



# Mezilidské vztahy a socializace v americkém televizním seriálu Teorie velkého třesku

## Bakalářská práce

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# Interpersonal Relationships and Socialization in the American Television Series The Big Bang Theory

## Bachelor thesis

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Cílem práce je analyzovat mezilidské vztahy a schopnost socializace v americkém seriálu Teorie velkého třesku

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- 2) Analýza poruch mezilidských vztahů a vývoj schopností postav socializovat se.
- 3) Kontextualizace zmíněných vztahů a schopností z pohledu genderových a sociálně-psychologických teorií.

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## **Anotace**

Cílem této bakalářské práce je analyzovat mezilidské vztahy v americké situační komedii Teorie velkého třesku. Práce se zaměřuje především na hlavní postavy tohoto seriálu, které se dají označit jako nadané. Nadaní lidé jsou lidé s nadprůměrnými schopnostmi především v akademických oblastech. Vycházím z předpokladu, že tito jedinci mají takové schopnosti na úkor sociálních dovedností. Za účelem nalezení konkrétních příkladových situací, ve kterých nadaní projevují nedostatečnou sociální kompetenci, jsou důkladně analyzovány čtyři vybrané série tohoto seriálu. Na základě této analýzy a s pomocí sociální psychologie tato práce názorně ukazuje, že nadaní v této situační komedii obvykle skutečně mají obtíže v mezilidských vztazích.

## **Klíčová slova**

Teorie velkého třesku, nadaní, sociální dovednosti, funkční mezilidské vztahy, sitcom, nadprůměrné schopnosti

## **Annotation**

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to analyse the interpersonal relationships in the American sitcom *The Big Bang Theory*. The paper focuses particularly on the main characters of this series that can be labeled as gifted. The gifted are people with above-average abilities primarily in academic areas. I work on the assumption that these individuals possess these abilities to the detriment of their social skills. Four selected seasons of the series are analysed thoroughly in order to find specific example situations in which the gifted show their insufficient social competence. On the basis of the analysis, and with the help of social psychology, the thesis illustrates that the gifted presented in this sitcom indeed tend to struggle in interpersonal relationships.

## **Key words**

The Big Bang Theory, the gifted, social skills, functional interpersonal relationships, sitcom, above-average abilities



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## 1. Introduction

*The Big Bang Theory* is a sitcom that belongs among the most popular ones nowadays and it presents a group of scientists and their everyday life. What engaged my attention the most is the peculiarity of these characters, although and partially because they suppose to belong among a rare group of gifted people. Therefore, it occurred to me that this could be an interesting object for research.

The aim of this paper is, as the title itself suggests, to analyse the interpersonal and social skills of the main characters. I work on the assumption that the gifted, even though they significantly excel in academic areas, tend to struggle when it comes to the building of functional interpersonal relationships and that their emotional intelligence is thus at a lower level.

In order to accomplish such an analysis I will try to prove that the sitcom characters can be considered similar to real persons and that fictional characters can actually have some personality that can be analysed through psychological models. Thus, in the first part I will focus on the personality of a fictional character in literature, film and television. Then, I will provide a brief description of the typical characteristics of gifted people and their extraordinary abilities.

The main source for my analysis is *The Big Bang Theory* television series. For this purpose, I chose four specific seasons – season 1, 2, 7 and 8 since the whole series cannot be covered in such a short length that a bachelor's thesis offers. I am convinced, however, that the selected seasons provide a representative sample of the whole series, and thus, the specific examples and situations can be used to confirm my hypothesis.

## 2. Personality of a Fictional Character

In order to analyse interpersonal relationships in the TV series *The Big Bang Theory* we need to consider whether fictional characters can actually depict a plausible personality. It may seem probable that invented characters either in a book or in a TV series should only present separate parts of a whole story and thus are necessary only to make it complete.

I am certainly aware of the fact that fictional characters cannot be fully compared to a real human being. However, in order for a narrative to be as authentic as possible, one needs believable characters. Ones that resemble the reader's experience of a human being as closely as possible. As René Wellek and Austin Warren (1949) explain: "The creation of characters may be supposed to blend, in varying degrees, inherited literary types, persons observed and the self"(84). In other words, during the creation process, authors can draw on their own experiences with themselves, with other individuals, or on experiences with some fictional characters.

Generally speaking, the audience can be considered to expect to obtain an opportunity to tune in to the feelings of characters. They want to empathize with them or take a critical stand on them. Therefore, it seems almost essential to create realistic personalities with certain types of behaviour, feelings or habits. "Narratives may not examine habits microscopically, but they do demand of the audience the capacity to recognize certain habits as symptomatic of a trait: If a character is constantly washing his hands, mopping already clean floors, picking motes of dust off his furniture, the audience is obliged to read out a trait like 'compulsive'" (Chatman 1978, 122). Even if we do not face a realistic situation in a narrative, we assess it on the grounds of our experiences and knowledge. "It is enough to distinguish the narrative from the real-life case by adding 'narrative' or 'fictive' to

remind us that we are not dealing with psychological realities but artistic constructs, yet that we understand these constructs through highly coded psychological information that we have picked up in ordinary living, including our experiences with art”(Chatman 1978, 126). The reality and the fictional reality mingle and there is no certain boundary between them, because from the beginning the aim is to make them at least similar.

Furthermore, a fictional character, although we know it represents only an artistic imitation of a real human being, is not defined only by his descriptions and the dialogues he holds throughout a story. As Chatman (1978) mentions with an example from a famous work of Shakespeare’s: “Of course Hamlet and Macbeth are not ‘living people’; but that does not mean that as constructed imitations they are in any way limited to the words on the printed page” (117). They are not defined only by the words they say, but in the eyes of the audience, they become true persons. As in real life we meet a great amount of people, we befriend some of them and try to know them. The same process is applied by the audience while observing characters. There is always an effort to penetrate deeper into their personality and to understand their motives, which does not have to be always successful. “Some characters in sophisticated narratives remain open constructs, just as some people in the real world stay mysteries no matter how well we know them” (118). This fact can only make them more comparable to real persons.

The horizons of personality always recede before us- Unlike geographers, biographers need never worry about going out of business. No one would ever accuse their objects of being mere words. The same principle operates with new acquaintances: we read between their line, so to speak; we form hypotheses

on the basis of what we know and see; we try to figure them out, predict their actions and so on. (118)

We can undergo quite a similar procedure when trying to know a character in a book or in a film. According to Chatman: “A viable theory of character should preserve openness and treat characters as autonomous beings, not as mere plot functions” (119). Characters play an important role in the story development and perhaps they may occupy even more important position than the story itself. “There is nothing wrong with ”concentrating on characters as the main source of ‘the tragic fact’ ...not as ‘abstractions’ from the words of the plays as finally written but as the concrete semblances of real men and women, each with a being more or less independent of the particular actions he performs in the completed drama”(Crane 1953, 16).

