reputation included casting aspersions to my face on my nationality, making nasty remarks to third parties (subsequently reported to me) and once to my face about my religion, and spreading false rumors of ill health such as that I was a homosexual suffering from an increasingly aggravated case of AIDS.

Attacks on the quality of the professional and life situation included being assigned to only one minor committee and then designated to chair it only to have its other committee members boycott meetings. This prevented any work from being transacted, enabling the criticism that I not only failed as a rule to assume administrative responsibilities but also accomplished nothing in the single opportunity I was given. Additionally, there was an overt solicitation of complaints about my performance, to which I was then ordered to reply in writing. This occurred repeatedly and systematically, with significant drain on my time and energy, not to mention morale. Finally, there were negative job evaluations followed by a blanket refusal to consider claims of their bias, even via channels prescribed for this purpose.

Mobbing and Giftedness

From the standpoint of the study and treatment of gifted individuals, bullying and mobbing have in common the fact that the

target's giftedness requires special consideration. Since bullying is better recognized than mobbing, it is useful to begin with a brief discussion of the situation of gifted children who may be bullied. (On bullying in general, see Olweus, 1993; Smith & Sharp, 1994.) The experience of being bullied is a severe matter for every child. Although all children are at risk of being bullied, there is reason to suppose not only that gifted children are more at risk (Fox & Pope, 2005; Hollingworth, 1930), but also that among gifted children the experience of being the object of bullying is qualitatively different (Peterson & Ray, 2006). The bullied gifted child need not be bullied for being gifted in order to have this response. Any stigma will do, including but not limited to such standbys of bigotry as religion, race, ethnic origin, manner of dress, physical demeanor, and perceived or attributed sexual orientation.

A very talented therapist of my acquaintance, herself highly gifted in several widely unrelated fields, once described to me that portion of her practice dealing with gifted ex-children. She had placed a small announcement seeking highly creative people as clients and was inundated by gifted ex-children who had experienced or were experiencing workplace harassment that met the definition of mobbing. Many of them were, to put it mildly, vexed beyond the point of incomprehension. "Why me?" was not an uncommon response.

For at least three reasons, the stakes are higher for the adult mobbed in the workplace than for the child bullied in the playground. First, since adults are expected to be more self-sufficient than children, social-psychological support structures are not always so well established for the persecuted. Second, career and livelihood (which are social forms of identity and physical well-being) often come under threat. Third, since gifted adults develop more deeply such characteristic traits of giftedness as enhanced awareness and sensitivity, the accentuation of these traits may make gifted ex-children *less capable* of dealing with workplace mobbing than more typical adults, hence more at risk even if they are mobbed at the same rate as the general population.

The heightened awareness and sensitivity, characteristic of gifted individuals, are not their only distinctive traits. A growing literature (e.g., Roeper, 1995; Kerr & Claiborn, 1995; Maxwell & Silverman, 1995; Silverman, 1999; Tolan, 1995) has articulated, made explicit, and sought to examine the distinctive traits of gifted children and adults. The constraints and focus of the present article make it impossible to review that literature here. Perhaps one of the most extended, sensitive, and detailed such expositions is Roeper's (1995) discussion of no fewer than 23 characteristics of gifted individuals. Her original catalogue can be categorized in any number of ways. Here I offer, grounded in my own

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introspection, an interpretive condensation of her catalogue into seven categories. This categorization (see Appendix 2 for details) is only a vehicle for indicating how clinical work on mobbing suggests that these very traits may, as suggested above, put gifted individuals at an increased risk of being mobbed.

- A. Difference from others and their misunderstanding.
- B. Distinct moral sense.
- C. Drivenness and strength of feeling.
- D. Perfectionism and estheticism.
- E. Overwhelming perceptiveness.
- F. Overwhelming multifacetedness.
- G. Need for solitude and search for meaning.

It should be evident that these categories of traits overlap and are interrelated. That is still truer for the individual characteristics listed in Appendix 2, which further simplifies reality by seeking to classify each characteristic under one and only one trait-cluster. In order to show which trait I am discussing below, I have chosen simply to put that trait into **boldface** so as to indicate to the reader that one of the categories constructed from Roeper's list in Appendix 2 is being invoked. For example, what I have above called the gifted individual's "awareness" and "sensitivity" appear respectively in the list as **(E.) overwhelming perceptiveness** and **(C.) strength-of-feeling**.

