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Citation

KLIMECKÁ, Eva. Advantages and disadvantages of being 'gifted': Perceptions of the label by gifted pupils. *Research Papers in Education* [online]. Routledge Journals, Taylor & Francis, 2022, [cit. 2023-02-06]. ISSN 0267-1522. Available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02671522.2022.2065523>

DOI

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2022.2065523>

Permanent link

<https://publikace.k.utb.cz/handle/10563/1010961>

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Advantages and Disadvantages of Being “Gifted”:

Perceptions of the Label by Gifted Pupils

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We have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

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Abstract: The aim of this qualitative study was to discover the positive and negative consequences of the labeling of gifted pupils and to find coping strategies for pupils, which would eliminate the negative consequences of labeling. Two hundred and eight intellectually gifted pupils of adolescent age from the Czech Republic participated in the research. The source of data was a questionnaire with open-ended questions. The positive aspects of labeling mainly concerned the academic and personal spheres, for instance, feeling good about oneself and extensive opportunities with regard to further education. Negative consequences affected the personal (problems resulting from giftedness) and academic (perfectionism, high expectations) areas, but above all, the social sphere. We discovered that gifted pupils are singled out from their peer groups, used, and even bullied. The gifted pupils developed several coping strategies to deal with the negative consequences of labeling, such as helping others, conforming and denying their giftedness.

Keywords: gifted pupil, labeling, gifted pupil's perception of giftedness, coping strategies, reflexive thematic analysis

Introduction

According to Sternberg and Zhang (2004), there are more than a hundred completely different types of giftedness definitions. Each definition is dependent on the intended use, e.g., from scientific aims, the goals, and type of gifted support programs, or from social considerations and norms (Heller, 2012). Children who fit the accepted descriptions are most likely to be recognized as gifted and subsequently provided for (Freeman, 2013). Although the concepts of giftedness vary widely, they substantially influence the development of “gifted” individuals. At the same time, this situation gives rise to the creation of specific “gifted” labels, many of which do not even match the gifted individual (Robinson, 1990). These labels could lead to the exclusion of gifted pupils from the community and to a negative change of their social and emotional development, which is an obstacle for the development of their potential (Gates, 2010).

Gifted Pupil – Focus of our Study

In our study, we focus on intellectually gifted pupils of adolescent age who share a key characteristic: they passed formal in-depth pedagogical-psychological diagnostics within the Education Counselling facilities (see NUV, 2018), and based on the results, they are integrated into one of four degrees of the “supportive measures” which define depth and form of differentiation in education (MŠMT, 2016). According to the CSI (2019) there are 0.1% of these “gifted pupils” in the Czech Republic.

We thus monitor gifted pupils in a regular primary school, whose giftedness is officially recognized (by facilities of Education Counselling), who stand out in education (their giftedness is purposefully developed due to supportive measures) and their giftedness is very rare (0,1%). At the same time, this is the only group of gifted pupils whose numbers are compulsorily reported in all Czech schools (see CSI, 2019). In a regular school, perhaps we will not find

another so specified group of gifted pupils who would enter teaching with a more pronounced label. The article addresses the question of how these pupils perceive this kind of label.

From Traditional Labeling Theory to Labeling Theories

The traditional Labeling theory is associated with the description of the origins of deviance and claims that a person becomes deviant after the label assignment and its self-acceptance (Becker, 1973; Goffman, 1963). The theory posits that the self-identity and the behavior of individuals may be determined or influenced by the terms used to describe or classify their characteristics (Matsueda, 2014). The precondition of this process is the existence of a negative connotation to a certain attribute of an individual, which becomes the substance of the label (Goffman, 1963). Labels are given to an individual by others with some power or dominance. The whole process of labeling is further strengthened by institutions such as the judiciary, the media, or educational institutions (Becker, 1973). After receiving the label, the individual is separated from the original social group and forced into an individual or collective segregation within an alternative social group. Such segregation in turn strengthens the given label, leading to the internalization of the attribute (Kolb & Jussim, 1994). An individual demonstrating the attributes of the label then closes the labeling process cyclically (Shang-Yu et al., 2020).

However, since the end of the last century, traditional Labeling theory expands to other groups of people at risk, such as homosexuals, individuals with mental illness, or obesity (Friehe, 2019; Hencken, 1984; Myers & Rosen, 1999; Whitt & Meile, 1985). As for the educational context, the studies are beginning to focus mainly on students with special educational needs. They mostly point out the barriers to the students' development. These studies focus on a wide variety of social actors (e.g., school, peers, or politics), monitoring the causes and consequences of labeling such as politics of education (Arishi et al., 2017), managing the stigma (Barga,

1996), pupils' self-esteem (Taylor et al., 2010) or teacher's beliefs that support the labels (Jordan & Stanovich, 2003). The attributes associated with these individuals are viewed not only in a negative but also positive or neutral view. What form it will be inclined to depends on other circumstances (environment, the individual's personality, the current stage of the labeling process, etc.) (Gates, 2010). The labeling theory primarily focuses on situations that have a negative impact on the individuals in question (Boyle, 2014; Frieh, 2019).

