

Chapter 3

“Do Not Turn the Light Off” for Gifted Children and Adolescents with Overexcitabilities



3.1 Introduction: Short History of Giftedness and Overexcitabilities

The description of highly sensitive children, and children and adolescents with exceptional intensities and overexcitabilities goes back to 1899, when for the first time “Dr. Clouston of Edinburgh describes certain morbid conditions in neurotic children” (States of over-excitability, hyper-sensitiveness, and mental explosiveness in children, 1899, p. 292). The *Lancet*, where this news had been published, had described children with overexcitabilities as “neurotic” and attributed “certain morbid conditions” to them (ibid.). A few decades later, Dąbrowski, the well-known Polish psychologist, psychiatrist, and physician, published his first work about overexcitabilities (1937), a part of his “Theory of Positive Disintegration” as a stage in personality development (Piechowski & Colangelo, 1984).

When Dabrowski’s first translation to English was published (1964), he was already a well-known theorist. But though his definition and description of overexcitabilities are quite similar to the way we use this term up to now, and in spite of the fact that for about 40 years—since scholars in the field of giftedness had first adopted his Theory of Positive Disintegration—Dabrowski had not been considered a giftedness theoretician. Perhaps it had to do with the iron-curtain between West- and East Europe preventing the west from adopting theorists from communist countries; perhaps with communist ideology of equity, and Dabrowski’s avoidance of using the term “gifted” (though there is a Polish term for it; see David, 2016). It might also be that while the West accelerated education of the gifted after the Sputnik launched on the moon (e.g. Van Warmer, 1976), it was convenient for the west to believe that Russia and its allies excelled in “hard” sciences, but failed to see their achievements in other areas. Thus, studying giftedness, which focused since Terman, his colleagues and followers (Burks et al., 1930; Cox, 1926; Janos, 1987; Oden & Terman, 1968;

Seagoe, 1975; Sears, 1984; Terman, 1925, 1954; Terman & Oden, 1935, 1947) on emotional-social and educational characteristics, turned its focus towards nurturing the gifted to become technology-based scientists. In many countries this tendency has not changed since.

3.2 Overexcitabilities and the Gifted: Definitions, Literature Review and Main Theories

Mendaglio and Tillier (2006) summarize some definitions of overexcitabilities. According to them: “In Dabrowski’s theory, OE is a heightened physiological experience of sensory stimuli resulting from increased sensitivity of the neurons” (p. 69). Dabrowski (1972) used the term “psychic overexcitability”, defining it as “higher than average responsiveness to stimuli, manifested either by psychomotor, sensual, emotional (affective), imaginal, or intellectual excitability, or the combination thereof” (p. 303). Piechowski (1975) stated that, “Overexcitability means that the response exceeds the stimulus input” (p. 270). Piechowski (1991) noted that Dabrowski used the term “psychic overexcitability” to “underline the enhancement and intensification of mental activity much beyond the ordinary” (p. 287).

Ackerman (1997), and many other of her followers (e.g. Steenbergen-Hu, 2017; Wood & Laycraft, 2020), defined overexcitability as an intensified way of experiencing the world. Lind (2001) defined overexcitabilities as “inborn intensities indicating a heightened ability to respond to stimuli” (p. 3). Intensities of the gifted are a main issue also in the work of Daniels and Piechowski (2008), Lo (2018) and Piechowski (2006).

Tucker and Hafenstein (1997) have defined the five overexcitabilities typical to highly gifted children as:

Psychomotor Overexcitability. The manifestations of psychomotor excitability are essentially of two kinds: surplus of energy and nervousness. In nervousness, the emotional tension is translated into psychomotor activity such as tics, nail biting, or impulsive behavior ... The surplus of energy can be observed in animated gestures and taking on self-improvement tasks...

Sensual Overexcitability is expressed in heightened experiencing of sensory pleasures and in seeking sensual outlets for inner tension ... other manifestations of sensual overexcitability include marked interest in clothes and appearance, fondness for jewelry and ornaments...

Intellectual Overexcitability. The manifestations of intellectual overexcitability are associated with an intensified and accelerated activity of the mind. Its strongest expressions have more to do with striving for understanding, probing the unknown, and love of truth than with learning per se or academic achievement...

