

Conforming and Condescending Attitude of Gifted Children in Response to their Social Anxiety and Asynchronous Cognitive and Emotional Development

Alexandros Papandreou^{1*}, Evangelia Athinaiou¹ and Alkistis Mavrogalou¹

¹Elkyda, Research & Education Centre of Charismatheia, Athens, Greece

*Corresponding author: Alexandros Papandreou, Elkyda, Research & Education Centre of Charismatheia, Athens, Greece

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 📅 May 01, 2023

Published: 📅 May 10, 2023

Citation: Alexandros Papandreou, Evangelia Athinaiou and Alkistis Mavrogalou. Conforming and Condescending Attitude of Gifted Children in Response to their Social Anxiety and Asynchronous Cognitive and Emotional Development. Biomed J Sci & Tech Res 50(2)-2023. BJSTR. MS.ID.007934.

ABSTRACT

Main characteristic of giftedness is the asynchronous cognitive and emotional development of children even from an early age. This deviation affects the self-concept of gifted children when they join educational environments as they compare themselves with their peers. Sometimes, this results to social anxiety that triggers two common behavioral issues that gifted children suffer of, a condescending attitude of arrogance or a conforming attitude of compliance. Both result to maladaptive behaviors. In this report, two cases of gifted children are presented. In the first case, a child that displayed arrogance is presented while in the later another that exhibited compliance, putting aside its own interests and identity, to feel accepted by its peers. Both cases are analyzed in respect with the abilities, self-concept, emotional balance, motivation, support systems and attitude of the children evaluated. Useful insights are provided in both cases.

Keywords: Gifted Children; Giftedness; Asynchronous Development; Arrogance; Compliance; Self-Concept; Support Systems; Motivators; Attitude; Underachievement; Perfectionism

Introduction

Typically, gifted children exhibit cognitive abilities beyond their emotional development [1]. Although Intelligence Quotient (IQ) tests are widely used as a tool of identification of gifted individuals, they remain insufficient for the recognition and assessment of their qualitative traits associated with giftedness [2,3]. Some of the characteristics highly observed to gifted children are creativity, leadership skills, high perceptual and cognitive ability, productive thinking, ego strength, persistence [4], as well as an internal locus of control [5]. However, all these characteristics are not pre-requisite for a child to be identified as gifted. There is no single definition that best describes gifted children, and they are not considered as a homogeneous group [6]. Nevertheless, they all exhibit asynchronous cognitive and emotional development since their cognitive capacity is of, at least, 2 standard

deviations ahead of their age. Consequently, it is frequently observed that they have difficulties in adjusting in a peer environment.

As a result, they display different attitudes, have different needs and need special assistance [7]. Due to their deviation from their peers, gifted children often adopt an awry self-concept and exhibit social anxiety and pressure among their peers [8,9]. This tendency is reinforced by their self-awareness which is ahead of their age and stems out of their advanced cognition [10]. On top of that, their developed empathy enables them to understand the expectations that others have of them and comply with them, so that they feel accepted. As a result, sometimes, they seem to be prone to emotional manipulation, as they experience direct – verbal – and indirect – emotional – projections imposed by their parents and peers. Gifted children feel that they shouldn't disappoint their parents and comply to the

interests and way of thinking of their peers to gain their acceptance. Therefore, they tend to see their deviation more as an impediment to their relationships rather than an incentive for further personal development [11].

The response of gifted children to this social and emotional pressure varies. Sometimes, they exhibit arrogance, which derives out of their cognitive superiority in comparison with their peers. Other times, they choose to conform to their environment, and they prefer not to exhibit their potential, views, and skills, in fear that their peers will share the same awry image of them, which they have already adopted for themselves, and isolate them [12]. The manifestation of these attitudes by gifted children will be investigated and analyzed through the cases presented in this paper. Motivational characteristics of gifted children has repeatedly concerned the scientific community. Motivation has been defined as “the process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained” [13]. Support systems – parents, teachers, and friends – play a key role in the formation of their self-concept and their emotional stability. The inner locus, that stems out of their strong self-concept and emotional stability, enables gifted children to exploit and advance their potential instead of seeing their asynchronous cognitive and emotional development as a drawback [14].

