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**The Gifted Child in Adulthood:  
Opinions on Educational Experiences and their Relation to the Current Self**

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## Abstract

Giftedness is defined as excelling in a topic beyond the capability of other peers. Oftentimes gifted students are placed in gifted programs and/or assigned gifted Individualized Education Programs in order to provide acceleration and enrichment. My survey asks participants ages 18 years of age or older questions about how they feel gifted programs or gifted Individualized Education Programs may have influenced them, and if they have any comments or suggestions for improving these programs. I intended my study to be descriptive and exploratory to provide insight on any common themes and tendencies people in gifted programs may report. Descriptive and qualitative analyses were conducted through Qualtrics and Microsoft Excel.

*Keywords:* Gifted program, giftedness, Individualized Education Program (IEP), education, opinions, experience

**The Gifted Child in Adulthood:****Opinions on Educational Experiences and their Relation to the Current Self**

A gifted or talented student is a socially constructed term for a student who excels in one or more subjects beyond the average abilities of their peers. Historically, gifted students have been identified through IQ testing in order to solidify giftedness through providing a limit for what IQ constitutes a gifted student (Dai, 2019). In more recent times there has been a shift to broader methods of identifying giftedness. A wider scope allows for individual differences to be taken into account when assessing giftedness, such as socioeconomic status, cultural disparity, and test anxiety (Dai, 2019). In general, gifted programs are intended to provide additional enrichment for students who surpass standard curriculum, and/or accelerate the speed of their learning. However, experts are torn on how exactly to accomplish these goals. For example, some experts believe gifted students are an individual group which should be separated from other students while others believe giftedness is a spectrum that encompasses every child (Dai, 2019).

Opinions on the potential effects of gifted programs on students labeled as gifted vary within available literature. In some cases, it has been found that children placed in gifted programs are more likely to have positive mental health experiences and higher reports of well-being (Jones, 2013). There is also some evidence that attending gifted courses improves the attention skills of gifted children. When compared to gifted children in standard education, gifted children in enrichment programs performed better in sustained attention assignments and became more accurate over time (Tao & Shi, 2018). Opposingly, there is evidence that being placed in a gifted program as a child can increase rates of depression and suicide. When identified as gifted, some children develop inadequate coping skills such as withdrawing socially and practicing

extreme perfectionism that can lead to poor mental health. One possible explanation for these actions could be the feeling of estrangement from their peers (Winsor & Mueller, 2020).

In a study by Hände et al. (2013), opinions of students on their gifted peers were mixed. In general, students gifted in math or science were considered the most intelligent, most conscientious, and least sociable; students gifted in the languages were considered the next most intelligent, next most conscientious, and moderately sociable; and students gifted in physical activities were considered the least intelligent, least conscientious, and highly sociable (Hände et al., 2013). These stereotypes can be harmful. Such opinions could lead to low self-esteem, poor mental health, and encourage children to adhere to the social role assigned to them rather than choosing who they want to be themselves.

Although much progress has been made in the domain of giftedness and gifted education, there are still many possibilities that need to be studied to provide more concrete results. The aim of my study was to be exploratory and provide a gateway for future research. Through a survey, I collected the opinions of people who used to be in gifted programs on these programs, as well as their opinions on how being labeled as gifted may have influenced their self-perception and life outcomes. It is my hope that the results of my study will assist in gathering input on how gifted student feel about their experiences and what changes they would like to see implemented in the future.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants included adults ages 18 and older who were enrolled in gifted programs and/or assigned gifted IEPs (Individualized Education Program) during their educational experience. A gifted IEP is an individualized education plan meant to meet a gifted student's

needs for more advanced or more fast paced learning. Gifted IEPs are different from IEPs intended to assist students with disabilities in their education. Recruitment methods included posting a script and anonymous Qualtrics survey link to the Psi Chi website, Reddit, Snapchat, and Facebook.

There were 168 total participants. When asked to describe their gender identity, 62 participants identified as women, 28 as men, and 7 as some other way. Of the provided races and ethnicities, 81 were White/European American, 4 were Black/African American, 8 were Asian, 2 were American Indian/Native American (Mainland), 7 were Hispanic/Latino/Hispanic origin, 4 were Middle Eastern or North African, 1 was Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 8 identified as other.

For educational attainment, there were 2 participants with some high school, 5 with a high school diploma or equivalent, 1 with vocational training, 14 with some college, 5 with an associate degree, 38 with a bachelor's degree, 7 with some post graduate work, 18 with a master's degree, 1 with a specialist degree, 1 with an applied or professional doctorate degree, 3 with a doctorate degree, and 2 who said "other". There were 77 participants who said they were between ages 18-39 years old and 15 who said they were between ages 40-64 years old. The average of participants was 30.5. This study was reviewed and approved by the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board.