Imaginational Overexcitability. The presence of imaginational overexcitability can be inferred from frequent distraction, wandering attention, and daydreaming. These occur as consequence of free play of the imagination. Here, too, belong illusions, animistic thinking, expressive image and metaphor, invention and fantasy...

Emotional Overexcitability. Among the five forms of psychic overexcitability, the manifestations of emotional overexcitability are the most numerous. They include certain characteristic and easily recognizable somatic expressions, extremes of feeling, inhibition, strong affective memory, concern with death, anxieties, fears, feelings of guilt, and depressive and suicidal moods (p. 68).

Intellectual overexcitability (e.g. Daniels and Piechowski 2008; Mendaglio & Tillier, 2006; Piechowski & Wells, 2021) is, perhaps, best perceived both among mental health professionals and educators as connected to giftedness, even as a characteristic of high intellectual level. It is used as an explanation of some less desirable behaviors typical of many gifted, such as impatience, impoliteness, the ability to concentrate for long periods at a young age, curiosity, the need to be stimulated—many a time by subjects considered not age-appropriate, and the justified feeling of boredom often in class but also among peers and relatives. However, even in the twenty-first century it is still more socially acceptable for boys than for girls to express boredom.

Psychomotor overexcitability (e.g. Ackerman, 2009; Mendaglio & Tillier, 2006; Piechowski & Wells, 2021) perceived, quite often, as ADHD (e.g. Amend et al., 2004; Mika, 2006; Rinn & Reynolds, 2012; Tolan, 1994). Psychomotor overexcitability has been found to be lower than other OE's among the gifted (e.g. Rinn et al., 2010).

Both *Sensual overexcitability* (Mendaglio & Tillier, 2006; Piechowski, & Wells, 2021), also defined as Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) (e.g. Rinn et al., 2018), and *Imaginational overexcitability* (e.g. Daniels & Piechowski, 2008; Lind, 2000, 2001; Mendaglio & Tillier, 2006; Piechowski & Wells, 2021), result for many highly gifted children in false diagnoses, and thus, rather than being nurtured for their giftedness, they are treated as suffering from various psychiatric conditions.

Emotional overexcitability (e.g. Ackerman, 2009; David, 2019; Mendaglio & Tillier, 2006; Piechowski & Wells, 2021), often defined just as “sensitivity”, has been quite often perceived as a disadvantage, a characteristic that should be taken care of, a risk-factor common among the gifted (e.g. David, 2019; Karpinski, 2018; Mueller & Winsor, 2018).

Gender differences in overexcitabilities have been widely discussed, but the findings have been mixed, probably due to different definitions of giftedness, samples of different ages, backgrounds, and educational levels, and problems of measuring overexcitabilities. For example: in the study of Gross et al. (2007), females reported higher levels of sensual, imaginational, and emotional overexcitabilities than males, but in some other studies different results have been found. Piechowski and Miller (1995) found no gender differences in imaginational overexcitability. Brain sciences will shed more light and allow further, more accurate research of this important issue.

3.3 The Cultural Aspect of Overexcitabilities in General and Among the Gifted in Particular

As we mentioned in several other chapters of this book (e.g. Chaps. 1 and 4), culture plays a major role in understanding both the frequency and the power of the appearance on the various frames of overexcitability in general and among the gifted in particular. One of the first studies concerned with this issue (Siu, 2010) compared overexcitabilities of 217 gifted and 229 non-gifted school children in Hong Kong. 196 of the gifted group came from a gifted center located in a local university; they were classified as gifted after taking a battery of assessment measures, including standardized tests on intellectual abilities; 21 were chosen by the schools based on individual psychological reports. The overexcitabilities profile of this study was compared to that of Tieso's (2007a) to explore possible cultural differences. Significant differences were found between gifted and non-gifted. The difference between gifted and non-gifted students in the composite OE subscales was larger in the Hong Kong sample than in the American (ibid.). While mean scores for gifted and non-gifted students in Tieso's study were significantly different on the Intellectual and Imaginational OE subscales, with gifted students scoring higher on each subscale, in the present study mean scores for gifted and non-gifted students were significantly different on all OE subscales. Thus, it can be concluded that culture plays a significant role in overexcitabilities of the gifted.