Thus, although it is true that “[c]haracters do not have ‘lives’; [and] we endow them with ‘personality’ only to the extent that personality is a structure familiar to us in life and art. [...] But characters as narrative constructs do require terms for description, and there is no point in rejecting those out of the general vocabulary of psychology, morality, and any other relevant area of human experience” (Chatman 1978, 138). As mentioned above, when creating a character, authors usually take into consideration their own findings about how people behave and at the same time they can use knowledge from a field of psychology. “Sometimes a psychological theory, held either consciously or dimly by an author, seems to fit a figure or situation” (Wellek and Warren 1949, 86). We can name various examples from literary works. For instance,

Lily Campbell has argued that Hamlet fits the type of ‘sanguine man’s suffering from melancholy adust’ known to the Elizabethans from their psychological theories. In like

fashion Oscar Campbell has tried to show that Jaques, in *As you like it*, is a case of ‘unnatural melancholy produced by adustion of phlegm’. Walter Shandy could be shown to suffer from the disease of linguistic associationism described in Locke. Stendhal’s hero Julien Sorel is described in terms of the psychology of Destutt de Tracy, and the different kinds of love relationship are obviously classified according to Stendhal’s own book *De l’Amour*. Rodion Raskolnikov’s motives and feelings are analysed in a way which suggests some knowledge of clinical psychology. Proust certainly has a whole psychological theory of memory, important even for the organization of his work. Freudian psychoanalysis is used quite consciously by novelists such as Conrad Aiken or Waldo Frank. (Wellek and Warren 1949, 86-87)

In summary, even if a fictional character can never replace a real person, he can nevertheless resemble him in various ways. Authors create these abstractions on the basis of realistic experience and they may take into consideration some psychological theories. As a narrative’s aim is often to attract the attention of the audience and make them believe the characters may represent real men or women, we can say that characters do have a certain type of personality that is familiar to us from our own experience. As René Wellek and Austin Warren (1949) state: “Characters in plays and novels are judged by us to be ‘psychologically’ true” (86). This opens up the possibility for me to describe narrative characters from the perspective of psychology.

### 3. Visual Narrative

#### 3.1. Film

Film, unlike literature, may seem to be a quite new invention, when one looks back on many years of human history. “The origins of film were placed around the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the pre-sound film era” (Cristian and Dragon 2008). This may be one of the reasons why some might hesitate to consider film as a new type of narrative art similar to literature.

Film is, as the American word “movie” suggests, a series of moving pictures that altogether can create a story. According to Cristian and Dragon (2008) “[i]ndeed, the sequences of repetitive pictures suggest the idea of a narrative strip, a story that unfolds with the progression of pictures.” Without narrative, the film would be only a chaotic representation of moving pictures.

According to Albert Laffay, the cinema is based on narrative because it is the only way to “make reality legible on the screen” (66). If cinema was to present reality as it is, the spectator would not be able to make sense out of the “vague outlines, confused distances” and the “open and dispersed” [...] universe (ibid). Narrative is the key: it is the tool that weaves separate components of reality together; it is the logic around which a story gets organized; and the frame that provides structure and perspective for the recorded world. In doing so, narrative is able to give meaning to the represented world, provides it with logic and vocabulary, by which it makes film into a language. (Cristian and Dragon 2008)

Clearly, narrative is an essential part of the film because it organizes a sequence of events in a logical and understandable way, so the audience can easily immerse in the story.

Film does not always have to introduce a completely new narrative. One can certainly recall at least one film that is based on a literary work. One could easily assume that adaptation of literary works is caused by the lack of imagination of film makers. However, “[o]ne glance at history of film reveals that adapting literary works to film is by no means a new invention: even the Lumière brothers did it (their thirteen-scene production of *The Life and Passion of Jesus Christ* - an adaptation based on biblical stories - was presented in 1897). It means that film adaptation as a way of making films is as old as the cinema itself” (Cristian and Dragon 2008). Apparently, film makers were never afraid to use the potential of literature in order to create something new and at the same time to represent an already existing piece of art in a different way. Even though many experts have sometimes doubted the artistic value of films

[t]he adaptations of ‘high’ literature, partly at least, established the cinema as a culturally respected form of entertainment (entertainment-as-art), at the same time providing it with an economic support. Furthermore, a certain extent of pedagogical value had also been attributed to films, since they were thought to be able to ‘teach’ a nation about its classics, its literary and cultural heritage – in a way, to teach a nation about itself, which immediately takes the institution of the cinema to the forefront, turning it into a means of identity-



maker (consider the role of BBC productions of classics in British cultural heritage). (Cristian and Dragon 2008)

From the very beginning, other arts have been closely connected to this relatively new invention. Film makers have looked for inspiration especially in literature, and the development of cinema has never really been separated even from other arts, including literature.

The neutral template of film was laid over the complex system of novel, painting, drama and music to reveal new truths about certain elements of those arts. In fact, if we disregard for the moment the crudity of early recording processes, the majority of the elements of those arts worked very well in film. Indeed, for the last hundred of years the history of the arts is tightly bound up with the challenge of film. (Monaco 1981, 20 cited by Cristian and Dragon 2008)

One of the main elements from other arts that is connected to the film is, as already mentioned above, the narrative. And a narrative certainly cannot complete without characters. This opens up a possibility to analyse characters in the film from a psychological point of view, as it may be done in literary works. Cristian and Dragon (2008) mention this issue in their work:

During the history of films there have been five main psychological approaches in film criticism and theory. The third approach is the analysis of characters appearing in films. Characters and their narrative lives, relations to other characters in the film, or even connections of several characters in cycles or series of films (for example in a family

saga of a trilogy of films) are analysed to produce comprehensive case studies that explain the motives and characteristics that govern the plot.

Thus, it is important for this thesis that film characters, their behaviour and traits can be examined the same way as literary characters are.

### 3.2. TV

One of the first things one can say about TV is that since its beginnings it has become a very popular kind of entertainment for a huge amount of people around the whole world. Until this invention one could watch films only at the cinema. At first, only short films were produced since this technology was not as advanced as today, but later film has gradually developed into the form known nowadays. With the arrival of television, visual production has extended and new forms, such as various reality shows, news or TV series were represented in TV broadcasting.

Considering the short history of visual production, some have hesitated, whether TV could be perceived as a new form of art comparable to, for instance, literature. Television as a new media has drawn great attention and many have started studying television in detail. “Within academia, television has been part of the ongoing study of mass media in general, which has been influenced by many disciplines, including political science, sociology, economics, psychology, and literary studies” (Wasko 2005, 6). As one may notice, academic research is based on various approaches when studying this new media, for it may be necessary to observe it from different perspectives as Wasko mentions in his work: “[n]umerous authors [...] argue that interdisciplinary, multi-perspective approaches are needed” (6).

One approach among the others is particularly important for this thesis since my analysis focuses not on television in general but on a certain form: the television series. As mentioned above, when analysing film, literary studies, less or more modified, may become very useful. The same approach can be applied to television. “ ‘Art’ films, ‘foreign’ films often constituted the subject matter in some earlier classes devoted to film studies, and, as with television, many analytical approaches

were modifications of literary studies” (21). In view of the fact that film has been studied quite thoroughly, a very similar attention was naturally devoted to studies of TV. “Television studies emerges in the 1970s and 1980s from three major bodies of commentary on television: journalism, literary/dramatic criticism and the social sciences” (Brundson 1997, cited by Wasko 2005, 23). Therefore, one can notice that literary theories became a part of television studies from the very beginning.

TV in general is a media that serves various information and provides different types of shows for a very large audience. “In addition to news and public affairs, television provides endless varieties of entertainment and diversion. [...] Thus, many have called television a storyteller, if not THE storyteller for society” (Wasko 2005, 3). Currently, the majority of people own at least one television and use it on a daily basis as a source of new information about various topics and at the same time as a tool for relaxation and amusement.

Television’s role in society is one of common storyteller – it is the mainstream of our popular culture. Its world shows and tells us about life – people, places, striving, power, fate. It lets us know who is good and who is bad, who wins and who loses, what works and what doesn’t, and what it means to be a man or a woman. As such, television has joined the ranks of socialization agents in our society and in the world at large.

(Signorelli and Bacue 1997 cited by Wasko 2005, 3)

Without doubt, television holds large importance in the lives of many individuals and thus should not be overlooked. Once, people could rely on different sources when they were looking for entertainment and among the most known of these certainly belonged reading literature. Today, many may replace this old form of entertainment

with watching television, since one does not need to read a book in order to immerse in a story anymore, since TV broadcasting offers numerous possibilities – one can watch a film, a television series, a sitcom or other storyline based shows.