Regarding the Family Support System

According to our relevant survey conducted in Greece [15], children accept direct – verbal – and indirect – emotional – pressure by their parents about their academic performance. As a result, they are confused and regard that they receive acceptance and emotional coverage due to their performance. This fact leads gifted children to define their self-concept through the others’ expectations and lose their motives and enthusiasm to chase their own path. Even in cases they demonstrate their abilities, commonly they try to prove their worth in response to their parents’ demands [15,16]. Any kind of emotional pressure derived from parents strengthens children’s tendency to perfectionism and weakens their desire to accomplish tasks their parents disapprove [15-17]. This emotional pressure, at first, may motivate the children for a short period of time. In long term, though, as the level of difficulty rises, their high motivation turns into avoidance, resignation, depressive symptoms [18] or anxiety disorders [19]. In a more demanding environment, the children will no longer feel confident that they will succeed and the confusion that their performance affects their acceptance will be an insurmountable obstacle.

Regarding the Educational Support System

It is observed that the greater the parental interference in the academic demands is, the more difficult for the children becomes to gain self-esteem and stability [20]. Being subjected to verbal and emotion-

al pressure to perform well, they are accustomed in building their identity around their ability to achieve. It is reported that children of a stressful family background are observed to give up, more likely, in case of a more demanding educational environment [21]. Being in a low-demand educational environment, they are used in succeeding without struggling. As a result, they build their self-concept around their achievement ability, and they perceive difficulty purely as a risk of ruining their self-image rather than a chance to ameliorate their abilities. Gifted children usually find school easy and repetitive. Most of the times, they adopt one of the two following attitudes; either they participate in the educational process – even though they may be bored – to meet their parents’ expectations, an attitude that results in perfectionism, or they remain uninvolved and tend to underachieve, since their needs are not met through the curriculum [22].

Regarding the Peer Support System

Due to their deviation in interests, performance, and abilities, gifted children often stand out from their peers. As a result, they usually confront social cohesion problems [23]. In most cases, gifted students – especially at primary school – feel alienated and difficult to be understood. Triggered by their social anxiety, they sometimes end up exhibiting either a condescending or a compliant attitude. Nevertheless, such behaviors can become permanent if they are not addressed on time, since they act as fundamental elements that affect the children’s identity development [24].

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to highlight two different attitudes exhibited by gifted children due to their awry self-concept and social anxiety: the condescending attitude of arrogance and the conforming attitude of compliance. The purpose of the study is to raise awareness on these awry attitudes, so that they can be identified and effectively addressed. For this purpose, two cases will be demonstrated and analyzed.

Study Methodology

For this study, a psychometric tool, of several questionnaires and tests, was used. In more detail, an IQ test (IQ Figure Reasoning Test, FRT [25]), a semi-structured interview, 7 questionnaires provided to children, and 2 corresponding questionnaires provided to their parents, based on Renzulli’s research [26], are included in the evaluation process. Questionnaires refer to children’s self-concept, attitude, motivation, competences, interests, emotional stability, their support systems, and preferable learning method. Through the collected data of this procedure, 107 parameters are calculated and provide a reliable insight into these several factors. This psychometric tool has proved to be accurate and suitable for a holistic profiling of gifted

children since, in addition to their potential, it also identifies the main factors affecting their behavior and attitudes. It considers, besides their cognitive ability, also their emotional stability. Furthermore, it provides an overview of their support systems and how they impact children's motivation, their readiness to leave their comfort zone, and the potential that they have unlocked compared to their full potential.

This psychometric tool has been successfully used since 2017 for the assessment of more than 2,500 children, while it was also used to investigate the impact of emotional pressure on children because of distance learning during quarantine in COVID-19 [15]. The cases presented in this study were selected by a convenient sample of children, 6-16 years old, who appeared with their parents to "Elkyda", the Educational Research Centre of Charismatheia (<https://charismatheia.edu.gr/program/elkida/>, accessed on 28 April 2023), to be evaluated. They were appended for psychometric evaluation after the urge of their teachers, either due to abnormal behavior in the classroom, or due to a discrepancy between the view of the teacher and the parents about the potential and needs of the children. At the beginning of each evaluation, an informed consent agreement is given to the parents, who can decide whether the quantitative and qualitative results of the questionnaires can be used for research purposes in the future, in an anonymized way and following ethical guidelines. The cases analyzed below concern children identified as gifted, who have exhibited arrogance or conformity. In particular, the present study is focused on their self-concept, their emotional stability, their relationship with their support systems, the skills that they exhibit, as well as the level of motivation to further develop their potential.