3.4 The Gender Aspect of Overexcitabilities Among the Gifted

Gender plays a major role in the pattern of overexcitabilities both among the gifted and among the non-gifted. The most updated study showing these differences is that of Gallagher (2022), who analyzed the NEO-FFI and Overexcitabilities Questionnaire-II (OEQ-II), based on the NEO Personality Inventory (a personality inventory that assesses an individual on five dimensions of personality, the so-called Big Five), of a sample of 108 highly gifted middle school students. She found that gifted females had significantly higher scores on NEO-FFI neuroticism scale than gifted males.

Another, earlier study, that of Siu (2010) found, that while in the non-gifted sample females scored significantly higher than males on the Emotional subscale while males scored significantly higher on Intellectual, in the Tieso (2007a) sample females scored significantly higher than males on the Emotional and Sensual OE subscales. But among the gifted, the pattern of overexcitabilities was similar for both genders: significant differences were found in both sensual and emotional overexcitabilities. Martowska and Romanowicz (2020), who used the same means to find gender differences in overexcitabilities among musicians found that female musicians scored significantly higher in sensual, imaginational, and intellectual OEs

compared to the women from the control group, while male musicians scored significantly higher in sensual and emotional OEs and lower in psychomotor OE compared to the men from the control group. They also found that the number of individuals showing high emotional and high sensual OEs was more than twice as high in the group of musicians than in the control group.

3.5 Overexcitabilities of the Gifted and Brain Sciences

3.5.1 *Short History*

The study of giftedness and neuropsychology had substantially accelerated since the beginning of the twenty first century. This development has occurred simultaneously with the study of connections between neuropsychology and learning, training and exercising, as well as medical conditions, such as injuries and traumas, that change the human brain. New knowledge about overexcitabilities has also been added by learning about brain connectivity, and the use of new means for measuring brain activation, previously used mainly in the medical area—illnesses and disorders.

3.5.2 *Overexcitabilities, Intensities an Asynchronous Development and Giftedness*

One of the main connections between overexcitabilities and intensities (e.g. Daniels & Piechowski, 2008; Falk & Miller, 2009; Lo, 2018; Piechowski, 2006; Tucker & Hafenstein, 1997), which are characteristics of the gifted, has a major influence on everyday life. This influence is observed especially in the life of the young gifted who are perceived, in many cases, as strange, “unfit”, or “socially inferior”. Overexcitabilities and intensities are tightly connected to the asynchronous development of the gifted (e.g. Bailey, 2011; Silverman, 1997; Tolan, 2016); both have a high potential of interfering in learning and social relationships. A similar negative attitude is frequently applied towards those suffering from learning-disabilities, often defined as “difficult”, uneducated, or “neurotic” children or adolescents (e.g. Tordjman et al., 2018). Historically, though overexcitabilities had been originated from the condition known as “nervousness” (Wells & Falk, 2021), when reexamination overexcitabilities and defining it as intense experience, Piechowski and Wells (2021) mentioned that it was Dabrowski (1972) who first connected giftedness with overexcitabilities and thus gave OE’s a positive “flavor”, and stated that “psychoneurosis [= overexcitabilities] is not an illness”.

Individuals, especially children with high intensities or overexcitabilities have been traditionally treated as if it was their fault. Even young children have been expected, many a time, to “overcome” their sensitivities or intensities; not to do

things “too quickly” or “take easy” events or incidents that made them very uneasy. It had probably to do with the presumptions that it is easier for a highly-intelligent than to a less intelligent child to develop self-control. It was assumed that the intelligent child can, “with just a little effort” control themselves, their overexcitabilities not considered at all.

Furthermore, ADHD, whether when a child (e.g. Bussing et al., 2003; Theule et al., 2011) has it or a parent (e.g. Chronis-Tuscano et al., 2017; Johnston et al., 2012), has been recognized as one of the main causes of stress in the family. Overexcitabilities have not been recognized as such, and it is often the child who is “blamed” for this characteristic and “advised” to “overcome” it, to “mellow out”. This phenomenon has been described in the literature (e.g. Piechowski, 2006).