One need only consider the sensitivity and **(B.) advanced moral judgment** that research has established to be characteristic of gifted children (e.g., Piechowski, 1997), in order to suppose that they may suffer differently. They are likely to be both more sensitive and better able to articulate their suffering, and so will **(C.) feel more acutely** different kinds of suffering (Lind, 2001). They will be more anguished by the confrontation between their own often-advanced moral judgment and the base motives of their tormentors. These motives will be difficult and painful to come face to face with, whether the gifted individual recognizes them for what they are or, especially true of youth, remains innocently unable to comprehend them.

For although gifted children are **(E.) more aware of the world** – and also **(F.) more aware of their own awareness of the world** – than children more typical of the general population, they will not always be aware that their giftedness can evoke hostility. If so informed, they will probably **(A.) not understand why**. The highly gifted child's reaction may be **(F.) so complex** as to require therapeutic intervention on a cognitive level approaching that usually associated with late adolescents

or early adults. *It follows that highly gifted adults who are mobbed in the workplace will also require special attention and complex treatment.*

Let me give for example a few distinctive aspects of my own experience. For me, *the very absence of intellectual stimulation was a sensory deprivation.* Taken from me were powers of concentration, enthusiasm for work, and indomitable self-confidence: I became frustrated and depressed, losing my **(C.) drivenness** as my **(E.) overwhelming perceptiveness** become frustrated and turned in upon itself because of my inability to **(G.) make sense of my situation**, perhaps its most painful aspect. Figure 1 usefully suggests one way of looking at the interrelationship of these clusters of traits. It is intended only as an heuristic device to suggest the fruitfulness of pursuing more rigorously the nature of such interrelationships of traits in clinical and therapeutic work. At the same time, it highlights how the gifted individual is at heightened risk of mobbing due to the mutual reinforcement and, presumably, correlation among the underlying characteristics. (Again for example, in my own case an injured moral sense diminished both drivenness and estheticism.)

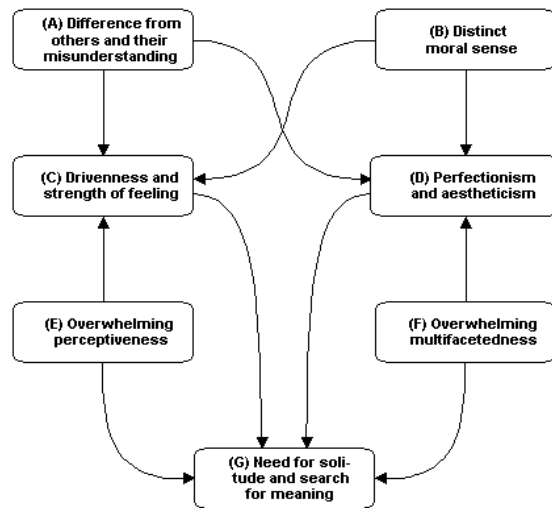


Figure 1. An Heuristic Construction of Interrelationships among Trait-Clusters of the Gifted Constructed from Roeper (1995).

Why the Gifted Are at Heightened Risk

A review of the literature by Zapf and Einarsen (2005) suggests that individuals describing themselves “as more achievement-oriented and as more conscientious than their colleagues” (p. 253) are more often mobbing targets. The **(D.) perfectionism** that is a virtue of the highly gifted individual is **(A.) misunderstood by others**, whereas for the gifted individual this is but an expression of his or her **(D.) estheticism** in the same way that a perfect diamond’s refraction of light is also beautiful. Colleagues will know that their work does not stack up by comparison, and they will need no one to tell them so. The gifted individual’s perfectionism and estheticism are seen as a threat, even if the gifted individual does not speak about them and does not offer criticism of others. A highly gifted adult cannot obscure his or her presence in such a milieu even through innocuous behavior. Such a presence will become and remain a recognized social fact because gossip, malicious and otherwise, will establish it as such. This malice will enforce the gifted adult’s social isolation, probably also intensifying his or her search for the meaning of that social isolation. Highly gifted adults’ **(A.) difference from others**, exacerbated by **(A.) others’ misunderstanding** of this difference, offers less capable colleagues the opportunity to establish by rumor and innuendo other socially recognized “facts,” to the detriment of the gifted person, whether those “facts” are actually true or not.