At present, the Labeling theory can be applied in research of any attribute that in some kind of connotation may bring discreditation to its recipient (Southgate, 2018), for instance, an individual with COVID-19, a single parent (Villa et al., 2020; Stack & Meredith, 2018) or a child with food allergy (Lee, 2015). In many cases, this issue is closely related to respecting human rights and the ethical principles of society (Millum et al., 2019; Sayani, 2018).

The Labeling of Gifted Pupils

The modified Labeling theory is also applied to gifted education (Gates, 2010; Meadows & Neumann, 2017; Wiley, 2020). The essence of the problem with labeling lies in how one deals with the "gifted" attribute. For example, Freeman (2013) claims that the attribute comes with a set of connotations, with these truths, half-truths and misconceptions existing in the society in the form of myths about gifted children (e.g., Treffinger, 2009; Leavitt, 2017). Portešová et al. (2014) have attempted to categorize the myths that appear in empirical studies, establishing three main categories:

- The essence of giftedness and its identification: gifted children come from higher social classes; giftedness self-manifests without a concentrated effort; giftedness is exclusively hereditary, etc.
- Social and emotional characteristics: gifted individuals tend to exhibit suicidal behavior; they have problems establishing social contacts; they suffer from

bouts of depression; gifted children will grow up to be gifted adults with high-paying jobs, etc.

- Education of gifted pupils: gifted children do not have any problems at school; a gifted individual will excel in all areas of education, etc.

These generally accepted projections are then associated with all gifted individuals and can create attributes on a scale from supporting the elitism to denying the care for the gifted (Delisle, 2001; Gagné, 2018). According to Gates (2010), an attribute may be both positive in one area (e.g., enriching individual educational approach and high expectations towards the gifted) and negative in another area (e.g., fear of academic failure, perfectionism, or elitism). Borland (2005) even argues that labeling gifted individuals always leads to negative implications, as there is no full-fledged personality development.

According to the Labeling theory, the “gifted” label may be a significant risk factor (Brown, 2016; Eccles et al., 2018, Freeman, 2013; Kurt & Chenault, 2017; Seeley, 2004) that gives rise to social and emotional issues which can result in a very low quality of life for gifted pupils. A significant contribution in this area comes from Freeman (2013), who in her longitudinal studies with labeled gifted children (with a formal diagnosis of giftedness and placed into a special educational program) confirmed significantly more emotional and social problems in the labeled children when compared to gifted children without a label. Moreover, some authors (Rinn & Majority, 2018; Wiley, 2020) claim that challenging characteristics traditionally associated with gifted individuals as their typical qualities (perfectionism, multipotentiality, overchoice, underachievement, impulsivity, overexcitability, rebellion, guardedness in social contacts, low social competence, individualism) are, in fact, just consequences of labeling. Yet other authors talk of predictable crises of labeled gifted students (Colangelo & Wood, 2015).

However, where gifted education is concerned, the Labeling theory does not aim to refute labeling as such because it recognizes that labeling is a necessary part of caring for the gifted (Heward, 2013). However, it strives to suppress the negative consequences of labeling as much as possible by respecting the ethical principles of society and professional educational approach towards the development of gifted individuals (Tirri & Laine, 2017; Millum et al., 2019.).

Implications of Labeling Gifted Pupils

The gifted pupils on which we focus are on the threshold of adolescence. It is a period of many changes, especially with regard to emotional, social and cognitive development. The environment places more social demands on the adolescent, which can manifest itself in anxiety and hypersensitivity (Belsky, 2019). In addition, gifted students tend to be characterized by specific socio-emotional attributes such as perfectionism, emotional sensitivity, depth of experience, impulsivity, restraint in social contacts, and individualism (Gross, 2011; Rinn & Majority, 2018). The implications of labeling that are primarily related to changes in the social and emotional areas can reach significant proportions in gifted adolescents.

From the point of view of the Labeling theory, the question is to what extent some typical socio-emotional characteristics of gifted pupils can be seen as implications of labeling (Barab & Plucker, 2002; Rinn & Majority, 2018; Wiley, 2020) or their dispositions (Vygotsky, 2019). The studies (Casino-García et al., 2019; Cross et al., 2014; Meadows & Neumann, 2017; Sarouphim, 2011; Zeidner, 2020) seek to find an answer by comparing groups of gifted students with labels (i.e., diagnosed and educated in specialized programs) and gifted students without labels. However, in presenting these results, it is necessary to emphasize the application of different definitions of giftedness, which is limiting for the generalization of the results for the whole group of gifted individuals.