3.6 Giftedness, Overexcitabilities and Vox Populi

Connections between overexcitabilities and giftedness have been evident to those meeting gifted children, adolescents or adults: parents, other family members, educators or mental health professionals. However, as has been found in some meta-analyses, not all five overexcitabilities had significant positive correlations with intelligence. For example, Winkler and Voight (2016) found that the effect size of psychomotor OE was not statistically significant; the effect sizes of the emotional and sensual OEs were small; calculated effect sizes of intellectual and imaginal OEs were medium. Limont et al. (2014) and Yakmaci-Guzel and Akarsu (2006) did not find that all OE’s were positively correlated with giftedness. Bouchet and Falk (2001), Martowska and Matczak (2016), Nordin (2007), Piirto et al. (2008) and Van den Broeck et al. (2014) revealed that the effect depended on gender; according to Piechowski (2012), Steenbergen-Hu (2017) and Van den Broeck et al. (2014) such correlations depended on the intelligence level.

It can thus be concluded that though connections between giftedness and overexcitabilities are not simple, they are valid and have a neuro-psychological basis.

3.7 Brain Sciences as Intermediary Variable Connecting OE’s and Giftedness

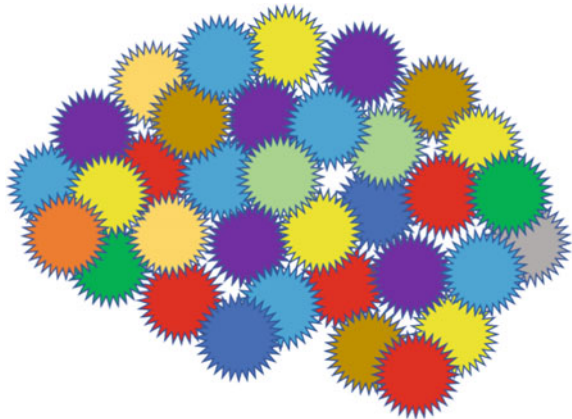
Though overexcitabilities have not yet proven as a direct measure of high cognitive abilities, the development of brain sciences has contributed to the scientific world as the missing link between what has been known as wisdom of the crowd and actual facts: they have supplied evidence to the assumption of existing connections between high ability and overexcitabilities (e.g. Chia & Lim, 2017; Newman & Malaia, 2013). These connections are related both to brain connectivity and brain activity, both elevated among individuals with high IQ and overexcitabilities.

Another result of connections between overexcitabilities and intelligence is the misdiagnosis many gifted individuals as disabled or suffering from a variety of disorders. Well before the term “overexcitability” was in use, Dabrowski (1937) was already fascinated by the fact that many great men, such as Michelangelo, Dostoyevski, Weininger, Dawid, or Tolstoy were labeled as having severe mental disorders (*ibid.*), which led to his Theory of Positive Disintegration. As the link of brain sciences was missing in Dabrowski’s days, it was not possible to draw a connecting line between greatness and overexcitabilities, using measurable means developed only later.

Some of the most important works about such connections have been done by Nordin (2007), Tieso (2007b), and Yakmaci-Guzel and Akarsu (2006), who discovered that gifted students had significantly higher intellectual and imaginal OE’s than their nongifted peers; Bouchet and Falk (2001) found that the gifted had higher emotional OE’s than nongifted, and Alias et al. (2013), who stated that sensual OE’s were higher among the gifted-talented than among regular students.

A monumental work that examined all five overexcitabilities through brain structure and activity was done by Chang, Kuo and their colleagues (e.g. Chang & Kuo, 2013; Kuo et al., 2012). Using MRI, Kuo et al. (2012) found positive correlations between sensual, intellectual and imaginal overexcitability and grey matter volume; and negative correlations between psychomotor and emotional overexcitabilities and grey matter volume of certain brain areas. Their work showed significant correlations between actual brain matter and intelligence—as measured by intellectual overexcitability, and supplied irrefutable proof of physiological connections between high intelligence, measured by high IQ, and heightened brain activity, or intellectual overexcitability (Fig. 3.1).

