

If the essence of my being has  
caused a smile to have  
appeared upon your face or a  
touch of joy within your heart,  
then in living I have made my  
mark.



Thomas L Odem Jr

# EMOTIONAL SENSITIVITIES AND INTENSITIES OF GIFTED

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One of the basic characteristics of the gifted is their intensity and an expanded field of their subjective experience. The intensity, in particular, must be understood as a qualitatively distinct characteristic. It is not a matter of degree but of a different quality of experiencing: vivid, absorbing, penetrating, encompassing, complex, commanding – a way of being quiveringly alive.

Piechowski, 1991:181

“When one studies life histories of writers, composers, artists, scientists, one is struck by the fact that from early childhood they manifest an enhanced mode of reacting to the world around them. Furthermore, their enhanced reactivity is coupled with intensified experiencing in cognitive, imaginal, and emotional areas. One observes a similar pattern in gifted and creative children and youth.”

(Dabrowski 1972 in Dabrowski 1996:6)

I have no nostalgia at all for childhood. Throughout the passing years, I have never had the feeling of a paradise lost, but rather of a paradise to be found, elsewhere, one that was waiting. A paradise inside me, buried.

Uncontrollable  
Unsatisfied  
Unmanageable  
Impossible  
Undisciplined  
Insatiable  
Insubordinate  
Unadaptable  
Unpredictable

Hélène Grimaud

# Overexcitabilities

Psychomotor

Sensual

Intellectual

Imaginational

Emotional

Without some degree of intensity in these areas, talent is mere technical facility lacking heart and fire

Piechowski, 2002

# Psychomotor

## Surplus of Energy

- rapid speech; fervent enthusiasm; intense physical activity; a need for action

## Psychomotor expression of emotional tension

- Compulsive talking and chattering, impulsive actions, nervous habits, workaholism, acting out



Sometimes in class I get bored because I understand what is being taught, and get a lot of energy. This energy seems to just swell up inside of me, then just flows over. Honestly, some classes are boring and I wish those who understand could go ahead and work, then maybe I wouldn't use my energy so harmfully.  
(F 13yrs)

Sometimes I was completely happy, as when my parents would suddenly decide to get away from our house in Aix. ...

No more school, no more neighbours, no more glances in my direction. All restrictions were left on the doorstep. ... During these little trips ... I truly felt I was finally present. I was me, indivisible, an actress in the moment – no longer marginalised, or watching with a sharp eye what was happening around me, events in which I could never manage to participate. Hiding exhausted me and at the same time it filled me with a stormlike electricity, as if the electrons of the universe were coming apart, churning my blood, my bad blood, my rebellious blood.

Hélène Grimaud

# Sensual

## Enhanced sensory and aesthetic

- heightened sense of smell, taste, touch, hearing, sight; delight in beautiful objects, sounds of words, music, form, colour, balance

## Sensual expression of emotional tension

- Overeating, buying sprees, wanting to be in the limelight

... there was one place where I did not have this feeling of strangeness. It was in the Camargue, and it was magical. A dream that emanated from the sea. ... Even though everywhere else I felt like a wrong note, here I was a part of a vast harmony. ... The Camargue was more than a landscape – it was a brief glimpse, a dazzling intuition of a harmony between my soul and what was to come. There for the first time, I had the premonition of great things, of my destiny.

I was a horse, wind, raging tide, soft hyacinth. I rolled in the waves. Finally at peace with my body, I was neither girl nor boy. I was simply, completely, and marvellously alive.

Hélène Grimaud

# Intellectual

## Intensified activity of the mind

- curiosity; concentration; problem solving; theoretical thinking, avid reading, detailed visual recall, detailed planning

## Passion for probing questions and problem solving

- Search for truth and understanding; forming new concepts

## Reflective thought

- Metacognition, love of theory and analysis, preoccupation with logic, moral thinking, introspection, conceptual and intuitive integration; independence of thought

During recess, to avoid the others, I would run and hide in a classroom or in the corridor, behind the coats hung on their metal hooks.....

I didn't get on any better with my classmates in the schoolroom. My teachers failed to keep me in line. Not that I was a bad pupil, it was just that I interrupted all the time, and I daydreamed when I should have been paying attention. I asked inappropriate questions; I was constantly overflowing with words.