Case 1

T. is a 12-year-old boy identified as having an exceptionally high mental potential and ability of reasoning. He exhibits a disturbing behavior during class, observed by his teacher who appended him for the evaluation. He seems to have a condescending attitude towards his peers and an inherent need to give all the answers in classroom. This attitude disturbs the balance among him and his classmates and makes the educational process more difficult. Although he seems to be comfortable projecting his abilities, he doesn't seem confident. He constantly seeks reward, both in the educational and family environment. This was also corroborated by his attempts to peek a look at the interviewer's notes, during the interview in the evaluation process, to see if he answered correctly, while he was constantly asking for affirmation. This also confirms his incentives to be extrinsic and imposed by others, as well as his emotional stability depends on the environment in which he acts. At the time of assessment, he seemed to be in a state of emotional balance, which, however, stems out of his perception of high academic performance and achievement.

During the interview, when the level of demands increased significantly, he demonstrated overwhelming anxiety that he could not control. He made easy mistakes and paid more attention trying to

figure out whether he had correctly answered the previous question than answering the next one. This fact indicates that he is used to correlating his ability in succeeding with the acceptance he gets from his parental environment. It is possible that his anxiety has significantly intensified by his misperception that he will let down his parents in case that he doesn't score high. As a result, he lost his concentration, and it became even more difficult for him to answer. T. feels happy about his school and the educational environment he is into. He is committed and, although he finds it to be not demanding, he participates. It seems like he wouldn't prefer to be in a more demanding environment, since he couldn't feel safe about his high performance without abandoning his safety zone. His critical thinking and analytical skills seemed to be excellent compared to his peers'.

He seemed to have practiced a lot and intensively. He was fluent on mental calculations and his responses were automated, an indication of his high ability, of his consistent training over the years, and of how essential it is for him to have a top-level academic performance. The above mentioned were also proved by his strong short-term memory. These characteristics, along with his persistence to find the correct answer, in any case, also indicate his commitment to perfectionism. Perfectionism further indicates that T. is in an educational environment of low demands since he didn't prove to be efficient when the level of difficulty raised significantly. He lost his temper and concentration and became anxious. This proves that he is not used to cope with difficulty in his educational environment. Although he claims to be ready to face difficulty, he is proved to prefer avoiding it, if it is possible. He didn't seem to have developed the resilience needed to restrain from anxiety. Concluding, he seems to be motivated to find the correct answer, but not resilient enough to do so, if it lies beyond his safety zone.

His imagination and creativity seem to be constrained by his inhibitions, as he fears that his more divergent ideas might lead him astray. He enjoys teamwork and group activities, since he is looking for a sense of belonging. Although, he doesn't seem too eager to hear the other team members or collaborate. For T. the participation in a team is a chance to prove his cognitive superiority compared to his peers. Although he believes he has leadership skills and qualities, what seems to be most important to him is to impose his point of view rather than compromise different opinions within the group, listen and help others to give their best. In other words, it is through the team that he gets the affirmation he is in need of. T. doesn't always find good his relationship with his parents. Although they are close to him and involved, he doesn't always feel they understand him, and he believes that they are overly demanding. He, sometimes, feels that their expectations overwhelm him.

Thus, he neither feels that they are supporting him, nor feels at ease talking to them about it and act unless he has their consent. In

the drilling questions, during the interview, about the demands and expectations of his parents, T. admitted that they are not verbal or direct. "I see them so proud when I get distinctions and I want them to be happy and proud of me", he stated. His relationships with his peers are poor. He feels that they are distant and not very fond of him. "They are envious of me", he explains. It is a challenge for him to build communication strategies, to reach out to his peers, and create meaningful relationships as these conflict with his perception of his parents' academic expectations. He feels he jeopardizes the acceptance of his parents, if he doesn't demonstrate his supremacy, a fact that leads him to display a competitive rather than cooperative attitude. As a result, sometimes, he feels lonely or unhappy. In conclusion, there are lots of things that motivate T., but there are also many other that hold him back.