Fig. 3.1 Connectivity in the gifted, overexcited brain



3.8 Overexcitabilities as a Tool for Giftedness Identification

Overexcitabilities had been proposed as a complementary means of identifying giftedness and creativity (e.g. Ackerman, 1997; Bouchard, 2004; Chang & Kuo, 2013; De Bondt et al., 2019; Gallagher, 1985, 2022; Piirto & Fraas, 2012; Tieso, 2007b). Furthermore, it was suggested as means of giftedness identification when more traditional measures had missed up to a third of the gifted examined (ibid.).

Overexcitabilities have not only been listed as a characteristic of giftedness, as Bouchard (2004) has shown, the “ElemenOE”, a Likert-scaled observation checklist developed to measure five personality characteristics in elementary school children, has a predictive validity for identifying giftedness. Intellectual OE, which is one of these characteristics, has identified more than three quarters of those previously-identified-as gifted. It has also identified additional 42% who had previously not been identified as gifted. Ackerman (1997) had a similar finding: she found that taking OE’s into account identified up to a third more children as gifted. It can be concluded, that neuropsychological means are to be used for giftedness identification, with overexcitabilities as an intermediary variable.

3.9 Case Study: Helen

3.9.1 *From Creativity to Social Rejection and Back to Self-materialization*

Helen’s case study is about a highly intense, intelligent, artistically gifted female adolescent (about intensities of artists see, for example, Piechowski & Cunningham, 1985). Her life history, from early age, had been quite challenging, but the support, understanding and flexibility of her family helped her materialize her giftedness in spite of all difficulties.

3.9.2 *Family Background and Early Childhood*

The Leibovich family is mild-religious, living in a medium-size town in the center of Israel. Both parents are highly educated and do very well professionally and financially. The family has three gifted daughters¹: Helen, 21-year old, and two younger girls.

Helen was born with a severe skin condition, and needed constant care in order to maintain high hygiene level in order to protect her skin from infections. She stayed at home for the first 18 months of her life, during which her mother exposed her to

¹ This case study is a concise translation of a chapter in David (2015).

as many as possible stimulations: dancing while listening to music, jumping around and with her, telling stories, singing and listening to classical and contemporary musical pieces. Helen did not need a lot of sleep, so she enjoyed all these activities during many hours on a daily basis. Her mother used also to paint a lot, so Helen was exposed to the creation process, in addition to pictures of famous masterpieces shown by her mother. There were always people around; some were sometimes quite noisy, but Helen, who was exposed to it from her first month of life, liked this friendly atmosphere. Helen's mother used to take her along when she went out for her errands, and soon enough Helen was a regular visitor at museums, news exhibitions and performances, carried comfortably in her mother's sling.

Helen started eating by herself when she was just 6-month old, holding the food in her tiny fingers, spreading it around her and mess everything. Soon enough she started scribbling on a paper while sitting on the floor, using the colors her mother used while painting on a stretched cloth on a drawing stand.

When Helen was 8-month old she overcame her skin condition. At this age her accelerated development was already obvious: she started walking when 11-month old; the world instantly became much more fascinating for her. Walking around enabled Helen explore every corner of the house. She also started drawing on the walls then, but when she realized that her mother was not happy about that she learnt to hide the colored pencils...

In her second year of life Helen already had quite a rich vocabulary. She preferred Legos, building cubes and puzzles over playing with dolls. When she turned two, a neighbor's girl started taking her to afternoon walks, while her mother instructed painting classes at home. But Helen resisted as loudly as she could to this arrangement, so the girl was replaced with another one. Helen was not satisfied with the second one either; she started shouting and yelling every time the girl appeared at the door, so the mother gave up and let her stay home during classes. Helen would half-hide under the table, enjoying the noises, the colors' smells, follow each of the participants' work that interested her, and seemed to be very happy.

3.9.3 Elementary School

At age 6, when Helen started school, her teacher complained that she "drove her crazy" when, for example she made her peers disobey the teacher who told her class to open their math booklets. As a result, the teacher started insulting Helen and punishing her. This went on for about two years; by then Helen started her school dropout process. She still completed her homework in the afternoons, using books and materials she borrowed from the local library, and as the teacher did not report her school absence, Helen managed to hide this behavior from her parents for quite a while. When the parents discovered what had been going on, they consulted both the headmaster and the school counselor. At the end of this meeting Helen was labeled as "a typical child in a single parent family" due to the fact that Helen's father was working very long hours... After this "diagnosis" Helen started complaining about

various pains in order to skip school. The parents went from one doctor to the other, but nothing was found. At this point it was clear that Helen just did not want to go to school. This went on until the end of grade 3.

