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Title: Attachment Styles and Experience of Workplace Interpersonal Relating in Intellectually Gifted Adults.

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctorate in Psychotherapy by Professional Studies, Metanoia Institute (Middlesex University).
Abstract:

Intellectually gifted adults are a generally little recognised or understood minority population whose high potential is not always actualised in the workplace. It has been documented that such adults perceive workplace interpersonal relationships as one of the greatest barriers to attaining career goals. As attachment styles have been correlated with workplace interpersonal issues, the present study sought to explore intellectually gifted adults’ experiences of their workplace interpersonal relating and investigate how their attachment styles might affect this, towards building a greater understanding of the part workplace interpersonal relations play in gifted adults’ prospects of actualising their career potential. Method: A mixed-methods research design used questionnaires and interviews, recruiting participants from British Mensa. Data was analysed using SPSS and Thematic Analysis. Quantitative Findings (n=229): 1. This sample had a significantly atypical attachment styles profile (p<0.001), with half the proportion of secure attachment (33%) than in general populations. 2. Participants with a secure attachment style experienced their workplace interpersonal relating as significantly more competent than did those with insecure attachment styles (p<0.001). Qualitative findings (n=16): Interview themes included a strong need to utilise abilities, a pairing of intellectual giftedness with interpersonal difficulty, and not utilising abilities and/or experiencing interpersonal difficulty being the main causes of negative mental health effects. Interviewees encountered certain similar workplace interpersonal phenomena such as gaining recognition or being asked to help others, but there were differences that appeared to be linked to attachment style, particularly around sociability at work. However it appeared that whatever their attachment style, interviewees were happier and more fulfilled at work if their workplace environment was welcoming of rather than threatened by and therefore hostile to and/or obstructive of gifted ability. Conclusion: 1. There appear to be differences according to attachment style in how gifted adults experience and conduct their workplace interpersonal relationships. 2. The significantly higher proportion of insecure attachment – a known risk factor for interpersonal difficulty – and the interview themes are suggestive of this population having a susceptibility to interpersonal difficulty, although their most frequently selected self-rating of workplace interpersonal relating was “somewhat competent”. 3. Type of workplace environment is a factor in whether interpersonal relations impede career progress.
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1. INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITIONS

This study sought to explore the workplace interpersonal relating of intellectually gifted adults and how their attachment styles might affect this, towards building a greater understanding of the part that workplace interpersonal relations play in gifted adults’ prospects of actualising their career potential. The rationale for this is to help enable individuals, teams and organisations derive the most benefit from gifted ability.

1.1 Giftedness

‘Gifted’ is a term used of individuals who stand out from their peers by manifesting exceptional ability in a specific area or in several areas. This study deals with intellectual giftedness, which is the only area targeted by the traditional (and controversial) use of IQ tests to classify giftedness. IQ tests do not assess multiple intelligences (Sternberg & Davidson 2005; Gardner 2011) or behavioural characteristics but only cognitive ones (Renzulli 2005).

Although different percentages are quoted in different studies and countries (Freeman 2005), globally giftedness affects a small minority of people, meaning a gifted person is by definition a deviation from the norm. Differences have been found in neural structure and functioning that “account for enhanced executive capability as one important neuropsychological characteristic of gifted people and a more efficacious working memory as another” (Geake 2009:261). Giftedness is also associated with particular traits such as heightened excitability, sensitivity and perceptiveness; speed of cognitive processing; high energy; and intensity of drive (Lewis, Kitano & Lynch 1992; Jacobsen 1999b; Webb et al 2005; Daniels & Piechowski 2009; Nauta & Ronner 2013). It constitutes a “quantitatively, qualitatively, and motivationally different way of experiencing life” (Jacobsen 2008:19). Although the researcher dislikes the term ‘gifted’ as it is not a neutral term describing the phenomenon involved but is judgment-laden, connoting privilege, the term is used in this paper to clearly link its subject matter with that of other established sources relating to this phenomenon.
By far the majority of research on giftedness focusses on children and not adults. Giftedness constitutes high potential but can have very different outcomes depending on how it is responded to and whether or not it becomes actualised. For intellectually gifted adults the workplace is often the arena in which the question of whether or not they can fulfil their potential is most grappled with.

1.2 Attachment styles

Attachment styles are a way of describing individual differences in interpersonal relating that derive from Attachment Theory, an extensive, comprehensive and empirically grounded theory of human development and personality (Bowlby 1969, 1973, 1980; Ainsworth et al 1978; Cassidy & Shaver 2008). In different texts the number of attachment styles presented differs and the terminology for the styles differs. In this paper the attachment style terms used and the self-image and disposition toward relating with others they denote conform with those of Bartholomew & Horowitz (1991) as follows: 1. Secure: seeks closeness with others, comfortable and confident about being close to others (positive view of self and others); 2. Preoccupied: seeks closeness with others, but anxious about whether the other is available or rejecting, and is preoccupied about relationships (positive view of others, negative view of self); 3. Dismissing Avoidant: suppresses the need for closeness with others, with an attitude of being dismissive about having any need for such closeness, and is avoidant of closeness (positive view of self, negative view of others); 4. Fearful Avoidant: avoids closeness with others out of fear of being close (negative view of self and others).

A review follows of literature related to the topic introduced above.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Intellectually gifted adults are generally little recognised or understood. For example, whilst Lovecky (1986), Streznewski (1999), Jacobsen (1999a, 1999b), Corten et al (2006), Grobman (2009), Freeman (2010), Nauta & Ronner (2013) and Heylighen (undated) document certain special needs and interpersonal challenges specific to gifted adults, these are not generally represented in the psychotherapy literature.

There are suggestions that the very fact of being gifted can impede a person’s career progress (Lovecky 1986; Streznewski 1999; Jacobsen 1999b; Corten et al 2006; Persson 2009; Nauta & Ronner 2013). However some gifted adults clearly fare better in their careers than others: why might this be? Perrone et al found that for academically talented individuals, the second highest perceived barrier to career success (after commitment to non-work roles) was “organizational politics or interpersonal relationships in the work environment” (2004:128). Corten et al (2006), Nauta & Corten (2002), Streznewski (1999), Jacobsen (1999b), DeRaat (2002), Persson (2009) and Nauta & Ronner (2013) cite workplace interpersonal issues and difficulties associated with gifted adults, however these are not reflected in general workplace-related literature. The latter tends to present interpersonal difficulties in the workplace as arising undifferentially for anyone (eg. Winbolt 2002) or as being pathological (eg. McFarlin & Sweeney 2000; Kusy & Holloway 2009; Babiak & Hare 2006). Such literature focuses on the pragmatics of how co-workers can cope with others’ behaviour rather than on identifying or understanding underlying causes such as giftedness (eg. Weeks 2008; Kusy & Holloway 2009).

It has been well-established that interpersonal relationship competence is the greatest predictor of success and well-being at work – for individuals, teams, and organisations – more than other factors such as cognitive ability, qualifications or expertise (Goleman 1998; Tan 2012). Attachment research has demonstrated the importance of attachment styles in how people conduct and experience their interpersonal relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver 2007; Levine & Heller 2011), and Hardy & Barkham (1994) – using a clinical sample – found significant correlations between attachment styles and workplace interpersonal issues.
In the giftedness literature there is a tendency to write as though gifted people’s giftedness is the most distinguishing influence on their experience and trajectory in life (e.g. Jacobsen 1999b), but there are many other factors. Where attempts have been made to classify differences amongst gifted adults in their ways of comporting themselves and in their life trajectories (Streznewski 1999; Nauta & Corten 2002; Persson 2009) these attempts do not address themselves to other areas of knowledge about individual difference that are available for example in the psychology and psychotherapy literature, such as attachment theory. In the Mensa Research Journal’s special edition “Gifted in the Workplace” (2008) the papers collected (from the USA, the Netherlands, Canada and Poland – there is none from the UK) do not consider attachment styles. In the few instances there are of attachment theory being used in the giftedness literature (Wellisch 2010; Wellisch & Brown 2012; West et al 2013) these are recent and deal with gifted children, not adults in the workplace. Applications of attachment theory specifically to the workplace are also few, eg. Hardy & Barkham (1994); Mikulincer & Shaver (2007a); Harms (2011); Richards & Schat (2011); Grady & Grady (2013).

