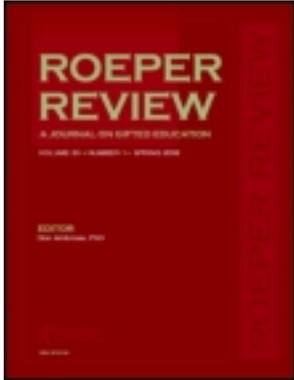


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Social Competencies and Difficulties of Gifted Children Compared to Nongifted Peers

Zipora Shechtman and Anat Silektor

This study, conducted in Israel, examined the social and emotional difficulties of gifted children, in comparison with nongifted children. The gifted children were further compared in two educational settings: segregated classes and pull-out programs. The 974 participants were from the fifth to twelfth grades. The dependent variables included loneliness, social competence, empathy, and self-concept. The results indicated that gifted children score higher on need fulfillment, empathy, academic self-concept, and lack of emotional anxiety and lower on self-disclosure and physical self-concept. Few differences were found between the two settings for gifted children. The conclusion is that gifted children differ from nongifted children only on some of the social–emotional variables examined, mainly for the better.

Keywords: gifted children, social competencies, social difficulties

In Israel, gifted children are identified on the basis of intelligence tests and account for 1% of the student population. They are offered several enrichment programs, the most common of which are segregated classrooms and weekly one-day pull-out programs in special centers. The goal of this study was to compare the social and emotional competencies and difficulties of gifted children with those who are not as well as to compare these characteristics for gifted children who are placed in segregated classrooms vs. pull-out programs. Understanding such differences may help in planning unique programs that address the special needs of gifted children.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gifted children often demonstrate specific emotional and social difficulties, most of which are explained by gaps in their development. Terrassier (1985) used the term *dyssynchrony* to describe both the internal gaps and the social gaps. The first refers to gaps in the child's intellectual, emotional, and motor development (e.g., the child can read but cannot write). Social dyssynchrony refers to the gap in their social development compared to other children of

the same age. Silverman (2002) used the term *asynchrony* to explain the internal and external gaps in children's development. Such discrepancies are expected to cause social, emotional, and adjustment difficulties. Yet, many researchers have indicated that gifted children do not have adjustment difficulties and that they are even superior in this respect to nongifted children (Beer, 1991; Gagné & Gagnier, 2004; Nail & Evans, 1997). Hence, no consensus exists among researchers regarding these children's difficulties.

Loneliness is one of the most common characteristics associated with gifted children. Robinson (2002) suggested that they feel lonely even when they are popular and that they try to hide their giftedness to save their friendships. Others explain their loneliness as a result of their rich internal worlds, which makes them enjoy themselves more than they do others (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993; M. U. M. Gross, 1993; Winner, 2000). Moreover, because the number of possible friends who share their interests is limited, gifted children tend to be isolated (Adams-Byers, Whitsell, & Moon, 2004; Janos, Marwood, & Robinson, 1985). As such, they may not have enough opportunities to practice social skills, such as conflict resolution, self-disclosure, and tolerance, all of which are important components of friendship. Friendship also requires the initiation of common activities, which gifted children may be unable to do, because many of their friendships do not address their specific needs and interests. Furthermore, gifted children are extremely sensitive to their surroundings. They quickly understand social situations, even unspoken cues;

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this may be presented in high empathy (Bouchet & Falk, 2001; Lind, 2001; Robinson, 1985) but also in vulnerability (Tieso, 2007), the latter often acting as a buffer to intimate relationships. Though existing findings are inconsistent, overall, the problems that are often associated with gifted children are related to loneliness.

All of this may affect the self-concepts of gifted children. Some researchers have found such children to possess a high self-concept, ascribing this to their high academic achievements (Hoge & Renzulli, 1993), whereas others have pointed to a low self-concept as a result of extremely high expectations, which generates a sense of failure (Freeman, 1985; Strop & Goldman, 2002). Actually, self-concept comprises several components, each of which may be presented in a different way. For example, gifted children were found to have a higher academic self-concept but a lower physical self-concept than nongifted children (Hoge & Renzulli, 1993). Even for the same component, results are inconsistent: Ablard (1997) did not find a difference in self-concept between gifted children and nongifted, whereas Bain and Bell (2004) found them to score higher than nongifted children. Pyryt and Mendaglio (1994) found that gifted children scored higher on academic, social, and physical components; Tong and Yewchuk (1996), in contrast, found no difference between gifted children and those who are not.

