

Coping with the Stigma of Giftedness

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Google Search: Smart Person



Google Search: Athletic Person



“Average Joe vs. Michael Phelps”



“Nerd Gets Girl” in the Media



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"Mr. Wickers called me 'gifted' in front of the whole class. I'm ruined."



What is Stigma?

- ⊗ Early Greeks used the term to refer to marks that were intentionally put on someone's body to indicate unacceptable behavior.
- ⊗ Goffman (1963) defined stigma as “a mark that is deeply discrediting.”

There is evidence to show that the gifted are influenced by their peers', parents' and teachers' feelings about their abilities. If they are seen as mental freaks, unhealthy personalities, or eccentric simply because they are brainy or creative, many of them will avoid the stigma through conformity. Some would rather underachieve and be popular than achieve honor status and receive ostracism.

-Tannenbaum

Stigma of Giftedness Paradigm

- ⊗ Gifted students want to have normal social interactions
- ⊗ They learn when others discover their giftedness, they will be treated differently
- ⊗ They learn they can manage information about themselves that will enable them to maintain a greater amount of social latitude

Coping Strategies

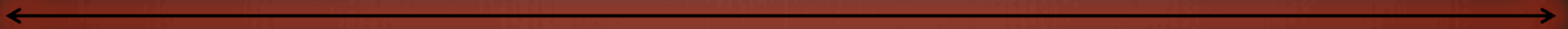
- ⊗ Underachieving
- ⊗ Identify with Non-intellectual Group
- ⊗ Downplay Abilities
- ⊗ Deny Giftedness
- ⊗ Manage Information
- ⊗ Sit Quietly
- ⊗ Suicidal Behavior

Visibility Continuum

HIGH VISIBILITY

INVISIBILITY

DISIDENTIFYING



Coleman, L.J. & Cross, T. (1998). Is being gifted a social handicap?," by L.J. Coleman and T. Cross, 1998, *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 11,44

How the Gifted Student Becomes Invisible

- ⊗ Don't carry items such as books or calculators
- ⊗ Purposefully miss a few answers on a test
- ⊗ Wear contact lenses
- ⊗ Don't volunteer answers
- ⊗ Don't admit a test was easy
- ⊗ Downplay accomplishments
- ⊗ Conceal age if accelerated

How the Gifted Student Disidentifies

- ⊗ Be seen with people who are not gifted
- ⊗ Ask silly or crazy questions
- ⊗ Tell jokes
- ⊗ Go out for extracurricular activities for which they have little talent
- ⊗ Claim a test was difficult
- ⊗ Feign interest in small talk
- ⊗ Make fun of other gifted kids

Continuum of Verbal Responses

Truth

Placate

Cop Out

Cover Up

Lie



Cross, T, Coleman, L., & Terhaar-Yonkers, M. (1991). The social cognitions of gifted students in schools: Managing the stigma of giftedness. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 15, 52.

The Biology Exam

Setting: In the cafeteria line, several people from your class are discussing the biology exam.

Tracy: Man! Wasn't that test impossible? I must have spent 10 minutes trying to label that crazy diagram of the muscular system.

Chris: I blew the whole thing, even though I studied really hard.

Marti: I probably failed it too.

Marti says to Jon, "I bet you breezed through it and didn't even open the book to study." Actually, Jon spent several hours studying and thought it wasn't a difficult test. If you were Jon, what would you be most inclined to say?

Examples of Responses

A: “I thought it was kind of easy.” (Truth)

B: “I probably studied as hard as you did, but the test wasn’t too hard.” (Placate)

C: “How long did you study?” (Cop-out)

D: “Tests can be hard sometimes.” (Cover-up)

E: “Yeah, that exam was a pain.” (Lie)

Recommendations

- ⊗ Treat gifted children as children first
- ⊗ Establish communication among parents, teachers, and counselors
- ⊗ Teach gifted children social skills, ways to manage stress, and to enjoy nonacademic activities
- ⊗ Try to understand the social milieu of school

Recommendations

- ⊗ Learn about individual child's personality, social goals, and needs
- ⊗ Find counseling for gifted students and their families
- ⊗ Create opportunities for gifted children to interact
- ⊗ Model adaptive behaviors

Gifted Children's Bill of Rights

- ⊗ You have the right:
 - ⊗ To know about your giftedness
 - ⊗ To learn something new everyday
 - ⊗ To be passionate about your talent area without apologies
 - ⊗ To have an identity beyond your talent area
 - ⊗ To feel good about your accomplishments
 - ⊗ To make mistakes
 - ⊗ To seek guidance in the development of your talent
 - ⊗ To have multiple peer groups and a variety of friends
 - ⊗ To choose which of your talent areas you wish to pursue
 - ⊗ To not be gifted at everything

-Del Siegle