The present study investigates what workplace interpersonal issues arise specifically for a non-clinical sample of gifted adults and what part attachment style might play in this. Explication follows of the design of the study and how it was carried out.
3. METHODOLOGY

As a psychotherapist and executive coach the researcher is particularly interested in understanding more about and working effectively with interpersonal issues such as those referred to in the giftedness literature cited above. She adopted an essentialist/realist epistemological position for this study, focussing on the phenomenon of participants’ experience rather than on how it is constructed socially or by discourse (Braun & Clarke 2006). Identification of themes in the qualitative data was therefore at a semantic or explicit level rather than at a latent or interpretative level (ibid).

3.1 Aims of the study

i. To obtain a profile of attachment styles for a sample of gifted adults.
ii. To explore gifted adults’ experiences of their workplace interpersonal relations.
iii. To investigate how gifted adults’ workplace interpersonal experiences relate to giftedness and to attachment styles.

3.2 Design

A mixed methods design was used:

a) The Attachment Style Questionnaire (ASQ) (Freeney et al 1994) was administered to obtain an attachment style indicator for each participant. Of the available standardised attachment measures the ASQ was chosen because its wording makes it most amenable for considering not just close family- or romantic-relationships but also workplace relationships, and because it has been repeatedly tested with high validity and reliability (Mikulincer & Shaver 2007:87-88; Ravitz 2010).

b) To obtain a quantitative value on participants’ workplace interpersonal relating the researcher designed a One-Item Rating Scale. All participants were asked to choose on a scale of 1-5 how they would rate their overall experience of their relating with others at work, with 1 being “particularly competent and unproblematic” and 5 being “particularly inadequate and problematic”. This scale’s limitations include the fact that it only had one
item and was not piloted and tested for validity and reliability. However, because it was targeting interpersonal relationships it would be expected to show an association with attachment styles, and the fact that it did is suggestive of construct validity (De Vellis 2012).

c) Qualitative interviews, semi-structured, were conducted with a purposive sub-sample (Kvale & Brinkman 2009; Silverman 2013) so as to explore the workplace interpersonal experiences of gifted adults with different attachment styles. Interviewing was selected as a method to allow for a greater depth, comprehensiveness and clarity of data to be collected than would be possible by questionnaire. An interview schedule was designed and used to help focus the interview but avoided the rigidity of a fully-structured interview which could exclude participants from offering responses unforeseeable by the researcher whilst designing the research instrument.

3.3 Limitations

All three research instruments relied on participants’ self-reports and self-assessments, limiting data to participants’ subjective perceptions. The interview data captures only what emerged during the course of the interview duration and therefore might exclude other pertinent information concerning the interviewees. Rating Scale limitations are mentioned above (section 3.2b) and in the Discussion (section 5.1), and sampling limitations are mentioned below (section 3.4).

3.4 Sampling and recruitment

Participants were sought who are intellectually gifted adults. As high IQ is an aspect of intellectual giftedness, participants were recruited from the British branch of Mensa whose sole membership criterion is proof of having attained top 2% results on a standardised IQ test. Although the study benefits from a standard objective criterion of this type, a limitation is that it is unknown how representative gifted adults are who have voluntarily joined a high IQ society. The fact that participants were self-selected (by replying to an advert) may also limit the representativeness of the sample.
The sampling strategy for the interviews was not for representativeness of the main sample, but to interview an equal number of gifted adults from each attachment style in order to see whether workplace interpersonal experiences differed across different attachment styles. Table 1 below shows the inclusion/exclusion criteria for interviewees.

**Table 1: Interview selection criteria.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Requirements for interviewees</th>
<th>Reason</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Included only if employed in an environment involving regular interaction with others.</td>
<td>So that current workplace interpersonal relations could be discussed rather than historical or hypothetical ones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td>Excluded if had a psychological diagnosis, were on psychiatric medication, or were currently undergoing psychotherapy.</td>
<td>Because a non-clinical sample was desired, to limit the variables and to access participants who were not already involved in a potentially skewing intervention.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These criteria were screened for by means of Participant Information Forms. The first four participants who met these criteria were invited for interview on a first-come-first served basis, then as ASQs were scored the remaining twelve were selected so as to have two males and two females from each of the ASQ’s four attachment style quadrants across a spread of ages and occupations.

### 3.5 Data collection

The research study was advertised in the ‘members’ only’ area of the Mensa website and in an email by the Mensa Research Officer to members. Interested members were requested to contact the researcher for a confidential “no-obligation enquiry”. 312 responded. All were emailed the Information Sheet, Participant Information Form, Consent Form, and Research Questionnaire (incorporating ASQ and One-Item Rating Scale). 231 returned full sets of completed forms, two of which arrived too late to be included, setting the final sample size at 229.

For the interviewees, the options were offered of being interviewed at the researcher’s office or by remote video (Skype) at the participant’s preferred venue. The literature referred to (King & Horrocks 2010:83-85) showed no difference in implications for the data
collection of it being carried out by face-to-face interview in real time either using or not using Skype technology. Only four of the sixteen interviewees opted for Skype. Each interview lasted around 1.5 hours and was audio-recorded and transcribed.

3.6 Ethics

This research was approved by the DREC (Departmental Research Ethics Committee of Metanoia’s Post-Qualification Doctorates Department) and ratified by the Metanoia Research Ethics Committee (MREC). It was also approved by Mensa, and was carried out in accordance with the British Psychological Society’s Ethical Principles for Conducting Research with Human Participants (2006). The researcher is registered as a Data Controller with the Information Commissioner’s Office and all data was handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998), being stored securely and separately from participants’ names and contact details to protect participants’ identities from being linked with any of the data collected.

An assistant inputted anonymous questionnaire scores into SPSS and a typing service assisted with transcribing the interviews. Signed confidentiality agreements were obtained in advance from both assistants and neither had access to the names or contact details of any of the participants.

The main potential benefits of participating in the research related to having the opportunity to explore confidentially a topic of personal relevance. The main potential risks related to any negative effects that such exploration might instigate such as difficult memories, thoughts or feelings. Main mitigating strategies were that full prior information was provided to, and informed consent obtained from, all participants; participants had the right not to answer any question and to withdraw from participation at any point; every participant was offered a free debrief session; and for interviewees, in addition up to four free sessions in a coaching format were made available plus sign-posting to any further services necessary for dealing with any negative effects. All interviewees were sent the draft research report so they could confirm they were satisfied that their contributions were fully anonymous.
In practice these measures proved satisfactory. It transpired that respondents were overwhelmingly interested in the study and eager to participate. Several reported finding the filling in of the questionnaire interesting and thought-provoking. The only difficulties reported involved deliberating about which questionnaire choices to select.

Interviewees were towards the end of the interview given the opportunity to comment on what the experience had been like for them, and all who gave feedback reported having found the experience enjoyable and worthwhile (see interview excerpts, Appendix 13 at foot of this report). No participants reported ill-effects or required sign-posting to other services. Four participants requested the offered debrief, and one interviewee requested the four free coaching sessions. Of the 229 participants only a handful did not request the research findings to be emailed to them.

