

## The Social Adjustment of Our Gifted Children: An Adlerian Interpretation

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After a preliminary survey of the material available in this field, it became evident that a thorough research into the topic might well be the function of a much more comprehensive work. However, there appeared to be enough evidence even in the limited number of studies examined to show a trend that might warrant further research, with possibly significant results.

The question involved in this investigation is: how successful are our gifted children in making the social adjustments necessary to insure happy, useful lives in the highly competitive and materialistic culture of today? Are they living up to the potentialities of superiority that have been claimed for them, or are these claims exaggerated?

Before looking into some of the studies involving our gifted children, it is probably well to define what is meant by optimum social adjustment. Although psychologists use different wording in describing this aspect of personality, there seems general agreement as to meaning. Thorpe describes a well-adjusted person as one who is tactful, courteous, likes people, and is skillful in dealing with them. He says:

Such social behavior makes its object feel that he is worthy in the estimation of those about him, and he responds accordingly. His sense of personal adequacy—the ego-need—has been strengthened, and he tends to return the “build-up” by contributing in some way to the security and sense of status of his associate (10, p. 249).

Alfred Adler, one of the first psychologists to recognize the social implications concerning human behavior, says:

The man who meets the problems of human life successfully acts as if he recognized fully and spontaneously that the meaning of life is

interest in others and cooperation. Everything he does seems to be guided by the interest of his fellow beings; and where he meets difficulties he tries to surmount them only by means consonant with human welfare (1, p. 9).

Another modern psychologist, Ruch, defines the healthy type of social relationship as:

Working together, cooperating for the attainment of more interesting results than can come individually. Personal friendships are particularly good examples. We become more rounded persons, more adequate persons, as we share our lives openly and frankly with others. Once again it is not submission or dominance that is the key-note, but the participation of equals—getting a richer meaning out of life (7, p. 478).

The general principle underlying these three descriptions of a well-adjusted person would seem to be a satisfactory social relationship with others involving cooperation, sharing of interests and activities, and concern for the welfare of others.

How do our gifted children measure, according to this criterion? On the basis of verbal tests they rate very high over unselected children, according to Terman. 532 of his gifted children of over 140 I.Q. were given a battery of seven character tests and their scores matched with a control group of 533 children of average I.Q.'s. The results showed a marked superiority of gifted children over control, the following being the order of superiority in the various tests:

%*	<i>Boys</i>	%*	<i>Girls</i>
86	Test 5. Social Attitudes	83	Test 5. Social Attitudes
77	Test 4. Character Preferences	81	Test 4. Character Preferences
74	Test 3. Book Preferences	76	Test 3. Book Preferences
68	Test 6. Trustworthiness	75	Test 7. Woodworth-Cady Test <sup>†</sup>
67	Test 7. Woodworth-Cady Test <sup>†</sup>	73	Test 2. Overstatement B
63	Test 2. Overstatement B	61	Test 6. Trustworthiness
57	Test 1. Overstatement A	59	Test 1. Overstatement A

\* Percentages given indicate the number of gifted children whose ratings were at or above the mean of the control group.

† The Woodworth-Cady Questionnaire was devised by Woodworth in 1918 to be used to identify soldiers having psychotic tendencies.

As is noted, the gifted children scored the highest in the test on "social attitudes." (8, p. 513) However, an analysis of the trait ratings by teachers and parents of nearly all of the same group (there having been some 600 children rated in each group) shows almost the exact opposite of the ratings on the character tests, at least as far as social traits were concerned. According to these ratings the gifted children were the least superior to control children in social traits with the averages coming to 58% for boys and 59% for girls. Also in the analysis of 25 specific traits as rated by the parents and teachers of these children, the seven lowest ratings on traits were as follows:

	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
Sympathy and Tenderness .....	59	58
Health .....	58	62
Sensitivity to Approval .....	58	56
Generosity and Unselfishness .....	55	55
Popularity .....	53	59
Freedom from Vanity .....	52	53
Fondness for Large Groups .....	48	55

Although the order of rank of the traits for girls was different from that of boys, the six trait ratings for girls other than Health were the lowest of the 25, as were those of the boys (8, pp. 546-47).

