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Parent Perspectives of Behavioral and Emotional Development of Young High-Ability Children: A Pilot Study

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Abstract: We conducted a thematic analysis of 25 parent responses to open-ended survey questions from the Behavioral Assessment System for Children (BASC-3) regarding their young, high-ability children's behavioral and emotional development. Our analysis revealed four themes: (a) demonstrating advanced abilities, (b) displaying motivation to do well, (c) enjoying the company of adults and peers, and (d) experiencing difficulties regulating emotions. Further, three themes from parents of young typically developing children were also included as a comparison: (a) demonstrating academic strengths, (b) connecting with others, and (c) experiencing difficulties regulating emotions. These themes provide a first step in informing classroom teachers, counselors, and psychologists about young children's social, emotional, and behavioral needs and matching them with appropriate educational programming and intervention options. This paper also includes implications of the findings and suggestions for further research to maximize young children's gifts, talents, and exceptionalities.

Keywords: parents; gifted; high ability; young children; behavioral and emotional development

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1. Introduction

Parents play an important role in nurturing children in their early school years (Jeong et al., 2021; Ma et al., 2016). Parents' behaviors shape their children's intellectual, social, emotional, and behavioral patterns from birth to kindergarten and have long-term effects into adulthood (Gunderson et al., 2013; NAEYC, n.d.). Since the life experiences of young children are limited compared to those of adolescents, parents function as proxies to inform schools about children's gifts, talents, and exceptionalities (Hertzog et al., 2018; Jolly & Matthews, 2012). How parents think about or interact with their children can benefit educators and other professionals (e.g., speech-language pathologists, social workers, counselors, and psychologists) because parents' insight can help educators reflect on educational programs and improve teacher training programs, especially for kindergarten and early elementary school years (Ratliffe & Ponte, 2018). In return, parents and caregivers (e.g., grandparents, foster parents, adopted parents, and other trusted adults) can better support their children's needs across academic, non-academic, and other environmental settings (Hemmeter et al., 2018). The insight gained from parents' perspectives can initiate conversations at district, school, and classroom levels to promote opportunities that effectively support young children (Gagné & Gagnier, 2004).

Parents' awareness of their young children's behavioral and emotional development can assist them in providing support to nurture their children's strengths, gifts, and talents, which has far-reaching implications (Bierman et al., 2018). When young children face challenging situations, parents can help them develop resilience, skills, and character across environments. Additionally, researchers have indicated that young children who are academically advanced or highly able compared to others of the same chronological age are easily misunderstood by adults because their advanced abilities mask their social, emotional, and behavioral developmental needs (Baum et al., 2014; Besnoy et al., 2015; Cross et al., 2003). In such cases, parents or professionals with a limited understanding of their children's behavior might implement ineffective interventions that do not correspond to their children's specific affective needs (Garn et al., 2010; Hertzog et al., 2018).

This pilot study aims to investigate parents' perspectives of young, high-ability children's behavioral and emotional developmental characteristics by comparing them with those of typically developing children. The findings are an initial step toward understanding the attributive characteristics of high-ability young children as perceived by parents of high-ability children and what practices can best support them in the context of families and schools.

2. Young High-Ability Children

2.1. Definition of High Ability

The federal definition of high abilities in young children, as stated in the Marland report (1972), includes children who have "outstanding abilities" and those who are "capable of high performance" and have "potential ability" in different areas (ix). Despite definitions that can vary widely at state levels (Rinn et al., 2020), the definition offered by the state in which the study took place reported the following: "Academically or intellectually gifted students exhibit high performance capability in intellectual areas, specific academic fields, or in both intellectual areas and specific academic fields" (Article 9B; N.C.G.S., § 115C-150.5-8. A). Although not explicitly stated, young children with high ability may or may not have other diagnosed learning or physical disabilities. For our purposes, the term young children refers to the age range between six and eight years old, typically from kindergarten to second grade in U.S. schools.

2.2. Behavioral and Emotional Development of Young High-Ability Children

The early development of young, high-ability children often varies, as some learners present with characteristics that may challenge parents, educators, and stakeholders to consider their academic and socio-emotional needs beyond typical academic settings (Bildiren, 2018; Matthews, 2004). Examples include, but are not limited to, (a) above-average ability, (b) advanced communication skills, (c) high motivation, (d) task commitment, and (e) creativity (Renzulli & Reis, 2018). In addition, intellectual and social differences among precocious learners reinforce the concept that no two students are the same, suggesting the need to respect each learner and their individual needs when negotiating learning expectations and experiences that reflect their diversity (Conejeros-Solar et al., 2024; Kroesbergen et al., 2015).