3.7 Data analysis

The data were analysed in five stages:

1) The ASQs were scored using a specially designed Excel worksheet, assigning each participant a graphically represented indicator of attachment style (attachment styles explained in section 1.2 above).

2) One-Item Rating Scale results were recorded on the same score sheets.

3) An assistant inputted the anonymous score sheets data into SPSS and generated descriptive statistics according to the researcher’s instructions.

4) The researcher analysed the interview transcripts using Microsoft Word and principally in accordance with Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006), organising the data into superordinate and subordinate themes. This involved multiple iterations (Stiles 1993:605) of moving between coding tables and the
original interview transcripts, defining and refining the different themes. The analysis prioritised identifying and describing themes over interpreting them.

To explore whether themes differed according to attachment style there was an emphasis on cross-case rather than within-case analysis. Tallies were made of how many interviewees manifested each theme – and where relevant, whether in confirming or disconfirming form – and in how many interviewees per attachment style group each theme manifested.

5) All the above data were compared to note distribution of attachment styles; how Rating Scale results compared across attachment styles; statistical significance; and any differences in interview themes according to attachment styles.

3.8 Quality control

The interviews showed a high degree of accordance with Kvale & Brinkmann’s quality criteria for interviews (2009:164), which include a pattern of short interviewer verbalisations followed by much more extensive interviewee responses; a great extent of “spontaneous, rich, specific and relevant” interviewee replies (Ibid); and the interviewer throughout checking meanings and understandings, clarifying, summarising back to the interviewee and obtaining their verification of the summary’s accuracy. The interviewer also proved alert to picking up internal contradictions during interviews and querying them. During the analysis stage different excerpts from within the same interview were cross-checked for contradictions.

Resources unfortunately did not allow for independent checking of the coding but an audit trail (Gray 2009:516) was maintained throughout to facilitate subsequent scrutiny. The whole research report in final draft was checked by all 16 interviewees (respondent validation, Silverman 2013), and critiqued by the researcher’s supervisor, her academic advisor, and by three ‘critical friends’. The latter’s feedback indicated that the research met validity criteria of coherence (Stiles 1993) and grounding in examples (Elliot et al 1999), eg:
The appendices document well what you develop in your text...I found some appendices... very impressive in their thoroughness and the aptness of the quotes chosen to make your point. The colour highlighting makes them visually clear, and they are well signalled throughout the text. (Gonschorrek 2013)

(The appendices referred to above with colour highlightings are not included in this report for the sake of brevity.)

3.9 *Critique*

Advertising the study generated high interest, verifying the relevance of the research topic for the population concerned. The complexity of the research design proved in practice highly ambitious for the limited scope of what was intended to be a pilot study, and ultimately data had to be excluded to fit within the confines of this research report. This report could only include the data on gifted adults’ workplace interpersonal experiences. The researcher will for the next phase of her doctoral work return to the remainder of the rich data gathered which relates to the development of a gifted identity and its intrapersonal and interpersonal implications.

A strength of the research design was its triangulation (Stiles 1993; Mason 1996) of different sets of data, which gave valuable insight into how the qualitative and quantitative elements related to and interacted with each other and enhanced the knowledge gained. It also highlighted the complexities underlying the selections people make on a quantitative instrument (examples available, Appendix 25), which raises questions about the reliability of information obtained from quantitative measures on their own.

The results of the research follow.
4. RESULTS

4.1 Quantitative Results: ASQs and One-Item Rating Scale

This section presents the profile of the full sample, their attachment styles and ratings of their interpersonal relating at work, and how their attachment styles related to age, mental health, and workplace interpersonal relating.

4.1.1 Profile of full sample

229 participants (73.4% of the number of initial responses): 132 male (57.6%), 97 female (42.4%). Age range: 20 to 82, M=45.4, standard deviation 13.7.

Of the 208 who recorded their employment status, the majority (80.3%) were employed in a context involving regular interaction with others. 86.9% of participants recorded no mental health issues on their Participant Information Forms. 13.1% recorded issues such as depression, anxiety, or psychiatric diagnoses. Of the full sample, 3.9% recorded a learning/developmental disability such as Aspergers.

4.1.2 ASQs: Attachment styles for full sample

The two attachment categories of highest frequency were Secure (33.6%) and Fearful Avoidant (28.8%). Then came Dismissing Avoidant (21%), with the lowest frequency being Preoccupied (11.4%). Throughout this document each of these four ASQ attachment categories will be denoted with initial capitals but when the term “insecure” is used to
collectively refer to the three styles other than Secure, insecure will not have an initial capital as it is not a named ASQ category.

12 participants (5.3%) fell on an axis line rather than within a quadrant (see Figure 2 below). This group, termed attachment category “Unclassified”, was too small to have statistical analyses conducted on it.

**Figure 2**
This profile of roughly one third Secure (33%) and two thirds insecure (61.2%) differs significantly (Binomial test, \( p<0.001 \), Appendix 27) from that of other populations reported in the literature which generally have roughly two thirds Secure and one third insecure, with about 20% being Avoidant (Ainsworth et al 1978; Hazan & Shaver 1987; Mickelson et al 1997; Prior & Glaser 2006). Here nearly half the sample (49.8%) was Avoidant.

An independent T-test showed those of Secure attachment style to have a significantly higher mean age (48.6) than those of insecure attachment (\( M=43.3 \)), \( p<0.01 \) (Appendix 28).
4.1.3 **Attachment styles and mental health**

The prevalence of mental health issues varied significantly according to attachment style categorisation (Chi-Square, p<0.001). Those with Secure attachment who had mental health issues (2.6%) were significantly less than those with insecure attachment who did (19.3%) (Chi-Square, p<0.001) (Appendix 29).
4.1.4 One-Item Rating Scale: Interpersonal relating at work

Only 3 of the 229 participants did not make a Rating Scale choice.

Figure 7

The majority of participants (69.8%) selected the “competent” options, with 18.5% selecting the “inadequate” options. 11.5% selected the non-committal option of “neither competent nor inadequate”.
4.1.5 Attachment styles and interpersonal relating at work

Figure 8: Rating scale choices within each attachment style

The mode for each attachment category except Secure was “somewhat competent”; for Secure it was “particularly competent and unproblematic”. Table 3 below shows the mean scores for each attachment category.

Table 3: Rating Scale mean scores.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attachment Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>.828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissing Avoidant</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>1.109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupied</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>1.140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fearful Avoidant</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>1.180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because the Rating Scale results did not yield a normal distribution (Figure 9 below), the cautious choice was made of using nonparametric testing. Post-hoc analysis using the Kruskal-Wallis test to compare individual pairs of attachment style showed that Secure differed significantly from each of the three insecure styles (p<0.001 for each, Appendix 30). None of the pairs of insecure styles differed significantly from each other. The Mann-Whitney test confirmed that it was between Secure and insecure attachment that the significant difference lay (p<0.001) (Appendix 31).
The qualitative results follow.

4.2 Qualitative Results: Interviews
This section contains the interview results, starting with a profile of the interview sub-sample, then presenting the dominant interview themes and finally how the themes related to attachment styles.