A situational comedy or sitcom, which is currently a very popular form of TV series, holds an important role for this thesis since I will focus on the American sitcom *The Big Bang Theory*. “American sitcom has been a carrier of discourses on very sensitive cultural and social matters: from racism to war, from intergenerational clashes to sexual identity”(Savorelli 2010, 176). The protagonist usually deals with a particular situation that should be solved by the end of an episode.

Sitcom, just as film, has a narrative structure, although they slightly differ from each other. Stadler and McWilliam (2009) claim that

[c]lassical narrative film favours goal-oriented protagonists with strong psychological motivation who plough through unified narratives, following a clear chain of cause and effect to achieve the symbolic resolution of social problems. [...] Television narration is, by contrast, ongoing and character driven. (172)

Narrative films, unlike television narration deal with a limited period of time, thus, they need to cover the whole story all at once. On the other hand “[a] television narrative might be as small as a 30-seconds advertisement, or as long as an episode, a season or multiple seasons across an entire long-running series” (174). Hence, there is no need to rush into a quick conclusion and there remains more time to focus on characters rather than on the storyline itself.

One may object that television narrative does not act as a fully-fledged narrative as it is not presented at one go, but continuing in the next episode. Yet,

television handles the connection between episodes in that it “[c]onstantly repeats and reinforces information about characters, relationships and plotlines from the previous episode to help new viewers get up to speed” (172).

Television production concentrates its attention on a larger audience than film – it is expected that thousands of viewers may watch the broadcast and on that account, it needs to be adjusted accordingly. The setting, characters and storyline thus may resemble more an ordinary life.

Because television privileges character development over plot development, and often features the familiarity of ordinary life, it is also dominated by content with a domestic nature or setting. This relates to television’s concern with immediacy, liveness and reality: as a medium, television deals with more up to date information and more ‘reality genres’ than cinema does. (173)

Cinema and television cannot be expected to become exactly the same creation as each of them targets a different type of audience and as they also differ in their form. “Situational stories (such as sit-coms) and dilemma-based dramas (such as soap operas) are character driven and, by their nature, domestic, ongoing and relational; hence it is appropriate that their narratives shouldn’t require grand goals, over-arching meanings or absolute closure” (176-177).

In summary, television functions as one of the most powerful media that provides entertainment for thousands of millions around the whole world and it certainly deserves to be called a modern storyteller. Due to its popularity, it has become a subject matter for various studies.

Indeed, in this tendency to confound singly focused approaches, television has also become the site at which various theories and methods, not to say larger systemic constructions such as ‘the social sciences’ or ‘humanities’ or ‘critical theory’ have been forced to recognize shortcomings and attempt conversation, if not always conjunction with others. (Wasko 2005, 25)

Cinema and television, even when they resemble considerably, can be distinguished by some aspects. Cinema as a creation that is presented on screen at one go is expected to introduce a gripping story that focuses mainly on one protagonist. The main hero usually needs to surmount one or more obstacles and afterwards a conclusion is provided. Film is also largely based on various special effects, attractive setting and professional camera shots. On the contrary, television prefers character development and a larger amount of dialogues. Therefore, one should not consider these two visuals to be equal but rather different as their aim and target audience vary.

Indeed, rather than judge television cinematography on the basis of the expressivity of fancy crane shots and complex camera movements – techniques associated with Hollywood film production – we would instead expect a lot of close-ups suitable for screening dialogue and facilitating character engagement. (178)

Thus, one can safely conclude that an analysis of the characters of a television sitcom, from a psychological perspective, which the present thesis aims to do, is a feasible venture, and one that might provide one with interesting findings. This is

what this paper attempts to achieve through an analysis of the specific issues  
“talentedness” causes for the protagonists of *The Big Bang Theory*.



## 4. Gifted People

The world is full of many different people, and intelligence undoubtedly belongs amongst the most significant differences. In this thesis, I specifically focus on people with above-average intelligence, who are called gifted people.

Gifted people in general are distinguished by high-level abilities in various areas. The most known method for measuring such abilities are IQ tests. Individuals whose score is above-average or higher are ranked among gifted people. According to Feldhusen (1995), Renzulli and Reis (1985) and Tannenbaum (1986) “giftedness emerges when moderate levels of intellectual ability (e.g., IQ greater than 120) are combined with other factors such as creativity, motivation, positive self-concept, environmental support and chance factors“(cited by Moon and Hall 1998, 61). However, IQ test does not need to be the only indicator when defining giftedness.

Defining gifted people is not easy. Nevertheless. “[m]ost definitions of intelligence agree with the view that intelligence consists of goal-directed mental activity marked by efficient problem solving, critical thinking, effective abstract reasoning and superior memory” (Pfeiffer 2001 cited by Pfeiffer 2008, 178).

Generally, gifted people usually tend to remember a large amount of knowledge after a short period of time, they understand complex problems more quickly than regular people and they seem to quickly contrive one or even more solution to a particular problem that may seem hard to solve for average individuals.

The gifted are simply very different in some aspects from other people. These differences, however, do not always have to ease their life. Many gifted possess such abilities to the detriment of other skills. A great example may be social and interpersonal skills. As mentioned above, these individuals share one common characteristics: due to their exceptionality they do not really fit into society. Moon

and Hall (1998) confirm this statement in their study: “Highly intellectually gifted students appear to be particularly at risk for psychosocial difficulties because they are so different from the norm” (7). It may seem logical that these individuals can feel uncomfortable in an ordinary situation. They excel in their field of study or in other interests, but when it comes to making acquaintances, they can appear to be clumsy and uncertain about how they should behave in this situation, since they usually rely only on their exceptional abilities. A large amount of knowledge or an exceptional memory, however, may not be helpful at that moment and this is not even the only reason why gifted people may struggle in the socialization process. Naturally, as any other human being, they are “looking for pals who ‘talk their language’ and understand their jokes” which may become more complicated than usual due to their uniqueness (Pfeiffer 2008, 36).

## 5. Analysis

### 5.1. Characteristics of Gifted People

When considering the general characteristics of gifted people, one can observe that these individuals may be set apart from common people due to their difference. Their extraordinary abilities allow them to achieve a greater success for instance in their career but on the other hand people with higher or above-average intelligence tend to have problems to integrate into society and to develop functional interpersonal relationships.

Generally speaking, “[g]ifted [...] will be broadly defined as [those] who have been identified in the to 5-10 % of the population in intellectual and/or creative ability through psychological testing and/or observation of behavioural characteristics” (Moon and Hall 1998, 62). Furthermore, as mentioned above, one of the most famous testing is certainly the IQ test. In the TV series *The Big Bang Theory*, one of the protagonists Sheldon Cooper states: “Penny, I have an IQ of 187” (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2007, s1e11, 09:59) which manifests the importance of this measurement for these people and what is more, gifted individuals may often define themselves through their intelligence quotient rather than through other testing.

“Intellectually gifted [...] usually have the following cognitive characteristics: early language interest and development, large vocabularies, [...], excellent memory, large knowledge bases, curiosity, ability to manipulate abstract symbol systems, ability to learn new material very quickly, and advanced understanding of principles and relationships” (Baska 1989, Tuttle and Becker 1983 cited by Moon and Hall 1998, 62-63). All of these mentioned traits are very easy to find in this TV series as

well. When Leonard together with Sheldon visit a hospital, during a conversation with a receptionist Leonard notices the lady is doing a crossword at that moment and he does not hesitate to quickly reveal the answers that the lady does not seem to know (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2007, s1e1, 00:31). In this situation one may notice the gifted people possess a large amount of knowledge and in addition they are able to recall it at any time. Another great example of the amount of knowledge of gifted can be a situation when Sheldon speaks about the history of chop sticks during a dinner. He and his friends ordered Chinese food and he seemed not to resist the temptation to demonstrate his encyclopedic knowledge about various topics and at the same time to educate the others (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2007, s1e2, 00:23). This points not only to their knowledge but also to the fact that gifted people indeed have an excellent memory since they know things common people do not know, unless they are devoted to a particular subject matter.

