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# The Drama Of The Gifted Child: The Search For The True Self, Third Edition

COMPLETELY REVISED AND UPDATED WITH A NEW AFTERWORD

*"Rare and compelling in its compassion and its unassuming eloquence... her examples are so vivid and so ordinary that they touch the hurt child in us all."*—*New York Magazine*

## THE DRAMA OF THE GIFTED CHILD

The Search for  
the True Self



ALICE MILLER



## Synopsis

Why are many of the most successful people plagued by feelings of emptiness and alienation? This wise and profound book has provided thousands of readers with an answer—and has helped them to apply it to their own lives. Far too many of us had to learn as children to hide our own feelings, needs, and memories skillfully in order to meet our parents'™ expectations and win their love. Alice Miller writes, "When I used the word 'gifted' in the title, I had in mind neither children who receive high grades in school nor children talented in a special way. I simply meant all of us who have survived an abusive childhood thanks to an ability to adapt even to unspeakable cruelty by becoming numb." Without this 'gift' offered us by nature, we would not have survived. But merely surviving is not enough. The Drama of the Gifted Child helps us to reclaim our life by discovering our own crucial needs and our own truth.

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## Customer Reviews

Alice Miller's "Drama Of The Gifted Child," was originally published as "Prisoners Of Childhood; The

Drama Of The Gifted Child," in 1981. I read the book over 20 years ago, and recently reread it. I find that it is just as relevant, wise and perceptive today as it was then. Ms. Miller was a practicing psychoanalyst, who gave up her work with patients to write books, for the layperson, primarily dealing with early childhood abuse. In a new Forward, Miller continues to disavow psychoanalysis. Although I am not in agreement with her on this, she continues to be one of my heroes. Ms. Miller, who writes an elegant and easily understandable prose, discusses here the issue of children raised by a narcissistic parent(s). She explains that this book is not about high I.Q. children, but about those who were able to survive an abusive childhood because they developed an adequate defense system. At a very early age the child intuitively apprehends the parent's needs. Since the parent, especially the mother, is the child's soul source of survival, the child strives to please, fearing disapproval, or abandonment. Thus, the child sublimates his needs for the parent's. Roles reverse and the child frequently takes on the parent's responsibility as emotional caregiver. This impedes the growth of a child's true identity, and a "loss of self" frequently occurs. The child adapts by not "feeling" his own needs, and develops finely tuned antennae, focusing intensely on the needs of the all important other. Ms. Miller writes, "An abused child, (emotionally), does not know it is being abused, and in order to survive and avoid the unbearable pain, the mind is provided with a remarkable mechanism, the 'gift' of 'repression,' which stores these experiences in a place outside of consciousness.

Miller has created a work that reaches into the soul and guides the reader through innermost (sometimes forgotten) memories and details of early life. By showing very clearly how gifted children are often relegated to that back burner of the family because of their own innate self-sufficiency, she paints a vivid picture of unconscious, conditioned manipulation and a common lack of emotional maturity in the part of the parents. The child is essentially denied a self of its own, as the needs of the parent are always paramount. **WARNING:** This book is powerful and extremely insightful, but not the informational or educational manual you might expect from the title--it is very personal, and is likely to evoke unexpectedly strong emotions. Several people saw me with the book over a course of a few months, and immediately thought it would be for them: "Oh, I should read that--I have three gifted children!". I found myself almost discouraging their interest, as they clearly were looking for validation of this statement, not actual insight. The content of this book is extremely powerful and can be a painful experience, especially for a reader who finds himself relating to the content but not ready to face their own reality. Although it is certainly a classic, it is not a book to be offered capriciously to friends and acquaintances--a casual recommendation may be detrimental to your

relationship with the unsuspecting victim. In my case, my role as peacemaker and surrogate caregiver in the family left me with an overall sense of personal worthlessness and confusion about my own reactions to the events of my adult life.

When I read this book (which was originally published in German in 1979) for the first time in the early eighties, it completely swept me off my feet. Here was an analysis that explained why I was in search of my 'true self', why I felt my achievements were 'empty', why I felt empathy for others and antipathy for myself. The idea proposed by Alice Miller, in a nutshell, was that there are children who are able to feel and ease the emotional insecurity of their mothers (the 'gift' of the title), thus gain her love but in the process deny their own desires. These children grow up to become helpers in various roles, including therapists - like Alice Miller herself. They develop sensors for the subconscious signals of the needs of others. The problem is, they subconsciously deny themselves the pursuit of their own needs, and consequently cannot become who they 'are'. Which makes them prone to the illnesses which, according to the Freudian theory, go with suppressed desires - depression and grandiosity (the latter being just a way of keeping depression at bay). Alice Miller's ideas are based on her experiences as a psychotherapist who practiced for 20 years, and her own self-analysis. Her reasoning draws on some basic Freudian ideas: if the subconscious is brought to consciousness, the illnesses caused by the suppression can eventually be contained; the life of a person is rooted in her childhood and childhood experiences shape who a person 'is'. In the last part of her book she adds a theory derived from her work experience: when children whose needs have been denied in their childhood grow up and have children of their own, they can 'get rid' of their pain by inflicting the pain on their own children.

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