4.2.1 Profile of sub-sample
The sixteen interviewees ranged in age from 26 to 53 (M=37.2) and turned out to be highly cosmopolitan, representing ten different national origins, with three-quarters having experienced education and/or work in different countries. See Table 4 below.
Table 4: Profile of interviewees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National origins</th>
<th>England (5), Wales (1), Spain (1), Sweden (2), Germany (1), Russian-German (1), Hong Kong Chinese (1), New Zealand (1), USA (1), India (2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>All had at least one tertiary educational qualification, with a quarter either already having achieved or currently working on a PhD.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Occupations      | • A quarter worked in IT, and the others worked in advertising and design, marketing, consulting, theatre production, music performance, manufacturing, writing, engineering.  
                        • The majority were not self-employed – only two worked freelance as their main job and one ran his own company. |
| Sectors represented | Financial, medical, law, local authorities, trade, professional services, entertainment (film and television). |
| Attainment within career | • Half worked in managerial roles. The three that worked in administrative roles all did so as a ‘day job’ whilst pursuing another main interest that wasn’t (yet) fully supporting them financially.  
                              • Some had reached levels of substantial seniority within their occupations, for example overseeing up to 250 staff including globally, or in law being called to the Bar in more than one country.  
                              • Two had been headhunted internationally, one of them on more than one occasion. One had received several musical awards. These achievements came at relatively young ages, given that the two oldest interviewees were aged 53 and 47. |
| Job stability    | • At the two extremes, one interviewee talked of changing jobs every 3 years because of becoming bored, and one interviewee started in a company straight after graduation and had stayed there to the present day – for 23 years.  
                          • For the remaining six who gave data about length of time at jobs, the average length of time at a job was 7 years, giving an overall impression of higher-than-average job stability (the USA Federal Bureau of Statistics figures from 2010 puts average length of time people stay at jobs at 4.4 years). Reference: http://www.nhregister.com/articles/2010/09/16/business/dd1_tenure0916091610.txt |

4.2.2 Interview themes

Table 5 below gives an overview of the interview themes. Appendix 32 defines the themes and outlines how they are differentiated from each other.
Table 5: Overview of interview themes.
(Blue figures show how many of the 16 interviewees manifested each theme.)

The interviews’ most dominant themes were divided into two main sections, A and B. Section A introduces how interviewees are affected by being intellectually gifted, with four superordinate themes looking firstly at its place in their personal identity (A1); then at its implications for their needs (A2), their interpersonal relationships generally (A3), and their well-being and mental health (A4).

Section B presents four superordinate themes (each divided into up to four subordinate themes numbered (i) to (iv)) covering workplace interpersonal experiences connected with productivity (B1) and sociability (B2); difficulties in workplace interpersonal relating (B3); and the perceived reasons for such difficulties (B4).

A. Being intellectually gifted.

| A1. Place of intellectual giftedness in personal identity. (16) |
| A2. Importance of utilising abilities. (16) |
| A3. Pairing intellectual giftedness with interpersonal difficulty. (15) |
| A4. Implications for well-being and mental health. (10) |

(of not utilising abilities and/or experiencing interpersonal difficulty)

B. Workplace interpersonal experiences.

| B1(ii). Helping others. (12) |
| B1(iii). Working well together. (7) |
| B2. Sociability. (14) | B2(i). Work-related social involvement specifically sought/considered important. (7) |
| B2(ii). Finds social environment at work pleasant but doesn’t seek social involvement. (5) |
| B2(iii). Does less socialising than others. (7) |
| B2(iv). Prefers being physically positioned at some social distance. (3) |
| B3. Experiences of interpersonal difficulty. (15) (impeding productivity and/or sociability) |
| B3(i). Obstruction. (8) |
| B3(ii). Hostility. (11) (including dislike, exclusion) |
| B3(iii). Relationally out of sync. (14) |
| B4. Perceived reasons for interpersonal difficulty. (15) |
| B4(i). Threat. (12) (including envy, jealousy, insecurity) |
| B4(ii). Dislike of cleverness. (8) |
| B4(iii). Own challenging behaviour. (11) |
| B4(iv). Impact of context/environment. (11) |
Section A: Being intellectually gifted

A1. Place of intellectual giftedness in personal identity.

In responding to the question “On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being low and 10 high, how important a part of your personal identity do you feel being gifted/having a high IQ is?”, nearly all the interviewees (fourteen out of sixteen) chose the high end of the scale, from 7 to 10. More than half went as high as the highest rankings, 9 or 10, indicating that they experienced giftedness as an extremely important part of their personal identity. For example:

This is what defines me. If I, I have two big fears in life, as far as I am concerned, personally about myself. One is I lose my eyesight, and the second is I lose my logical way of thinking. For me both are as good as dying. If I couldn’t see any more I wouldn’t know what to do with myself. If I didn’t have my thinking, if I could not think things through or try to understand what’s going on around me, there would be no point in living anymore would there? So a 10. (p.17:28-p.18:11)

Only two chose the lower end of the scale, both of whom said “3 or 4”.

One interviewee suggested how it might have come to be important to her:

You know, with me I was just a bit sort of like… I don’t know whether I like relied on being smart, because I felt inadequate in other areas… (No.30, p.32:34-p.33:2)

Another described the purpose she thought it might serve:

The highest, yeah probably. If 10 is high then 10. I think, you know why, identity is our crutches to survive in a way, to lead you through life. I think that’s why it became in the recent year my crutch to stand tall and maybe walk one day on my own. (No.41, p.26:14-17)

And one mentioned how its importance to him had changed over time:

...maybe 3 or 4 now... When I was a child it was a 10, it was my whole identity.... (No.74, p.18:4-20).

A2. Importance of utilising abilities.

All the interviewees spoke of the importance to them of utilising their abilities by regularly engaging with and applying themselves to a variety of intellectually stimulating and challenging tasks. Having a need for and appreciation of variety was emphasised by eight; six mentioned wanting – even craving (no. 55) – intellectual stimulation and ongoing
learning; and eleven mentioned having a need for and/or enjoyment of solving problems and being challenged.

When questioned about what they liked most and least about their jobs, for three-quarters their replies comprised or included either the utilising of their abilities as what they liked most about a job or not utilising their abilities as what they liked least. Additional to these, one interviewee described how he preferred having a challenging job rather than one where he was simply the best guy in the team and could slack off.

Five interviewees were in the process of pursuing a better utilising of their abilities, either by contemplating a career change or by undertaking further studies. Another, whose job did not fully challenge him, described how he compensated by playing an intellectually challenging game online every evening before bed.

Five interviewees described having experienced negative mental health effects when not utilising their abilities, such as experiencing frustration, insecurity, suffering depression, or, as No.55 put it, “you go mad” (p.15:2-6). (See also Section A4, “Implications for well-being and mental health”.)

A3. Pairing intellectual giftedness with interpersonal difficulty.

Fifteen of the sixteen interviewees at some point talked in ways that paired a person (themselves or others) having intellectual giftedness with also having interpersonal difficulty. Appendix 35 records these instances and shows whether the interviewee made this pairing in relation to their own experience, or as an observation of others, or as a generalisation (which could derive from own experience or observation of others or something absorbed culturally). An example:

He was, ‘Oh, you’re not a member of Mensa.’ And I was like, ‘Why?’ and he was like, ‘Cause I’ve met members of Mensa and they’ve got no emotional intelligence whatsoever.’ And I was like, ‘Well that’s a bit of a raging like, you know, stereotype’ (No.30, p.27:1-5).
Of the fifteen, four who made this pairing in relation to their own experience spoke of interpersonal difficulty as something they had experienced in the past but which they felt they had overcome (Nos. 74, 2, 6, 30).

Fourteen interviewees were asked if they were offered coaching on any area they would find helpful, what would they choose? The majority (eleven – see Appendix 36, grey highlighting) described aspects of interpersonal relating.

**A4. Implications for well-being and mental health.**

Although participants’ Personal Information Forms were used to select for interview only those who did not indicate any mental health diagnoses or medications or current psychotherapy, ten of the sixteen interviewees mentioned during interview some kind of impact on their well-being/mental health that they attributed to being intellectually gifted. This included experiencing depression (six); chronic frustration (two); insecurity/low self-esteem/negative feelings about self (four); unwelcome ruminating (two); eating disturbances (two); feeling that life might be easier/happier if one were less intelligent (eight); and for two interviewees, suicidal thoughts.