A study by Repetschnig appears to show a somewhat similar result, although her research was organized on a different basis. She investigated a group of 350 ninth grade students at the Richard Henry Dana Junior High School in San Pedro, California (the entire ninth grade class at the time), with I.Q.'s ranging from 65 to 140 on a fairly normal curve distribution. She correlated the I.Q.'s with a three-year school rating by teachers of each pupil's cooperation, effort, and home room citizenship; with reports of any misconducts to the vice-principal; and with the George Washington Test of Social Intelligence, which each pupil was given. According to her findings, there was no correlation between intelligence and the way students cooperated in the classroom or at the school in general. However, there was a high correlation between the intelligence of the students and their results on the Social Intelligence Test. As a result of this Repetschnig says:

This tendency of individuals of high general intelligence to have high social intelligence, as measured by tests, leads one to believe that these tests measure the same variables, or that they are so closely allied that they are not analyzed by the test devices used. These results further confirm the idea that the reading proficiency of those of higher mentality may account for the high scores on the social intelligence tests. . . .

The remainder of the correlations show a negligible relationship. The results may be taken to mean that either the Social Intelligence Test is not a measure of such traits or that results of pen and pencil tests are no indication of the student's ability to cooperate, of the quality of his home room citizenship, or of the number of times he is sent to the principal's office (6, pp. 91-92).

In a study of 56 gifted children of I.Q. from 135 to 190 at Public School Number 165, Manhattan, New York, Lamson compared them with an equal number of average children in the school in teachers' ratings of eight character traits. These traits were self-control, intelligence, personal appearance, conceit, sustained effort, general deportment, general quality of work, and popularity with school mates. On a rating scale of one to five, the gifted group showed the lowest rating of 2.7 as compared with the control group's rating of 2.6 on conceit; the next lowest on popularity with schoolmates, gifted at 2.6, controls at 2.7. The third and fourth lowest of the gifted group were tied at 2.4 for traits of self-control and personal appearance, as compared with 2.7 for the control group in self-control and 2.6 in personal appearance. (4) This would serve to indicate that on the four qualities most related to social adjustment, the gifted group rated the lowest, and the most nearly the average of the control group. In the one case of the rating on conceit, the control group averaged slightly better than the gifted group. These figures were taken from the table of results, and no evaluation of them with respect to these particular traits was made by the author.

Knipe, in an investigation of 110 superior children at the Francis E. Willard Junior High School in Santa Ana, California, whose I.Q.'s ranged from 101 to 160 (with mean of 122.9) tested these children with the Margaret L. Hayes Scale for Evaluating the School Behavior of Children, a written short-answer test. The first four of these ratings were generally concerned with social behavior. Percentage scores based on a norm established for the test of 50% were as follows:

I. General Relationship to Others .....	84%
II. Respect for the Rights of Others .....	41%
III. Relationship with Teacher .....	52%
IV. Relationship with Other Pupils .....	71%
V. Initiative .....	72%
VI. Emotional Control .....	58%
VII. General Interests .....	90%
VIII. Scholarship and Study Habits .....	42%

A breakdown of these scores by individual cases showed that the higher the I.Q. in general, the lower the scores in those phases of the test relating to social adjustment. (3)

In her study of children of I.Q. 180 or above, Hollingworth also mentions the difficulty these children have in adjusting to their peers. Their main problem, in her opinion, was that they were bored with the activities of their age-mates, as young children, and were rejected by the older children of their mental status because of their being too small physically to mix with the older group. Consequently they tended to indulge in more solitary and less cooperative activities. (2)

