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Gifted Adolescents and Multipotentiality: Links with Stress, Anxiety, Perfectionism and Career Indecision

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ABSTRACT

Gifted and talented students are often thought to sail through school and life, due to their superior academic or non-academic abilities. However, this is not always the case, as gifted and talented students have characteristics and needs that are as diverse as those of any other population.

Adolescence can be a particularly challenging time for these students, especially those who may consider themselves to be multipotential. Multipotentiality, defined as having varied and diverse abilities as well as the potential to succeed to a high level in a number of different fields, has been linked in the research literature to stress, anxiety, perfectionism, and career indecision in gifted adolescents. The current study aimed to investigate the level and manifestation of multipotentiality in a New Zealand sample of gifted adolescents, as well as its links to the aforementioned constructs.

A mixed methods, sequential explanatory research design was used to explore these topics in a cohort of 23 Year 13 students identified by their school as gifted and talented. The students completed a questionnaire that combined the Perceived Stress Scale, the Zung Self-Rating Anxiety Scale, and the Child-Adolescent Perfectionism Scale, as well as questions on multipotentiality and career decision-making. Analyses revealed high levels of self-reported multipotentiality among the participants. Results also showed that stress, anxiety, self-oriented perfectionism, and career indecision were higher for females than for males. Three participants participated in a focus group, where the themes from the questionnaire were discussed in further depth. Results from the questionnaire and focus group indicated that for gifted adolescent girls in particular, being multipotential appeared to exacerbate stress, anxiety, perfectionism, and career indecision. However, being multipotential was found to be linked to lower stress and anxiety in adolescent males. Implications and suggestions are made in terms of how educators and counsellors can be more aware of the existence of multipotentiality and the impact it may have on the mental health of gifted adolescents.

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