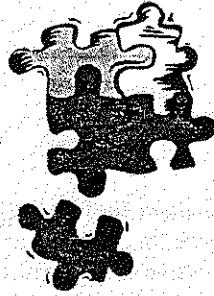


LIVING WITH INTENSITY



"The intricate thought processes that mark these individuals as gifted are mirrored in the intricacy of their emotional development. Idealism, self-doubt, perceptiveness, excruciating sensitivity, moral imperatives, desperate needs for understanding, acceptance, love -- all impinge simultaneously. Their vast emotional range make them appear contradictory: mature and immature, arrogant and compassionate, aggressive and timid. Semblances of composure and self-assurance often mask deep feelings of insecurity. The inner experience of the gifted young person is rich, complex and turbulent."

Linda Silverman

OVEREXCITABILITIES

Kazimierz Dabrowski

(1902 - 1980)

(Descriptions of overexcitabilities are adapted from Falk, Piechowski, Lind, 1994)

(Strategies are from Sharon Lind)

- Mode of functioning or dimension of personality through which input is filtered and in which a person reacts
- Five types: psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, imaginal, emotional
- Not present in all people – more likely in highly creative or intellectual – but presence of OE's do not necessarily indicate giftedness
- May have none or one or all five
- Give dimension and energy to intelligence and talents
- Part of Dabrowski's concept of developmental potential
- Facet of the Theory of Positive Disintegration – a theory of emotional and moral development

TYPES OF INTENSITY (OVEREXCITABILITIES)

(Adapted from Falk, Piechowski, and Lind, 1994)

PSYCHOMOTOR

- Heightened excitability of the neuromuscular system
- Capacity for being active and energetic; Love of movement for its own sake
- Organic surplus of energy [Rapid speech; marked excitation; intense physical activity; need for action]
- Psychomotor expression of emotional tension [Compulsive talking and chattering; impulsive actions; acting out; nervous habits (tics, nail biting); drive; workaholism; organizing; competitiveness]

SENSUAL

- Heightened experience of sensual pleasure or displeasure [Seeing; smelling; tasting; touching; hearing]
- Intense sexuality
- Sensual expression and outlets for emotional tension [Overeating; buying sprees; wanting to be in the limelight]
- Aesthetic pleasures [Appreciation of beautiful objects, words, music, form, color, balance]

INTELLECTUAL

- Heightened need to seek understanding and truth, to gain knowledge, analyze and synthesize
- Intensified activity of the mind [Curiosity; concentration; capacity for sustained intellectual effort; avid reading; keen observation; detailed planning; detailed visual recall]
- Penchant for probing questions; problem solving [Search for truth, understanding; tenacity in problem solving]
- Preoccupation with logic and theoretical thinking [Love of theory and analysis; thinking about thinking; non-judgmental introspection; moral thinking; conceptual and intuitive integration; independence of thought (sometimes criticism)]
- Development of new concepts

IMAGINATIONAL

- Heightened play of the imagination
- Rich association of images and impressions (real and imagined) [Frequent use of image and metaphor; facility for invention and fantasy; detailed visualization; poetic and dramatic perception; animistic thinking; magical thinking]
- Spontaneous imagery as an expression of emotional tension [Animistic imagery; mixing truth and fiction; elaborate dreams; illusions]
- Capacity for living in a world of fantasy [predilection for fairy and magic tales; creation of private worlds, imaginary companions; dramatization]

EMOTIONAL

- Heightened, intense positive and negative feelings [Extremes of emotion; complex emotions and feelings; identification with others' feelings; high degree of differentiation of interpersonal feeling; awareness of range and intensity of feelings]
- Somatic expressions [tense stomach; sinking heart; blushing; flushing, pounding heart, sweaty palms]
- Strong affective expressions [Inhibition (timidity, shyness); ecstasy, euphoria, pride; strong affective memory; feelings of unreality, fears and anxieties; feelings of guilt; concern with death; depressive and suicidal moods]
- Capacity for strong attachments and deep relationships [strong emotional ties and attachments to persons, living things, places; compassion, responsiveness to others; empathy; sensitivity in relationships; difficulty adjusting to new environments; loneliness; conflicts with others over depth of relationship; intense desire to offer love]
- Well differentiated feelings toward self [Awareness of ones real self; inner dialogue and self-judgment]