Hélène Grimaud

I made mistakes and I called those errors by their real name: failures. My failures allowed me to make progress. In this profession, everything is a mind game: if you don't have enough confidence in yourself, you will never reach your potential, but if you never fail, you never progress.

Hélène Grimaud

Often I thought I was saved, and then, once again, I would be tormented by doubt. I advanced like a mountaineer across a snow bridge between two glaciers, my every step hesitant, testing the safety of the snow, evaluating the risk of an avalanche, eliminating the risky paths that led to dead ends, and even to death. I crept forward on eggshells. And sometimes I wavered.

Hélène Grimaud



# Imaginational

## Free play of the imagination

- rich imagination; daydreaming; use of metaphors

## Capacity for living in a world of fantasy

- fantasy play; imaginary friends; predilection for magic and fairy tales

I had no real friends, and no brother or sister. I didn't complain. My parents supplied me with everything that my imagination needed. With books, first and foremost.

My passion for books carried me along like a cloud ... The friendship offered by their characters protected me against the inanity of the schoolyard and the boredom of the classroom.

Hélène Grimaud

# Emotional

extreme and complex emotions; intense feelings; strong emotional attachments to people, places, things; sensitivity in relationships; loneliness; strong somatic expressions; strong sense of justice; identification with others' feelings; strong affective memory, concern with death; inner dialogue and self-judgment

I like to watch how individual a person is. If they have to follow a crowd to belong, or can be with just a few friends to be an individual.

I also like to watch how people react to others. If they respect others or if they treat others, different from them, like losers or just plain mean.

Finally, I like to just watch adults. They are all different from one another. The way they act towards children, other adults and finally older people differs so much it fascinates me. (F 14yrs)

Piechowski, 2006

“Nanou, you mustn’t ask in a loud voice why the concierge for the building walks like a “duck. /he limps because he’s crippled, and he heard you. That upset him, and you shouldn’t hurt people. It’s cruel.”

**I was three years old.** The next day we ran into our concierge at the same location, and I exclaimed: “You see. Mama? I didn’t say that man walks like a duck.”

I don’t remember my mother’s reaction to these words. I only recall the instantaneous response: **the concierge’s visible sorrow struck me to the heart. I felt it physically.** It was mixed with sadness, because the little girl he had known since birth had succumbed to the cruelty of tactlessness, the power to hurt.

I remember being **horrified by my own words**, and I remember as well my **remorse and suffering**. It had the **metallic taste of the schoolyard**, the same deep purple discharge as when I watched **my classmates mocking someone**, when I saw their **aggressiveness....**

Hélène Grimaud

... my earthly envelope constricted me, the awareness of my envelope, of this me that limited me, and from which I wished to escape. One day, seated at my school desk, concentrating on writing left-handed, ... all at once I experienced this “me,” my me that concentrated all my energy within the limits of my body, even as I longed to burst out of it. I remember feeling the pressure of the entire universe on my skin. It was an incredible, dazzling, overwhelming moment, an experience of my presence in the world that I would remember several seasons later when, for the first time, I encountered the piano – but with the exact opposite sensation.

That first time, at school, I felt closed in, imprisoned. Entirely concentrated on this me, I understood that I was the frontier of the world. ... This was the starting point, the big bang of my consciousness that forever afterward had led me to say – especially with regard to music – that each one of us is an act of magic, that we almost never take the wrong path, and that quite often we just haven't gone far enough. After all what is to come is not so much something to be discovered as invented.

That day at school, I identified for the first time the intense urge to be somewhere else, someplace better, to find the ideal place – as if I had known it previously!

## Level I: Primary Integration

dominant concern with self-protection and survival; self-serving egocentrism; instrumental view of others

*Dog-eat-dog mentality*



## Level II: Unilevel Disintegration

lack of inner direction; inner fragmentation  
– many selves; submission to the values of  
the group; relativism of values and beliefs

*A reed in the wind*

## Level III: Spontaneous Multilevel Disintegration

sense of the ideal but not reaching it; moral  
concerns: higher vs. lower in oneself.

# Level IV: Organised Multilevel Disintegration

self-actualization; ideals and actions  
agree: “what ought to be, will be”, strong  
sense of responsibility

*Behind tranquillity lies conquered  
unhappiness*

Eleanor Roosevelt

## Level V: Secondary Integration

Life inspired by a powerful ideal, e.g. equal rights, world peace, universal love and compassion, sovereignty of all nations

*A magnetic field in the soul*

Dag Hammarskjöld