



Why So Many Gifted Males Get Misidentified as Having ODD (Oppositional Defiant Disorder)

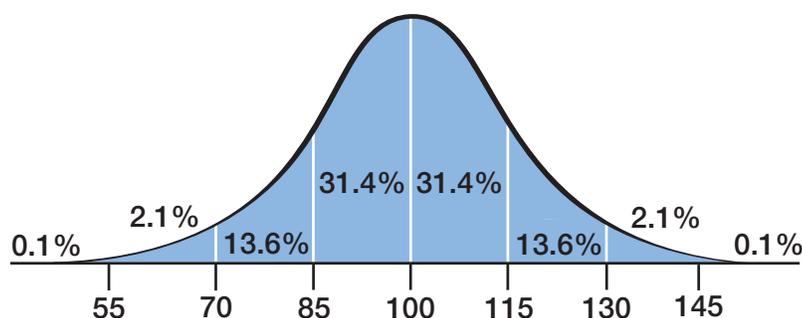
by Ruby K. Payne, Ph.D.

At a workshop I had a participant ask me why so many more males are now being identified as having ODD. Many times (but not always) these male students are not ODD but rather are gifted. If you are a gifted male from poverty or another marginalized group, you will be more often be identified as ODD rather than gifted. When I was director of a gifted program, I had teachers repeatedly beg me not to teach “those gifted kids.” When I asked why, I got the following responses: “They challenge me on everything. They are rude in the way they ask questions. If they don’t like what I say, they will not do it. They argue about everything.” Etc.

A friend of mine told me this story: She said, “If our fourth child had been our first child, he would have been our last child. I congratulated myself on being such a fabulous parent, and then I had our fourth child. Nothing worked. I still remember the day he refused to eat his peas. He was about two years old. I said to him, ‘We will sit here until you eat your peas.’ Four hours later, they were still sitting there. I thought, who is in charge here? It is not me.”

What is the difference between a high achiever and a “gifted” student? There are generally two answers: It depends on where you fall on the standard deviation of intelligence (IQ) and on an additional set of characteristics.

Standard Deviation of Intelligence (IQ)



Many arguments can be made about the questions on IQ tests. IQ tests were developed to predict success in school. Since then, they have been equated with intelligence, which was never their purpose. But they are an indicator of the ability to learn academically and the speed with which you learn.

In standard deviation research, approximately 95% of the population falls two standard deviations (either way) from the norm.

“Giftedness” generally starts at an IQ of 130, which represents only 2.1% of the population. When you get to an IQ of 145, you are now three standard deviations from the norm, and only .01% of the population is there. When you get to an IQ of 160, you are four standard deviations from the norm. And IQ scores can go beyond that.

When a person is that far from the “norm” in intelligence, it is very difficult to “fit.” You don’t see the world the way other people do. Adults often seem “stupid,” and why would you do what a “stupid” person tells you to do? A lot of the work in school is meaningless and seems like busywork. You often know the answer immediately. It is also

hard for you to make and keep friends. Everyone is fairly boring. What you are interested in, they are not.

My late husband had three siblings with IQs over 150. To them, people in the normal range were “boring and stupid.”

Number Two: A Set of Characteristics/Behaviors

The other identifier of those who are gifted is a set of characteristics that can show up as positives or negatives. In the following scale, you can see the characteristics identified in the research on a positive/negative continuum. Many of the characteristics of ODD show up on the negative side of the equation.

Slocumb-Payne Teacher Perception Inventory: A Scale for Rating Superior Students from Diverse Backgrounds

Developed by Paul D. Slocumb, Ed.D. and Ruby K. Payne, Ph.D.

Student's name _____ Date _____

School _____ Grade _____ Age _____

Teacher/person completing this form _____

How long have you known this student? _____ years _____ months

Directions: This scale is designed to obtain a teacher's perception of a student's characteristics as a potentially gifted/talented student. This is not a recommendation form; it is a perception of a student within the context of a classroom or school. Since each classroom is as unique as the teacher conducting that classroom, one teacher's perception of a student may vary considerably from that of another.

The items are derived from the research literature dealing with characteristics of gifted and creative persons. A considerable number of individual differences can be found within any student population; therefore, the profiles are likely to vary a great deal. There is no right answer to any question.

Each descriptor item in each row should be read from the left and from the right, and then circle the applicable number that best describes your perception of the student as related to that descriptor. *You are to circle only one number in each row.* Each descriptor is designed to be “two sides of same coin.” Persons completing this instrument may find it helpful to first read the descriptor on the left, then the one on the right, and then place a check mark beside the descriptor that best aligns with your perception of the student under consideration. Then, using that descriptor, circle the number that most closely describes your perception of the student in relation to the descriptor.