Furthermore, many of these difficulties may be related to the setting in which the gifted child is placed. For instance, such children, when placed in segregated classrooms, feel less lonely (Adams-Byers et al., 2004; Cross & Swiatek, 2009), make more friendships (Manor-Bullock, Look, & Dixon, 1995), and feel more popular (Saylor & Brookshir, 1993). But they also have a lower self-concept than do such children in heterogeneous classrooms, explained by the higher competition in the segregated classrooms (Janos & Robinson, 1990; Kulik & Kulik, 1992; Marsh, 1987; Shi, Li, & Zhang, 2008; Zeidner & Schleyer, 1999). Thus, there is a need to clarify the situation for the gifted children, considering the setting.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Based on the literature, we hypothesized the following for differences between gifted and nongifted children:

Differences between gifted and nongifted children:

1. Gifted children will score higher on most components of self-concept—behavioral, academic, social, and general satisfaction—but lower on physical self-concept and lack of emotional anxiety.
2. Because of their higher intelligence and success, gifted children will score higher on social competence and empathy.
3. Gifted children will score higher on loneliness.

The hypothesis for differences between settings for gifted children included:

1. Gifted children and placed in segregated classrooms will score lower on academic self-concept (due to the higher competitiveness) and on social competence (due to limited options to develop social skills) than children in pull-out programs will.
2. Furthermore, they will score lower on loneliness and anxiety, because of the limited social relations in the small segregated classroom, which are likely to buffer such feelings.
3. On other variables, there will be no difference between the educational settings.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 974 students in Grades 5–12 participated in the study. Of these, 330 had been placed in segregated classrooms for the gifted, 178 were in pull-out programs, and 466 were nongifted. The participants came from eight schools in two geographical areas of Israel: center ($n = 488$) and north ($n = 486$). Demographically, 281 were elementary-school students (Grades 5–6), 420 were in junior high (Grades 7–9), and 273 were high-school students (Grades 10–12); there were 553 boys and 421 girls, with a higher rate of boys among the gifted children, $F(2, 34.74) = 20.98, p < .001$.

Instruments

Loneliness was measured by the Loneliness Scale (Asher, Hymel, & Renshaw, 1984), which consists of 16 items in four components:

- Sense of loneliness (“I am lonely.”)
- Social status (“I have many friends in my classroom.”)
- Satisfaction of need fulfillment (“When I need help, I don’t have someone to turn to.”)
- Social capability (“I work well with others.”)

Responses were given on a Likert-like scale of 1 (*not true*) to 5 (*true*). Scores ranged from 16 to 80, with high scores reflecting high loneliness and low social status, need fulfillment, and social capability. Reported internal reliability (Cronbach’s alpha) was .90. Validity was indicated by significant correlations between scores on the scale and popularity scores, specifically sociometric status and best-friend nominations (range was .25 to .37, $ps < .001$ for their sample of 506 third to sixth graders; Asher et al.). The questionnaire has been widely used (e.g., Frankel et al., 2010), as has its translation to Hebrew. Internal consistency in the current study was .92, ranging from .72 to .84 for three of the subscales: Sense of Loneliness (5 items, $\alpha = .84$), Social

Status (4 items, $\alpha = .83$), and Social Capability (5 items, $\alpha = .72$). The Satisfaction of Need Fulfillment subscale had only 2 items ($r = .40$); note the low internal consistency of this subscale.

Social competence was measured by means of the Adolescent Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire (ICQ; Buhrmester, Furman, Wittenberg, & Reis, 1988). Its 35 items measure five components:

- Initiative (“Ask a friend to go to the movie.”)
- Provide social support (“Listen to the complaints of others.”)
- Assertiveness (“Tell friends that they have no regard for you.”)
- Self-disclosure (“Tell others personal things.”)
- Coping with conflict (“Control oneself during an argument.”)

Responses were given on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*don't try at all*) to 5 (*try very hard*), with higher scores indicating higher social competence. The reported internal consistency was .83. Test-retest reliability ranged from .69 to .89. Validity was indicated by a comparison with relevant scales; for example, correlations with self-esteem ranged from $r = .34$ to $r = .67$ (Buhrmester et al., 1988). Internal consistency in the current study was .88, ranging from .66 to .86: initiative (5 items, $\alpha = .72$), provide social support (7 items, $\alpha = .86$), assertiveness (7 items, $\alpha = .66$), self-disclosure (7 items, $\alpha = .81$), and coping with conflict (9 items, $\alpha = .74$).