Research on young, high-ability children included varied interpretations of their behavior and emotional development related to their cognitive abilities. Despite a lack of representative sampling and interference to help participants (Warne et al., 2020), Terman and Oden (1947) found that high-ability children demonstrated emotional well-adjustments and distinguished character traits. Additionally, high-ability children displayed varied interests, better reading habits, and more positive attitudes than typically developing peers

(Morawska & Sanders, 2009). Wilson (2015a) also found that gifted preschool children chose problem-solving and creative activities compared to typically developing preschool children.

Despite prevalent assumptions that students identified as highly able children are compliant and well-behaved (Moon, 2009), other studies revealed that these children experience psychological stresses and conflicts and may not know how to manage their negative emotions (Adelson & Carpenter, 2011). For example, in another study conducted by Wilson (2015b), young elementary school children's maladaptive behaviors such as 'temper tantrums', 'annoys other children', and 'physically aggressive' (p. 389) were strongly associated with giftedness in literacy. However, there was little evidence that giftedness in math was related to their negative behavioral characteristics.

Further, significant variations in young, high-ability children's cognitive ability and interests shape personal and academic development, emphasizing the need for choice related to placement options in curriculum and education settings (Lubinski et al., 1996). Thus, developmental variations present the need to assess behavioral and affective development at early ages to provide parents and stakeholders with individualized data designed to inform the education environment, appropriate planning, and guidance that may have a long-term impact on the high-ability children's adulthood and career-related choices (Lubinski & Benbow, 2000).

2.3. Parent Perspectives of Young High-Ability Children

Prior studies have evaluated a broad range of parent perspectives on topics ranging from gifted identification to programming options for their children (Colangelo & Dettmann, 1983; Garn et al., 2010; Jolly & Matthews, 2012; Walsh et al., 2012). Some studies show that parents often contextualize appropriate programming options by observing their children's behavioral patterns and emotional reactions. For example, Tay et al. (2018) found that parents considered STEM-related enrichment activities beneficial when they observed positive changes such as excitement in their children's attitudes and behaviors from experiencing a challenging curriculum or related activities that could be replicated at home.

Other parents perceived high-ability children's negative behavior increased when their school needs were unmet (Wellisch, 2019). The parents of highly gifted preschoolers observed that their young children academically and socially adjusted better through early entry programs and acceleration (Wellisch, 2019). Indeed, Kaplan and Hertzog (2016) reported a shift in gifted education from focusing primarily on academics to considering the whole child's development across different domains. On the other hand, some parents observed that gifted labels caused more behavioral issues. Pilarinos and Solomon (2017) discovered that parents perceived their children as having more social problems due to giftedness rather than due to the school failing to provide gifted services. Regardless of whether high ability plays a causal role in social problems, these studies indicate that parents' perspectives provide insight into their young children's psychological development.

A few studies on parent perspectives have also provided a window to the complex challenges of raising high-ability children. Peebles et al. (2022) found that parents continuously adjust their parenting skills based on the gifted children's shifting interests and emotional and behavioral needs. Other themes across multiple studies have discussed social isolation, frustration, and exhaustion related to raising young precocious children (Nordström, 2025). Some gifted children have co-existing exceptionalities, commonly referred to in the gifted education literature as twice-exceptional or multi-exceptional children (Reis et al., 2014). Raising multi-exceptional children can present additional challenges for parents and caregivers (Besnoy et al., 2015). Not directly related to young children but still relevant to parent perspectives, Rubenstein et al.'s (2015) phenomenological study revealed

that parents perceived distinct characteristics of their gifted adolescent children with autism and shared dilemmas and concerns regarding differentiated school programming. These articles reveal the importance of engaging parents and their perspectives when supporting gifted young children's specific developmental needs.

2.4. School Supports for Young High-Ability Children

Many states and school systems nurture gifts and talents during early elementary years to provide opportunities for gifted identification and advanced academic services (Matthews & Rhodes, 2020). Gifted education programming for young children includes enrichment opportunities in and out of schools (Gavin et al., 2013; Little et al., 2018); curricula interventions (Casa et al., 2017; Mooij, 1999); and accelerated opportunities, such as early entry to kindergarten or grade-level accelerations (Colangelo et al., 2004). Further, Kettler et al. (2017) discovered that preschool program coordinators face multifaceted challenges regarding training teachers in gifted education because the teachers lack educational licensure and knowledge of the fundamental understanding of teaching young children with high abilities.