One descriptor item per row (either the one on the left or the right) is to be rated as follows:

- 1 = Seldom or never
- 2 = Occasionally
- 3 = Frequently
- 4 = Almost always

Perception of attributes									Perception of attributes
	Seldom or never	Occasionally	Frequently	Almost always	Almost always	Frequently	Occasionally	Seldom or never	
1. Curious about information; inquisitive; doesn't accept information at first glance; questions and pushes for more information	1	2	3	4	4	3	2	1	1. Obnoxious with questions; likes to "stump" people with hard questions; enjoys questions with "shock value"; questions authority; unwilling to follow rules
2. Stubborn; avoids tending to other things that need to be done just because student is not through with own priority	1	2	3	4	4	3	2	1	2. Sticks to task; gets job done; doesn't give up easily even when things are difficult
3. Finds it hard to wait for others; unwilling to do detail work; shows reluctance to do some assignments because the student already "knows" content or skill	1	2	3	4	4	3	2	1	3. Learns at faster rate than peer group; absorbs more with less practice; able to accelerate own learning; displays eagerness to do work
4. Understands subtleties of language in own primary language; uses language in powerful ways; displays unique sense of humor; able to use language to build personal relationships	1	2	3	4	4	3	2	1	4. "Smart mouth"; master at put-downs of others; uses humor in destructive manner; unable to relate to peers because own sense of humor isn't as sophisticated; class clown
5. Thirsts for knowledge; seeks answers to questions; motivated to do research to find answers to questions; likes rhetorical questions; curious about ideas	1	2	3	4	4	3	2	1	5. Shows little interest in what is to be learned; wants to pursue only those things that spark own curiosity; is more curious about people than events
6. Has difficulty completing tasks; unaware of deadlines; oblivious to those nearby; very focused on and committed to own priorities	1	2	3	4	4	3	2	1	6. Commits to long-range projects and tasks; focused; goal-oriented; strives to meet high standards
7. Loves ambiguity and dislikes being given specific directions and/or parameters; unable to be specific with other people who need specific direction; comes across as highly creative/inventive	1	2	3	4	4	3	2	1	7. Able and willing to ascertain and solve problems; does not need specific directions; may set own goals that surpass teacher's expectations
8. Deeply interested in many things; is good at many things; loves to learn new things	1	2	3	4	4	3	2	1	8. Unable to make decisions—or makes decisions quickly without regard for consequences; may hop from one thing to another without experiencing closure in anything; appears random
Subtotals of page 2									Total for this page

Perception of attributes	Seldom or never	Occasionally	Frequently	Almost always	Almost always	Frequently	Occasionally	Seldom or never	Perception of attributes
9. Develops high standards and expectations of self; self-starter who needs little supervision; has self-control	1	2	3	4	4	3	2	1	9. Perfectionist; nothing is ever good enough; can't finish something because it still isn't correct; may display low self-image about academic performance
10. Has trouble listening while others talk; interrupts others to point of rudeness; talks at inappropriate times; may be reluctant to write; very expressive in casual register	1	2	3	4	4	3	2	1	10. Excellent facility with language; can elaborate on thoughts and ideas; uses formal register when communicating with others
11. Highly developed social conscience; concern for social issues and problems; awareness of global issues; has internal locus of control	1	2	3	4	4	3	2	1	11. Overconcern for social problems and issues to extent that depression results; doomsday view of life; overwhelmed with despair in world/community; sees self as victim
12. Able to comprehend complex ideas and thoughts; able to learn advanced and more complex content	1	2	3	4	4	3	2	1	12. Out of touch with reality, day-to-day routines; bored by simpler things in life; unwilling or unable to abide by basic requirements and/or rules
13. Unwilling to learn facts to support generalizations; can be great "talker" but is unable to produce because work lacks substance	1	2	3	4	4	3	2	1	13. Sees patterns in things; can transfer learning to new situations; sees big picture; discovers new information; supports generalizations with facts/details
14. Makes connections; sees relationships between/among diverse ideas and events	1	2	3	4	4	3	2	1	14. Difficult to stay focused because of random thoughts/ideas; highly creative but perceived as "weird" by peers
15. Shows clever, unique responses to questions and problems; often responds with humor or offers "silly" response to questions	1	2	3	4	4	3	2	1	15. Generates large number of ideas or solutions to problems and questions; often offers unusual, unique, clever responses
16. Appreciates color; likes to doodle and draw; has affinity for graffiti	1	2	3	4	4	3	2	1	16. Sensitive to beauty; tunes in to aesthetic characteristics of things
17. Uninhibited in expressions of opinion; sometimes radical and spirited in disagreement; tenacious	1	2	3	4	4	3	2	1	17. Uninhibited in expressions of opinion; sometimes appears radical and disagreeable; may show anger when disagreeing with others
Subtotals of page 3									Total for this page

Perception of attributes	Seldom or never	Occasionally	Frequently	Almost always	Almost always	Frequently	Occasionally	Seldom or never	Perception of attributes
18. High risk-taker in academic endeavors; is adventurous and speculative in own thinking	1	2	3	4	4	3	2	1	18. Risk-taker; dares to break rules and then challenges authority when caught; unafraid to challenge others
19. Criticizes openly; unwilling to accept authoritarian rules and procedures; orally and openly condemns them; may irritate others	1	2	3	4	4	3	2	1	19. Criticizes constructively in socially acceptable manner; unwilling to accept authoritarian pronouncements without critical examinations
Subtotals of page 4									Total for page 4
									Total for page 3
									Total for page 2
									GRAND TOTAL

Source: *Removing the mask: How to identify and develop giftedness in students from poverty* (3rd ed.). Slocumb, P. D., Payne, R. K., & Williams, E. (2018).