Empathy was measured by the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI; Davis, 1980). The questionnaire, which measures both cognitive and emotional empathy, consists of 28 items—for example, “Sometimes I have difficulty understanding the other’s point of view”; “Sometimes I do not feel the sorrow that others experience.” Responses were given on a Likert-type scale from 1 (*not at all like me*) to 5 (*very much like me*), with a higher score reflecting a higher level of empathy. Validity was indicated by comparisons with relevant scales, for example, with the Empathy Quotient (EQ; Lawrence, Shaw, Baker, Baron-Cohen, & David, 2004); correlations were $r = .49$ for cognitive empathy and $r = .42$ for emotional empathy. The reported internal consistency was .75 (Davis, 1980). The reliability of the total score in the current study was .72. Both cognitive empathy ($\alpha = .78$) and emotional empathy ($\alpha = .38$) had 14 items. Note the low internal consistency of the Emotional Empathy subscale.

Self-concept was measured by the Piers-Harris Child’s Self-Concept Scale–Revised (Piers, 1984). The purpose of this instrument is to measure children’s perception of self. Its 80 items measure six components:

- Behavioral self-concept (“I am well disciplined.”)
- Academic self-concept (“I am good in school.”)
- Physical self-concept (“I look good.”)

- Social self-concept (“I have many friends.”)
- Lack of emotional anxiety (“I am often afraid.”)
- General satisfaction (“I am a happy person.”)

Responses are Yes/No, and the range of scores is 0–80, with a higher score reflecting a more positive self-image. The reported internal reliability ranges from .78 to .93; validity is indicated by a comparison with the Lipsitt’s Children’s Self-Concept Scale ($r = .68$; Piers). Internal consistency in the current study was .90 for the total score. Due to low internal consistencies for the subscales, we conducted a factor analysis (with varimax rotation), with eigenvalues ranging up to 5.81. Fifty one items were classified and thus range of scores in the present study was 0–51. Internal consistencies for the subscales were as follows: behavioral ($\alpha = .73$), academic ($\alpha = .63$), physical ($\alpha = .79$), social ($\alpha = .86$), lack of emotional anxiety ($\alpha = .71$), and general satisfaction ($\alpha = .63$). The scale has been widely used (e.g., Frankel et al., 2010), as has its translation to Hebrew.

Procedure

Schools were selected randomly from those that included segregated classrooms for gifted children, usually one school in a given geographical region. Nongifted students came from parallel classrooms in the same schools that host segregated classrooms. The pull-out programs were also selected randomly. In some cities the system includes only segregated classrooms for gifted children, whereas in other cities the preference is for pull-out programs. Segregated classroom are self-contained classrooms, located in a public school, one classroom per grade level, comprised of up to 30 students. The pull-out programs are conducted once a week, for 6 hours a day, are located in a special setting, and serve several schools in the area. Pull-out programs are terminated after ninth grade. All of the students referred to as gifted were identified based on a specially developed paper-and-pencil test administered by the Israel Ministry of Education and they account for 1% of the student population. There is no difference in the criteria for selection to one program or another; the setting depends on the geographic location.

Six schools in two different geographic areas (north and center of Israel) and two pull-out programs were approached and agreed to participate in the study. The study proposal was approved by the Ministry of Education prior to administering the questionnaires. The participants were told that they were helping out in understanding children’s social issues. No parental consent was required by the Ministry because the students filled out the questionnaires anonymously, in group format, led by one of the researchers. All instruments were administered in Hebrew. The students were told that they could refuse to participate, but only a few opted out (overall, less than 5%). We assume that the group format, within a lesson with the teachers’ presence, ensured almost full participation.

RESULTS

Data Analysis

Because scores on the study variables are nested in school classrooms, children’s scores cannot be assumed to be independent of each other. Thus, data were analyzed in a hierarchical model (mixed models) at two levels: the individual and the class. The class (42 classes) within a school (eight schools) was defined as the random variable. Individual-level variables included gender and all dependent variables—loneliness, social competence, empathy, and self-concept. Class-level variables included placement group (segregated, pull-out, nongifted) and school level (elementary, junior high, high school).

Differences in the study variables between the three placement groups were examined with models of analysis of variance, including placement group, gender, school level, and their second-order interactions. It should be noted that, due to the large number of variables and comparisons, tables display means and standard deviations and significant interactions are presented in the text.

Preliminary Analyses

Differences were first analyzed according to gender by placement group (segregated/pull-out/nongifted) and school level by placement group. Results indicated significant gender differences on all variables (alpha ranged from $p < .05$ to $p < .001$) but not Placement Group \times Gender. As for school level, there were only a few differences, but no Placement Group \times School Level differences. Therefore, all further nested analyses (mixed procedure) were conducted with school level and gender as covariates and their second-order interactions with placement group.