In this pilot study, we investigated what parents observed of their young, high-ability children's behavioral and emotional development. We also explored how these perspectives can inform educators and researchers about the extent to which these issues may or may not be unique to high-ability versus typically developing children of similar home backgrounds. To address this issue, the following research question guided the present study: What are the perspectives of parents on the behavioral and emotional development of their young, high-ability children?

3. Theoretical Framework

The pilot study assumes that parents play critical roles in transmitting cultural norms, tools, or behaviors to their young children through social interactions (Vygotsky, 1978). This transmission shapes not only children's cognitive development but also non-cognitive development, such as behavioral and emotional growth. In that sense, parents' perceived understanding of their children's behavioral and emotional expressions provides insight into how these young children's needs are interpreted in and out of school contexts. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978) functions as a framework to explore whether certain behavioral and emotional development is unique to high-ability or shared with typically developing peers. This approach guides the study's analysis and discussion by emphasizing parental observations as a key factor in understanding developmental patterns in young, high-ability children.

4. Method

4.1. Research Design

The pilot study used "basic qualitative research" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 23), a common and typical qualitative design that uses an interpretive approach to investigating parent perspectives. The pilot study frames parent perspectives through a constructivist epistemological stance that assumes parents' observations and views create and reveal multiple realities about their beliefs, perspectives, and experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). We were interested in exploring how parents interpret their experiences interacting with their high-ability children (p. 24). By doing so, the researcher can move toward an understanding of the complex nature of behavioral and emotional development of high-ability children and the ways in which these are influenced by parents' backgrounds, values, and experiences with their children.

4.2. Participants and Data Collection

After the university's institutional review board approved the study, 122 parents of children ages four to nine participated through a purposeful sampling method. The study was conducted at a public charter school serving grades K-3 and located in the southeastern United States; all participants had at least one K-3 child who had attended this school and/or another school nearby. The research team met with parents on selected Saturdays from February to June 2022 to collect responses from Behavior Assessment System for Children ([BASC-3], Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2015) and related demographic information. Children participated in a series of individual and group assessments while their parents completed the demographic information and the parent measures. Parents answered the open-ended questions at the end of the BASC-3's Parent Response Survey (PRS) and identified their race, ethnicity, and gender. The age range of their children was five to eight years, representing Kindergarten to Grade 3.

The rationale for selecting the age range for the study was to match the description of kindergarten and early elementary school children defined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The first researcher transferred the open-ended responses of the BASC-3 to a secure Google spreadsheet for analysis. To protect the identities of parents and children, all identifiers were replaced with pseudonyms.

To identify a high-ability group from the participants' parents who completed the survey, we arbitrarily chose a criterion of top 10% and above (n = 21) on at least three categories of each child's two composite scores from the Screening Assessment for Gifted Elementary and Middle School Students (SAGES-3; Johnsen & Corn, 2018): the Reasoning Ability (RA) and Academic Ability (AA); their overall percentile score on the Test of Mathematical Ability for Gifted Students-Second Edition (TOMAGS-2; Ryser & Johnsen, 1998); and their percentile score on the Raven's Coloured Progressive Matrices (Raven et al., 1998). Four parents of high-ability students did not complete the open-ended questions and were excluded from the study, which led the first researcher to collect a total of 17 high-ability parent responses. The rationale for setting the criterion to the top 10% was based on Gagné's (2018) delineation of the integrative model of talent development (IMTD), in which he recommended selecting the top 10% of the overall achievement distribution as being those learners who need differentiated instruction beyond what the classroom ordinarily provides (Marland, 1972; National Association for Gifted Children, 2019). This 10% cutoff is also commonly used in many definitions of giftedness, including the childhood and adult definitions proposed by the National Association for Gifted Children (McBee & Makel, 2019).

For a comparison group of typically developing students, we arbitrarily chose scores that were at the bottom 25% (n = 21) on at least three categories or scores of these same measures (See Tables 1–3). The reason for analyzing the data of the comparison group was to investigate if there are attributive differences in the perspectives of high-ability parents. Although they are the bottom 25%, the score range reflected that of typically developing children. Eleven forms were excluded because they did not complete the open-ended survey, and two forms were excluded because parents did not identify the corresponding child's name. A total of eight parent responses were collected for the analysis. We use thematic analysis to analyze the two open-ended PRS questions from the BASC-3. The questions from PRS are:

1. What are the behavioral and/or emotional strengths of your child?
2. What are behavioral and/or emotional concerns you have about your child?

Table 1. Descriptions of each measure.