It is unhappily the case that there are not always enough places in superlative organizations to house the number of highly talented and gifted individuals who merit such positions. At institutions less than first-rate, therefore, one characteristically finds a small number of highly talented individuals who merit placement at a truly first-rate institution, surrounded by a rather larger number of less talented individuals who know that they could never reasonably aspire to such a position. The latter will typically compensate for their sense of inferiority by seeking ego-satisfaction through the acquisition of institutional power and prerogative. This power they will then tend to employ to make others’ lives hell, often targeting highly talented colleagues whose greater abilities evoke their own deep-seated insecurity.

Einarsen’s (1999) research on “predatory mobbing” (i.e., cases where the victim has not acted in any provocative manner that might justify the behavior of the predator) gives examples of the foregoing destructive cycle. Stucke’s (2002, cited in Zapf & Einarsen, 2005, p. 251) study establishes empirically that “active mobbing behavior [is]

highest for a group high in narcissism but low in self-esteem stability, [as this group's] individuals had to stabilize their high but unstable self-esteem by treating other individuals negatively." In other words, inflated but weak egos need to beat down genuine quality in others. This is a "textbook description" not only of the organizational culture of the institution where I worked but indeed of the cultural syndrome of the whole broader social milieu of which the institution is characteristic. Zapf and Einarsen (2005) explain how such a dynamic develops on the microsocial level:

This group of victims was certainly **[D.] not among the least efficient** employees in the organization. Their problem was that they clashed with the norms of the work group to which they belonged. It is likely that in this case, the victims' **[B.] conscientiousness** went against a group culture characterized by rigidity and low tolerance for diversity. These victims were probably perceived as constant annoyances or even threats to the work group to which they belonged. As a consequence, the group may have started to harass these individuals, either to enforce conformity or to get rid of the person. (p. 254; emphasis added)

Elsewhere, they refer to this process as "human resource management by other means" (Zapf & Einarsen, 2005, p. 259, citing Leymann, 1993).

High-achieving highly gifted adults, wherever they may be, will often have had the good fortune, as children and adolescents, to develop their qualities and capacities in a supportive and challenging environment and to enjoy the psychological rewards of accomplishment. *They, more than others*, may find it incomprehensible to be plunged into a situation where, perhaps for the first time, their exceptional qualities and accomplishments are not positively appreciated. *They, more than others*, may be unprepared for the hostility and punishment that resentful mediocre colleagues may exact through administrative power. *They, more than others*, may be baffled by the experience of being thrust among the general population as such, especially in an institutional context of professional striving that merely pretends to meritocracy. Westhues (2005) appears to be the first to mention this issue, although he addresses it in terms of excellence rather than giftedness, and from an objective sociological rather than from a clinical or therapeutic standpoint.

Consequences of Mobbing

Like many gifted adults, I have been interested since childhood in how I have come to know that which I know. When my own mobbing began and intensified, therefore, I was torn apart by my inability to **(G.) understand what was happening or why**. Once I understood what I saw happening, the outrage to my **(B.) sense of justice** outstripped my concern for my own well-being. I went from being uncomprehendingly appalled to being morally horrified. Having now achieved some distance from the experience after leaving the organization on terms dictated to me, it is evident to me that the workplace had institutionalized an organizational pathology. For my erstwhile colleagues, their conduct was the natural order of things and a way of life.

The institution as well as the particular workgroup appear to require, for their (mal)functioning, the identification, stigmatization, and administrative persecution (mobbing) of such individuals as myself. After the mobbing succeeded in forcing the departure of the designated individual, a new individual was found to be the target of the organizational pathology. I later discovered that this collective behavior had a history stretching back three decades. Within my workgroup alone, outsiders such as myself were mobbed on an average of once every five to ten years, with the average duration of the mobbing being six to eight years. Since my departure from the organization in question, I have learned that this pathological behavior has continued unabated. Recognizing that they had done it before and would do it again exculpated me in my own eyes, but that recognition did nothing to resolve the objective situation or to alleviate my sense of having been personally diminished.

Not only did the stress of being mobbed likely contribute to the etiology of a nearly fatal illness, now thankfully cured. Also my experience tends to validate Leymann and Gustafsson's (1996) observation that "mobbing and expulsion from the labor market *are in themselves* a series of victimizations of traumatic strength" (p. 272). This is because, as Leymann (1996) explained, the administrative persecution leads "individuals in question [to] develop such a poor reputation that it is extremely difficult to remain in the labour market; if they do so, then it is only at the loss of their earlier status as they receive only very poor work tasks in the future" (p. 172). Moreover,

... as a person becomes older, his or her ability to find a new job diminishes. ... The risk that the victim's

occupational position will stagnate or even worsen is elevated. ... Expulsion from employment may easily turn into a situation in which the individual in question is unable to find any job at all, which means that he or she is essentially expelled from the labour market. (p. 174)

This, Leymann further notes, is probably why targets of mobbing who develop Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are usually at least 40 years old.