According to Kerr et al. (1988) and Gates (2010), we can classify the implications of labeling into three main overlapping areas: personal, academic, and social. Where the personal area is concerned, on the basis of the research of adolescents involved in a special program for the gifted (Kitsantas et al., 2017; Sarouphim, 2011; Thomson, 2012) cite mostly positive consequences in this field, namely perception of increased self-confidence, self-esteem, feelings of inner harmony and satisfaction from one's own growth. Coleman and Cross (1988) conclude their research on gifted students with a claim that 79% state that, with regard to themselves, labeling has a positive effect. Guskin et al. (1986) and Meadows & Neumann (2017) reported that gifted students had "highly favorable views of themselves," meaning they have high life goals, they believe in their own skills and studiousness. Striley (2014) likens labeling to "discovering oneself." Because of labels, gifted children start being interested in their own giftedness; they find answers as to why they are different and what this difference entails (Freeman, 2013). On the other hand, studies mention higher levels of depressive symptoms among labeled gifted children (Sarouphim, 2011). Other studies have shown a very low level of subjective emotional well-being (Casino-García et al., 2019) and "happiness" among labeled gifted children (Zeidner, 2020).

The academic sphere of the consequences of labeling is generally perceived positively, as labels usually lead to the development of the cognitive side of the personality. Using a questionnaire for gifted adolescents, Coleman & Cross (1988) have discovered that a label encourages the pupil to be more responsible for his or her academic development. Gifted students from the study by Kerr et al. (1988) list among the advantages of giftedness the opportunity to grow, participate in many educational events and achieve better results in their studies. Berlin (2009) and Freeman (2013) also mentioned advanced learning and special experiences in gifted education programs among positive attributes of giftedness. On the other hand, pupils might worry about academic failure (Henry et al., 2019; Almukhambetova et al.,

2020) and feel pressure and higher expectations with regard to their performance (Gross, 2011; Hewitt, 2005). Sastre-Riba et al. (2019) talk about perfectionism that can have a positive effect in terms of better academic performance but can also be linked to anxiety and depression.

The social sphere is the most discussed where labeling is concerned. Most authors engaged in the topic draw attention to the strong social isolation of gifted pupils in an average group (Makel et al., 2015; Meadows & Neumann, 2017; Cross et al., 2014). For example, 50% of participants in a qualitative study with gifted adolescents shared powerful stories about unwanted social isolation and total alienation (Striley, 2014). Coleman and Cross (1988) have discovered that 77% of gifted adolescents strongly perceive some behavioral difference between them and others. The gifted feel that their age peers without identified giftedness notice their giftedness before other personality traits. Wolf & Chessor (2011) have identified in their research most of the gifted students bullied by their peers. Robinson (1990) claims that 43% of gifted adolescents perceive their giftedness in relation to their age peers negatively.

Coping with the “Gifted” Label

The creators of the traditional Labeling theory claim that the aim of a labeled individual is to “pass for normal” (Goffman, 1963). Similarly, a labeled gifted pupil wishes to eliminate negative consequences of the label, apparent especially in social-emotional area (Coleman, 1985; Meadows & Neumann, 2017).

Gifted pupils often act to reduce the effects of stigma and use social coping strategies. For example, Swiatek (2002) reveals strategies such as denying giftedness, helping others, hiding the giftedness, and using humor to cope. Cross et al. (2014) add the following: claiming that a test was difficult; being evasive when being complimented; pretending to be stupid; voluntarily refraining from giving the correct answer; being seen with people who are not gifted; telling jokes and playing the role of the class clown; being nice and pretending to be

interested in superficial conversations. Swiatek (2012) later draws attention to psychologically unhealthy coping strategies used by an exceptionally gifted student, such as underachievement and conformity.

Differences exist in the use of coping strategies between gifted girls and boys. From the point of view of social sciences, the differences are attributed to cultural factors influencing gender differences in performance, personality characteristics, and attitudes (Callahan & Hébert, 2014). Accordingly, girls show typical signs such as low self-esteem, low expectations, and self-criticism (Kerr & Huffman, 2019). Swiatek (2002) has discovered that gifted girls demonstrate coping strategies that are focused on the cultivation of relationships with their peers, helping others, and denying giftedness, with which they try to eliminate negative stereotypes society holds towards intellectually gifted women. Where boys are concerned, coping strategies of the “provocative gifted” type are used, not only in order to be accepted in a group but also due to frustration stemming from an unsupportive curriculum (Kerr & Huffman, 2019). Denying signs of giftedness that are incompatible with masculine expectations is common, such as sensitivity and vulnerability (Hébert, 2013).

Chan (2005) and Cross et al. (2014) also point out cross-cultural differences in the use of coping strategies. The matter of coping strategies being dependent on the environment is described in other studies, indicating the specificity of coping strategies used by pupils in inclusive education (Košir et al., 2016; Schrag, 2019) or in segregated schools or programs for gifted students (Vialle et al., 2007). Within inclusive education, the strategies are usually applied during lessons in relation to peers with unidentified giftedness. Gifted students from segregated schools apply strategies outside their group of gifted peers.