Assessment	Raw Score Range	Score Range Top 10%	Score Range Bottom 25%
Raven's	12–36	23–36 *	12–21 *
SAGES RAS	101–148	119–148	101–108
SAGES AAS	106–151	119–151	106–109
TOMAGS	74–137	120–137	74–108

* Raw score. Note: SAGES RAS—Screening Assessment for Gifted Elementary and Middle School Students Reasoning Ability Subtest; SAGES AAS—Screening Assessment for Gifted Elementary and Middle School Students Academic Achievement Subtest; TOMAGS—Test of Mathematical Abilities for Gifted Students.

Table 2. Demographic data of young, high-ability children.

N	ID	Parent Gender	Child Gender	Age	Parent Race	Languages Spoken at Home	Another Language Spoken at Home
Andy	18	F	M	6	Asian	English	Tamil
Ben	25	F	M	7	White	English	None
Cam	29	F	M	8	Asian	French	None
Dan	40	M	M	7	White	English	None
Emily	45	M	F	6	White	English	None
Frank	52	M	M	7	Asian	English	Marathi
Gina	55	M	F	6	White	English	None
Helen	57	F	F	7	Hispanic	English	Spanish, Romanian
Ian	68	M	M	6	White	English	None
Jack	76	F	M	6	White	English	None
Ken	80	M	M	6	White	English	Russian
Leo	81	M	M	6	Asian	English	None
Mark	84	M	M	6	Multi-Racial *	English	None
Nate	86	M	M	6	Asian	English	Telegu
Orwell	87	M	M	6	White	English	None
Peter	89	M	M	6	White	English	None
Quinn	103	F	F	7	White	English	None

* Black, Hispanic, Native American, and White.

Table 3. Demographic data of parents of young typically developing children.

N	ID	Parent Gender	Child Gender	Age	Parent Race	Languages Spoken at Home	Other Language Spoken at Home
Abner	23	F	U *	8	Asian	Other	Gujarati
Ben	42	F	M	7	White	English	None
Carrie	50	M	F	7	White	English	None
Dina	60	F	F	7	White	English	None
Eli	71	M	M	9	Asian	English	Telugu
Finley	90	F	M	7	White	English	None
Greg	91	F	M	6	Black	English	None
Harry	94	M	M	7	White	English	None

* Unknown.

4.3. Data Source

The BASC-3 was chosen as the instrument to analyze behavioral and emotional developmental characteristics of children with high abilities because the assessment has been validated and normed for use with children ages 2–25, and it often has been used in research on both typically developing (e.g., Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012) and gifted and talented children. Specifically, in the current study, we use the two open-ended questions, as mentioned above, at the end of the Parent Response Survey (PRS) related to

behavioral/emotional strengths or concerns to provide rich qualitative data on parents' perspectives of their children's behavior and emotions. The objective of this study was to gain a comprehensive understanding of young, high-ability children's behavioral and emotional development.

4.4. Coding Procedure

The first and the second researcher used an inductive, emerging coding process to analyze parent responses to the open-ended questions from the BASC-3 (Elliott, 2018). To ensure accuracy in identifying participants' ability levels, the researchers completed interrater reliability with two researchers on this team. Participant responses were then separated according to the child's academic level (i.e., high ability level and lower ability level) and entered into an Excel spreadsheet.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic approach to analysis was used to analyze the responses. The first two researchers familiarized themselves with the data by independently reviewing participant responses to generate an initial set of codes (See Figures 1 and 2). After this initial review of data, a "chunking" method was used to identify themes (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 31). The initial themes were documented on the spreadsheets, and researchers met to compare notes and generate initial codes. The researchers then searched for themes by discussing possible themes that emerged as they discussed their initial ideas with one another. This discussion yielded 21 codes for the young, high-ability children and 19 codes for the young typically developing children.

In the next step of the process, review themes, we organized the data and mapped/grouped data according to similar characteristics. This step resulted in five themes for the higher group and eight themes for the lower group. At the fifth step of the analysis, reviewers met to develop/name themes that emerged from the mapping. In this step, we finalized our edits by providing names to the themes and reviewed findings. During the final step, producing the report, salient points and main ideas were agreed upon to share in the final product.