OUTCOMES

Loneliness (The Loneliness Scale)

Means and standard deviations by placement group for loneliness are presented in Table 1. The results indicate a group difference in regard to satisfaction of need fulfillment, $F(2, 39.80) = 4.33, p < .05, \eta^2 = .01$, with post hoc tests showing more favorable outcomes for gifted children placed in segregated classrooms ($p < .05$). In addition, there was a placement group by gender difference for need fulfillment, $F(2, 899.84) = 3.12, p < .05, \eta^2 = .01$, with more favorable outcomes (i.e., lower scores) for boys who are gifted placed in segregated classrooms than for boys in pull-out programs or nongifted boys, $F(2, 94.78) = 5.24, p < .01, \eta^2 = .01$. No parallel differences were found for girls (see Table 2 and Figure 1).

TABLE 1
Means and Standard Deviations of the Study Variables by Placement Group ($N = 974$)

	Segregated classrooms ($N = 330$)		Pull-out programs ($N = 178$)		Nongifted ($N = 466$)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Loneliness Scale						
Total score	28.05	(10.04)	29.34	(11.43)	27.41	(10.79)
Sense of loneliness	7.66	(3.47)	7.96	(3.83)	7.41	(3.63)
Social status	7.14	(3.21)	7.55	(3.87)	6.87	(3.43)
Satisfaction of need fulfillment	3.13 ^a	(1.55)	3.33 ^b	(1.63)	3.36 ^b	(1.81)
Social capability	10.12	(3.32)	10.46	(3.56)	9.76	(3.53)
Adolescent Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire (ICQ)						
Total score	128.40	(17.39)	129.47	(16.31)	131.55	(18.07)
Initiative	19.55	(3.61)	19.33	(3.47)	19.80	(3.57)
Provide social support	29.86	(4.66)	30.26	(4.32)	30.49	(4.68)
Assertiveness	24.49 ^b	(4.33)	25.39 ^a	(4.20)	25.31	(4.95)
Self-disclosure	20.56 ^b	(5.82)	19.74 ^b	(5.55)	21.59 ^a	(6.09)
Coping with conflict	34.04	(5.72)	34.73	(6.21)	34.37	(6.20)
Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI)						
Total score	94.20 ^d	(12.96)	96.39 ^c	(12.86)	93.14 ^d	(11.15)
Cognitive empathy	45.82 ^b	(9.90)	47.99 ^a	(9.64)	46.14 ^b	(8.80)
Emotional empathy	48.38 ^c	(5.77)	48.41 ^c	(6.21)	47.00 ^d	(5.46)
Piers-Harris Child’s Self-Concept Scale						
Total score	40.17	(8.36)	40.09	(7.77)	39.88	(7.89)
Behavioral	9.26 ^a	(2.13)	9.04	(2.02)	8.76 ^b	(2.26)
Academic	6.43 ^c	(1.65)	6.80 ^c	(1.31)	6.07 ^d	(1.80)
Physical	3.34 ^d	(1.78)	3.44 ^d	(1.73)	4.07 ^c	(1.33)
Social	11.24	(3.11)	10.56	(3.58)	11.48	(3.06)
Lack of emotional anxiety	5.64 ^a	(2.03)	5.79 ^a	(2.18)	5.15 ^b	(2.08)
General satisfaction	4.24	(1.14)	4.41	(1.04)	4.37	(1.02)

Note. Significantly different groups are marked with superscripts: $p < .05$ is a > b; $p < .01$ is c > d.

TABLE 2
Means and Standard Deviations for Loneliness by Placement Group and Gender ($N = 974$)

	Segregated classrooms ($N = 330$)		Pull-out programs ($N = 178$)		Nongifted ($N = 466$)							
	Male		Female		Male		Female					
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
	3.15 ^a	(1.50)	3.03	(1.50)	3.62 ^b	(1.75)	2.67	(1.08)	3.61 ^b	3.22	(1.89)	(1.78)

Note. Significantly different groups are marked with superscripts: $p < .01$ is a > b.

Social Competence (ICQ)

Means and standard deviations by placement group for social competence are presented in Table 1. The results indicate a significant group difference in assertiveness, $F(2,$

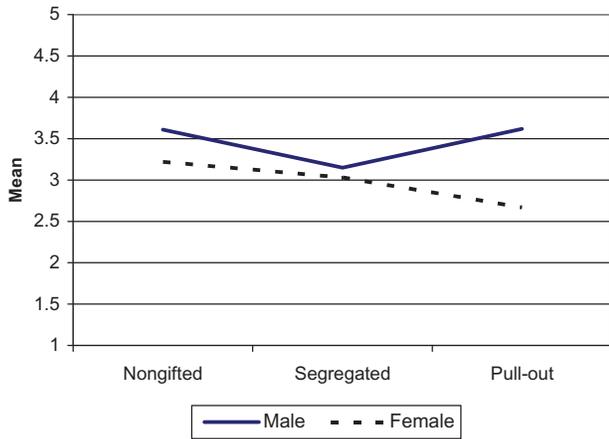


FIGURE 1 Need fulfillment on the Loneliness Scale by placement group and gender (color figure available online).