The most predominant causes of these negative effects as depicted by the interviewees were not utilising their abilities (five interviewees), and experiencing difficulty with interpersonal relations (six interviewees).

**Section B: Interpersonal Experiences At Work**

**B1. Productivity**

**B1(i). Gaining recognition**

In terms of productivity at work, gaining recognition for the contribution they are able to make was evidenced in some form by all interviewees, for example in comments colleagues made (eg. No.1: “They will say, ‘Yeah you know a lot about this’, or, ‘You’re very good at this” (p.8:7-11); in positive feedback received (eg. No.69: “I stood up before 500 scientists, amazingly wonderful people from all over the world, did my presentation and most of the people were extremely delighted with it” (p.16:29-32); appreciation being shown (eg. No.2:
“It felt like every meeting I went into...I was the Messiah, like it was the second coming, ...they were like ‘oh God we’ve been waiting for somebody like you, we’re so happy’” (p.27:17-21); a person getting the status of being the one who can provide solutions (eg. No.43: “I was like an oracle for things” (p.16:17-21); being sought after in their industry (eg. being internationally headhunted, Nos.167, 43); being retained in a job longterm (eg. No.68, for 23 years); being given repeat business (eg. No.5) and promotions (six interviewees); and being within the minority of people who successfully passed stringent selection procedures (eg. No.1).

But the recognition given is not always positive: a person can be told that the capability they are manifesting is not welcome (eg. No.156), or be unsuccessful at a job interview because their ability is seen as being in excess of what is required (eg. No. 1). Also, gaining recognition can sometimes be at the expense of others (eg. being retained when others are losing their jobs – No.2; being given more projects than others – No.156; progressing in their career faster than others – Nos.69, 68; or being given more recognition than others – Nos.30, 17) which can be experienced as difficult or cause difficulties with others (see Section B3, “Experiences of interpersonal difficulty”).

B1(ii). Helping others

Because of becoming noticed for their capabilities, interviewees were often placed in a position of being asked to help others, and this is one of the kinds of contribution many made at work, whether or not they felt they themselves derived benefit from making this kind of contribution. Three-quarters described having taken up helping roles of one kind or another. Interviewees described how helping others brought them enjoyment (eight) and self-esteem (five), and of how helping others positively benefited their own learning (five). No.36 expressed the idea that

...if you have a gift, you have an intelligence, or you’re born with a high social status, you have a moral obligation to use it for the benefit of others (p.26:19-26).

However, frustration could be felt when others sought their help rather than finding out for themselves (No.30), or they could try to help but become impatient (No. 189, who was criticised for having made the person he was trying to help feel stupid), and some preferred not to be in the helper role (No.68), or not with people below a certain minimum level of
skill (No.189). And it was mentioned that one could be more productive in advancing one’s own work when not having to spend time helping others (No. 43, p.16:17-28).

B1(iii). Working well together
Productivity at work is also increased if one has colleagues with similar abilities who are quick to understand things (No.43, several citations) and can make really relevant input themselves (No.43, p.26:19-20); with whom “you can really make things spark and create a chemistry” (No.55, p.39:34); who are “stimulating and inspiring” (No.68, p.3:17) and with whom it is possible to “challenge each other in all sorts of ways” (No.68, p.33:2-10). Seven of the interviewees described this kind of experience of working well together, such as:

Really bouncing off ideas and it was this... you know, here’s an idea. I would criticise and say, ‘Yeah, that’s great, but what about this?’ and then you know... And we eventually got the solution and it was fantastic. And I don’t think we could have done it alone. (No.189, p.24:22-33)

B2. Sociability

B2(i). Work-related social involvement specifically sought/considered important
In terms of sociability at work, work-related social involvement was specifically sought/considered important by seven interviewees, who for example chose a career for its enjoyable social nature (No.5) or initiated and led regular weekly social activities (No.189). In this group the interpersonal climate was described as having a significant impact on contentment at work: eg. No.2 cited the bad atmosphere in the office as what she found worst about her current job, and No.17 said:

...by having some good friends and peers at work I feel more motivated of even going to work and just being at work, so I think it’s just a source of inspiration/motivation to work in because you find it much more valuable and fun to go to work if you have people that you can connect with... (p.32:33-p.33:11)

B2(ii). Finds social environment at work pleasant but doesn’t seek social involvement
Five others mentioned finding the social environment at work pleasant but they didn’t seek social involvement, for example “everybody’s extremely pleasant to me, I’m extremely pleasant to everybody, we have a great working environment” (No.69, p.27:4-12), or No.55 saying of her colleagues:

Fundamentally they’re really nice people. A friendly bunch. Probably don’t want to see them outside work much, but they’re, for the most part, nice people. (p.37:38-40).
B2(iii). Does less socialising than others

Seven interviewees actively avoided the social aspect of work, doing less socialising than others at their workplace did. Avoidance of social participation could be described as being because of not having colleagues with whom they felt they had things in common (No. 6), or could be described as a general personal preference: even if they found their colleagues pleasant or good for collaborating with on tasks, they’d still avoid participating in socialising such as spending time at work chatting (No.68) or joining in with lunches or after work drinks (Nos. 69, 167, 43).

B2(iv). Prefers being physically positioned with some social distance

Three even stated a preference for being physically positioned at some social distance, such as wishing to have their own separate office (Nos. 1, 6), or, as No.69 described, he was happy having “the last possible desk in the [office]” (p.27:6-10) as it meant not having people passing up and down by him who he’d have to greet.

B3. Experiences of interpersonal difficulty

Fifteen of the sixteen interviewees mentioned having experienced interpersonal difficulty of some kind at work, affecting their productivity and/or sociability. The three main themes here were experiences of obstruction, hostility, and being relationally out of sync.

B3(i). Obstruction

Obstruction involved interviewees’ experiences of being prevented from utilising their abilities and making a contribution, such as not being given a job (Nos. 1, 36), their input not being welcomed (Nos. 156, 41), or being blocked from attaining visibility, progress or achievement (Nos. 43, 156, 6, 189, 36, 55). For example, when No.156 at his own initiative developed a full report on an opportunity his company could expand into, he was criticized: “That’s not what we’ve hired you for” (No.156, p.31:3-16). Half of the interviewees described experiences of obstruction.
B3(ii). Hostility
Eleven interviewees spoke of experiencing hostility from others, which involved feeling disliked, even hated (No.2, p.22:5) and/or excluded. This included descriptions of unfriendly body language (eg. “a cold stare”, No.156, p.15:7-8), negative reactions (eg. “get[s] my colleagues’ backs up” – No.6, p.14:13), being “an object of ridicule” (No.156, p.14:25), others being “closed off” to you (No.2, p.32:1), and having “made enemies” (No.55, p.41:26).

B3(iii). Relationally out of sync
The theme of being relationally out of sync was identified where interviewees spoke of experiences not of obstruction or hostility but of just not getting on with others (eg. No.17), having misunderstandings (eg. No.41), misjudging politics (eg. No.36), feeling different from others (eg. feeling “an outsider” – Nos. 2, 6, 17 – which is not having others actually exclude them, but themselves feeling that they’re different and don’t belong), or interviewees’ style or speed of communicating causing friction because others couldn’t keep up with or understand how they got to an answer (Nos. 68, 55). Also included in this theme were instances of problems arising because of being focused on the task at hand to the exclusion of an awareness of the relational elements of the situation, such as not being tuned into another’s perspectives/expectations (eg. No.189, who rushed to voice a solution without realising he was thereby causing offence).