Leymann and Gustafsson (1996) used the 20-item version of the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-20: see Goldberg, 1978; Goldberg & Hiller, 1979) for a clinical survey of mobbing targets who had left their places of employment. McDowell (2006) describes the GHQ as a “first-stage screening instrument for psychiatric illness that could then be verified and diagnosed” by “focus[ing] on breaks in normal functioning rather than on life-long traits” (p. 259). (The questions ask whether the respondent has experienced a particular symptom—abnormal types of feelings, thoughts, or behavior—recently, as compared to the person's normal situation.) For the binary-scored GHQ-20, the maximum score is 20, while the cutoff point indicating “mild psychiatric disorder” is four. In their clinical survey of mobbing targets who had left their places of employment, Leymann and Gustafsson obtained for them the astounding *median score* of 18, reporting that “patient PTSD values were so high (the majority received ‘full scores’), that we used the GAD [General Anxiety Disorder] criteria group D [differentiated psychosomatic stress symptoms] as a ‘magnifying glass’ for the PTSD criteria group D [permanent signs of hypersensitivity not present before the trauma]” (p. 255). Leymann and Gustafsson’s clinical description of this situation is all the more striking for its understated accuracy: “...it is no longer possible to evaluate the victim’s original personality during a chronic PTSD phase, [but] what is diagnosed is the destruction of the personality”(p. 257).

Conclusion

The special problems of “adjustment” of gifted individuals, arising from their qualitatively different way of experiencing the world as children, do not disappear with adulthood (Roeper, 1995; Silverman, 1995). Taking myself as an example, I have never really found an answer to my naïve failure to comprehend **(A.) why I am able** to understand and do things that others cannot. The fact that I am exceptional was somehow never a fully satisfying answer, but I now suspect it to be the best pragmatic reply available.

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A significant moderation of my **(D.) perfectionistic tendencies** is probably responsible for my ceasing to absolutize my accomplishments. Although this is not a direct result of having been mobbed, a direct result of the mobbing does seem to manifest as diminished **(C.) drivenness** producing the experience of demotivation, disappointment, and demoralization. Even my **(E.) awareness** of my exceptional qualities is not always sufficient to overcome a residual lethargy, which is conditioned by my **(A.) feeling of not being understood** and reinforced by a **(G.) sense of isolation** that the memory of being mobbed can trigger. This lethargy expresses how the lengthy mobbing experience led me, by Pavlovian conditioning, to associate punishment with accomplishment itself. The origin of that lethargy is therefore in a drive to avoid punishment. However, giving in to this lethargy not only fails to overcome the conditioned *anticipation* of the punishment but, moreover, frustrates my real and even more basic drive for **(C.) excellence and self-expression**.

So doing, I succeed only in controlling my punishment by becoming the punisher. This affords no pleasure and represents no reward. Among the motives that helped me to overcome that developing lethargy during the mobbing itself were four reasons to excel that it behooves me now to recall. These motives, which are at the same time imperatives to preserve one's integrity, are: (1) simply for oneself and one's own well being, (2) to "show" the persecutors, (3) as an example to unknown others for their sake, and (4) because to do so may be a prerequisite for something else later.

Hesitation to recall my **(F.) unique and distinctive qualities** as an "extraordinarily gifted" individual **(B.) must** come to an end, even if such recollections are sometimes tied to painful memories of being mobbed. This implies a re-differentiation of those mobbing injuries from the less complicated and indeed earlier-experienced pain of simply being **(A.) misunderstood**. For the project of continuing the re-formation of my post-mobbing personality, there could be worse roadmaps than to re-develop my **(E.) overexcitabilities** and **(C.) emotional intensities** that the mobbing somewhat deadened (compare Dabrowski, 1972; Nelson, 1995).

If highly gifted adults can recover from such extreme experiences as mobbing, then studying their recovery from these life-shattering events may produce broadly significant insights on both the theoretical and the therapeutic level, applicable not only to the highly gifted. Frankl (2000) illustrates this possibility, exemplifying how one highly gifted individual's exploration of recovery from a still more

extreme experience has produced clinical benefit to others through introspection, analysis, and exposition.