### **Materials and Procedure**

An anonymous online Qualtrics survey (see Appendix) was distributed to participants through Reddit, Snapchat, Facebook, and the Psi Chi website so they could self-report their answers. My survey was 10-15 min long and consisted of 43 questions. These questions were designed to assess how participants felt being labeled as gifted influenced them (Q5-20, Q34),

opinions on gifted programs/IEPs (Q21-30), how long the participants attended their gifted program/IEP (Q32-33), and what suggestions they have to improve programs such as these (Q35). Additionally, I asked demographic questions to describe the sample population. (Q37-41).

### **Results**

I analyzed my data through Qualtrics using percentages and through Microsoft Excel using frequencies to determine if there were any tendencies in my population regarding how they viewed the programs, the potential influences of the programs, and suggestions to improve the programs. The average number of years someone stayed in a gifted program was 10.22 (Q33). When asked if being in a gifted program was beneficial to their educational experience, 74.79% of respondents agreed, while 25.22% either disagreed or were neutral (Q5). Opinions on social experiences were more mixed with 43.48% agreeing they were positively influenced by their programs while 56.52% either disagreed or were neutral (Q7).

One short answer question asked how participants believed being in a gifted program or gifted IEP influenced them, if at all (Q34). I came up with five categories to group similar answers together for qualitative analysis, which are as follows: “Academic positive”, or any experience that influenced participants in a positive way related to education (i.e., dedication to school, creativity, critical thinking skills); “social positive”, or any experience that influenced participants in a positive way related to interactions with others (i.e., autonomy, making friends, real world experience); “social negative”, or any experience that influenced participants in a negative way related to interactions with others (i.e., bullying, self-esteem issues, approval seeking behaviors); “increased expectations”, or any experience that involved extremely high standards from others and for themselves (i.e., pushed to learn, lack of choice, mental health); and “none”, which was not noticing any influence at all.

In Microsoft Excel I coded academic positive as one, social positive as two, social negative as three, increased expectations as four, and none as five. I found that 44 answers fell into the “academic positive” category, 34 answers fell into the “social positive” category, 24 answers fell into the “social negative” category, 9 answers fell into the “increased expectations” category, and 9 answers fell into the “none” category.

### **Limitations and Implications**

As this study is exploratory and only uses descriptive analyses, I cannot draw any conclusions, but rather show different tendencies of my sample. Additionally, some participants reported the format of my survey questions was confusing because I asked about gifted programs and gifted IEPs in separate questions. Though this format was intended to avoid double-barrel questions, I see now how it could be frustrating as a participant who only participated in one of the two options. My population was also largely female and largely white, which does not provide the most generalizable results.

Current implications of my research include gathering first-hand opinions on gifted programs from people who were involved in them and exposing common themes to understand what these programs are doing well and what possibly needs to be reformed. If I were to conduct this study again, I would consider implementing a true experimental design where I would conduct a study on gifted children in a mock classroom that implements suggestions I have gathered to improve gifted programs compared to a mock classroom that uses the typical gifted program format. It is my hope that this study will spark interest in other researchers and lead to more research on the topic of giftedness so gifted children and adults may experience the best enrichment and outcome possible.



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## **Appendix**

### Qualtrics Survey

# **The Gifted Child in Adulthood**

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#### Start of Block: Survey

Q1 You are being asked to participate in a research study. We are doing this study to assess the opinions of people who grew up in gifted programs on gifted programs, how they believe they were influenced by them, and any suggestions for these programs to consider. During this study you will answer multiple choice and brief text write-in questions. It will take 10 to 15 minutes to complete this study.

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time. There are no risks from participating in this project. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study.

We will not collect any data which may identify you.

We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. We do not intend to include information that could identify you in any publication or presentation. Any information we collect will be stored by the researcher in a secure location. The only people who will be able to see your data are: members of the research team, qualified staff of Lindenwood University, representatives of state or federal agencies.

Who can I contact with questions?

If you have concerns or complaints about this project, please use the following contact information:

Miranda Brannum: [mb659@lindenwood.edu](mailto:mb659@lindenwood.edu)

Michiko Nohara-LeClair: [mnohara-leclair@lindenwood.edu](mailto:mnohara-leclair@lindenwood.edu)

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or concerns about the project and wish to talk to

## THE GIFTED CHILD IN ADULTHOOD

someone outside the research team, you can contact Michael Leary (Director - Institutional Review Board) at 636-949-4730 or mleary@lindenwood.edu.

- I agree to participate
- I do not agree to participate

*Skip To: End of Survey If You are being asked to participate in a research study. We are doing this study to assess the opi... = I do not agree to participate*

---

Q2 Are you 18 years of age or older?

- Yes
- No

*Skip To: End of Survey If Are you 18 years of age or older? = No*

---

Q3 In your educational experience, have you ever been enrolled in gifted courses or assigned gifted IEPs? A gifted program is any educational program meant to provide supplementary enrichment to children in one or more subjects (i.e., math, music, reading...), and an IEP is an individualized education plan meant to meet a gifted student's needs for more advanced learning.