41.63) = 3.50, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$, and self-disclosure, $F(2, 36.48) = 4.04$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$. Post hoc analyses showed that scores on assertiveness were higher for gifted children who are placed in pull-out programs than those in segregated classrooms, and scores on self-disclosure were lower for gifted children (regardless of placement group) than for nongifted children.

Moreover, there were some School Level \times Placement Group differences (see Table 3 and Figures 2 and 3), in total score, $F(3, 35.99) = 3.28$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$, and in assertiveness, $F(3, 37.09) = 3.98$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .02$. Nongifted high-school students scored higher on the total score, $F(1, 44.53) = 4.52$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$, and on assertiveness, $F(1, 44.19) = 8.60$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .01$, than gifted children studying in segregated high-school classrooms. Gifted elementary students placed in pull-out

programs scored higher on assertiveness, $F(2, 36.86) = 4.38$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .02$, than both gifted children placed in segregated elementary classrooms and nongifted elementary-school children.

Empathy (IRI)

Means and standard deviations by placement group for empathy are presented in Table 1. A significant difference was found among all three placement groups. Post hoc analyses showed higher scores for gifted children who are placed in pull-out programs than for gifted children placed in segregated classrooms or for the nongifted on both the total score, $F(2, 37.06) = 6.64$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .02$, and cognitive empathy, $F(2, 35.80) = 4.74$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .02$. With respect to emotional empathy, scores were higher for all of the gifted children than for the nongifted children, $F(2, 35.57) = 7.79$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .02$.

Placement Group \times School Level differences were also found: total score: $F(3, 33.47) = 3.15$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .02$; cognitive empathy: $F(3, 32.51) = 3.91$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .02$; emotional empathy: $F(3, 31.12) = 3.40$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$. Post hoc analyses revealed that these were found in elementary school and junior high but not in high school (see Table 3). A pattern of differences was detected in elementary school: gifted children placed in pull-out programs scored higher than those in segregated classrooms on the total score $F(2, 33.21) = 6.35$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .02$ and on cognitive empathy $F(2, 33.20) = 6.69$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .02$, but were similar to them, and higher than nongifted children, in emotional empathy $F(2, 30.25) = 8.50$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .02$. In junior high, gifted children (regardless of placement group) were higher on empathy than nongifted children (total score: $F(3, 34.70) = 4.75$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$; cognitive

TABLE 3 Means and Standard Deviations for Social Competence and Empathy by Placement Group and School Level (N = 974)

	Segregated Classrooms (N = 330)						Pull-Out Programs (N = 178)						Nongifted (N = 466)						
	Elementary		Jr. High		High		Elementary		Jr. High		High		Elementary		Jr. High		High		
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Adolescent Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire (ICQ)																			
Total score	129.39	(14.92)	129.64	(17.29)	125.72 ^b	(18.93)	134.29	(13.99)	125.62	(16.57)	—	132.90	(18.43)	130.22	(17.26)	132.38 ^a	(17.96)		
Assertiveness	24.23 ^b	(4.27)	24.89	(4.27)	24.18 ^d	(4.46)	26.57 ^a	(4.11)	24.73	(3.95)	—	24.72 ^b	(5.43)	25.02	(4.96)	26.31 ^c	(4.15)		
Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI)																			
Total score	90.25 ^d	(11.48)	95.64 ^a	(13.41)	94.90	(12.42)	98.01 ^c	(13.71)	95.19 ^a	(12.11)	—	92.62 ^d	(10.57)	91.65 ^b	(11.09)	94.91	(11.49)		
Cognitive empathy	42.45 ^d	(9.49)	46.94 ^a	(9.77)	46.70	(9.44)	49.29 ^c	(10.73)	47.04 ^a	(8.68)	—	47.07 ^c	(8.54)	44.75 ^b	(8.92)	46.70	(8.61)		
Emotional empathy	47.96 ^c	(4.90)	48.75 ^a	(6.12)	48.21	(5.93)	48.78 ^c	(5.91)	48.14 ^a	(6.45)	—	45.51 ^d	(5.77)	46.92 ^b	(4.92)	48.23	(5.50)		

Note. Significantly different groups are marked with superscripts: $p < .05$ is a > b; $p < .01$ is c > d.