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Appendix 1. Leymann Inventory of Psychological Terror.

(Reproduced from Schuster, 1996, pp. 310-11, as translated from Leymann, 1993, pp. 33-34.)

1. *Attacks on communication opportunities.*
 - 1.1. The boss limits opportunities to speak up.
 - 1.2. Repeated interruptions.
 - 1.3. Colleagues limit opportunities to speak up.
 - 1.4. Yelling or loud screaming.
 - 1.5. Permanent critique of work.
 - 1.6. Permanent critique of private life.
 - 1.7. Telephone terror.
 - 1.8. Oral threats.
 - 1.9. Written threats.
 - 1.10. Denial of contact by means of degrading looks or gestures.
 - 1.11. Denial of contact by means of allusions without directly addressing anything.
2. *Attacks on social relationships.*
 - 2.1. To stop talking to the person.
 - 2.2. To not allow being addressed.
 - 2.3. To relocate somebody far away from colleagues.

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- 2.4. To forbid colleagues to address the person.
- 2.5. To treat somebody as if not there.
3. *Implications on social reputation.*
 - 3.1. Bad talk behind somebody's back.
 - 3.2. Spreading rumors.
 - 3.3. Ridicule.
 - 3.4. To suspect somebody being psychologically ill.
 - 3.5. To try to force somebody to psychiatric examination.
 - 3.6. Making fun of a handicap.
 - 3.7. Imitating movements, voice, or gestures in order to ridicule.
 - 3.8. To attack political or religious attitudes.
 - 3.9. To make fun of the person's private life.
 - 3.10. To make fun of the person's nationality.
 - 3.11. To enforce carrying out work damaging to self-esteem.
 - 3.12. To judge work in an improper or hurtful way.
 - 3.13. To doubt the decisions of the person.
 - 3.14. To call him/her names or degrading expressions.
 - 3.15. Sexual approaches or verbal sexual offers.
4. *Attacks on the quality of the professional and life-situation.*
 - 4.1. The person is not assigned any tasks.
 - 4.2. The person is denied activity at the workplace, so that the person cannot even think of any task by him- or herself.
 - 4.3. One assigns tasks that do not make any sense.
 - 4.4. One assigns tasks far below the actual capabilities.
 - 4.5. One permanently assigns new tasks.
 - 4.6. One assigns tasks offending somebody's pride.
 - 4.7. One assigns tasks far beyond the person's qualification in order to discredit him/her.
5. *Attacks on health.*
 - 5.1. Health-threatening tasks enforced.
 - 5.2. Physical aggression threatened.
 - 5.3. Mild forms of violence used.
 - 5.4. Physical abuse.
 - 5.5. To cause costs for the person in order to harm him/her.
 - 5.6. To cause physical damage at the home or workplace of the person.
 - 5.7. Sexual violence.

Appendix 2. An Heuristic Clustering of Roeper's (1995) Identification of Traits of the Gifted.

- A. *Difference from others and their misunderstanding.*
 1. Intellectually different.
 3. Feel fundamentally different about selves than others feel about them.

16. Feelings of being misunderstood, outsider, unable to communicate.
 17. Difficulties understanding seemingly inconsistent and short-sighted behavior of others.
 20. Sense of humor.
- B. Distinct moral sense.*
18. See difference between justice and equality.
 22. Difficulties with authority figures.
 23. Strong moral convictions to use specific talents, etc., for betterment of world.
- C. Drivenness and strength of feeling.*
4. Driven by own giftedness.
 5. Overwhelmed by pressure of own creativity.
 6. Strong feelings encompassing many areas of life.
 7. Amazing verbal ability, love of intense intellectual discussion.
- D. Perfectionism and estheticism.*
13. React angrily to being subject to public relations methods of image making.
 14. Perfectionist.
- E. Overwhelming perceptiveness.*
11. Special problem awareness.
 12. See pattern of development of growth, therefore recognize trend.
 19. Risk taking more difficult because knowing more what is at stake.
- F. Overwhelming multifacetedness.*
2. Retain childlike emotions.
 15. Often confronted with problems of having too many abilities in too many areas where would like to work, discover, and excel.
 21. Emotional problems related to abilities, but greater resources for dealing with problems.
- G. Need for solitude and search for meaning.*
8. Need solitude, time for contemplation and day-dreaming.
 9. Search for meaning in both inner and outer world.
 10. Develop own method of learning and of grasping concepts.

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