A large vocabulary definitely belongs among other typical traits that gifted people possess. In the eleventh episode of season 1, Sheldon becomes ill and he comments on his condition with the words: “As I have predicted I am sick. My fever has been tracking up exponentially since 2 am and I am producing sputum at an alarming rate” (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2007, s1e11, 06:18). Here one can observe his statement contains lexis that is not usually used in this connection. A regular individual expresses his illness rather simply with ‘I have a cold’ or ‘I am ill’ than by using technical terms such as ‘sputum’.

The very same episode also demonstrates the fact that the gifted tend to be very curious. Sheldon, after finding out that he is ill, is making petri dishes to grow throat cultures in order to find out what bacteria invaded his throat (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2007, s1e11, 03:27). Considering the fact that Sheldon’s field of study is

physics this behaviour cannot be regarded as professional deformation, but rather as being interested in figuring out a particular problem and in obtaining new knowledge. This matter may be also associated with what Stalnacke and Smedler (2011) mention in their giftedness study: “The interviewees all expressed an experience of always seeking patterns and solutions [and] identifying issues [...]” (904-905).

The exceptional mental abilities of these above-average intelligent individuals enable them to analyse problems more thoroughly and thus to find a solution more quickly. In the eighth season Leonard, Amy, Raj and his girlfriend Emily decide to try an escape game which is a real-life game where a group of participants must solve a series of puzzles in order to get out of the room. The riddles must naturally be designed in such a way that average people would be able to solve them in a limited time. Albeit the group of friends enjoyed the game, they managed to accomplish all tasks needed to escape within a few minutes although they still had more than enough time left to deal with the puzzles. Eventually, Leonard expresses himself in disappointment: “200 dollars for 6 minutes of fun” (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2015, s8e16, 03:27). Obviously, the gifted, due to their advanced understanding and faster thinking may find tasks that are for most people considerably difficult rather easy and perhaps even boring.

As already mentioned above, the learning abilities of gifted individuals observed in this thesis are significantly more developed than those of regular people, therefore they learn new material very quickly. In the second season of this sitcom, Sheldon suggests Rajesh to play a new version of the traditional rock-paper-scissors game: “It’s very simple. Scissors cut paper, paper covers rock, rock crushes lizard, lizard poisons Spock, Spock smashes scissors, scissors decapitates lizard, lizard eats

paper, paper disproves Spock, Spock vaporizes rock and as it always has, rock crushes scissors” and Rajesh’s prompt response may seem slightly surprising: “Okay, I think I got it” (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2008, s2e8, 00:45-01:06). Most people might surely deem such a quick explanation to be unsatisfactory and they would probably demand to hear it at least once again before they could participate in the game. Even more surprising may be Sheldon’s appellation of the game to be very simple. Not only the thinking of the gifted is at an advanced level, but they also do not perceive complex issues to be complicated at all.

Therefore, this may lead to various issues especially when the gifted come into contact with individuals that are not endowed with such extraordinary mental abilities. Stalnacke and Smedler (2011) describe specifically that gifted may be “[f]rustrated over the lack of logic and mental speed in other people” (904-905). The gifted may not always realize their performance reaches far behind average and thus when someone does not understand a certain matter or lack any knowledge they consider to be essential, they may become even irritated. When Leonard introduces Penny to Sheldon’s twin sister Missy, Penny responds in surprise that they do not share the same physical appearance. Sheldon therefore explains Penny with annoyance that “fraternal twins come from two separate eggs. They are no more alike than any other siblings” (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2007, s1e15, 06:18).

This frustration over the lack of logic in other people that the gifted often suffer, may easily lead them to a conclusion that barely anyone can equal these individuals and that no one can lead a satisfying and meaningful conversation or discussion on a higher level with them. According to Stalnacke and Smedler (2011) “[f]or some, having superior GMA<sup>1</sup> meant being right and having the prerogative to

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<sup>1</sup> “superior general mental ability [...] defined by an IQ score > 130” (Stalnacke and Smedler 2011, 900)

assume that others were wrong and stupid” (912). The character in this TV series who especially assumes that everyone besides him lacks intelligence is definitely Sheldon Cooper. In one episode, he and his roommate Leonard elaborate a work together and they are invited to present it at the Institute of Experimental Physics. They receive a special letter announcing this event but Sheldon throws it away before Leonard can read it, but later he discovers the letter by coincidence and demands an explanation why Sheldon did not inform him and threw away the invitation. Sheldon responds: “Because I have no interest in standing in the Rose room of the Pasadena Marriot in front of a group of judgemental strangers who wouldn’t recognize true genius if it was standing in front of them giving a speech. Which if I were there, would be” (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2007, s1e9, 04:19). Here one can observe that in this case Sheldon automatically assumes everyone who will attend the presentation lacks enough intelligence to appreciate his brilliance. The discussion between the two roommates continues later and Leonard demonstrates his indignation that Sheldon dares to throw away such an important correspondence and adds what if he received an announcement about, for instance, a Nobel prize. Sheldon responds in a quite insulting way: “Leonard, please don’t take this the wrong way but the day you win a Nobel prize is the day I begin my research on the drag coefficient of tassels on flying carpets” (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2007, s1e9, 04:44). His answer indicates that he perceives not only strangers to be unintelligent, but he also looks down on his closest friends, such as Leonard who actually obtained education in a similar field of study as Sheldon.

Leonard is unfortunately not the only one who became Sheldon’s laughing target. Rajesh recounts Sheldon’s visit in his office with significant displeasure: “He watched me work for 10 minutes and then started to design a simple piece of

software that could replace me” (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2007, s1e12, 10:28). Howard, another member of the group of scientists and also a friend of Sheldon’s, suffers the most, due to the fact that he does not have a Ph.D. In the thirteenth episode of season 1, Sheldon, Leonard, Raj and Howard practise for a quiz show in which they intend to participate. Sheldon answers the quiz questions so fast that the others are not able to join in as well. Howard raises an objection that someone else besides Sheldon could possibly provide the correct answer but Sheldon cuts him off immediately with the words: “Oh please, you don’t even have a Ph.D.” (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2007, s1e13, 05:55). One may note that there is a number of examples when the gifted assume the others are wrong and stupid and as demonstrated in the situations above it does not necessarily have to be only in connection with significantly less intelligent individuals.

The last example of the same issue is again, as one may already suppose, connected with the one most peculiar protagonist. When Sheldon gives a lecture to physics students, he claims that none of them will be able to make any significant contribution on physics in the future (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2007, s2e6, 03:46). Thus, his assumption is that indeed everyone but him lack the necessary abilities and intelligence to achieve such success he already did. In this case, such behaviour represents more an excessive egocentrism that is not necessarily typical for all the gifted in *The Big Bang Theory* TV series.