Among his motivators is the desire to prove his worth and meet his parents' expectations, while, among his restraints, is his fear of failure when he tries new endeavors that expand beyond his comfort zone. T. feels that he only finds support at school.

Case 2

M. is a nine-year-old girl, that visited our research center because of her parents' concern about what they described as "low self-esteem". On top of that, they noticed great discrepancies among their perception and the teachers' perception on her cognitive ability. The parents claim to have seen her perform in very advanced and demanding tasks, while the teacher claims that her performance is average and sometimes below average. The teacher claims that parents pressure M. to overachieve, to meet their standards, while she finds her perfectly fine in her current state. From the psychometric assessment procedure, she proved to be of an exceptionally high mental potential and have a superior ability of reasoning, greater than 3 standard deviations ahead of her average peers. Through the assessment, it was observed that, to her, it was obvious that she greatly deviated, compared to her peers. She stated that she likes many and various things, but she prefers to do them on her own. She does several activities with her friends, such as gymnastics and swimming, although she does not seem to prefer sports activities in the interest questionnaire.

Through the interview process, it was noted that she doesn't want other children to think she is odd, so she prefers not to reveal the kind of books she reads, as well as her interest in history and crafts. She enjoys, according to her statements, going to gymnastics and swimming as she can meet her friends and feel included. However, she hasn't been doing these activities for a long time. In the past, she was used to join in other activities chosen by her friends. This is a sign of conformity, since M. does not seem comfortable expressing her desires and interests, as she is dominated by fear of rejection. Her poor self-image affirms the above conclusion. "I often feel like not fitting in anywhere. I used to think less before saying or doing something but I ended up

getting everyone staring at me in a strange way. Now I do think more in order not to stand out for what I say or do." Her parents informed us that she had changed school environment a few years ago, after refusing to go to school, due to the alienation and teasing she experienced by her classmates.

Her relationship with her parents seems poor. M. feels that they are overly demanding and pressure her to improve her school performance. However, her demonstration of good academic performance would come in contrast with the communication strategy of compliance she has adopted. In particular, she fears that in case she ameliorates her performance, she will be isolated, and her classmates will understand "she has a problem", as she stated. As a result, she believes that her parents cannot understand and support her. Although school seems to be easy for her, she is not getting bored. She enjoys going to school, in order to associate with her classmates. She doesn't usually participate in class and sometimes becomes noisy. Despite her extremely high critical thinking and analytical skills, she is neither competent in mental nor in automated calculations. Her weak short-term memory, as well as her narrow attention span, are indicative of her lack of attention in class and could both be significantly improved. Her vocabulary is quite rich and she is a fluent speaker, which shows that she enjoys reading books. During the interview, she became communicative, although at first, she seemed very shy and gave one-word responses.

Her imagination seems to be highly developed, but her creativity is stifled by her inhibitions. She rarely implements divergent ideas, even though she seems to have a fluency in creating imaginary worlds in her mind. Taking into consideration her high mental potential, she should feel more confident in trying new things and undertaking initiatives. Although she enjoys teamwork, she hesitates to express and support her point of view. Instead, she prefers adopting another point of view, so she usually listens and thinks before sharing her opinion. She tends to follow guidelines, so that she feels safe, even if she must discard a part of herself and oppress her personal expression to do so. She dislikes being the centre of attention and for this reason, she avoids taking leading roles and responsibilities. However, she has a strong sense of empathy and ability to understand what others expect of her. She finds it easy to compromise different opinions and please others. Even though she does not feel ready to face difficulty, she is not annoyed by it. She seems to have developed skills, although she could have advanced them much more. She is considered to underachieve.