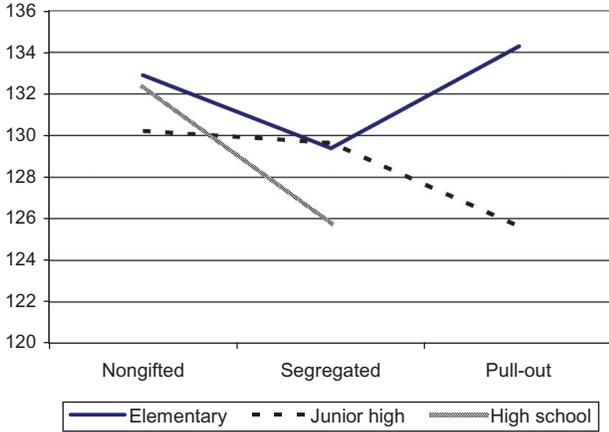


FIGURE 2 Social competence: total score on the Adolescent Interpersonal Competence Scale by placement group and school level (color figure available online).

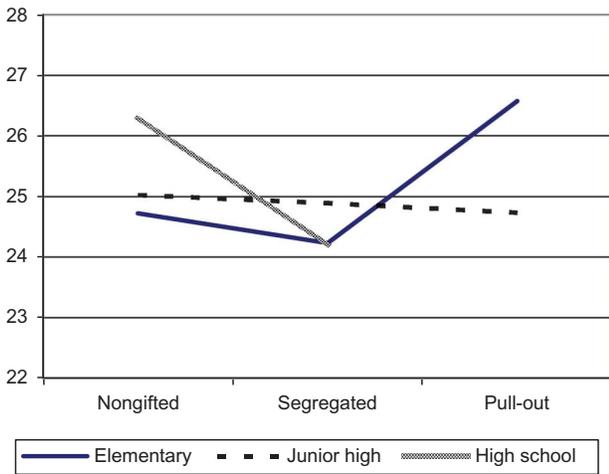


FIGURE 3 Assertiveness on the Adolescent Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire by placement group and school level (color figure available online).

empathy: $F(3, 33.78) = 3.31, p < .05, \eta^2 = .01$; and emotional empathy: $F(3, 32.88) = 4.33, p < .05, \eta^2 = .01$. Figure 4 illustrates the significant interaction for the total empathy score.

Self-Concept (Piers-Harris Child’s Self-Concept Scale)

Means and standard deviations by placement group for self-concept are presented in Table 1. The results indicated several group differences. Post hoc analyses showed that gifted children placed in segregated classrooms scored higher on behavioral self-concept than did nongifted children, $F(3, 34.85) = 3.72, p < .05, \eta^2 = .02$. On academic self-concept, $F(3, 35.21) = 8.42, p < .01, \eta^2 = .03$, and lack of emotional anxiety, $F(3, 35.68) = 3.39, p < .05, \eta^2 = .01$, all gifted children scored higher than nongifted children. In contrast, the gifted children all scored lower on physical self-concept than did the nongifted children, $F(3, 34.84) = 7.51, p < .01,$

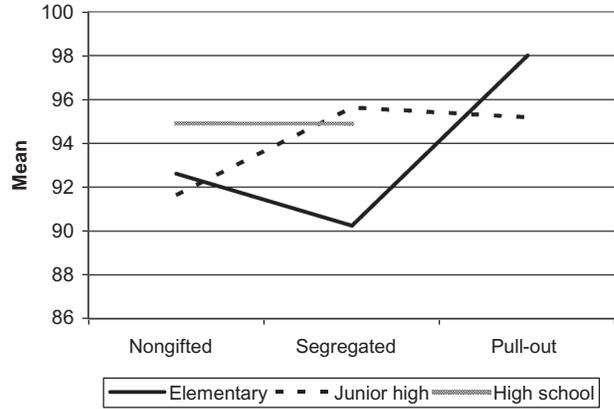


FIGURE 4 Empathy: Total score on the Interpersonal Reactivity Index by placement group and school level.

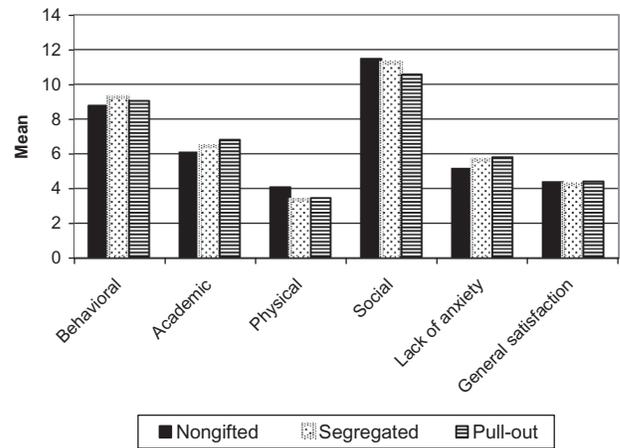


FIGURE 5 Self-concept scores on the Piers-Harris Child’s Self-Concept Scale by placement group.