The study addresses the question of how gifted pupils perceive the label “gifted”, in both positive and negative views. We also focus on the identification of coping strategies of gifted pupils for this label.

Methodology

The aim of this qualitative study was to discover the positive and negative consequences of the labeling of gifted pupils and to find coping strategies for pupils, which would eliminate the negative consequences of labeling. The aim was specified during a Reflexive Thematic Analysis.

Two hundred and eight “gifted pupils” participated in the research; 75 of them were girls (36%) and 133 boys (64%), aged ten to fifteen. All were pupils of regular inclusive elementary schools. We used purposive sampling (pupils defined as gifted), as well as convenience sampling (schools with “gifted pupils” easily accessible to the researcher) for the selection of the gifted pupils’ sample.

The data source was a questionnaire administered during the fall of 2019, with open-ended questions: “What do you consider to be the advantages of being gifted? And why? List and describe as many advantages as possible; What do you consider to be the disadvantages of being gifted? And why? List and describe as many disadvantages as possible.”

The data were analyzed through Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), an approach of analyzing qualitative data to answer research questions about people’s experiences, views, perceptions, and representations of a given phenomenon. It is theoretically flexible, it can be guided by concepts from a variety of fields, as well as be used in a variety of research approaches. Analysis is “reflexive” because of the centrality of the researcher to the end product; a researcher acknowledges and reflects themes explaining people’s experiences of a given topic (Terry & Hayfield, 2020). In our research, the Reflexive Thematic Analysis followed steps recommended by Braun & Clarke (2006):

- Familiarization with the data. The answers from the printed questionnaires were transcribed by two researchers into an editable version in Microsoft Excel, next

to demographic data of the research participants (gender). Then the statements were printed out and cut up, while the structure of advantages and disadvantages set by the pupils was left during analysis. This phase involved reading and re-reading the data.

- Open coding (creating codes). Using open coding, we identified important features that might be relevant to the aim of the research. The majority of pupils most often gave their answers with one code identified by us; a few statements contained two codes. All pupils answered the open-ended question.
- Generating initial categories (from codes to categories and main categories). This phase involved examining the codes and collated data to identify significant broader patterns of meaning (categories). During this phase, a final list of 246 codes for advantages and 209 for disadvantages was created, and these were further divided into 21 categories, which were grouped into four main categories (see Table 1). For example, codes such as “recognition by those around”, “respect for giftedness”, “is favored”, “authority in a group”, etc., a category titled “popularity” was created and placed within the main category “relationships and social skills”. Subsequently, 21 categories were put back into Microsoft Excel in order to categorize them in line with the adolescents’ demographic characteristics (gender) and the quantification of the dimension of the studied phenomenon within the categories. McPherson and Sauder (2016) claim that there are certain conditions under which it is possible to quantify qualitative data. In our case, it was an objective to describe the dimension of the category, including the finding of key gender differences. However, the quantitative analysis of the data is not the study’s primary ambition. During the analysis, we applied the so-called realistic approach (Fletcher, 2017), which

reflects the reality of the statements viewed by pupils. The researcher did not interfere in the structure of advantages and disadvantages set by the pupils. The inductive system of coding was prevalent.

- Reviewing themes (from codes to categories and main categories in revised context). This phase involved checking the candidate themes against the dataset to determine that they tell a convincing story of the data and one that answers the research question. Additional relationships and connections between the categories were sought, which contributed to the specification of the analytical story in relation to the issue of labeling (see chapter Reviewing and Defining Themes, Discussion). Unlike in the previous phases of the analysis, here we applied the so-called narrative approach (Smith & Sparkes, 2006), whereby the researcher analyses the data in relation to the theoretical basis of the key issue. The deductive system of coding was prevalent here.
- Defining and naming themes. This phase involved developing a detailed analysis of each category, as well as working out the scope and focus of each. The results are presented in Table 2.

In order to strengthen the validity (see Archibald, 2015), the data were transcribed and analyzed by two researchers. During the early phases of the analysis, they worked separately, in contrast to the subsequent phases of the analysis, where the data were reorganized, and more cooperation was required. Both researchers are academic professionals with pedagogical qualifications who specialize in gifted education, which is considered to be the initial factor influencing the perspective of the researched reality.

Data Analysis – Open Coding and Generating Initial Themes

The following data present the outcomes from the initial steps of the Reflexive Thematic Analysis (steps 1 – 3). From open coding, 21 categories emerged. For more transparent presentation, we further grouped them under four main categories within the “advantages and disadvantages of giftedness” and aligned them with a frequency differentiated by gender (B – boys, G – girls); see Table 1.

Learning Characteristics

One of the main key categories is the learning characteristics of pupils as an advantage of being gifted. There were answers describing the speed of understanding and learning, more developed logical thinking, memory, and extensive knowledge. This results in better grades the pupil can achieve or in the fact that the pupil is able to solve a complicated task without help. Other codes, typical for boys, linked these characteristics to less effort or shorter time to achieve.