GENERAL STRATEGIES

- Focus on positive nature of these characteristics
- Cherish and celebrate diversity and individual differences
- Think about how these traits effect a person's perception of the world – through a different, perhaps kaleidoscopic, lens
- Use joint decision making to deal with any negative impact caused by these traits
- Accept the individual as is – including "bizarre" descriptions and expressions of feelings and alternative ways of viewing and doing things
- Use and teach clear verbal and non-verbal communication skills
 - Verbal
 - Listening
 - Responding
 - Questioning
 - Telephoning
 - Problem Solving
 - Nonverbal
 - Rhythm and use of time
 - Interpersonal distance (space) and touch
 - Gestures and postures
 - Facial expressions
 - Tone of voice, pitch, etc.
 - Style of dress
- Help individual to become aware of and responsible for own behaviors
 - Facilitate an understanding of impact of their supersensitivity and behaviors upon others
 - Facilitate an understanding of which behaviors may be inappropriate or distracting
 - Use natural and logical consequences
 - Teach about locus of control and how to effect change
- Teach about stress and stress management
 - Teach individuals to recognize tension in themselves – to anticipate problems or behaviors
 - Help individuals to create a comforting environment
 - Remember stress will exacerbate these intensities
 - Use simple management strategies
 - Talk about your feelings to someone
 - H.A.L.T.
 - Relaxation
 - Exercise & Diet
 - Meditation/visualization
 - Assertive behavior
 - Ask for help
 - Organizational and time management skills
- Remember most classrooms are not reflective of the "real world" – most people have choices about their environment and mode of working
- Allow time to pursue passions
 - Try not to remove passions as consequences
 - Cultivate gifts/talents



RESOURCES

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Living with Intensity

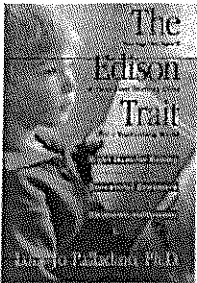


Born to Explore! The Other Side of ADD

- [Home](#)
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- [Causes](#)
- [Positive/Alternative Books](#)
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★★★★★

[Books I recommend:](#)



[The Edison Trait: Saving the Spirit of Your Nonconforming Child \(Dynamos, Discoverers and Dreamers\)](#)

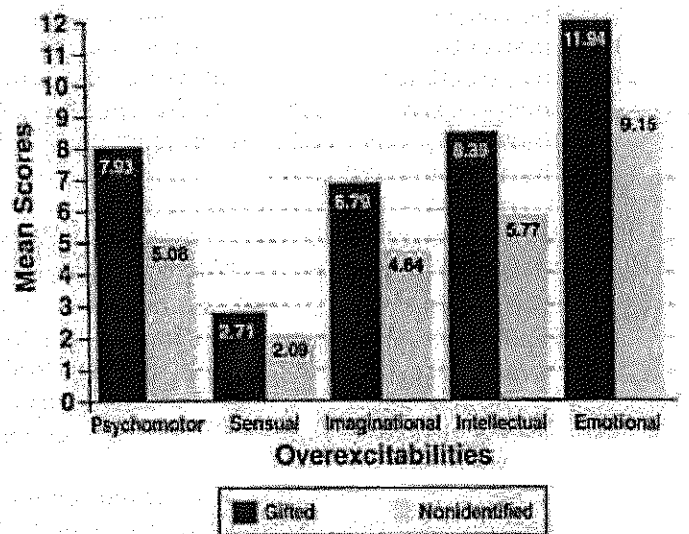


[Beyond ADD: Hunting for Reasons in the Past & the Present](#) by Thom Hartmann

"Overexcitabilities" Used to Predict Giftedness

Over the past few decades researchers have been trying to map out the correlation between "overexcitabilities" and giftedness. It all started in the sixties when Dabrowski proposed his Theory of Positive Disintegration, which stated that people born with overexcitabilities had a higher level of "development potential" than others. After decades of research, it appears that overexcitabilities can actually be used to predict which kids might be gifted. Of course, the very same overexcitabilities are being used by others as evidence of a brain defect.

In one recent study of high school students, overexcitabilities in "gifted" students were compared to overexcitabilities in students who had not been identified.¹ The chart below shows how gifted students had significantly more overexcitabilities than their peers.



Gifted N = 42; Nonidentified N = 37. total possible score for each OE = 103

Table from "Identifying Gifted Adolescents Using Personality Characteristics: Dabrowski's Overexcitabilities" by Cheryl M. Ackerman, Roper Review - A Journal on Gifted Education, Volume 19, No. 4, June 1997.

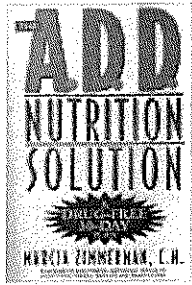
Note that the term "gifted" includes not only high IQ (130 or above) but also students who excel in one particular subject or who are deemed "creative."