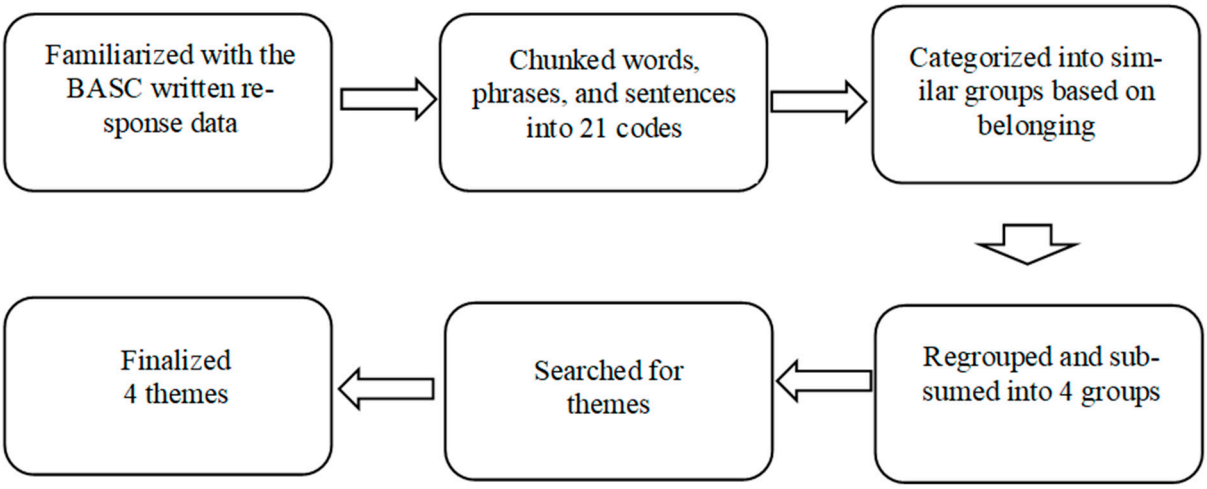

Figure 1. Coding Process for Young High-Ability Children.

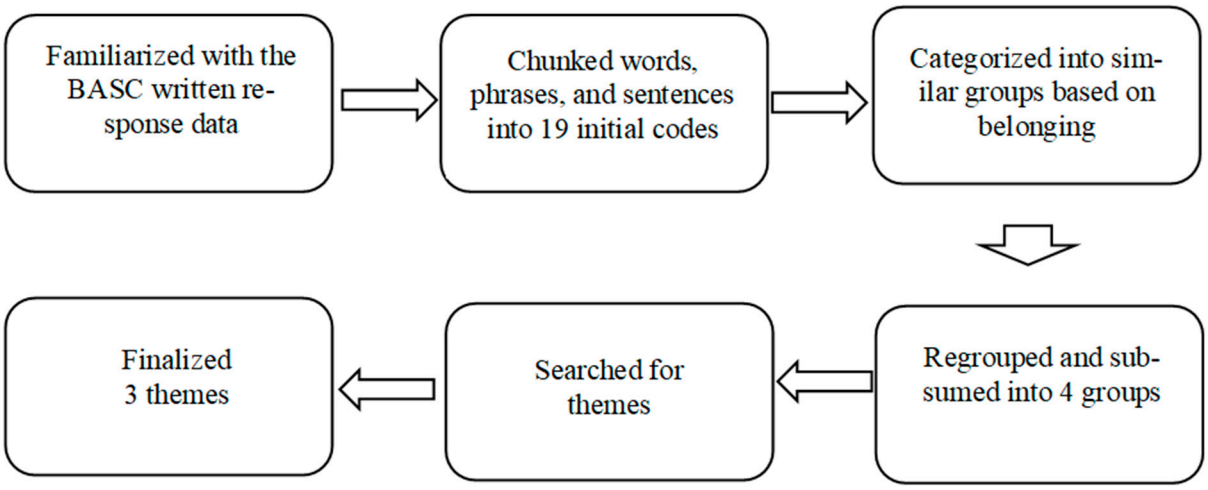

Figure 2. Coding Process for Young Typically Developing Children.

4.5. Positionality

A clinical assistant professor in Gifted Education, who was a doctoral student in Special Education with an emphasis in Gifted Education at the time of the study, and an associate professor who holds a Ph.D. in Special Education with an emphasis in Early Childhood were the primary coders. Before reviewing data for qualitative analysis, the first two authors—those involved directly in the data analysis—completed subjectivity and positionality statements (Hannes, 2011) to consider how their positions and prior experiences might influence their interpretations of the data. Both coders had experience conducting and publishing qualitative research prior to the onset of this study. The first researcher identifies as an Asian female with 15 years of experience in teaching gifted students and working as a gifted specialist in multiple school districts and schools. The second researcher identifies as a White female and had ten years of experience working with children and families receiving Part C and Part B services (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004) prior to becoming a faculty member.

5. Findings

Four themes emerged from the analysis of parents' perceptions of the behavioral and emotional development of their young, high-ability children. The themes from the perspectives of young, high-ability parents about their children's behavioral and emotional development include: (a) demonstrating advanced abilities, (b) displaying motivation to do well, (c) enjoying the company of adults and peers, and (d) having difficulty regulating emotions. Although not directly related to the research question, three comparative themes were drawn from parents of typically developing children, (a) demonstrating general aptitude and preferences, (b) maintaining good relationships with others, and (c) having difficulty regulating emotions.