“I am ahead of others; my logical and mathematical thinking as well as my memory are more developed; ability to discuss and alter my opinions, ability to learn effectively. I don’t have to spend so much time learning because I understand things during lessons; ... so I have more time for my hobbies.”

The only category classified by the pupils as a disadvantage of giftedness was the connection of learning characteristics with one-sided (cognitive) skill. This disadvantage was mostly named by girls.

“He is gifted only for one thing and the rest he might not be good at; on the other hand, he might have problems with comprehension or not understand a question that is simple for others. Being gifted in one area usually brings an opposite effect in another area.”

Relationships and Social Skills

In the other categories, we saw many answers that could be classified as disadvantages of giftedness. More than a half of the codes pertaining to disadvantages of giftedness focused

on relationships and social skills. The category included complaints such as bullying, contempt, insults, teasing, and other malicious reactions by the other pupils from the class. It was a rather aggressive form of segregation, typically perceived by boys. According to them, the clear cause was the envy of others and worrying about their social status within the group being threatened. The answers also indicate the origin of perfectionism and stereotypical evaluation of gifted individuals.

“Being gifted is very cruel, at schools they are the target of ridicule, bullying and ill treatment; ... I have been beaten up because of my giftedness; others are afraid of a person like this, they think this person can threaten them somehow so they put up a defense with aggressiveness; they’re jealous of me; they envy me; they laugh at me that I am the teacher’s pet even though my grades are sometimes worse than theirs; everybody waits until I make a mistake so that they could laugh at me; the others think that every gifted person is a genius and that a genius is crazy so they treat you like that.”

Girls’ statements describe being shunned from the group but not being directly hurt by other classmates. They claim it is because of them being different. From reading the statements, it is clear that girls perceive being shunned as unpleasant.

“Being gifted means being lonely; I have problems with finding people I can relate to; we are not sure if the others, for example, understand what we say; we are unable to make friends, we have high demands on them, we want them to be like us; people are just wary of the gifted; even if I was the nicest person there is, they wouldn’t trust me; I am simply different and I don’t want to pretend to be someone else.”

Another part of gifted pupils, chiefly boys, openly call themselves weird and perceive their social exclusion as a logical consequence of their giftedness.

“A gifted person is a bit of a weirdo and has problems with communication, because of that, their life is unnecessarily complicated; many gifted people around me, including myself, have

strange personalities with a tendency towards autism; usually someone with a high IQ has a low EQ, like me, they are antisocial.”

Gifted boys especially perceive as an advantage the opportunity to meet with friends who are also gifted, or to be more respected by adults in a professional discussion. For a minority of them, the popularity they gained through labeling is important.

“Older and more experienced people like to engage us in discussions, they seek us out; I can be friends in this special club with others who are also gifted. Sometimes I can really entertain people; you have a chance to make your name within the group; when you are clever, you can make others like you.”

One recurrent theme seen solely in girls is helping others. It is perceived as an advantage as well as a disadvantage. Girls state that they enjoy helping their classmates, but on the other hand, they understand that they are being used in this respect too.

“An advantage of giftedness is helping others when they cannot do something because then they will like me; if you can do something that can be beneficial to others, your popularity skyrockets. My classmates keep wanting to copy my work; lines of people during breaktime; everybody relies on me helping them, that I will do something for them; a gifted person has lots of friends when they need to copy your work.”

Motivation

Motivation was categorized solely as an advantage. The main drive for pupils to develop their giftedness is the vision of an easier way to get to a more attractive type of next school and thus get a more interesting and well-paid job. Some claim that their giftedness is valuable for the society and describe their dreams, perhaps even overestimated expectations, for the future.

“They have a chance to get into better secondary schools and universities; we can earn good money and be successful in what we are gifted at; gifted people are usually those that control the world; I could become so famous for my giftedness that children will learn about me; I might help mankind for example by the fact that I discover a cure for something.”

Another motivation for pupils is understanding that thanks to their giftedness, they have more opportunities for education.

“You have more opportunities; you get more interesting work; I will have two extra lessons and then in our science team, I will get to meet other gifted people and we will learn about interesting things; I was able to get to this school because I am gifted.”

Many pupils, mostly boys, also perceive as an advantage the fact that they are popular with teachers and are favored by them. They openly declare that they are given privileges.

“Teachers like him more; he takes part in more school events; teachers allow for you in everything, they give you more time because they see the future in you; ... some really favor you; as if they were afraid to give you a bad grade.”

The last area of motivating gifted pupils, especially boys, is their participation in competitions, where they can experience success. It is also clear that this is an escape from education that is unsupportive.

“I like winning competitions; thanks to competitions, I can get out of lessons I don't enjoy.”