B4. Perceived reasons for interpersonal difficulty
Interviewees talked about what they knew to be or speculated to be the reasons for the interpersonal difficulty experienced.

B4(i). Threat
Themes here centred around threat: the phenomenon of someone, by seeing what’s capable or admirable in you, feeling in relation to you, less good about themselves, or fearing you will – because of what’s capable or admirable in you – deprive them of something that matters to them (eg. status, a job, promotion). As No.55 reported her mother having explained to her:

You have to understand that they feel less, because you are making... to them, you seem to be more... They feel threatened by that (p.8:11-28).
Related to this is envy – coveting what advantage someone else seems to have – and jealousy, which is feeling envious resentment towards someone for their perceived advantage. The resulting behaviour is the kind of obstruction and hostility listed in Section B3, “Experiences of interpersonal difficulty”, such as colleagues protecting their own territory by blocking you, excluding you, putting you down (to try to stop you looking good to themselves or others). As No. 156 said: “Envy means they are going to start building walls and barriers” (p.22:24).

Several interviewees (Nos. 2, 5, 55, 1, 41, 189, 36) expressed that they perceived a person feeling threatened as arising out of that person’s personal insecurity or unhappiness (eg. No.1, when asked “what sorts of reactions do you get to being clever?”, responded “Some people are impressed. I think secure people are impressed, insecure people aren’t.” – p.13:4-17), or as arising out of a situationally-induced insecurity (eg. as No.36 put it: “people feel insecure that someone clever has come along because they will of course use that cleverness to get ahead”, and losing out to someone else is what “anybody fears” - p.27:2-5). (The reality of the threat posed, for example instances of the gifted interviewees surpassing others, is shown in Section B1(i), “Gaining recognition”.)

B4(ii). Dislike of ‘cleverness’

In the dislike of ‘cleverness’ theme, instances were tallied of interviewees describing others as being averse to manifestations of being intellectually driven, quick, capable and confident – which could be seen as “showing off” (eg. No.5, p.14:11-12), thinking you’re better than others (Nos. 5, 6, 17) or being “arrogant” (No.1, p.29:21). Also included was the mention of derogatory terms for cleverness that others had used in relation to them or that they believed others were thinking of them, such as “smart arse” (No.156, p.20:24), "know-it-all" (No.2, p.25:18-21), “clever clogs” (No.6, p.12:21), “geek” (eg. No.17, p.12:20), “nerd” (No.74, p.6:29). No.1 put it like this:

In an interview, if you look too confident you come across as a threat. You have to try and portray yourself as having less knowledge than they do and not being as clever as they are, almost like being a dog that’s subservient to its master, you’ve got to display the attitude where, I find, always make them aware they can pat you down, keep you on the leash (p.22:27-32).
B4(iii). Own challenging behaviour

Eleven interviewees mentioned times when it was their own challenging behaviour that triggered interpersonal difficulty, such as their manifestations towards others of impatience (Nos. 2, 68, 189), obstinacy in wanting things done their own way (Nos. 55, 1), criticism/disagreement (Nos. 74, 55, 1, 17), or extreme sensitivity (Nos. 17, 30, 36). When asked “What do you think others would say is worst about working with you?”, one interviewee (No.1, p.27:21-24) replied: “Bossy.” Three interviewees described experiencing a strong internal pressure to say something, and despite knowing it might be unwise, saying it anyway (Nos. 41, 189, 36). Five described their frustration with others.

B4(iv). Impact of context/environment

An important factor in interpersonal experience at work was, as No.17 put it, “I think being gifted is very different depending on the environment” (p.15:4). Whether a person reacts to gifted ability by welcoming it and employing it or by being threatened by it and being hostile-obstructive, can depend on the person’s position (superior, peer or report) and style of working (eg. encouraging creativity and initiative or just expecting orders to be followed – described by No.55); what the nature is of the task at hand; and the nature of the workplace – its organisational structure and culture. Eleven interviewees gave examples of directly contrasting experiences they’d had that demonstrated the impact of context/environment. For example, No. 41 described having “Relationally out of sync” (ref. Section B3(iii)) experiences of people thinking she was interrupting them because she wasn’t interested in what they were saying, whereas actually she was interrupting because she had already understood what they were saying and was responding to it. Contrasted with this, the same interviewee described how this same behaviour of hers, in a different context, constituted an experience of “Working well together” (ref. Section B1(iii)):

The best experience I ever had with a guy was he was as fast as me at understanding what I was about to say. We never had to finish sentences, we had the most condensed conversation ever possible because we were speaking at double speed half the time. It didn’t matter to each other whether we were interrupting because we understood... (No.41, p.9:27-p.10:33)

Three interviewees described how they felt they had to hide their full abilities in certain contexts/environments in order to avoid interpersonal difficulty, whereas in others they could freely express themselves fully (Nos. 68, 189, 17). Interviewees most disliked – eg.
describing it as the worst aspect of their job (No.69) or the reason for leaving a job (No.17) – hierarchical systems where, as No.69 described,

> If you don’t have grey hair then... it’s deemed that you are less knowledgeable than the person who is having more years’ experience.... You are not allowed to jump out the queue. You join at the back of the queue and you have to work your way forward. (p.21:25-p.22:7)

Interviewees most thrived in systems where out-of-queue contributions were welcomed on their own merits, in a workplace culture that supported non-hierarchically-restricted free communication and open but respectful feedback focussed on the betterment of the job at hand rather than supporting practices of individuals building and protecting their own egos and power bases (Nos. 43, 189). Where interviewees described their workplaces comprising environments that in these ways showed a welcoming and employing of gifted ability, such interviewees described enjoying high levels of job satisfaction, feeling they were using their full potential, and having more experiences of “working well together” and fewer experiences of “obstruction” (see Appendix 45 at foot of this report), regardless of their attachment style.

Several interviewees also mentioned their experiences of workplace cultures in different countries. Although the majority (ten out of sixteen) had not been born or raised in the UK, three-quarters currently lived and worked in London and compared their new environment favourably, even specifically mentioning they preferred it because of improved interpersonal relating (Nos. 41, 74), giving the impression of relocation to London as a kind of haven for intellectual refugees.

4.2.3 **Interview themes and attachment styles**

Appendix 46 lists how many interviewees per attachment style manifested each theme. Certain trends were visible, presented below with the caveat that these are merely suggestive and not conclusive given the small numbers of interviewees per attachment style. The two kinds of Avoidant (Dismissing and Fearful) have been grouped under a single heading as they showed very similar patterns.
Table 5: Differences in interview themes according to attachment style.

<table>
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<th>Attachment Style</th>
<th>Differences</th>
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| Secure           | - The two interviewees with the markedly lowest ratings of importance of giftedness to their personal identity were both Secure.  
- The only group in which none of the interviewees made the pairing of intellectual giftedness with interpersonal difficulty in terms of their own current experience (as opposed to their past experience, or as an observation of others or a generalisation).  
- Only group in which all specifically sought workplace social involvement.  
- Only group in which all manifested the theme of experiencing hostility from others. |
| Avoidant         | - The only group in which not all interviewees manifested the “helping others” theme, plus it contained the only interviewee who manifested it by saying she doesn’t like being in a helping role.  
- The only group with the theme “finds social environment at work pleasant but doesn’t seek social involvement”.  
- The only group with “does less socialising than others” theme (applied to all Avoidant interviewees except one).  
- The only group with “prefers being physically positioned with some social distance” theme.  
- Of the five interviewees who experienced negative mental health effects because of not utilising abilities, nearly all (i.e. four) were Avoidant. |
| Preoccupied      | - The only ones who had under “own challenging behaviour”, trouble with their sensitivity (three interviewees).  
- Under “implications for well-being and mental health”, the only ones who had “unwelcome ruminating”.  
- The only group in which all manifested the “threat” theme in confirming form. |

Discussion follows of both the quantitative and qualitative results as presented in the preceding sections.
5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Associations: attachment style, workplace interpersonal relations, mental health issues

A striking finding is this sample of gifted adults’ significantly higher proportion of insecure attachment compared with other populations. Considering why this might be is beyond the scope of the present discussion and will be addressed in a separate paper. The present focus is what this might mean for workplace interpersonal relations.

