



## **‘Brilliant: But what for?’ Edith Pollet & Tatjana Schnell**

**Review of the article by Maggie Brown, 15-09-2016.**

Pollet, E. & Schnell, T. (2016). Brilliant: But what for? Meaning and subjective well-being in the lives of intellectually gifted and academically high achieving adults. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 5 augustus 2016.

Link to the full article: <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10902-016-9783-4>

In reviewing this paper, I focus on two areas: methodology and some interesting findings. It is not my intention to offer a comprehensive summary, but rather to whet your appetite!

I found the study to be methodologically interesting for many reasons:

- The researchers avoid operationalizing giftedness solely on, for example IQ scores. Instead, they recognize and shed light on some distinctions between High Achievers (HA) and Intellectually Gifted (IG).
- Similarly the researchers employ a dual conception of wellbeing by including measures of subjective (Hedonic) well-being and of meaningfulness (Eudaimonic). Here again, by avoiding oversimplifying they were able to tease out some potentially important and otherwise hidden differences.
- Regarding the previous two points, the research opens up important conversations about the constructs and measures used in this evolving area of study. Overlaps between the HA and IG groups are acknowledged – those in the HA group have not been ‘ruled out’ as having high IQ, and those in the IG group are not ‘ruled out’ as being achievers. Overlaps can also be found in the constructs and measures of wellbeing. Future research will need to carefully examine overlaps and distinctions in any measures and constructs used.
- Research on giftedness has historically focussed on children. This is a study of adults.
- The study examines the likely importance of work experiences to HA and IG, and makes a distinction between joy of work and meaningful work. The importance of school experience is also recognized and included. All of these areas are practically relevant for gifted adults, their employers and educators.
- Self-compassion is included as a potential predictor of subjective well-being. This is a quality that is likely to have particular relevance to those prone to perfectionism and self-criticism.
- The inclusion of a randomly selected control group (C) addresses methodological shortcomings in some research on gifted adults.

The researcher in me is excited about all of the aforementioned, and equally impressed with the statistical analyses. Use of 3 subject groups and an array of measures makes for some interesting data mining. Very useful in this emerging field of research, and the Results section is worth a careful read.

The clinician in me, (not to mention the gifted adult who has a gifted son) read this paper with curiosity. What can be learned about the relationship between giftedness in adults and well-being? The paper is worth a read if only because the authors do a good job of both summarizing and synthesizing relevant research and theories. But more than that, they add intriguing new information.

We learn, for example, that HA and the Controls scored significantly higher on both aspects of well-being than did the IG. Drawing on their own findings, and previous research, the authors offer interesting thoughts about what might account for the relatively low scores on meaningfulness and subjective wellbeing amongst the IG.

Personal development, including growth, goal striving and generativity, were found to be important to both the IG and the HA, but not to the Control Group. There were similar differences in the importance of self-compassion between the Controls and the two gifted groups; self-compassion was found to be significantly more important as a predictor of well-being for the gifted compared to the controls. Another interesting result was that while work was an important factor for all groups, joy at work was only found to be predictive of wellbeing for HA whereas meaningfulness of work was predictive for all 3 groups. Perhaps serious and intense endeavours trump happiness at times?

All in all, this study does a fine job of moving research on gifted adults forward. It provides useful and interesting information and raises questions that will intrigue researchers, clinicians, employers, educators and those who are gifted. Very worth a read.

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