Another typical trait Pfeiffer (2008) mentions in his work is that “[h]igher IQ persons have been found to: [...], have larger and more elaborately organized knowledge bases; and use more, more complex, and more active processing strategies” (22). When the gifted happen to be found in a situation in which they should evaluate or solve some issues, they usually process the new information in a



more complex way and often come up with an answer that would not occur to other people. For instance, when Leonard tries to help Penny surmount her current personal matter with a man, she refuses to talk to him. Sheldon comments her behaviour with a very detailed explanation: “Penny’s emotional responses originate in the primitive portion of brain, the amygdala. While speech is centered in the recently developed neocortex. Former can overpower the latter giving scientific credence to the notion of being rendered speechless” (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2007, s1e17, 02:30). Whether this conclusion is nearing the truth one can only guess. Anyway, one may contemplate such a response to be quite unusual. Apparently, the way of thinking of this particular gifted person does not resemble the thinking of most average people. He was able to immediately recall information he has probably read in some literature and connected it with this specific situation. In the same episode, the very similar situation occurs again when Penny asks Sheldon for advice concerning Leonard. Accordingly he explains her relationship with Leonard by the very famous psychological test: “Just like Schrödinger’s cat, your potential relationship with Leonard right now can be thought of as both good and bad. It is only by opening the box that you’ll find out which it is” (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2007, s1e17, 15:57). Obviously, when taking the provided examples into consideration, the brain processes of the gifted function on a different level than the ones of regular individuals, their knowledge organisation appears to be more complex and they are able to get significantly deeper into the matter.

On the other hand, the more complex way of thinking does not always have to serve to their benefit, for sometimes “[h]ighly gifted [...] tend to make simple tasks more complex [and] have a need for extreme precision” (Pfeiffer 2008, 23). One such relatively simple task may be carrying a package. Penny asked Sheldon and

Leonard whether they could take over her furniture package and carry it into her apartment. The first problem arises already by the discovery that they need to use stairs that are in addition not straight but spiral. Before they even start they try to invent the easiest way to carry it with the help of a physical law. In the first turn they find out physics will not be helpful even with the knowledge of an angle formula and thus they come to the conclusion that only raw strength needs to be employed. (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2007, s1e2, 04:31-06:15) Apparently, the gifted are often accustomed to rely preferably on their mental abilities and when a situation appears in which they should apply common sense, they often fail. An even more fitting example can be demonstrated later in the same episode. The group of four scientists, namely Leonard, Sheldon, Rajesh and Howard offer Penny help with a media center assembling. First of all, they check whether the package contains the corresponding number of required components and then begin to study a manual. The manual does not appear to them to be sufficient enough and that is why they decide to invent their own more sophisticated procedure. In the meantime, Penny manages to herself build the new piece of furniture. (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2007, s1e12, 18:48-20:31) As one can notice, the gifted presented in this TV series perfectly confirm the statement that they incline to change a very easy task into a very complicated one, which can be solved only thanks to their extraordinary intelligence.

As for the need for enormous precision, Sheldon again may serve as the most relevant example. When he and Penny go shopping by car, Sheldon suddenly admonishes her for not leaving enough space between their car and the one driving in front of them. (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2007, s1e4, 5:55) Considering the fact that Sheldon himself does not drive, although he has a driving licence, his concern may

be connected rather with the knowledge he received in a driving school about the safe distance between cars than with the real threat of danger. As soon as he concluded by his estimate that the distance is too short, he became almost hysterical that Penny does not observe the rules precisely. Sheldon also has great respect for correct English grammar and when someone makes a mistake he does not hesitate to correct it promptly. In *The Big Bang Theory* there is a large amount of such occurrences but I will name only one for illustrative purposes. Leonard and Sheldon discuss Penny at lunch and Leonard confides to his friend: “Now that I am actually about to go out with Penny, I’m not excited, I’m nauseous” (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2007, s1e17, 17:03). Sheldon replies to his concern with an advice and eventually he does not forget to point out: “You also made a grammatical mistake. You said ‘nauseous’ when you meant ‘nauseated’” (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2007, s1e17, 17:17).

The gifted, however, do not naturally only brim over with superlative abilities but they also evince signs of problematic character.

Examples of potentially troublesome affective traits cited in the literature as typical of gifted [...] are a heightened sense of justice, intensity, [...], high expectancies, excessive self-criticism, pressure to meet external expectations, perfectionism, difficulty coping with failure, [...], high levels of energy, and strong attachments and commitments (Baker 1996, Ford 1989, Kitano 1990, Lovecky 1992, Roberts and Lovett 1994, Sowa, McIntire, May and Bland 1994, Webb 1993 cited by Moon and Hall 1998, 63).

As the gifted may be used to the phenomenon that they succeed in almost everything, in most cases a failure can be perceived by these individuals as almost unacceptable. This failure does not necessarily have to relate to something important. On the contrary, it can be a small, insignificant failure like, for instance, being defeated in a game. When Penny decides to play a videogame together with Leonard, Raj and Sheldon, none of them anticipate that she could beat Sheldon without having any experience with the particular game. Thus, Sheldon, who cannot endure this situation, walks away insulted. (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2007, s1e7, 04:00-04:45) Such behaviour may give the impression of being rather childish, but when one observes it from a different angle it is not so surprising after all. People whose performance surpasses that of most average individuals can indeed have difficulty in dealing with a situation which is completely new and unknown for them.

Another quite common characteristic feature of the gifted is intensity, which can be considered as both good and bad depending on the situation. These individuals may very easily become enthusiastic about various activities and therefore, they are able to put a large amount of energy into doing it. When Leonard, Sheldon, Raj and Howard spend their evening together, they manage to turn the stereo down by sending a signal around the world via internet. All of them seem to be extremely excited about it (they are jumping, dancing and literally celebrating their achievement) and obviously, they experience the situation with immense intensity. (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2007, s1e9, 00:01-01:14) In this case their behaviour does not affect anyone, they are only having fun. On the other hand, when Leonard and Penny are having a romantic dinner, Leonard, all of a sudden looking quite thoughtfully, stops talking and leaves Penny sitting alone at the table with an excuse that he has to share an idea concerning physics that he has just invented with

Sheldon. Afterwards, Leonard spends the whole evening with him in a bid to confirm his hypothesis. (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2015, s8e14, 01:02-02:36) On the one hand, it could seem quite understandable that Leonard experienced his brand-new idea with such an intensity, but on the other hand his behaviour may appear to be rather impolite towards Penny.

Highly intelligent persons also tend to have, as already mentioned above, significantly strong attachments and commitments. The relationship of Howard and his mother may be presented as the most suitable example. It has been labelled as ‘unhealthy’ during the whole series. In the first episode of season 8 Howard becomes rather disconcerted by a discovery that his mother has developed quite a close relationship with his friend Stuart, who lives in his house and takes care of his ill mother. He even finds out they recorded a message together on the answering machine, which makes him unimaginably jealous of Stuart. (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2014, s8e1, 12:03-13:00) Considering that both Howard and Stuart are adult men, this story attachment to his mother on Stuart’s part seems to be slightly unusual. Apparently, he is strongly bound to his parent and he cannot stand the fact that anyone else could possibly get closer to his mother. The situation makes him feel threatened and depressed.

Being so above the average in intelligence can sometimes also become for such persons rather difficult or even frustrating. Since the gifted usually succeed in their field of study or in their other interests, they can gain the impression that their performance needs to be always outstanding. Thus, these people can feel under pressure, since they try to live up to expectations of the others. This assumption may lead to a desire for perfection and also to abnormal self-criticism at the same time, extraordinary intelligence does not necessarily have to be the only cause of such

feelings since the gifted may lack self-confidence owing to their often less developed social and emotional skills, which I will narrow down more in detail later in this thesis. In the ninth episode of season 1 during a conference in front of strange people Leonard argues with Sheldon and he expresses himself quite explicitly on this topic: "And I am clearly not the only person who is tormented by insecurity and has an ego of constant validation. My name is Dr Leonard Hofstadter and I could never please my parents so I need to get all my self-esteem from strangers like you" (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2007, s1e9, 15:40-15:55). In this case, one may notice his feeling of insufficiency is also connected, besides other things, to his dysfunctional relationships with his parents who were, according to his own words, never willing to appreciate his abilities. This may seem quite surprising since Leonard as a gifted person must have excelled in many things and he would certainly deserve their appreciation.