Barriers in the Development of Giftedness

In the last of the main categories, pupils mentioned barriers in the development of giftedness, categorized as a disadvantage. Many of the gifted (especially boys) are hampered in their development by high expectations from people around them, especially parents but also from teachers and classmates. This results in high levels of stress and a tendency for passivity.

“Because they expect a lot from us and when you don't do something well, it brings more attention than when that happens with the non-gifted; you might be expected to cope with more than you actually can do; they take it for granted that I always succeed ... and when that isn't the case, they are disappointed; I am expected to be the best at school; some have given up to please everyone at all costs.”

Perfectionism as a disadvantage of giftedness is described mainly by girls. They are motivated by those around them to be the best. They link perfectionism with consequences such as extreme tiredness and not enough time for hobbies.

“At times there is a tendency for excessive learning; at the end of the week it is easy to feel exhausted; a person wants to carry on despite being tired and has tendencies towards being a workaholic; you have to work hard and don’t have enough time for hobbies.”

In addition to the intense perception in the cognitive area, gifted pupils also include an emotional perspective. They think too much about every little thing that might feel common for others. Consequently, they might agonize over the fact that they did not find a suitable solution. This is predominantly found in boys.

“You think too much about things and then worry about it unnecessarily; he takes everything too seriously; overthinking = unnecessary dwelling on trivial things; with his logical deduction, he might get to places he should not.”

Gifted boys also claim that a disadvantage of being gifted is more work during lessons. Their answers show that extra work discourages them, especially tasks that do not develop them due to their nature. It is clear that not all gifted children enjoy taking part in various competitions, especially when this is often the only way to develop their giftedness in their school.

“Extra worksheets all the time; teachers keep making you take part in all sorts of competitions all the time, which I really dislike; the more you work, the more extra assignments you get.”

The opposite and equally unsuitable is the unsupportive environment in some schools. In these statements, the gifted children cite passivity and do not assert their realistic wishes for education.

“When you are really good at something, you don’t get to learn much in some schools; boring lessons; you often think about something completely different at school.”

Some gifted boys complain about teachers' negative attitudes towards giftedness. It is yet another barrier in the development of giftedness.

“Many teachers disapprove of gifted children; they pick on us, I have learned not to bother at all in this class; at bad schools, teachers cannot cope with the fact that we are gifted; some teachers try really hard to show us that we are actually not gifted and sometimes they even succeed.”

Reviewing and Defining Themes, Discussion

Based on the subsequent phases of the Reflexive Thematic Analysis, we defined our own analytical story, which we put into the Labeling theory of gifted pupils. Here we have revealed positive and negative consequences of labeling, found coping strategies and pointed out gender differences in the above-mentioned phenomena. The key results are presented in Table 2, referred to later.

Ad 1) (see Table 1) A positive consequence of labeling can be the fact that gifted pupils are aware of their giftedness; they know that it is an important commodity to have, which must be developed. Pupils are aware of their strengths and weaknesses with regard to various fields and are able to describe them extremely well. A negative consequence of labeling is the fact that gifted pupils perceive the negative expressions of their giftedness as a phenomenon inherently linked with giftedness. In this way, there can be a targeted deepening of the negative characteristics that are usually associated with giftedness.

Ad 2) A positive consequence of labeling is an extensive offer of educational activities. Gifted pupils appreciate the fact that they are able to study at their particular school, represent it in competitions, have extra individual lessons, attend after-school clubs for gifted pupils, etc. For another group of pupils, it is too much; they do not wish to participate in competitions and do not want to be given extra tasks they deem purposeless. As a defense, they create some

coping strategies, such as a denial of their giftedness (I won't be successful in this competition on purpose), underperforming, or conversely taking part in competitions as much as possible to escape the routine at school.

Like Coleman and Cross (1988) and Kerr et al. (1988), we have discovered that the academic sphere of giftedness consequences is perceived positively by gifted pupils. On the other hand, we also reveal a certain stereotype in the description of the giftedness characteristics and explaining own problems as typical traits of giftedness. From the point of view of the Labeling theory, this result can be interpreted as an example of self-stigmatization (Cross et al., 2014), whereby the pupil accepts their social attitudes towards giftedness, which they internalize and subsequently display. Another problem that has emerged from the statements is not respecting the specific educational needs of gifted pupils. Teachers, forced to apply formal requirements to modify the curriculum, might have a tendency to give gifted pupils many assignments that lack purpose, which they would most probably not use in regular lessons with a gifted pupil who has not received an "official label." Contrary to this stands the ignoring of educational needs of gifted pupils. In both cases, gifted pupils react by applying classic coping strategies (Swiatek, 2002) in order to avoid a tedious task or boredom at school.