A major improvement was observed from the beginning of grade 4 until the end of grade 6, with Helen’s very experienced and understanding new teacher. Helen became a model student: her achievements were excellent, she was chosen as the class representative, responsible for organizing many social and cultural class activities. Nevertheless, the situation was still far from perfect: the teacher complained that Helen adopted the roll of the class-clown (see Morrow, n.d.; Ruch et al., 2014; Sense of Humor in Gifted Children, 2022; The gifted ‘class clown’, 1986). Helen would tie students’ laces to each other and at the end of the class many of her peers found that they could not move; she made it a habit to write messages to a bunch of children and ask others to pass them during classes, making a lot of noise... The teacher was also puzzled by Helen’s picking up only boys for these pranks, and wanted her parents to investigate whether the child had “hormonal issues”.

At this stage Helen started participation in an afternoon skating group. The instructor was a young man, new immigrant from Russia, who was also a resident-psychologist; he liked Helen and paid her a special attention. She flourished during these years and her behavior had substantially improved.

3.9.4 Junior- and Senior High School

Helen started her junior high school with many of her good friends. Her grade 7 home teacher loved her, nurtured her and treated her as a precious diamond; as a result, Helen’s self-image increased. Along with just five other students from her class, she participated at the mathematics acceleration program located at the Bar Ilan University (The Program for Youth Talented in Mathematics, 2022). In addition, Helen started publishing poetry in two literary journals.

At the end of grade 8 Helen registered to another, more prestigious school. But after moving to the new school she left the math acceleration program as well as the skating group. The instructor told her parents that “she was going through something bad”, and advised them help her find another extra-curriculum activity. They did not accept this advice.

At the end of grade 9 Helen got an excellent school report, and everything looked fine, but underneath the surface a long period of depression started for her. When her mother noticed the change in her behavior, she found a film-making youth group for her. According to the mother: “introducing Helen to the magic of the cinema, changed Helen’s life”.

Unfortunately, the home teacher of grade 10 was a very religious, strict, rigid woman, who tried to enforce her beliefs and opinions on her students. Helen, who

objected to any brain washing tried to argue with her, but these arguments resulted in her teacher's negative reactions to everything Helen did.

One of the main issues that the school objected to was Helen's appearance. Helen, a beautiful tall blond, liked to dress in original cloths, matched with colorful accessories. Soon enough Helen's mother was asked to meet the headmaster to discuss "Helen's modesty issue". The headmaster said that he could not allow a student to "look like that". The mother asked about the meaning of "like that", and the answer was: "you know what I mean". The dialogue was stuck at this point, the mother left angrily and Helen continued to be the victim of her teachers' abuse.

Helen's high abilities helped her be a good student in spite of the poisoning environment, but school life had become unbearable. The bible teacher made her stand in the corner of the room during his classes. The Hebrew language teacher used to insult her with no reason. Being treated like that made Helen believe that something was very wrong with her.

While school became a source of suffering for Helen, her cinema studies were her remedy. She was socially accepted, even loved, by her peers. She became the leader of the group, and produced a feature about a boy who was rejected by his friends while in his dreams he was Peter Pan, loved by everybody. Helen wrote the script, chose the actors, and took care of the outfits; she submitted the film as her personal project that replaced her cinema matriculation examination,² but her school rejected her submission. Encouraged by one her cinema teachers, Helen contacted the manager of The Sam Spiegel Film and Television School in Jerusalem. The manager was very impressed and convinced the school headmaster to allow the submission. It was the first time that Helen got an external independent opinion of her talent and devotion, as well as of her excellent creative work.

Helen volunteered to produce a play for her school Purim festival in order to change the teachers' opinion about her; she also opened a kiosk whose income covered all expenses of the play she had written. The play was a great success, and Helen felt satisfaction and some hope, but soon enough her home teacher restarted ridiculing her in front of the whole class, calling her names and making her life miserable.