The conclusions that could be drawn from these studies would seem to be these: First, in two out of three cases the teacher ratings of social adjustment differ markedly from those made by gifted children on written tests, and generally place social adjustment at the lowest level of achievement of gifted children. In one case, no effort was made to test the gifted children through written material, and the results of the teacher evaluation agreed with the other two cases. Secondly, in two out of the four cases, those studies by Terman (8, p. 513) and Repetschnig (6, pp. 91-92) the authors state their belief as to the possible unreliability of tests measuring social attitudes or social intelligence, because highly intelligent children are probably very much aware of the answers needed to establish superiority in these fields; consequently these tests may not be reliable measures of social adjustment. This is in accord with the beliefs of most Adlerians, as well as many other clinical psychologists, who contend that written personality tests of this type measure only surface symptoms and are no real index of deep-seated personality maladjustments. The teacher ratings, although subjective in nature, would appear to be somewhat more reliable, particularly in view of their like conclusions in the different studies.

At least in terms of their own averages, it appears that gifted children are not too well-adjusted socially, even though they may be, on the average, slightly better adjusted than unselected children. In terms of a clinical problem, this appears to be of negligible importance. However, in terms of their great potential as leaders of a future generation, these results may be of great consequence.

Possibly one of the problems with regard to a true evaluation of what is good social adjustment is the popular view that is even shared by many psychologists that no one really needs psychological guidance unless he or she is on the verge of a nervous breakdown or worse. It is also true that many of the people who will never be considered as needing guidance, by this view, are responsible for the pathological state of world affairs today. Adlerians will recognize that no one of us is ever entirely free from tensions and personal problems, the avoidance of which might have been accomplished with some skilled help—whether from teacher or psychologist—during our school days. The imbalance in the relationship of social adjustment to their other achievements would appear to make gifted children more in need of such help than the average student.

There is another problem here which has probably not been given much attention. The general criterion of what our society considers success or failure is still very largely academic. Those who become successful without formal education do so “in spite of it”; their ranks grow smaller every day. As a consequence, from the moment it becomes apparent to the parents of a gifted child that their offspring shows some unusual talent or superiority in this direction, they inevitably concentrate on expanding and enlarging this superiority. The measure of the personal worth of the child then becomes intellectual *academic* ability; if they succeed in displaying superiority in this field, they automatically become superior human beings not only in the eyes of their parents but of the community also.

If we are to accept the theory supported by Adler that character traits are not innate but acquired, we can therefore assume that the social skills such as cooperation and interest in the welfare of others are learned as much as English or mathematics. If this is true, why is it that our gifted children are not so much more versatile in the social skills than the average children? Much of the blame for this can be laid at the door of the parents and the mores of our competitive culture, but teachers must share some of this responsibility, also.

A research of value that might make a definite contribution to this question might be a correlation of Rorschach or other projection-type test scores with intelligence and achievement quotients of gifted children. In any event there seems a necessity to explore this aspect of education more thoroughly than has been done before. The reason for this is, I think, that a great reservoir of human good is still untapped in the social potentialities of our gifted children. We decry the waste of their academic talents, because of lack of specialized training, but what of the activities their gifts could lead them to if they were trained in cooperation and social leadership *as a primary goal*, rather than in academic knowledge which they would undoubtedly pick up anyway? We have an ample number of scientists, musicians, writers, engineers, and other brilliant academically trained experts, although the field is never crowded; but where are the geniuses in the political, social and psychological fields? Education, probably, has the majority of them with a skimming at the top in government and psychology, but it still seems that our greatest minds go elsewhere than to the fields of human relations. The tragedy of this is that here, probably the most important field of human endeavor, humanity has made its greatest failures.

There are, of course, theorists who contend that social skill and social intelligence are functions apart from academic ability. By this criterion, children of superior I.Q. might not be as well qualified as others in making great social achievements. But as long as this theory has not yet been proved, we must operate on the assumption that the potentialities of our intellectually superior children are important in the social as well as the academic field. Certainly we are only beginning to lay emphasis upon social adjustment as the most important function of education; our gifted children are still, for the most part, regarded as accidents about which to marvel, to eulogize, and to pass on to the next teacher without really ever exploring their possibilities for social good, or the success and happiness that they have a right to expect in life.

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