## 5.2. The Gifted and Emotional Intelligence

As one may notice from the previous description of the gifted, such individuals indeed excel within their field in the most extraordinary way. Their intellectual abilities go far behind average and therefore they belong to a very unique minority group of people. On the other hand, it is quite a well-known fact these days that the intelligence quotient certainly cannot be considered as the only indicator of an overall intelligence. One should definitely allow for the so called emotional intelligence, which should not be underestimated either.

Goleman (1995) specifies five major elements of emotional intelligence including self-awareness (knowing one's emotion); handling feelings (managing emotions); self-

motivation, mastery, and control (motivating oneself); empathy (recognizing emotions in others); and social competence (handling relationships). (cited by Seon-Young and Olszewski-Kubilius 2006, 31)

The emotional skills listed above certainly belong among other important abilities that are fundamental for every human being since our society is based on mutual coexistence.

Later, the definition [of emotional intelligence] was elaborated as ‘the ability to perceive and express emotion accurately and adaptively, the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge, the ability to use feelings to facilitate thought, and the ability to regulate emotions in oneself and in others. (Salovey and Pizzaro 2003, 263 cited by Seon-Young and Olszewski-Kubilius 2006, 31)

The gifted often lack a few or sometimes all of these typical traits that may appear to be quite a natural thing for an average person. For instance, the ability to understand emotions in others may become quite challenging for the gifted. In episode 3 of season 2 Penny comes home and manages to damage the lock of her apartment with a wrong key and thus she cannot get inside and must wait for a repairman. Besides that, she is dealing with other problems in her life, including unsuccessful career. Therefore, she sits on the floor and starts crying. Sheldon comes to see what happened and asks her: “Would you prefer to wait in our apartment?” after which Penny replies: “No Sheldon, I’d rather sit on this freezing-cold floor sobbing like a three-year-old.” Unfortunately, Sheldon does not understand Penny is sarcastic and he is going to leave her there alone. (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2008,

s2e3, 02:31-02:46). Here one can see Sheldon failed to recognize the true feelings of Penny. Even though he shows signs of certain empathy when inviting her to wait in his apartment, when she refuses to go, he is no more able to identify her mood and considers the issue solved.

Sheldon Cooper is not the only one who sometimes lacks empathy. When Howard and Bernadette have an argument about spending time together, Howard does not show an adequate understanding towards his wife's feelings. She expresses a certain dissatisfaction when she finds out how Howard spoke about her in front of his friends – "I'm just saying I'd never want to work with Bernadette. Can you imagine seeing someone all day long and then you're supposed to hang out with them after work too?" (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 20013, s7e5, 03:25). This statement may not seem so odd, except that, in fact, Howard does the exact thing with his friends as they work together all day long and afterwards they spend their free time together as well. Nevertheless, Howard tries to apologize to Bernadette but his apology is obviously only pretended and based on his fear of displeasing his wife. Thus, Bernadette takes offense at this matter and recommends him to find another overnight stay that evening. (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2013, s7e5, 06:39 – 07:53) Later the very same evening Bernadette comes to Rajesh's to bring Howard back home with an explanation that she may have overreacted and explains she only felt sorry Howard does not enjoy spending time with her, to which Howard replies: "I get that, I'm sorry. Starting tomorrow, I am turning over a new leaf. Time with you is my number one priority." Bernadette seems a little confused why tomorrow and Howard explains: "Well, we're real close to finishing off the new Batman game" (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2013, s7e5, 15:12-16:02). Here one may clearly see that in fact Howard did not manage to understand the emotions of his wife at all. Even



though he admitted his mistake, only a moment later he repeated it without realizing it. The only difference between him and Sheldon is that Howard at least tries very hard to cover his imperfection and acts like he is actually able to recognize the feelings of others.

Another key part of emotional intelligence is managing one's feelings. Emotions are a very natural part of everyone's life and one must learn how to handle them in the most effective way, not only for one's own good, but also for the good of others. This skill may appear to be quite difficult even for regular people, not to mention how tricky it may be for the individuals discussed in this thesis, since these ones struggle in this area in general.

The one main character who often struggles with managing his emotions is undoubtedly Sheldon. In the final episode of season 7 he finds himself in an unpleasant situation when his university forces him to change the subject of his study and at the same time his freshly married friend Leonard would like to move away from him. Additionally, his favourite place (comic book store) where he usually goes when he feels sad, has burned down. As this character cannot deal very well with any changes in his life, he gradually becomes very anxious. Eventually, Sheldon is nowhere to be found and Leonard with Penny start worrying about him and therefore decide to track his phone in order to see where he is. They find him at a train station and he, after being asked what happened, says: "I'm just getting on a train and leaving forever" (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2014, s2e3, 16:38). This kind of response to the events happening in his life could be considered quite exaggerated. One can easily discern that he completely failed to handle his feelings. His behaviour goes far beyond his usual, predictable actions, since Sheldon usually has strictly scheduled every single detail and such spontaneous leaving does not resemble him at

all. The emotional condition of this young man must be surely quite difficult and due to his lack of emotional intelligence he chooses a radical solution to his problems and, what is more, his actions affect not only him, but also the others, who care about him.

The following example of not managing one's own emotions concerns a situation that happened between Penny and Howard. Since Howard generally does not excel in particular at relationships with women, Penny often feels rather uncomfortable around him. He usually makes inappropriate allusions and suggestions when being in the company of Leonard's and Sheldon's neighbour. One such situation comes when Penny and Howard talk about the upcoming event "Southern California Fighting League". Howard explains how important this is for them and emphasizes the dance that comes afterward. At this point, he starts making the suggestions: "Once again, Penny and I have begun our little tango. The carnal repartee, the erotic to and fro" (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2009, s2e12, 03:42-03:46). This time Penny cannot tolerate his peculiarity anymore and replies with significant displeasure: "I know you think you are some sort of smooth-talking ladies' man, but the truth is, you are just pathetic and creepy" (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2009, s2e12, 04:29). Afterwards, Howard stays at home for two days and refuses to leave his home under any circumstance. Eventually, Penny is forced to visit him and apologize in order to get him out of the house. (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2009, s2e12, 09:20-12:59) Apparently, Howard did not expect such a response coming from Penny. He felt deeply insulted, which is not surprising at all, but the way he handles the situation is again slightly exaggerated. There is no doubt Howard failed to handle his feelings as well. It is only natural one could feel hurt after such a harsh and honest statement from another person, but dealing with it does not necessarily have to be so

dramatic. He should be able to control his emotions adequately instead of this rather childish behaviour. As one may notice, even though the majority of regular people could relate to these issues once in a while as well, the gifted tend to struggle in these situations even more.

Self-awareness belongs among the other qualities included in emotional intelligence. Probably all the gifted characters in *The Big Bang Theory* lack this particular skill to a smaller or bigger extent. They certainly realize that they are somewhat different and even they often label themselves as being 'nerdy'. But, on the other hand, they often do not realize just how different they are, which manifests itself especially when they come into contact with other people. For instance, Rajesh dares to flirt with his superior at a work party. He tries to be sympathetic in order to establish a relaxed atmosphere and comments on her recent divorce with the following words: "I recently read a fascinating article on infidelity among penguins. So if the fact that your husband left you makes you feel unattractive, just remember, penguins get cheated on and they're adorable" (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2013, s7e1, 07:15-07:24). Judging by the confounded look of Mrs. Davis, Rajesh's remark did not impress her at all. Besides the fact that he probably should not speak this way with his boss, his intention also turned out to be rather insensitive. In addition, Rajesh usually gets the feeling that he really did impress the woman after situations like these: "I think we had a moment" (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2013, s7e1, 07:15-07:24). Unfortunately, it appears to be rather obvious from watching the scene that he is mistaken. By contrast, a feeling of complete despair and lack of understanding is his second common response to these situations. He is evidently not able to recognize his emotions and reflect his own behaviour so he could improve in interpersonal relationships.