Ad 3) A positive consequence of labeling is that gifted pupils are motivated and look to the future with optimism. They long to study at better schools and have well-paying jobs, they are interested in contributing to the society with their giftedness, they are grateful for their potential, and feel good about themselves. It is the most important motivational impulse of the development of giftedness. According to the pupils, it mostly stems from their home environment. Like Kerr et al. (1988) and Coleman and Cross (1988), we have found that this label, based on traditional social misconceptions about giftedness (see Portešová et al., 2014), has a positive effect where the personal area is concerned. The opposite is the increased expectations from people around to give above-standard performance, which should be

demonstrated by a gifted pupil automatically. Together with Cross et al. (2015), we reveal coping strategies against these consequences, such as underperformance and the denial of giftedness. Here we can once again argue whether perfectionism is a typical sign of giftedness (Gross, 2011) or a consequence of labeling (Davis et al., 2011).

Ad 4) If we focus more specifically on peer relations, a positive consequence of labeling is popularity within a peer group. A pupil might be held in high esteem by others who want to follow him or her. However, the statements show a cruel prerequisite of being accepted – the gifted pupil must somehow be useful to the others. In this socially coping strategy, found by other researchers (Cross et al., 2014; Swiatek, 2002), the gifted pupil has a tendency to help others to such an extent that, in order to be accepted by their peer group, they are willing to develop their giftedness inadequately or risk punishment by the teacher. Furthermore, a vast majority of pupils state that they have been segregated from their peer group. The gifted are often ridiculed and bullied by their peers, which they find difficult to cope with. Expert sources often describe problems of gifted pupils in the social sphere (Gross, 2011; Hébert, 2011). According to the Labeling theory, social exclusion is a key negative consequence of the labeling of gifted pupils (Coleman et al., 2015; Košir et al., 2016; Striley, 2014; Wolf & Chessor, 2011). Our study has also shown that most of the problems concern the social sphere. Social issues were mentioned by more than half of the pupils.

Ad 5) A cause and at the same time a consequence of labeling is the specific attitude of teachers towards gifted pupils. Some teachers give gifted pupils more attention, offer above standard opportunities, and even give privileges, which results in negative consequences such as stigmas. Other teachers adopt a negative attitude towards gifted pupils, and they demonstrate that they do not agree with their idea of giftedness. When liked by teachers, gifted pupils make use of this situation, while in cases of being disliked, gifted pupils become passive or rebel.

Ignoring of needs of gifted pupils as well as giving them privileges is based on the preferred attitudes of the teachers that are influenced by socially widespread myths about the gifted (see Portešová et al., 2014). On the basis of their attitudes, teachers apply different concepts of giftedness. With regard to giving privileges to gifted pupils, we believe that teachers can arrive at this situation via the so-called Pygmalion effect (Matthews et al., 2014). Here, we can cite a study that documents a sudden improvement in the pedagogical evaluation of students about whom teachers have learned that they have been diagnosed as gifted (Johnsen & Kaul, 2019).

Regarding gender, as other authors (Callahan & Hébert, 2014; Hébert, 2013; Kerr & Huffman, 2019), we found different manifestations of the consequences of labeling between boys and girls, influenced by stereotypical perceptions of female and male societal roles. We found that boys demonstrate their giftedness more markedly than girls. In teaching, more is expected of boys, and many teachers favor them. In a peer group, popularity is important for boys as well as having gifted friends. If this is not possible, they describe a possible social exclusion as more aggressive (bullying) than girls, who tend to talk of passive exclusion. Compared to girls, boys are less eager, and they often simplify their work. In coping strategies, boys do not deny their giftedness but instead want to exploit their differences. Gifted girls demonstrate more pronounced perfectionism compared to boys; conformity and helping others are typical for them.

If we were to summarize the results in relation to gender, gifted girls are more at risk of diminished popularity, resulting in segregation. Concerning coping strategies, girls tend to conformity behavior. Boys are more endangered by separation from the collective in a more aggressive or visible form. They are also at risk from high expectations from teachers and parents, which results in emotional problems. Similar results are also reflected in other studies

comparing typical characteristics of gifted girls and boys (Guthrie, 2020; Kerr & Huffman, 2019; Watts, 2020).

In terms of frequency, more boys were at risk of labeling in our research due to the fact that their number greatly outweighed the girls (boys prevailed over girls in a ratio of about 3: 2). Although only the available selection of schools (convenience sampling) was chosen for the selection of the research sample, the ratio of these pupils corresponds to the national situation. For example, CSI (2019) annually reports two-thirds of gifted boys and one-third of girls within our defined group of the gifted. This may also correspond to the situation worldwide, where the numbers of labeled gifted boys (participating in specialized educational programs) significantly outweigh girls (Kerr et al., 2012; Petersen, 2013).