5.1. Parent Perspectives on Young High-Ability Children

5.1.1. Demonstrating Advanced Abilities

Parents associated advanced abilities as part of their high-ability children's behavioral and emotional development. These advanced abilities had six codes: (a) learning easily, (b) ability to concentrate or focus, (c) manipulative, (d) competitive, (e) lacking organizational skills, and (f) anxious or analytical. Recurring patterns in the parents' descriptions of behavior addressed how much their children loved and enjoyed learning new information and concepts. The parents of young, high-ability children viewed favorably their children's ability to learn quickly and easily as one of their strengths. For example, for the question

about the child's behavioral and/or emotional strengths, Leo's parents wrote, "[he is a]. . . quick learner, grasps things in one go". Frank's parent described how the child responded when the purpose and process are provided in challenging circumstances: "His ability to understand the concepts easily, very easily adjusts to new situations if explained why and how we will be doing things. . ." Further, parent perceptions of advanced abilities included circumstances that required flexibility and adaptability. Other developmental observations of young, high-ability children included both academic strengths and concerns. For example, while Helen's parent believed that Helen learns relatively quickly, they also believed that she could be "worried about small, small things. and over-thinking like 'what if. . .'".

5.1.2. Displaying Motivation to Do Well

The second theme was that the parents of young, high-ability children described their children's behavioral and emotional development as showing motivation to do well in and out of schools. The four codes from the data included: (a) determined, (b) ethical/moral, (c) disciplined, and (d) conscientious. Orwell's mother expressed that their child was able to adapt quickly when faced with academic challenges: "strong self-confidence; resilient; hard-working and focused with school and hobbies/interests". Helen's parents also shared, "Persistent, loves to learn, fast learner, good memory" when asked to describe their children's strengths. Another parent observed how their young children respond to hardship and challenging situations. Andy's parent remarked that he seemed to persevere when the child became ill and demonstrated conscientiousness: ". . .works through illnesses and hard times . . .and is stressed when others don't follow rules".

5.1.3. Enjoying the Company of Adults and Peers

The third theme that emerged from parents' views on their young, high-ability children's behavioral and emotional development is how their children interact with parents, adults, and peers. Eight codes for the theme included the following: (a) leadership, (b) connection with adults, (c) awareness of privacy, (d) social, (e) emotional intelligence, (f) adaptability, (g) family-focused, and (h) caring. For example, leadership was one of the descriptions several parents of young children provided regarding their child's positive behavior when interacting with peers. Ken's parent noted that one of Ken's strengths is demonstrating "great communication skills both with adults and kids". Also, while some high-ability parents shared that their children connected and communicated well with adults and peers, other high-ability parents felt that their children were being manipulative to get what they wanted: "She. . . knows how to make people feel good, but also finds their weaknesses so she can get what she wants. . ." (Quinn's mother). Another parent described that their high-ability child would refuse to disclose their feelings towards adults, even to their family members: "Doesn't share feelings openly and needs prodding. Doesn't tell about his day at school even if he got in trouble for something" (Frank's mother).

5.1.4. Experiencing Difficulties Regulating Emotions

Lastly, high-ability parents observed uncontrolled behaviors of their children that seemed to contradict the abilities demonstrated in their academic and reasoning abilities. The two codes were associated with challenging behavior: aberrant behavior and communication challenges. While high-ability children and typical children share similar characteristics, such as coping techniques when faced with challenges, high-ability parents described specific and concrete details of their high-ability children's behavior that seem aberrant to them. Ian's parent was most concerned about the behavior: "He sneaks around and lies at home. [Most of the time], he wants to eat sweet things or watch TV (computer games). When he doesn't get his way he swears, kicks things, slams doors, screams, and cries". When the parent expressed the high-ability child's behavior concerns, they were

characterized as contradictory or erratic relative to other characteristics other parents described. Some specific behaviors or disabilities functioned as barriers to developing positive behavioral and emotional characteristics because they accompanied a specific learning disability, such as sensory issues, writing difficulty, or speech disorders. For example, Andy's parents described the child's disabilities: "Speech is not normal—he is in speech therapy. Peers and teachers find it hard to understand him. . ."