Securely attached participants rated their workplace interpersonal relating as significantly more competent than insecurely attached participants did. The securely attached also recorded significantly fewer mental health issues than did the insecurely attached. These findings concur with other extensive research that has evidenced insecure attachment as a risk factor for interpersonal difficulty (eg. Mikulincer & Shaver 2007b:186; Howe 2011) and mental health issues (eg. Mikulincer & Shaver 2007b; Brisch 2011).

The interviews revealed interpersonal difficulty and not utilising abilities as the two main causes of negative mental health effects (and interpersonal difficulty can limit a person’s possibilities of utilising their abilities). This association between interpersonal difficulty and mental health issues is echoed in the quantitative results, where the two attachment styles (Fearful Avoidant and Preoccupied) with the highest ratings of inadequate interpersonal relating also had the highest incidence of mental health issues.

Given the interview theme (present in 15 of the 16 interviewees) of pairing intellectual giftedness with interpersonal difficulty, as well as the high proportion of insecure attachment, it could be concluded that gifted adults – or gifted adults who have joined Mensa – are at higher risk of experiencing both interpersonal difficulty and mental health issues. However, of the insecurely attached in this study it was a minority who selected “inadequate” options for rating their workplace interpersonal relating (27%) and a minority who reported mental health issues (19%).

It might be that these figures are inaccurately low. Regarding interpersonal relating, the Rating Scale was not a sensitive measure. There was only one item, and its wording could have caused a social desirability skewing effect (De Vellis 2012), weighting participants against rating their relating as “inadequate” (which might explain the non-normal
distribution of the Rating Scale results). Also, how participants interpreted the scale cannot be accounted for. For example, workplace interpersonal relations might be rated as satisfactory because difficulty is avoided by avoiding spending time with colleagues. (Avoidants – who comprised 81.43% of the insecure group – avoided spending time with colleagues, see section 4.2.3). Regarding mental health issues, although none of the interviewees recorded mental health issues on their PIFs, during interview 10 of the 16 mentioned implications for their well-being and mental health. The PIFs set a high threshold for reporting mental health issues by asking about diagnoses received, which appears to have led to under-reporting.

These considerations aside, given that insecure attachment is a risk factor for interpersonal and mental health difficulties but it was a minority of the current study’s insecure gifted adults who appeared to actually have such difficulties, could high intelligence be a protective factor? The latter is suggested by Wellisch (2010). Wautier & Blume (2004) found that a stable personal identity mediated against the mental health risk posed by insecure attachment, and might the strong personal identity of being intellectually gifted that the present study found (section 4.2.2, A1) perform this function? Whether the presence of giftedness constitutes a protective or a risk factor in terms of interpersonal relating and mental health has been repeatedly researched with completely contrasting results (Freeman 2013), though a recent meta-analysis (of studies on children, Jones 2013) concludes that it is more of a protective factor. Further research could clarify these issues by investigating whether insecurely attached gifted adults have a higher or lower rate of interpersonal difficulty and mental health issues in comparison with otherwise matched non-gifted insecurely attached individuals.

5.2 How giftedness and attachment style interact in the workplace

From the interviews it appears gifted adults encounter certain similar workplace interpersonal phenomena – such as gaining recognition for their abilities and being placed in the position of helping others – but that how these are experienced and reacted to can differ according to attachment style (eg. whether they enjoyed helping others and derived personal benefit such as self-esteem from it, or preferred not to be in a helping role – which accords with other research, eg. Geller & Bamberger 2009). This was most apparent regarding sociability at work, where some interviewees were comfortable socially and
enjoyed it (the Secures) whilst others were awkward and avoided it (the Avoidants). The fact that there was such a high proportion (nearly 50%) of Avoidants in the full sample might have some bearing on the stereotype that was encountered (in section 4.2.2, A3) of gifted people being socially awkward. Again there is the question of why this percentage is so high (to be addressed in a separate paper).

Because the Secures and Preoccupieds were more socially driven at work than the Avoidants, they also appeared to be more susceptible to being discontent at work if the social aspect was difficult (section 4.2.2, B2(i)), picking up more on phenomena related to the “hostility” and “threat” themes (section 4.2.3). They might be more perceptive of others being hostile or threatened/envious – but is it (always) true? Grobman (2006) describes how this can sometimes be a misperception born out of gifted people’s own unresolved guilt about having noticed they have certain advantages over others. As the Avoidants did not look to the interpersonal dimension for fulfilment at work, they appeared to be more immune to such phenomena, which might make them more robust at getting on with the job regardless of the interpersonal climate. But because Avoidants did not gain satisfaction from the interpersonal per se, they seemed more needy than the Secures and Preoccupieds of having satisfying job content and more susceptible than people with the latter attachment styles to suffering if their abilities were not being utilised at work (section 4.2.3).

In terms of the often-cited gifted trait of heightened sensitivity (eg. Lewis, Kitano & Lynch 1992; Jacobsen 1999b; Webb et al 2005; Daniels & Piechowski 2009; Nauta & Ronner 2013), it was only the Preoccupied interviewees who mentioned their sensitivity at work. And although all the interviewees described their always-active minds – “always running on something” (No.2, p.39:20) – it is only Preoccupieds for whom this took the form of worrying and ruminating about interpersonal relating (section 4.2.3). So perhaps the heightened sensitivity of giftedness only becomes interpersonally problematic if combined with an attachment style of being Preoccupied? These results do suggest the experience of giftedness being mediated by attachment style.

Several interviewees expressed that they perceived the cause of others being hostile or obstructive as being others’ insecurity. It is clear that if someone feels secure and
comfortable with themselves and their position they will be less likely to find it problematic to witness admirable and capable qualities in someone else, and therefore less likely to engage in behaviour that pushes that person down (and actually many interviewees evidenced that they themselves positively welcomed admirable and capable qualities in others). This colloquial usage of “insecurity” is not the same as attachment insecurity, but there are overlaps: if someone feels insecure in their position, fearing they might lose their job to someone else, the anticipated loss can activate their attachment system.

The “impact of context/environment” (section 4.2.2, B4(iv)) demonstrates that gifted adults of any attachment style can fulfil their career potential if there is a good match between them and the type of work environment. The importance of the right fit for gifted workers is also highlighted by Menel (2008).

Whatever the interviewees’ attachment styles and ratings of interpersonal relating, these are not permanently fixed states: some specifically mentioned change over time (section 4.2.2, A1) and how they’d overcome interpersonal difficulties that they’d previously experienced (section 4.2.2, A3). Attachment security significantly increased with advancing age (Section 4.1.2, Figure 4). Whatever difficulties are experienced, learning and development and improved interpersonal relating over time can bring about what is termed “earned secure” (Pearson et al 1994). And most of the interviewees showed a real interest in learning and developing in this area (Appendix 36), which is the focus of the researcher’s ongoing work.
6. **CONCLUSION**

This study contributes to the fields both of giftedness and attachment by providing a profile of attachment styles for a sample of gifted adults. It should be kept in mind however that the findings might be confined to members of Mensa as it is unknown whether or how the latter might differ from gifted adults who have not voluntarily joined a high IQ society.

Given this study’s limitations (see Section 3.3), these results should be taken as indications of the issues involved which could be investigated further, rather than relied upon as conclusive.