Summary

This study attempts to modify the Labeling theory with respect to gifted pupils for the above-defined preconditions relating to their specificity and environment. They are pupils who are going through the labeling process (see Kolb & Jussim, 1994 Meadows & Neumann (2017)). That is, their label has already been institutionally reinforced, and due to an (inconsiderately applied) modified curriculum or other reasons, these pupils are gradually moving from their original social group (age peers) to segregation in an alternative social group (gifted peers). Some of our pupils, probably a minority, might be surrounded by a suitable social environment that does not encourage the emergence of negative labels, or these pupils do not accept the negative connotations of the label and focus on the positive aspects of giftedness. Other pupils use coping strategies to fight against a negative label (helping others, conformity) or exploit it (using their popularity with teachers, evading obligations). Yet others have identified with the label and purposefully demonstrate its negative attributes (passivity, underachievement, rebellion, social exclusion, problems are consequences of their giftedness), thereby cyclically

closing the labeling process. Interestingly for us, even successful gifted pupils, in our opinion all of those from our study (that is, those who demonstrated cognitive signs of exceptional giftedness during the identification process), demonstrate a significant impact of negative consequences of a label (disadvantages of giftedness were mentioned by all pupils). We, therefore, deem the “gifted” label to be a significant “risk factor”, as it brings with it barriers related to the personal, academic, and social sphere of a child, eliminating the full development of the gifted individuals.

From the consequences of labeling, we strived to choose those that in reality depend on being given the label “gifted”, meaning that these consequences would hardly be able to exist without the label. Several results of our study correspond with the results of studies dealing with the typical characteristics of labeled gifted pupils compared to non-labeled gifted pupils. Influenced by the Labeling theory, we believe that they are characteristics of gifted pupils with a label (consequences of labeling), rather than typical attributes of gifted pupils without a label. In addition to the “gifted” label, we also accept the possibility of the existence of other labels that normally surround each of us.

Research Limitations

One of the biggest limitations could be perceived in questionnaire construction and its administration. As far as the administration is concerned, since we were not present during the completion of the questionnaires, we have reason to believe that pupils could have modified their attitudes for fear of their teachers reading the answers. Learning characteristics could thus have been overestimated, while the consequences of disrespecting the educational needs of the pupils and social problems could have been suppressed.

We also did not use triangulation of data with other research methods (for example, by observation or interview) or with other research participants (for example, teachers or parents).

Another significant limitation is the character and coding of the data. The statements gave separate information, in many cases without deeper context. This partial reduction of the data could have led to a simplification of the researched reality during the data analysis. A suitable follow-up research design could use in-depth interviews with pupils, while the nature of the data would allow the use of more advanced data analysis, such as grounded theory or situation analysis. We also are aware of the gender imbalance in the number of completed questionnaires from girls and boys, which may lead to a misrepresentation of the quantification of answers in Table 1. The results can be applied only to the group of gifted pupils corresponding to our chosen functional definition of giftedness.

Conclusion

Labeling is a necessary part of conceptual care for a gifted individual. However, it should be used professionally and ethically, with the aim to eliminate the negative consequences of labels. It is expected that the labeling of gifted pupils will rapidly gain in relevance due to the expansion of the development of caring for the gifted and the related increase in the number of gifted pupils with a label (i.e., pupils diagnosed and purposefully developed as gifted). With such treatment, we should prevent the paradoxical phenomenon that, despite the efforts made to develop giftedness, disrespect for the basic educational needs of (not only) the gifted emerges.

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Table 2
Positive and negative consequences and coping strategies

	Positive consequences of labeling	Negative consequences of labeling	Coping strategies
1	The personality of the gifted within the description of cognitive characteristics.	Stereotypical description of own characteristics.	They are not responsible for problems; these are a consequence of their giftedness.
2	More educational opportunities, extra work in lessons.	They use me (for competitions), give me purposeless tasks.	Denial of giftedness, underperformance
3	They see their future positively, good feeling about self, success in competitions.	High expectations, perfectionism.	
4	Popularity, having gifted friends.	Using gifted pupils, bullying and segregation from the group.	Helping others, purposeful rejection of the peer group.
5	Popularity with teachers, offer of activities	Prejudice by teachers / privileges	Using their popularity, passivity, rebellion.

Table 1

Advantages and disadvantages of giftedness as perceived by gifted pupils

Main categories	Advantages (category)	B	G	Disadvantages (category)	B	G
Learning Characteristics	Better learning performance, better grades	31	26	One-way skill	3	7
	Less effort to achieve	39	2			
	Less learning, more free time	16	3			
Relationships and social skills	Popularity	16	3	Bullying, contempt, and envy	49	30
	I have gifted friends	5	1	Segregation from the group	5	30
	Helping others	1	12	They are weird	8	1
				They use me / I have to tell them the right answers	0	9
Motivation	Better future	40	25			
	More educational opportunities	6	4			
	Liked by teachers / privileges	8	0			
	Success (in competitions)	7	1			
Barriers in the development of giftedness				High expectations from the gifted	17	3
				Overly sensitive and overthinking	12	1
				Perfectionism	3	6
				More work in lessons	9	2
				Boredom, I am not motivated	6	4
			Teachers' prejudice	4	0	
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