5.2. Parent Perspectives of Typically Developing Children

To provide nuanced context for the findings related to the parent perspectives of young, high-ability parents, the researchers also examined the survey data from the perspectives of parents of typically developing children. Although the response data from this group was relatively slim compared to that of the young, high-ability children's parents, three themes informed the ways in which these two groups perceived their children's behavioral and emotional characteristics. The themes include: (a) demonstrating academic strengths, (b) connecting with others, and (c) experiencing difficulties regulating emotions.

5.2.1. Demonstrating Academic Strengths

Parents of typically developing children generally focused on their children's academic strengths. Although the parents described their children's behavior and emotions as related to their children's choices and academic attributes, the degree to which children demonstrated specific advanced abilities was not apparent in the parent responses. The three codes included: (a) preferences in school subjects, (b) creative, and (c) intelligent/analytical. For example, Finley's parents described him as "verbal and gets his point across". In addition, Eli's parent also described their child as "good at art and imagination. . .like social studies and science".

5.2.2. Connecting with Others

The parents of typically developing children associated social aspects as a major reflection of their children's behavioral and emotional development. While high-ability parent perspectives described specific leadership behavior, these parents emphasized the extent to which their children maintained amicable relationships with others. The four initial codes included the following: (a) enjoying interacting with others, (b) emotional awareness, (c) personable, and (d) comparing oneself to others. For example, Greg's parent described him as "very affectionate, happy, funny, and enjoys being around friends and family, [and] likes to help and encourage others". Dina's parent also described her child as "[loves] to play and is easygoing when playing with other kids".

5.2.3. Experiencing Difficulties Regulating Emotions

The typically developing children's parents described specific behavioral and emotional characteristics when asked about behavioral and emotional concerns. These specific behavioral characteristics include distraction, fighting with peers, stealing, and repetitive behavior as barriers to developing behavioral and emotional skills. In contrast to losing control in emotional and psychological areas, these parents of typically developing groups related more specific problem behavior patterns. For instance, Eli's parent was concerned that the child "[stealing] stuff at school. . . getting] into fights easily in neighborhood". Further, Nate's parent, whose child demonstrated "empathy and plays well with others," also had "repetitive behavior" when the child was "stuck on some ideas". These two groups of parents described in detail what they were most concerned about their children through their daily observations.

6. Discussion

In light of the framework of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978), the perspectives of the parents play a major role in supporting the behavioral and emotional development of young, high-ability children in and out of school contexts. First, the four themes drawn from the high-ability parents revealed complex and dynamic connections between the children's behavioral and emotional development and that of advanced abilities, which include higher levels of focus, relatively quicker acquisition, and highly verbal behavior. The relative difference in parent perspectives can be contrasted with the themes of the parents of typically developing children. Another difference was that the two groups of parents attributed communication slightly differently from each other. The perspectives of young, high-ability children's parents included varied expressions associated with leadership skills, maturity, and their abilities to relate to adults compared to the perspectives of typically developing parents.

Although the last theme regarding lack of control over their children's emotions seems similar, the level of anomaly and aberrations shared by the parents of young, high-ability children seemed more surprising to these parents than similar behaviors were for the parents of typically developing children, whose descriptions were focused on repetitive behavior and physical fighting.

These findings from the parents of young, high-ability children are supported by the research conducted by Li and Shi (2019) and Zhang et al. (2017), in which high-ability elementary school children easily acquire memory and focus without interventions and strategies, compared to average-ability children. Further, parents also noted their children's leadership skills, which have garnered interest in recent gifted education literature (Mun et al., 2020; Ogurlu & Sevim, 2017). Secondly, the parents' observation of their children's connection with significant adults reveals the children's advanced verbal and communication skills. Beyond mannerism and courteousness, parents observed their young, high-ability children's ability to connect with adults as among their behavioral strengths. In other words, these children have a higher level of vocabulary they can articulate and thus make communications accessible to adults around them. This characteristic is supported by research regarding precociousness in reading and verbal abilities (Reis & Fogarty, 2022). Unlike some research that supports the claims that high-ability children are prone to having mental illnesses or suffer from psychological issues, many of the parents in the current study expressed positive characteristics of their children while articulating some challenges associated with their children's coping skills when faced with conflicts. Lastly, parents viewed that their high-ability young children struggled to regulate their emotions. The last theme shared some common behavioral characteristics with those of typically developing young children. Other common characteristics included positive character development, empathy, a strong work ethic, and emotional maturity.