During the interview, she stated that her relationship with her peers is great. She meets some of her friends both at school and outside the school, in extra curriculum activities. However, the questionnaires showed that she does not feel that her friends understand her. She enjoys being with them as well as she enjoys being alone and doing the things she prefers. Her motivation is not strong or sufficient. Although she is excited to try new things, she usually does not de-

cide to go through with them. She feels like she gets support from her school and friends. In conclusion, we consider that M. has not created healthy relationships with peers and adults. She is defined extrinsically, and she is prone to modifying her identity to meet the demands of the environment she deems most important for the fulfillment of her emotional needs. If this trait gradually become a permanent component of her identity, she will end up associating with people who don't understand her, making life choices that neither express her nor brings her happiness. Such life conditions may, in the future, lead her to depression, oversexualization or illegal behavior, as people having this state of mind, define their identity through others' acceptance, regardless of the circumstances in which it is provided.

Summary and Discussion

The aim of this study is to highlight the attitude of arrogance and compliance that gifted children exhibit due to their asynchronous cognitive and emotional development. Perceiving their deviation of their age group, gifted children strive to gain the acceptance of others to feel "normal" and cope with their social anxiety. As a result, gifted children are prone to emotional manipulation and tend to adopt, at least temporarily, the demands of their support systems, on the expense of their own interests and needs. To this point of view, gifted children need to be strengthened to gain self-acceptance and self-esteem, so that they can exhibit an inner locus, which is a key characteristic for the acquisition of emotional balance and maturity. The major issue of their maladjustment arises from their social anxiety and is evident when they are with their peers. Although they experience challenges of being accepted due to their divergent attitude, it should be noted that this may not be observed, as they often use their high perceptual ability and social awareness to conceal their deviation effectively and conform with what others expect of them.

This fact has a negative impact on their self-concept, self-acceptance, and self-esteem. As they define themselves through others, they often follow paths unrelated to their interests and personal aspirations. In cases of children exhibiting a condescending attitude towards their peers, it's easier for parents and teachers to recognize their need of acceptance and directly respond to it. On the other hand, a child's conforming attitude of compliance is more dangerous for their emotional stability and relationships since it may be easily overlooked or misinterpreted by the support systems of school and family. While condescending and conforming postures are malfunctioning behaviors that are normally observed in gifted children, they may result in perfectionism and underachievement, respectively, when they become permanent characteristics of the children's self-concept and transform into attitudes. So, they must be addressed properly before they negatively affect the children.

It is strongly suggested that excessive demands should be avoided

by parents, since they should cover the children's emotional needs unconditionally. The demands should be set from school which role is to impose external demands to the children so that, in time, they will gain self-confidence and set demands on themselves. Although, at first, overinvolvement of parents in the academic demands of the children may mobilize children for a short period of time, it has been proved to be an obstacle in the long run. Children perceive this pressure from their parents as an emotional manipulation, they derive that their acceptance comes on the condition that they meet their parents' expectations, and they finally build their identity around their ability to achieve and perform. As a result, when the level of difficulty rises, they face great fear of failure and anxiety, since they risk disproving their high-performing identity. This collapse of identity and the feeling that they have disappointed their parents, often leads to depression or other psychopathological symptoms, anxiety disorders and general loss of pleasure.

Conclusion

Family, as a support system, has a substantial role to create an emotionally safe environment for children and cover their emotional needs unconditionally. School and teachers, on the other hand, are responsible for setting, externally, demands for the children, adjusted to their cognitive abilities, to guide their development. This separation of roles among the support systems is crucial for the emotional stability of gifted children and the structure of their self-concept. In this way, gifted children won't feel oddly because of their deviation, they will gain self-acceptance, and build their identity around their interests and the satisfaction they get out of them, instead of their achievement score. This will enable them to cope with failure and a variety of levels of difficulty, without be controlled by their fear of rejection.

References

1. Silverman LK (1997) The construct of asynchronous development. *Peabody Journal of Education* 72(3-4): 36-58.
2. Nisbett RE (2009) *Intelligence and How to Get It. Why Schools and Cultures Count.* W. W. Norton & Company.
3. Renati R, Bonfiglio NS, Dilda M, Mascia ML, Penna MP (2023) Gifted Children through the Eyes of Their Parents. *Talents, Social-Emotional Challenges, and Educational Strategies from Preschool through Middle School.* *Children* 10(1): 42.
4. Cao TH, Jung JY, Lee J (2017) Assessment in Gifted Education. A Review of the Literature From 2005 to 2016. *Journal of Advanced Academics* 28(3): 163-203.
5. Collier RG, Jacobson MG, Stahl SA (1987) Locus of control measurements for gifted and nongifted children. *Roeper Review* 9: 196-200.
6. Pfeiffer S I, Grossman L, Walfish S (Eds.), (2013) *Gifted Children. Translating Psychological Research into Practice.* Springer Publishing Company New York, NY, USA, p. 57-60.
7. Ignat AA (2011) Counseling the Gifted: A Romanian Perspective. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences* 12: 615-618.