The study has suggested that while gifted adults might encounter similar workplace issues, how these are experienced and reacted to can be affected by attachment style, particularly in the area of sociability at work. It has described how not utilising abilities and/or experiencing interpersonal difficulty can be the cause of negative mental health effects.

The significantly higher proportion of insecure attachment found in this sample – which is a known risk factor for interpersonal difficulty – and the interview themes suggest that this population has a susceptibility to interpersonal difficulty, although their most frequently selected self-rating of workplace interpersonal relating on the One-Item Rating Scale was “somewhat competent”. Type of workplace environment – whether welcoming and employing or threatened by and therefore hostile to and/or obstructive of gifted ability – is a factor in whether interpersonal relations impede career progress.

This study emphasises that gifted adults are not a group made homogenous on the basis of their giftedness, and that how they behave or are reacted to in the workplace is affected by various individual and systemic differences that mediate the experience, manifestation and ‘outcome’ of giftedness, such as attachment style and the nature of workplace environment.

Further research would be useful with a sample not just derived from Mensa, using a higher number of interviews to verify interview theme trends according to attachment styles,
using a more sophisticated interpersonal relating Rating Scale, and incorporating a control of non-gifted adults. Also see suggestion at end of section 5.1.
REFERENCES


Gonschorrek, Christa. (noguera36@hotmail.com). (6th November 2013). Sonja’s Research. Personal email to S. Falck. (sonja.falck@btinternet.com).


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## Appendix 13

What interviewees said about their experience of participating in the research interview:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee No.</th>
<th>Excerpt from transcript (researcher’s speech is in bold italics)</th>
<th>Location in transcript</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>[switched off recorder before getting feedback]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 74              | I like coming here, talking to you, saying I’m gifted, because I’m aware of myself, so other people will say, wouldn’t say that, no, I like doing this because I’m intelligent and I like talking about that.  
**So it’s about something that’s being recognised? You’re saying it’s nice to talk to me about this. Would you say it’s because there’s something that’s quite a strong part of your experience that is being recognised, we’re talking about it?**  
It’s good for my ego.  
**Oh okay.**  
It’s an ego boost... I like being intelligent, I like saying, “Oh I’m intelligent”, or I like, I’m not going to tell people about this interview, I’m not going to boast about that. I don’t go that far away, and I also came because I want to help you research so you can help other people about it, that’s probably the main reason I want to do this, but I would also say that a small part of me likes doing it because I like being intelligent | p.17:24-p.18:10 |
| 156             | [switched recorder off before getting feedback]                  |                        |
| 2               | **Yeah we’ve kept within the time. Well it’s been really interesting to talk with you and thank you so much for coming and...**  
No problem, that’s really interesting, you’ve made me think about a few things....  
I think it’s really, really useful. I wouldn’t be surprised if MENSA want to somehow get you involved in work-shopping or something for their members... | p.55:23-p.56:2 |
| 167             | **Okay. Okay, well, that means that we’re really pretty much done with the interview. I don’t know if you’d like to say anything about what it’s been like for you to participate in this interview?**  
It’s been fine. I appreciate the ability to be able to help out. I hope it was helpful. You know, it felt a little therapeutic. | p.25:5-10 |
| 69              | Thank you, I enjoyed that, thank you very much.  
**Did you?**  
I did.  
**I’m pleased if you did.**  
It’s very rare you learn something more about yourself. It’s a profitable thing and I have profited from this, thank you. | p.35:30-p.36:5 |
| 55              | Have I talked your ear off?  
**Well no. You’ve... you know, it’s been very helpful. We’ve got through what I wanted to get through and...**  
Good.  
... thank you very much.  
You’re very welcome. It’s a weird thing to talk about, because you | p.44:20-30 |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Document Page(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Well I hope it’s been useful. Yeah, well it’s been really great for me, I hope it’s been okay for you to spend this time talking about these things. It’s been very interesting. I can tell you now that I wouldn’t say I’d need a de-briefing session, obviously I’d like to get the report you’ll send by email. I think it’s helped me as well because I’ve got someone who has an in-depth knowledge and an understanding of how I might feel and how I might relate to people. I think in a way it’s been very good to talk to you. It’s enabled me to be honest and frank and not have to do it with someone close to me, like a family or a friend, a family member or a friend, so to me it’s been very useful and I’m really glad to have participated.</td>
<td>p.36:10-22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>No real feedback given.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Well thank you very much for your time. We’re at the end of our questions and we’re exactly on time, so really thank you very much. It’s been interesting and we’ve covered all the things I would have liked to ask you about. I don’t know if, before we end, there’s anything you’d like to say about just what it’s been like for you to participate in the interview or any questions you have before we end? It was very interesting. Sometimes I had to find quick solutions and then find out something new, that’s quite interesting. It’s good to know somebody deals with that in the UK. I’m very much looking forward to see what will come out of this, and I’m happy to send you names of the German people, maybe they can help in your research.</td>
<td>p.37:23-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>Is there anything you’d like to say about what it’s been like for you or any other questions you have before we end? No I think the research piece that you’re doing is very interesting.... I’ve enjoyed the session. Oh well good. Sometimes it’s good to talk things through and reinforce what I’m thinking now. Also because people probably don’t often talk about this sort of thing. Yeah, it’s something that I’ve actually learnt to do actually, it’s enjoying the sharing part of it and it’s also good to hear about myself again and so I shall come out from a really quiet introvert type, it’s actually to start to enjoy people.</td>
<td>p.41:18-21 p.44:21-34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Well that brings us to the end so thank you very much, it’s been really interesting and thank you so much for your time. Yeah, it was very interesting to participate as well. Is there anything you’d like to say or ask or anything? I don’t know, how has it been, I would be very interested to read whenever you are... Yes well I’ll certainly send it to you. It will be many weeks before it will be ready. Yeah I know that, that’s understandable, it takes time to do it.</td>
<td>p.41:2-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>189</td>
<td>But yeah I’ll certainly send it to you. Whenever it’s done it will be very interesting to read it and have a think. I don’t know, I guess just because you seem to be very well read in the topic.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Is there anything you want to say about what it’s been like talking about all this or anything you’d like to ask me or anything before the end? It’s been really nice. I quite like talking about myself. It’s quite therapeutic. ...I think this kind of thing is just really sort of interesting to me...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>The interview was fantastic, you’ve been fantastic, you really are lovely to talk to. Well thank you, I’m glad you enjoyed it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 45: Overall work satisfaction.

Cells that contain data most strongly indicative of being satisfied at work are highlighted in grey.

Trend below suggests that regardless of attachment style, overall work satisfaction was higher if a person mentioned having a conducive work environment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Mentioned workplace environment being welcoming of gifted ability?</th>
<th>Happy in job?</th>
<th>Using full potential?</th>
<th>“Working well together” theme confirmed?</th>
<th>“Obstruction” theme confirmed?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secure No.74</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Very happy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure No.156</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure No.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure No.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Restless</td>
<td>Wonders</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fearful Avoidant No.167</td>
<td>No, but runs own company, so has been in control of creating a conducive working environment</td>
<td>Mostly</td>
<td>Mostly</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fearful Avoidant No.69</td>
<td>No, but the person’s profession is such that that would be the case</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fearful Avoidant No.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fearful Avoidant No.55</td>
<td>(Mentioned that such an environment would be her ideal)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Has experienced (freelance)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissing Avoidant No.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td>Not in current job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissing Avoidant No.43</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not in current job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissing Avoidant No.41</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Has experienced (freelance)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissing Avoidant No.68</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupied No.17</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Sometim es</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupied No.189</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupied No.30</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mostly</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupied No.36</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>