In the following example one can again notice a certain lack of self-awareness. In the eighth season Sheldon reveals some unpleasant information to Penny: “What if I told you that over the past few months Amy has secretly been giving you little puzzles to test your intelligence against chimpanzees in her lab?” (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2015, s8e15, 08:14). Not only does this situation demonstrate that the gifted really consider themselves to be significantly superior to others, but it also proves that they are not able to predict how their behaviour could affect someone else. Penny is naturally not delighted at all when finding her dear friend has involved her in such an experiment and she feels rather humiliated and insulted. Later, she even finds out Sheldon has been testing Leonard as well. Leonard seems to be rather perplexed and he does not understand why would Amy and Sheldon do such a thing, but Penny is quite clear about it: “Eh, what’s the matter with them is they think they’re so smart they don’t care if they hurt other people’s feelings” (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2015, s8e15, 15:56). Even after this confrontation the two scientists still seem not to identify where the problem lies: “I still don’t understand why you’re upset. You solved every puzzle faster than all of the chimps. Well, except Barnabas, but he was on Aderall” (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2015, s8e15, 16:04-16:11).

In the light of the examples above, one can conclude that “[h]ighly intellectually gifted [persons] appear to be particularly at risk for psychosocial difficulties because they are so different from the norm” (Robinson and Noble 1991 cited by Moon and Hall 1998, 65). This difference resides especially in their remarkable abilities that are usually noticeable since their early childhood. But, one must admit that when it comes to identifying gifted persons the main focus usually lies on a knowledge area and on measuring of rational intelligence. The other fundamental parts of overall intelligence often tend to be overlooked and as it is

rather evident from the examples presented in this thesis “[t]he development of academic giftedness may occur at the expense of some aspects of emotional intelligence for some gifted” (Miller et al. 1994 cited by Seon-Young and Olszewski-Kubilius 2006, 57). In *The Big Bang Theory* TV series all the main characters can be identified as gifted, except for Penny. She is presented as a regular person with no extraordinary abilities, but when it comes to dealing with interpersonal relationships, Penny certainly handles them in a more skilful way than her gifted friends. “Clearly, advanced abilities to reason and think verbally or mathematically do not give one advantage in the handling or understanding of one’s own or others’ emotions” (Seon-Young and Olszewski-Kubilius 2006, 59).

### 5.3. The Gifted and Interpersonal Relationships

Social competence also belongs among the skills included in emotional intelligence and at the same time it represents one of the most important parts for my analysis. Social competence means the ability to handle relationships. Seon-Young and Olszewski-Kubilius (2006) describe these abilities, which are very similar to Goleman’s emotional intelligence, as follows: “interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences, called personal intelligences, are about the capacity to interact effectively with other people via understanding their feelings, emotions, intentions, and motivations, and the capacity to regulate one’s own life through self-understanding of emotions and abilities” (32).

These abilities are not exactly a strong point of persons with above-average intellectual intelligence. The fact, that they are often incapable of managing their own feelings reflects on their relationships with others as well. The gifted tend to have large difficulties when it comes to building truly functional interpersonal

relationships. This weakness limits them not only when they try to make new acquaintances, but also in relationships they already have and, what is more, these inconveniences can sometimes make some of these individuals feel lonely or even isolated from society.

First of all, I would like to focus on situations in which the gifted seem to act the most awkwardly and that is meeting new people. In the first example, I will introduce the astrophysicist Rajesh Koothrappali and his unsuccessful attempts to meet someone. In the first episode of season 1 when Raj meets Penny for the first time, she tries to start a conversation with him but unfortunately Raj is dealing with his own psychological issues at that moment, since he is not able to speak with women at all. Thus, after Penny's question whether he works with Leonard and Sheldon at the university he just looks away and acts like he did not hear (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2007, s1e1, 17:09). One must say that such a handicap puts Raj at a larger disadvantage in comparison to his gifted friends.

The second example is also closely connected to his inability to speak in the presence of women. Due to the fact that Raj is not able to find any woman, his parents decide to arrange a date for him. This, as one may easily anticipate, puts Raj in a difficult situation and at first, he does not seem to find a solution to his problem with speaking. Later, without any choices left, he is forced to drink alcohol during the whole date since it is the only thing that enables him to relax and speak shamelessly. Unfortunately, the drink causes that Rajesh behaves rather inappropriately: "You have lost so much weight. That must have been difficult for you because you were so, so fat" (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2007, s1e8, 12:05). It is obviously not necessary to point out that the date ended as a failure since he only managed to insult his companion.

This type of problems have accompanied Raj during the whole series, although over time, he has finally learnt to speak with women without alcohol consumption. In the last example, Penny arranges a date with her friend for Raj. When they first meet, Raj expresses a certain amazement that such a beautiful girl has no partner. At first it seems they could spend quite a pleasant time together but then, again, Raj's poor social competence and lack of self-confidence emerge on the surface: "I don't believe you. You are lying to me! It's okay. I have no morals, and I'm desperately lonely. I'll be the other man if you want a little something-something on the side" (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2013, s7e8, 19:19). Observing these situations, one can see that Raj is not only unsuccessful at finding a partner himself, but he also fails when the date is already arranged.

The next main character, Howard Wolowitz, does not seem to handle interpersonal relationships any better. Although this scientist, unlike Raj, usually gives the impression of being excessively confident when it comes to flirting with women, the contrary is the case. In the first episode of season 1 Howard endeavours to impress Penny with his interesting suggestion to "hang out" together in an online game. In addition, he makes his offer in a rather seductive way, but Penny does not seem to be delighted at all. (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2007, s1e1, 20:25)

A similar situation emerges when Howard flirts with an actress from his favourite TV series in a train. At first he tries to invent the most suitable way to approach her. Leonard suggests to say "Hello" but Howard disapproves: "No, no, no. That always creeps girls out. I need to come up with something that's funny, smart and delicately suggests that my sexual endowment is disproportionate to my physical stature" (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2009, s2e17, 18:35). One may notice already from this statement that his assumptions are rather peculiar and probably incorrect.

Coming to a strange person with suggestions like these may appear to be weird and inappropriate. Accordingly, a few minutes later Howard approaches the woman with the words: “Hi, I’m the small package good things come in” (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2009, s2e17, 15:46). Judging by the annoyed look of the actress most people would recognize her lack of interest, but Howard with his insufficient social skills continues talking even after a straight refusal. (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2009, s1e1, 16:43-19:08) The whole scene culminates when the woman agrees to take a picture with Howard and he, obviously not being aware of the situation, asks a question: “Can I take one where it looks like we’re making out?” (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2009, s2e17, 19:10). Even after such an experience Howards shows no signs of self-awareness and feels significantly disappointed. Apparently, his lack of social competence does not allow him to make a new acquaintance successfully.

Leonard Hofstadter, another member of the group of scientists, also struggles with relationships in general. Although he, unlike his other gifted friends, does not usually fail in such a disastrous way. His problem lies especially in acquaintance making as such. He usually lacks the confidence and mainly the courage to approach a new person. Thus, he usually does not address the particular person at all or he remains speechless since he is not able to have a spontaneous conversation with strange people. In the second season of *The Big Bang Theory* one can see such a situation when Leonard together with Howard decide to visit a bar to meet women. Eventually, both scientists sit at a table the whole evening and they do not dare to talk to anyone (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2009, s2e20, 18:17).