8. Fornia GL, Frame MW (2001) The social and emotional needs of gifted children: Implications for family counseling. *The Family Journal: Counseling Therapy for Couples and Family* 9: 384-390.
9. Pfeiffer SI, Stocking VB (2000) Vulnerabilities of academically gifted students. *Special Services in the School* 16(1-2): 83-93.
10. Sisk D (2021) Managing the Emotional Intensities of Gifted Students with Mindfulness Practices. *Education Sciences* 11(11).
11. Cross JR (2015) Gifted Children and Peer Relationships. *School of Education Book Chapters*, p. 41-54.
12. Swiatek MA (1995) An Empirical Investigation of the Social Coping Strategies Used by Gifted Adolescents. *Gifted Child Quarterly* 39(3): 154-161.
13. Schunk DH, Pintrich PR, Meece ML (2008) *Motivation in education. Theory, research, and applications* (3rd Edn.), Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Merrill Prentice Hall.
14. Papadopoulos D (2020) Psychological Framework for Gifted Children's Cognitive and Socio-Emotional Development: A Review of Research Literature and Implications. *Journal for the Education of Gifted Young Scientists* 8(1): 305-323.
15. Papandreou A, Mavrogalou A, Periferakis AT, Periferakis A, Badarau IA, et al. (2023) The effects of Covid-19 on the emotional and social stability, motivation and attitudes of gifted and non-gifted children in Greece. *MDPI Children* 10(4): 706.
16. Clark B (2001) *Growing up gifted: Developing potential at school and in the home* (6th Edn.), Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Merrill Prentice Hall.
17. Lukasic M, Gorski V, Lea M, Culross, R (1992) *Underachievement among gifted/talented students: What we really know*. Houston, TX: University of Houston-Clear Lake.
18. Eren F, Çete AÖ, Avcil S, Baykara B (2018) Emotional and Behavioral Characteristics of Gifted Children and Their Families. *Noro Psikiyatry Ars* 55(2): 105-112.
19. Krain AL, Ghaffari M, Freeman J, Garcia A, Leonard H, et al. (2007) Anxiety disorders: Lewis's child and adolescent Psychiatry. In: Martin A, Volkmar FR Philadelphia. Lippincott Williams and Wilkins (4th Edn.), pp. 538-548.
20. Freeman J (2016) The Long-Term Effects of Families and Educational Provision on Gifted Children. In: Aneis, Sobredotação, pp. 95-112.
21. Perry SL (2008) Gifted Underachievement and its Dynamic Etiology. *Graduate Journal of Counseling Psychology* 1(1).
22. Brian P, Szymanski G, Szymanski A (2017) Sense of belonging or feeling marginalized? Using PISA 2012 to assess the state of academically gifted students within the EU, *High Ability Studies* 28(2): 181-197.
23. Gur C (2011) Do gifted children have similar characteristics? Observation of three gifted children. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences* 12: 493-500.
24. Nesdale D, Flesser D (2001) Social identity and the development of children's group attitudes. *Children Development* 72(2): 506-517.
25. Booth JF, Daniels JC, Horn R (2004) *Figure Reasoning Test (FRT)*. Manual für FRT und FRT-J. Swets Test Services: Frankfurt am Main, Germany.
26. Renzulli JS, Smith LH (1978) *The Compactor*. Creative Learning Press: Mansfield Center, UK.

ISSN: 2574-1241

DOI: 10.26717/BJSTR.2023.50.007934

Alexandros Papandreou. Biomed J Sci & Tech Res



This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License

Submission Link: <https://biomedres.us/submit-manuscript.php>**Assets of Publishing with us**

- Global archiving of articles
- Immediate, unrestricted online access
- Rigorous Peer Review Process
- Authors Retain Copyrights
- Unique DOI for all articles

<https://biomedres.us/>