- Yes
- No

*Skip To: End of Survey If In your educational experience, have you ever been enrolled in gifted courses or assigned gifted... = No*

---

Page Break

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Q4 The following questions will ask your agreement or disagreement on statements about gifted programs/ gifted IEPs.

---

Page Break

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Q5 Being in a gifted program was beneficial to my educational experience.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Q6 Being assigned a gifted IEP was beneficial to my educational experience.

- Strongly disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
-

Q7 Being in a gifted program positively influenced my social experiences.

- Strongly disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
- 

Q8 Being assigned a gifted IEP positively influenced my social experiences.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Q9 Being in a gifted program met my educational needs.

- Strongly disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
-

Q10 Being assigned a gifted IEP met my educational needs.

- Strongly disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
- 

Q11 Being in a gifted program/ assigned a gifted IEP increased my stress and anxiety levels.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Q12 Being assigned a gifted IEP increased my stress and anxiety levels.

- Strongly disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
- 

Q13 I am glad that I was placed in a gifted program.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Q14 I am glad that I was assigned a gifted IEP.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Q15 I would have rather attended typical classes than been placed in a gifted program.

- Strongly disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
- 

Q16 I would have rather attended typical classes than been assigned a gifted IEP.

- Strongly disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
-



Q17 I was bullied and/or outcasted because I was placed in a gifted program.

- Strongly disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
- 

Q18 I was bullied and/or outcasted because I was assigned a gifted IEP.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Q19 Being in a gifted program increased my academic confidence.

- Strongly disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
-

Q20 Being assigned a gifted IEP increased my academic confidence.

- Strongly disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
- 

Q21 People who are in gifted programs are held to a much higher standard than those who are not.

- Strongly disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
-

Q22 People who are assigned a gifted IEP are held to a much higher standard than those who are not.

- Strongly disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
- 

Q23 Being in a gifted program is only for people who are more intelligent than average.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Q24 Being assigned a gifted IEP is only for people who are more intelligent than average.

- Strongly disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
-

Q25 Being in a gifted program is unnecessary.

- Strongly disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
- 

Q26 Being assigned a gifted IEP is unnecessary.

- Strongly disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
-

Q27 I am satisfied with my educational experience in a gifted program.

- Strongly disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
- 

Q28 I am satisfied with my educational experience with an assigned gifted IEP.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Q29 Gifted programs provide unique opportunities that could not be found elsewhere.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

---

Q30 Assigned gifted IEPs provide unique opportunities that could not be found elsewhere.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

---

Page Break

Q31 The following questions will ask questions specific to your experience being placed in a gifted program/ assigned a gifted IEP.

---

Page Break

Q32 What grade were you first placed in a gifted program/ assigned a gifted IEP?

▼ Preschool (31) ... Other (47)

Q33 How long did you stay in the gifted program/ use a gifted IEP?

▼ 1 year (4) ... Other (18)

Q34 In what way do you believe your placement in a gifted program or you being assigned a gifted IEP influenced you? If none, say none.

---

Q35 What would you like to see more of in gifted programs or in IEPs?

---

Q36 What would you like to see changed in these programs if anything?

---

Page Break

Q37 The next few questions will ask you about demographics.

Page Break

Q38 What is your age in years?

---

Q39 Do you describe yourself as a man, a woman, or some other way?

Man

Woman

Some other way (3) \_\_\_\_\_

dQ40 What race/ethnicity do you identify with? Select all that apply:

White/European American

Black/African-American

Asian

American Indian/Native American (Mainland)

Native Alaskan

Hispanic, Latino, or Hispanic Origin

Middle Eastern or North African

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Other \_\_\_\_\_



Q41 What gender do you identify as?

- Male
- Female
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Q42 Please indicate your highest level of educational attainment:

- Some high school
- High school diploma or equivalent school
- Vocational training
- Some college
- Associate's degree (e.g., AA, AE, AFA, AS, ASN)
- Bachelor's degree (e.g., BA, BBA, BFA, BS)
- Some post undergraduate work
- Master's degree (e.g., MA, MBA, MFA, MS, MSW)
- Specialist degree (e.g., EdS)
- Applied or professional doctorate degree (e.g., MD, DDC, DDS, JD, PharmD)
- Doctorate degree (e.g., EdD, PhD)
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

End of Block: Survey

---

Start of Block: Thank you!

Q43 Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey for my project at Lindenwood University. I intend to gain insight on the opinions of people who were once in gifted programs/ assigned gifted IEPs on their educational, social, and personal experiences. Your feedback is appreciated. Thank you again for your contribution to the psychological sciences!

Please contact the Principal Investigator or Faculty Supervisor with any questions:

Principal Investigator, Miranda Brannum [mb659@lindenwood.edu](mailto:mb659@lindenwood.edu)

Faculty Supervisor, Dr. Michiko Nohara-LeClair [mnohara-leclair@lindenwood.edu](mailto:mnohara-leclair@lindenwood.edu)

End of Block: Thank you!

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