As one may notice, these individuals feel quite uncomfortable and uncertain when it comes to the socialization process and they find it extremely challenging, which causes their often repeated failure to connect with someone.



On the other hand, I must admit that the gifted observed in this thesis are not completely unable to build relationships with someone, but they still show certain signs of clumsiness in managing them. For instance, in the first episode of season 1 Leonard mentions he rather took conversation cards on a date with Penny (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2009, s2e1, 03:12). Indeed one may see that even such a regular situation like a date with a woman can put the gifted in a stressful situation so they rather try to prepare for it in advance.

The manners of the physicist Sheldon Cooper also seem to be peculiar in various situations. As one may notice, in this TV series, he has managed to make a few good friends who share his interests and who are more or less used to his unusual personality. But when it comes to new acquaintance making he appears to be rather helpless. For instance, in the second season, Sheldon even tries to invent an algorithm for friendship. After the creation of a detailed diagram, he attempts to make his first new friend and thus he calls his co-worker: "Hello Kripke, Yeah, Sheldon Cooper here. It occurred to me you hadn't returned any of my calls because I hadn't offered any suggestions for pursuing our friendship. Yeah, perhaps the two of us might share a meal together. Yeah, I see. Well, then perhaps you'd have time for a hot beverage? Popular choices include tea, coffee, cocoa"(Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2009, s2e13, 12:30-12:53). This conversation lasts another few more minutes and during the whole conversation Sheldon stands in front of a whiteboard and reads the question from the diagram. One can clearly see that Sheldon's goal is rather unrealistic. Friendship cannot be created in one phone call, it demands significantly more effort. Sheldon as the scientist often tends to handle relationships as scientific experiments and he seems not to understand the basic principles of the socialization process.

Even though the gifted eventually manage to get closer with someone, coexistence with them may still be challenging for people in their surroundings. For instance, Amy often struggles with Sheldon's unusual and unexpected reactions. In the seventh season they both should work at the same university for some time. The first day, Sheldon surprises Amy and joins her and her new colleagues at lunch. He starts making inappropriate jokes about them and ridicules Amy (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2009, s7e5, 10:11-10:43). Later, Amy expresses her dissatisfaction with Sheldon's behaviour to which he replies: "My behaviour in the cafeteria was delightful" (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2013, s7e5, 12:20). Observing Sheldon's response, one can clearly see he is not able to recognize his mistake and thus, he does not even apologize.

Amy is not the only one who suffers his oddness. In the very same season Howard invites his friends including Sheldon to spend Thanksgiving at his house. Sheldon's answer again appears to be rather odd: "You know I've been told that a bald refusal of an invitation is rude and one must instead offer a polite excuse, so I'd love to go but unfortunately that sounds awful" (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2013, s7e9, 01:06). One can clearly see that Sheldon's attempt to look socially normal and to respond in a polite way failed. He tries to learn the social convention his whole life but when he should use his knowledge in a particular conversation the result of his effort is still impolite.

Amy can sometimes give the impression of being socially awkward as well. In the final episode of season 7 she comes to visit Sheldon but he is not at home at that moment. Only Penny with Leonard are there, having a romantic dinner as a newly engaged couple. Even after this discovery Amy seems not to be able to figure out that they would rather stay alone. Thus, Penny is forced to send her away: "Amy, get

out” (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2014, s7e24, 12:47). Obviously, this character lacks a certain social understanding in the similar way as her gifted peers.

Coming back to the astrophysicist Rajesh, he seems to struggle in the already existing relationships equally as in making acquaintances. In the seventh season, he finally manages to find a girlfriend, but unfortunately this relationship does not last very long. Shortly after the breakup Raj manages to arrange a meeting with his ex-girlfriend thanks to Penny. It is supposed to be only a casual coffee talk, but he is extremely nervous about it and therefore he asks his friends Howard and Bernadette for advice: “Can I show her an oil painting I made of us surrounded by our children and grandchildren?” (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2013, s7e8, 12:37). Apparently, one can see Raj is not able to recognize what behaviour is adequate in this situation. In addition, one may sense a certain hopelessness and loneliness from his statement.

The previous example leads me to another issue that some gifted may struggle from time to time. Due to their significant difference from the non-gifted persons they may feel lonely and apart from society. Rajesh certainly represents the sample example of such feelings. As I already mentioned above, he used to deal with the one issue – talking to women. This fact made him feel so desperate that he volunteered for the testing of a new social anxiety medication: “Hey, guess what. I’ve been accepted as a test subject for a new miracle drug to overcome pathological shyness” (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2008, s1e15, 06:20).

Raj’s best friend Howard contends with this problem as well. In order to fit into society he once even brought an escort date to a work party. (Lorre, Prady, Cendrowski 2007, s1e4, 02:14) One can easily conclude that such an action is a sign of a feeling of isolation. Thus, Howard’s intensive attempt to look socially normal and to fit in leads him to such an idea.

From the copious amount of examples in *The Big Bang Theory* that describe various situations in which the gifted often find themselves, one may say for certain that these individuals really tend to struggle in interpersonal relationships just as the theoretical models used would suggest. “The highly gifted are so cognitively different from other [people] that it may be hard for them to build normal socialization skills” (Pfeiffer 2008, 225). They do indeed excel in various areas and their abilities are considered to be extraordinary, but “[a]lthough gifted [persons] tend to have higher self-concept in academic domains, in interpersonal areas they are lower than their nongifted peers” (Pfeiffer 2008, 333).

## 6. Conclusion

The aim of this bachelor thesis was to find out whether the above-average abilities of the gifted persons presented in the television series *The Big Bang Theory* were given to them to the detriment of their social skills and whether they really struggle in the area of interpersonal relationships.

Since this paper is dealing with fictional characters, it was necessary to find out to what extent one can perceive them in ways similar to real human beings. It was shown that even though these made-up constructions can never be fully compared to real persons, the intention is to create such characters that resemble real men or women in the most plausible way, and therefore one may observe them from similar points of view as one would with real, flesh and blood human beings, including the perspective of psychology.

Speaking of fictional characters, one may usually imagine a literary character but as I have mentioned in the chapter “Visual Narrative”, film and television are considered to be narratives as well, although they differ from literature in certain aspects. Research has also shown that the type of narrative I am dealing with in this thesis - the sitcom – is a specific genre that focuses on character development rather than on plot, and is thus especially suitable for an analysis of psychological characteristics.

Afterwards, the general characteristics of the gifted was provided. As shown, these individuals are generally described as persons with higher or above-average intelligence. Among the typical abilities that these persons usually possess belongs an outstanding memory, the ability to memorize a large amount of knowledge, and the ability to handle various issues in an extremely effective way.

In contrast, as this paper showed, the gifted have their own issues that they are often struggling with. It was pointed out that these persons have a significantly less developed emotional intelligence than their non-gifted peers and that they often tend to struggle with their poor social skills. They usually fail to recognize not only the feelings of others but also their own feelings which may cause a large amount of misunderstandings when being in contact with other persons. And, in most cases, it appears to be almost impossible for them to build fully functional interpersonal relationships. This happens mainly due to the fact that already ordinary acquaintance making seems to be impossible or very difficult for them, not to mention how they deal with relationships they already have. Although these persons may appear that they do not even understand their own problems, such inconveniences can be quite overwhelming for them.

These features of behaviour were all possible to find in *The Big Bang Theory*, as the previous pages have shown. I have provided a range of examples for all of the specific issues, involving all main characters of the sitcom. Thus, it is possible to conclude that this TV series indeed represents the gifted realistically in terms of their struggle in interpersonal relationships.

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