$\eta^2 = .03$. No differences were found for school level or Gender \times Placement Group interactions. Figure 5 illustrates these differences.

Summary

Gifted children score higher on need fulfillment, empathy, academic self-concept, and lack of emotional anxiety and lower on self-disclosure and physical self-concept. No differences with nongifted children were found on any of the other variables. Most of the revealed differences were related to subcomponents of the socioemotional variables, were statistically significant at only the .05 level, and had small effect sizes. Few differences were found between the two settings for gifted children.

DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to explore social and emotional competencies and difficulties among gifted children

placed in two educational settings (segregated classrooms vs. pull-out programs) compared with those of nongifted peers. Results indicated that gifted children are characterized by higher satisfaction of need fulfillment (in segregated classrooms only), assertiveness (in pull-out programs only), empathy, academic self-concept and behavioral self-concept, as well as higher lack of anxiety (i.e., lower anxiety) but also lower self-disclosure and physical self-concept than their nongifted counterparts.

On the Loneliness Scale, no differences between the gifted and nongifted children were found for loneliness—total, sense of loneliness, social status, or social capability. Similarly, on the ICQ, no differences were found for social competence—total, initiative, social support, or coping with conflict. Finally, on the Self-Concept Scale, no difference was found for self-concept—total, social self-concept, or general satisfaction.

In other words, gifted children scored higher than nongifted children on some of the variables studied and scored lower on a few variables, but on most variables they scored similarly to nongifted children. The comparison of gifted children in the two settings indicated three differences—in assertiveness, empathy, and satisfaction of need fulfillment—with children in pull-out programs scoring higher on the first two and with children in the segregated classrooms scoring higher on the third.

Higher scores on need fulfillment for the gifted children placed in segregated classrooms were not expected. Satisfaction of need fulfillment is a subscale of the Loneliness Scale, and loneliness is one of the features often attributed to gifted children (Adams-Byers et al., 2004; Robinson, 2002; Winner, 2000). No difference on loneliness was found in this study between gifted children and their nongifted counterparts, except for the Need Fulfillment subscale. The higher satisfaction of need fulfillment indicated in the current study may be explained as follows:

1. First, the subscale is comprised of only two questions, basically referring to the children's perception of social support. Because gifted children receive special attention from teachers and other school personnel (e.g., smaller classrooms, special programs), they may feel that their needs are met more than nongifted students do. Due to the short scale and its low internal consistency, caution is required in interpreting results.
2. Alternatively, the finding can be explained by the homogeneity of abilities and needs of gifted children in segregated classrooms. Research has supported the assumption that gifted children placed in such classrooms have enough friends and can fulfill their social needs (Manor-Bullock et al., 1995).

The lack of difference between gifted and nongifted children on the other subscales of loneliness, in contrast to findings suggesting that the former are more lonely (Robinson,

2002; Winner, 2000), may be ascribed to how loneliness is perceived in each study. Because all of the questionnaires were self-reports, the difference in results may be attributable to the subjective nature of the responses in the current study. Perhaps what an observer or an objective evaluator considers loneliness is perceived by the child who is gifted as his or her own choice, because such children enjoy so many interests. A sense of loneliness is best assessed through self-reporting, because what matters are the child's feelings.

Related to loneliness is social competence. Although higher scores on social competence were expected for the gifted because of their higher intelligence, only one difference was found between them and their nongifted peers: they scored lower on self-disclosure. Self-disclosure is an important skill for maintaining a close friendship. Children may be good in other social skills and even popular yet feel uncomfortable in an intimate friendship (Duck, 1991). Gifted children may self-disclose less due to tighter control of self or greater sensitivity to social cues; this may be presented in high empathy (Bouchet & Falk, 2001; Lind, 2001; Robinson, 2002) but also in vulnerability (Tieso, 2007), the latter often acting as a buffer to intimate relationships.

A closer look at the results indicated that gifted high-school students scored lower on social competence than did their nongifted counterparts. This may reflect the higher interest of the former in matters other than those shared by the rest of the children. Alternatively, it may reflect some developmental issues, because adolescence is the age when the peer group becomes crucial for a child's development. The failure of those students who are more successful academically to find a group of interest and be accepted into a peer group may affect their social competence scores.