Dabrowski described five types of overexcitabilities:

1. Psychomotor. An excess of energy that may be expressed as a love of movement, rapid speech, impulsiveness and restlessness.
2. Sensual. Heightened sensory awareness (e.g. touch,



The Minds of Boys:
Saving our Sons from
Falling Behind in
School and Life



The ADD Nutrition
Solution

More books...

taste, smell). May be expressed as desire for comfort or a sharp sense of esthetics.

3. Imaginational. Vivid imagery, use of metaphor, visualizations, and inventiveness. May also include vivid dreams, fear of the unknown, poetic creativity, or love of fantasy.

4. Intellectual. Persistence in asking probing questions, love of knowledge, discovery, theoretical analysis and synthesis, independence of thought. This is not the same as IQ, which is the *ability* to solve a problem. Intellectual overexcitability is the *love* of solving the problem.

5. Emotional. Expressions might include deep relationships, concern with death, feelings of compassion and responsibility, depression, need for security, self-evaluation, shyness, and concern for others.

People can have all five overexcitabilities or just a few. It's easy to see that someone with psychomotor overexcitability has a high likelihood of meeting the DSM IV criteria for ADD with hyperactivity. On the other hand, someone with imaginational (but not psychomotor) overexcitabilities might easily be described as inattentive and thus earn a classification of ADD without hyperactivity. In the real world, it seems that a bright child with overexcitabilities who is doing well in school will be labeled gifted. But if the same child underachieves in school, the ADD label might be used instead.

And many gifted students may be underachievers. There is evidence to suggest that as many as 45% of identified gifted kids with IQs above 130 have *below average* grades.² If that's true than half of all gifted kids might meet the DSM IV criteria for ADD! Or even more. A gifted student getting "only" B's is considered an underachiever. In the competitive world of grades, grades, grades, kids are taking Ritalin to help them achieve straight A's.

Why do so many gifted kids underachieve in the first place? The folks at CHADD would like us to believe they all have a brain defect which would be fixed by using stimulant medications. Proponents of the gifted, however, argue that these kids underachieve for other reasons, the most important being that traditional school environments simply do not appeal to many of the brightest kids.

Another reason a gifted child may be labeled ADD is negative behavior in the classroom. Researchers argue that the traits of gifted students, when expressed in a negative fashion, are nearly identical to the traits of ADD. Teachers typically associate giftedness with students who are compliant and obedient. Thus, teachers are not inclined to believe that a child who is acting out might in fact be gifted.³ And while there are many things that can result in behavioral problems in gifted students, researchers argue that most behavioral problems are developed in response to inappropriate curricula and instructional methods, or the social

climate created by the teacher and classroom peers.⁴

Interesting Note: Speaking of overexcitabilities, as I write this page I'm having to deal with a colicky infant. ADDers are often described as having been fussy or colicky babies, as if this is proof that there is something wrong with them. A popular theory about colic, or crying spells, is that it has to do with stimulation levels - too little or too much. These infants seem to be hyper-reactive to their environment, or overexcitable. So I found the following statement interesting when I read it yesterday. "Children who cry vigorously as infants appear, in fact, more likely to be vigorous and active problem solvers as toddlers than those with limp cries."⁵ Once again, problem behavior doesn't necessarily mean the child has something wrong with them.

Overexcitabilities and MBTI Temperament Types

For those of you familiar with the MBTI (Myers-Briggs) temperament system, it appears to be the divergent thinking SPs, NTPs and NFPS who are most often tagged ADD. There seems to be a synergetic combination of having overexcitabilities and a divergent-thinking temperament (this is my own personal theory). A convergent thinking SJ ("Traditionalist") with overexcitabilities will be inspired by pleasing the teacher, learning by rote memorization, being organized and getting things done. So this type of child is likely to be labeled gifted rather than ADD. On the other hand, a divergent thinking SP ("Artisan") with overexcitabilities is inspired by exploration, hands-on activities, and freedom of action. Forget passive learning and obedience! Obviously this child will have a hard time in a traditional school setting. And this child is therefore far more likely to be labeled ADD than the previously described SJ child, even though the child may be every bit as intelligent.

For more information on Dabrowski's theories see [The Theory of Positive Disintegration by Kazimierz Dabrowski](#) Presented by Bill Tillier

1. "Identifying Gifted Adolescents Using Personality Characteristics: Dabrowski's Overexcitabilities" by Cheryl M. Ackerman, Roeper Review - A Journal on Gifted Education, Volume 19, No. 4, June 1997.
2. "Smart Kids Have Problems, Too," by C. Johnson, 1981, Today's Education, 70.
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4. "Preventing Behavior Problems With Gifted Students" by J.R. Delisle, J.R. Whitmore & R.P. Ambrose, 1987, Teaching Exceptional Children, 19.
5. "What to Expect the First Year" by Eisenberg, Murkoff, and Hathaway, 1989