According to Johns Hopkins Medicine, this is a list of ODD behaviors:

- Having frequent temper tantrums
- Arguing a lot with adults
- Refusing to do what an adult asks
- Always questioning rules and refusing to follow rules
- Doing things to annoy or upset others, including adults
- Blaming others for the child’s own misbehaviors or mistakes
- Being easily annoyed by others
- Often having an angry attitude
- Speaking harshly or unkindly
- Seeking revenge or being vindictive”

According to Wikipedia, “the following risks are listed in The Social and Emotional Development of Gifted Children:

- frustration, irritability, anxiety, tedium, and social isolation (p. 11)
- intense social isolation and stress among those with IQ greater than 160 (p. 14)
- difficulty making friends due to advanced concept of friendship, mostly among those less than age 10 (p. 23)
- de-motivation, low self-esteem, and social rejection among the exceptionally gifted (p. 26)
- emotional awareness beyond their ability to control (p. 34)
- difficulty with peer relations proportional to their IQ (p. 35)

- loneliness, anxieties, phobias, interpersonal problems, fear of failure, and perfectionism (p. 43)
- underachievement for social acceptance (p. 64)
- lack of resilience reinforced by easy work and well-intentioned but misguided praise (p. 65)
- increasing perfectionism throughout school years among girls (p. 75)
- fear of failure and risk avoidance due to perfectionism (p. 75)
- depression among creatively gifted (p. 93)

“There is a cause-and-effect relationship between the unmet learning needs of gifted students and the above risks. ‘Research indicates that many of the emotional and social difficulties gifted students experience disappear when their educational climates are adapted to their level and pace of learning.’

“Linda Kreger Silverman enumerates these additional risks:

- refusal to do routine, repetitive assignments
- inappropriate criticism of others
- lack of awareness of impact on others
- difficulty accepting criticism
- hiding talents to fit in with peers
- nonconformity and resistance to authority
- poor study habits

“Further, there exists anecdotal evidence of truancy problems with gifted children, who sometimes miss school because of disengagement, and worse, fear of bullying.”
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gifted_At-Risk

As you can see, many of the characteristics of gifted at-risk students are very similar to those of students with ODD.

A Disproportional Number of Gifted Students Drop Out or Underperform

The Wikipedia article on gifted at-risk concludes: “Lastly, meta-analysis from the paper ‘Gifted Students Who Drop Out—Who and Why: A Meta-Analytical Review of the Literature’ by Kaskaloglu shows two key points. First, 4.5% of high school dropouts are gifted, and they leave school in part because of school-related issues. To understand the dropout rate, one must consider that the study cited indicates the percentage of children who both dropped out and who scored above 130 on an IQ test. One would expect a very small percentage of such children to drop out, given the ease with which they can excel in school. To expect more than one in ten would be hard to justify. Therefore, with only 2.27% of people scoring above 130 on IQ tests, to expect greater than 0.227% of dropouts to be gifted would be ostensibly far-fetched. Unfortunately, the actual percentage is closer to 20 times that. According to Achievement Trap, this problem is even more pronounced among economically disadvantaged children.”

Before you label a male student as ODD, please do the following:

1. Give an IQ test. If the student is from poverty, do the environmental assessment that is in the book *Removing the Mask: How to Identify and Develop Giftedness in Students from Poverty*.
2. Do the rating scale in the teacher perception inventory. How many of the gifted behaviors are there? Particularly on the “negative” side of the scale?

Strategies That Get Much Better Results from Gifted Males

1. Everything must involve a choice. Gifted males do not respond well to mandates.
2. Everything will involve a discussion. Count on it. If you use phrases like “because I said so,” expect outright refusal. Encourage them to research the issue being discussed.
3. Do not use psychological control (comments about who they are or who they should be); instead, use behavioral control (comments about boundaries, laws, and guidelines).
4. Gifted males do not respond well to negative reinforcers (taking things away, etc.). They will respond much better to positive reinforcers (working for things they want).
5. Gifted males will push the boundaries on everything. Decide which battles you have to fight and which ones you do not. Otherwise, you will be fighting about everything.
6. Understand that gifted students are generally two grade levels above their peers academically but two years behind their peers emotionally. Because they are so acutely

aware of everything, they have an increased sensitivity.

7. If they believe you have violated something they consider to be an ethical issue, they will be unforgiving.

Before you decide a male has ODD, please do more research. By nurturing giftedness rather than suspecting a disorder, you may allow an unbelievable talent to develop.

References

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