Based on the literature (Bouchet & Falk, 2001; Silverman, 1994), higher scores on empathy were expected among the gifted children. Fornia and Frame (2001) suggested that such children are particularly sensitive to the pain of others and react more emotionally to injustice and suffering. The current study confirmed that gifted children reported greater empathy than did nongifted children. It should be noted that on cognitive empathy and the total score, those who were placed in pull-out programs scored higher than those in segregated classrooms. Interestingly, there was also an age effect: the advantage of empathy for gifted children was present only in elementary and junior high-school children, disappearing in high school. Empathy is known to be developmental and to increase with age (Lovecky, 1997). This suggests that the early advantage of gifted children may be associated with their accelerated cognitive development. Overall, the finding of higher empathy among gifted children is important, because it can be used to enhance the development of leadership and similar skills.

Finally, differences between gifted children and nongifted were found in regard to several components of self-concept. Higher scores were expected on academic, social, and behavioral self-concept (Chan, 1988; Hoge & Renzulli, 1993) but

also on anxiety (C. M. Gross, Rinn, & Jamieson, 2007) and lower scores on physical self-concept (Hoge & Renzulli, 1993).

Though most of these expectations were supported, the higher score found on lack of emotional anxiety was not. According to the literature, the high expectations of those who are gifted, along with their strong ambitions and their tendency to strive for perfection, may generate a lot of anxiety (Freeman, 1985; Zeidner & Schleyer, 1999). This assumption was not supported in the current study, perhaps as a result of examining a different culture or the specific sample that was used. More studies are needed to better establish the issue of anxiety among gifted children. The lower scores on physical self-concept, though expected due to the many other interests that these children possess, also warrant further attention.

LIMITATIONS

The study has a number of limitations. First, the data were based on self-report questionnaires. Although the variables selected for this study are commonly measured through such questionnaires, particularly when large samples are used (as was the case here), self-report data are subjective in nature and therefore may be somewhat misleading, particularly when negative characteristics are considered. Future studies should include a social desirability subscale to explore such tendencies. Moreover, the use of other methods, such as open interviews, at least as an adjunct to self-reports might provide a clearer picture of the gifted children.

Second, it has been suggested that, among gifted children, those with an extremely high IQ may be more at risk for social and emotional difficulties (Dauber & Benbow, 1990; Hollingworth, 1975). This could not be corroborated in the current study but should be explored further. Moreover, there may be other individual differences (e.g., family relationships, personal characteristics) that have not been taken into account and also require further investigation.

Finally, because parental consent was not required by the Israel Ministry of Education because the students filled out the questionnaires anonymously, such consent was not obtained in the current study. Because some of the children were quite young, this may have been an unfortunate omission that will be corrected in future studies.

IMPLICATIONS

In light of the similarity between gifted and nongifted children, one could conclude that there is no need to address the needs of the former group in any special way. However, we reject this contention for four main reasons:

First, the revealed similarity does not necessarily mean that there is a lack of difficulties among gifted children;

it only indicates that such children do not have fewer or more difficulties than nongifted children on most variables. Yet, clearly, not all nongifted children are well adjusted. In fact, based on a review of literature (Kazdin & Weiss, 2003), over 25% of normative children demonstrate social, emotional, and behavioral problems that were formally diagnosed, and the numbers are higher for nondiagnosed problem children. As in the general child population, gifted children have learning disabilities, ADHD symptoms, and other emotional problems due to situational or personal difficulties. Therefore, just as nongifted children need to have their difficulties addressed, so do gifted children. Because of the future possibilities of gifted children, it is worthwhile to invest in them in order to prevent difficulties that may limit the use of their high potential.

Second, some disadvantages inherent in gifted children were indicated, such as lower scores in self-disclosure and physical self-concept. Self-disclosure is needed in close and intimate relationships, which develop at adolescence. Such issues can be dealt with in small groups, as suggested by Peterson (2008), a pioneer in this field. She suggested and, in fact, conducted discussion groups with gifted children in order to enhance social skills, self-awareness, and exploration of their unique identity. Physical self-concept may also be a concern, particularly in adolescence. This may be addressed in group counseling that focuses on self-acceptance in general. We are not aware of such work being done with gifted children, but for many other children such groups have led to improved self-esteem (Shechtman, 2007).

Alternatively, some of the differences found between gifted and nongifted children operate to the advantage of the gifted. For example, the former are higher in empathy. This is an important component that can be developed to enhance leadership skills. A high IQ, together with good leadership skills, may be helpful for the future success of gifted children.

This study is important in several ways. First, it supports previous results suggesting that gifted children are not very different from nongifted children of their age. This is good news, because some existing studies contribute to a distorted image of children identified as gifted. Second, the present research offers data for children and adolescents from a culture different from those commonly studied. Third, it investigated gifted children in two different settings. However, more studies are needed to explore in depth the unique difficulties of the gifted. Comparing them to the nongifted is only a first step to understanding and helping them.

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