In the face of conflicts and challenges, parents from these two groups describe their children's responses differently, which may be contextualized through differences in the parents' backgrounds and upbringing (Rindermann & Ceci, 2018); however, a stark contrast was observed in parents' perspectives on the behaviors observed when their children face challenging situations. For example, parents of high-ability children described challenging but somewhat abstract behavior that included issues with communication, losing control, or anxiety. In contrast, parents of typically developing children described concrete behavioral characteristics such as screaming at night, stealing, or getting into physical fights with friends. While these specific behavioral challenges align with studies associated with evidence-based interventions in special education (Cook et al., 2019), interventions for challenging behavior among high-ability children are less studied because of these learners' advanced performance in academics (Simonsen & Little, 2011).

How children express their thoughts and reactions opens opportunities for researchers to reconsider bridging the philosophical differences between gifted education and special education. In other words, exceptionalities could be operationalized through both gifted and special education. Favorable relationships with significant adults and parents' perceptions of their children are also influenced and shaped by sibling relations, parents' own upbringing, and the dynamics of the familial environment. Future research should investigate whether parents were identified as having high ability or receiving advanced services in elementary or secondary years.

Given the limited research in understanding the behavioral and emotional characteristics of young, high-ability children, how parents perceive high-ability children can offer a valuable contribution toward coaching teachers and personnel who interact with preschool and kindergarten-aged children in preschools, non-profit organizations, and faith-based educational programs. Drawn from early childhood research and models, other practices to support young gifted parents may include co-play (Chu et al., 2024) and coaching supports (Child Care Aware of America and the National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2023; Rush et al., 2003) provided in children's homes or natural environments (Division for Early Childhood Recommended Practices, 2014).

Lastly, affective curriculum for gifted students is part of serving and teaching gifted students (Weber et al., 2025). An appropriate curriculum can help develop young students' psychosocial skills and other related coping skills when faced with hardship, challenges, or barriers. Beirman and colleagues (2018) also discuss the imbalance occurring in supporting the social-emotional and behavioral needs of young children in comparison with the emphasis placed on academic learning. Strengths and areas of focus for the interventions are provided, as well as who may be coached on using these skills.

7. Limitations

Limitations were inherent in the pilot study. First, we used two prescribed open-ended questions from PRS. There might have been a carryover effect from the 175 PRS items because the open-ended questions appear at the end of this measure (Richards et al., 2003). Further, we did not provide definitions of the terms 'behavioral' and 'emotional' prior to completing the open-ended discussions, which may have allowed parents to apply their own understanding based on their personal experiences and assumptions. Moreover, among 19 parents whose children were a representative group of typically developing children, eight parents indicated in the demographic data that they spoke another language at home. Of those eight parents, six parents did not complete the open-ended questions and were excluded from the analysis. Additionally, due to the school's educational approach, researchers believe that the school also has a higher proportion of high-achieving students than would be found in most other U.S. schools. Lastly, self-selection of participating families also may have had unknown effects on the representativeness of the sample, despite our efforts to recruit all families at the school to participate in the study activities.

8. Implications for Future Study

Understanding the behavioral and emotional characteristics of young children with high abilities requires further research. Identifying specific behavioral and emotional skills can lead to developing and conducting experimental studies such as single-case designs that require one to several participants across multiple conditions or interventions (Simonsen & Little, 2011; Subotnik et al., 2020) to contribute to the evidence base in gifted education (Robinson et al., 2021). Much research on children with high abilities has been based on cognitive science, and researchers rarely perceive intellectual or academic abilities through the lens of behavioral science unless the children have specific behavioral challenges or

disabilities (Bishop & Hujar, 2021). The themes from this study revealed the need to explore further how behavior patterns of young children with high ability manifest in their daily lives as parents perceive them. Although gifted education empirical research has viewed the social and emotional characteristics through the lens of cognitive science, it is important to consider what types of behavioral interventions may be needed for parent coaching, which may result in support to redirect and improve their children's emotional and behavioral regulation abilities. Additional research on assessing and identifying young learners, such as kindergarten and early elementary school children, should be aimed at developing specific training to help administrators, teachers, counselors, and parents create support plans for students with high academic or intellectual abilities who also exhibit challenging behavior problems or other disabilities (Ritchotte & Zaghlawan, 2019). Further research with a larger sample across schools or districts will yield more generalizable findings and confirm, disconfirm, or build upon the findings reported here. A follow-up study might also benefit from using focus groups or in-depth interviews to obtain more varied perspectives and information.

Gifted specialists, counselors, and psychologists must consider how they communicate to parents and caregivers about assessing students' needs and how to collaborate effectively with parents to support their children's affective needs (Manz & Bracaliello, 2016). Depending on students' needs based on cultural, linguistic, and economic backgrounds (Ecker-Lyster et al., 2021), special education teachers also can and should collaborate deliberately with gifted education teachers to screen, identify, and serve high-ability children with behavioral challenges.

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