Helen did not share any of these happenings with her parents, but they could notice that she was depressed. She became introvert, avoided even shopping in order not to face anybody who knew her. Her school grades deteriorated; she used to say repeatedly: "I feel like I am worth nothing". She felt ugly, constantly hiding her face with her long hair. Her school absences became more and more frequent; gradually she stopped showing up at school. But in just a few weeks she completed the production of her film, saying: "when I come across other people they respect

² Cinema studies can be studied as a subject of choice (in addition to the compulsory ones) for the Israeli matriculation certificate.

me, complement me, always have something positive to say about my abilities and gifts. But among my teachers and peers I am unfit, I do not deserve being included”.

Coming to this sad but realistic conclusion, Helen wrote, without consulting her parents, to the head of Jerusalem Film and Television School, asking him to be accepted next September, a year before school graduation. The answer she received was that though she was accepted, she would not be able, due to the workload at the school, to take a full-time schedule if she wanted to complete her matriculation examinations and do national service,³ but she could take a part-time program. This answer made Helen very glad; however, her immediate problems were still unsolved. Around Passover Helen faced an extremely difficult situation at school. Every day she felt like returning to a prison with long corridors and barred windows threatening to close on her. Before her parents had an opportunity to help her, Helen left school. Her mother became alert watching her daughter sucking her finger while sleeping, and weeping bitterly. The mother also noticed, when getting on a bus where some of Helen’s class-mates were already sitting, that they all ignored her daughter. When asking “why” Helen answered: “because of the movie”.

After a 2-month absence the home teacher finally called Helen’s father, telling him that his daughter was missing for “two weeks”. The headmaster offered Helen to return to school if she promised to “behave nicely”. The father answered: “My daughter will not return until I decide that the school deserves her”. The whole family decided together that Helen had to move to another school.

3.9.5 Grade 12—Helen Finds Her Place

Helen started grade 12 in a private, non-religious school, intended mainly for problematic youths who had dropped out from the “good” state schools. But right from the beginning Helen was very happy there. Everybody respected her wearing long, modest cloths and admired her original appearance; students as well as teachers were open to hear about her religious family and their life style. The new school gave Helen both emotional and educational support. When she arrived too late, her parents got an immediate phone call requiring about her. As her class mates had already taken some matriculation exams in grade 11, Helen had to catch up quickly, in addition to starting a new track. While in her old school she had chosen the biological track, she had to switch as the new one did not have suitable laboratories. But all these obstacles did not stop Helen from succeeding in all her examinations. She also made new social connections, mainly with gifted adolescents whom she was surprised to find among her peers—mostly dropouts (see, for example, David, 2019). At the end of the year she received the “excellence prize” given to the best student of the year.

³ In Israel there is compulsory army service for all Jewish boys and girls aged 18. Religious girls are exempted, but many of them choose to do a 1- or 2-year civil national service instead.

3.9.6 *Helen's First Professional Steps*

Helen rehabilitated her self-esteem, self-image and self-belief. She did her national service under the instruction of a religious communication expert, who was also a film maker, a journalist and the founder of a radio channel. Her way to climbing the ladder of success had a solid base, on which she had built her career as an artist film maker.

When Helen's first film was screened in the "young film" TV program, along with her interview in the national channel, she became an admired celebrity.

In summa: Helen's problems since she was first labeled as "other", nonconformist and "unfit", were over. Her overexcitabilities, along with her giftedness and creativity, needed nurturing, but when she got what she needed, she finally materialized her artistic giftedness assisted by her overexcitabilities.

3.10 Conclusion

Helen's case study is in accordance with the findings of Lysy and Piechowski (1983), as well as Piechowski et al. (1985), where the members of the artistic group of the graduate students in the sample scored higher than the intellectually gifted in emotional and imaginal overexcitabilities, and higher than all 5 overexcitabilities in comparison to other adults. Unfortunately, school situation has not changed in this aspect, namely, overexcitabilities of the gifted are still not recognized by staff members, and thus are not taken into consideration. The result is, quite often, unhappiness, disappointment, even depression and (see, for example, Piechowski & Wells, 2021). But this situation can be reversed, as had been in Helen's case: when receiving the proper support, the gifted child or adolescent flourishes.

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