Fear Of Failure: The Paranoia Of Academically Gifted Students

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Abstract: The fear of failure has always been a subject of debate. In classical literature, this debate has always involved the variables of motivations and achievements. The author considers this motif not as a bipolar construction, but as an interacting dimension. The prevailing assumption of bipolar construction had nurtured the view that anxiety is always linear with rejection resulting from failure. This fear of failure had made some children nervous before trying, reluctant to take risks in order to achieve. This fear of failure emerged as a result of the modern culture, which views failure as incompetence and such. Those who failed are described as weirdos, bullied by others, rejected, and even labeled as losers. This article is written using the phenomenological case study approach. The research subjects consist of 6 people, with performance indicators used as follows: (1) a student is considered afraid of failure if their questionnaire score is >75; (2) a student is considered intellectually gifted if their IQ score is >110; (3) said student also shows at least one of the several indicators of academic gifts; (4) and said student has both academic and non-academic achievements. Subjects are determined based on identification results obtained from the questionnaire. Students who are indicated as having high levels of fear of failure and fulfills the criteria of intellectually gifted students are then grouped to become the research subjects. This article concludes that the data don’t differ much from the theories concerning fear of failure. However, there are several data anomalies discovered, such as: first, failure does not always drive one to despair. Some of the respondents are shown to handle failure by turning to the religious domain, creating alternative plans, or even switches their focus to the non-academic fields. This data show a pretty far departure from the mainstream theories concerning the fear of failure; there are several anticipative steps taken when facing failures, even involving the spiritual and emotional dimensions. Second, a departure from the prevailing theory can also be seen in the gender aspect. This article shows that gender has no correlation with the fear of failure. Someone who has never failed would not be able to develop their intelligence. To grow, failure is an important step. Third, when fear of failure affects a high IQ and academically gifted individual, it is guaranteed to cause a negative, even destructive, effects and excesses.

Keywords: Fear of Failure, Academically Gifted Students, Stereotype.

1. INTRODUCTION

The fear of failure has always been a subject of debate. De Castella, Byrne and Martin (De Castella, Byrne, & Covington, 2013) initiated the debate by stating that there have been differences of perspectives in classical literature concerning the debate between fear of failure and success orientation, which always involves the variables of motivation and achievement. Based on this initial idea, the author considers that this motif is not a bipolar construction, but instead an interacting dimension which makes some students extremely vulnerable of low achievement and lack of appreciation by the school. This author’s assumption is supported by data resulting from researches done by Elliott & Bempechat (Elliott & Bempechat, 2002), Pintrich (Pintrich, 2003) and Jose & Kilburg (Jose & Kilburg, 2007) which manages to prove that this avoidance orientation is related to self-confidence, defensive pessimism, and helplessness. These research results prove that fear of failure tends to be linked with various self-protection strategies when one is stuck in a maladaptive condition. This assumption seems to be leading into the view that anxiety is always linear with the rejection experienced due to failure. So, it is an anomaly that rejection instead happens when one manages to achieve a prestigious achievement. This assumption is supported by Buchalter’s (Fried-Buchalter, 1997) statement that society often is unable to tolerate those who failed, even if they have tried their hardest to avoid failure. Thus, one is forced to set their success target far below their real potential. This fact thus creates a dilemma. Krueger & Perri (Krueger & Perri, 2006) thinks that fear of failure can destroy self-confidence. Most people are unwilling to overcome challenges because they fear failure (Krueger & Perri, 2006). This condition supports Conroy and Elliot’s (Conroy & Elliot, 2004) findings that the fulfillment of excess needs accompanied by fear of failure (FF) will affect the fulfillment of goals. These various conditions are what can be easily found among students in Indonesia. Indonesian schools


tend to lack empathy for students who failed. Concerning this, Drost states that classical schools are proven to be non-beneficial for those who fear failure. Drost suspects that the main locus of this bad attitude is the excessive demands or hopes of parents. Thus, it is very irrational for children to fulfill their parents’ standards. On the other hand, these demands are too much for the present ability to fulfill those demands. This imbalance between expectations and actual capabilities results in an increase of cases of children pressured to achieve more, which in turn nurtures the phenomenon of “fear of failure”. Drost added that the fear of failure is also caused by parents being apathetical of children’s learning results. Due to disappointment, those children are no longer noticed. Fear of failure makes some children nervous before trying, afraid to take risks in order to achieve. This fear of failure can emerge as a result of the modern culture’s view of failure as incompetence, unpopularity, etc. Those who failed are described as weirdos, unattractive, bad; and they’re also mocked, bullied, and ultimately rejected. This means that failure tends to imply ostracization and a label of “loser”. Thus, failure becomes something people want to avoid. Thus, according to Prashnig (Prashnig, 1998)⁹, this tends to push people to limit themselves, in order to avoid making mistakes. There are also those who considered failure as caused by biological factors, such as gender. Olivia stated this as a reason for why girls are considered very vulnerable to extinguishment of individuality and creativity. Moreover, Awadi (Akbar & Hawadi, 2010)¹⁰ accused that gifted girls are very vulnerable to both fear of failure and fear of success due to the social tradition’s inability to accept successful women. Thus, women suffer Cinderella complex, a fear of success accompanied by a desire to be protected as someone [perceived as] weak. This social demands on girls thus can also affects the fear of failure. Thus, the genealogy of fear of failure spans from positive to negative extremes: fear of failure is correlated to things from achievement and motivation, self-competence, self-confidence, humanity, capability, performance expectations, sensory, perception, and mental behaviors to defensive pessimism, helplessness, self-protection, social rejection, setting goals well below actual potential, overprotectiveness, delaying success, social enmity and perceptions of “weakness”.

2. RESEARCH METHOD CONCERNING FEAR OF FAILURE SYMPTOMS IN ACADEMICALLY GIFTED STUDENTS AT SCHOOL

This article explores the relation between fear of failure and various situations of academic performances. This research proves whether fear of failure is also experienced by those who are academically gifted. This article is written using the phenomenological case study approach. The data is interpreted to present deeper meanings and facts after a process of “filtering” (ratio). Smith, etc., (Tindall, 2009)¹¹ stated that meaning is the important content of the experience of consciousness. The essence of experience is formed of 2 assumptions. First, expression of subjective consciousness. Second, intentionally. Smith, etc., (Tindall, 2009)¹² stated that any conversation concerning a person cannot be removed from the context of the world (person-in-context) and its intersubjectivity. To interpret the phenomenological data, it has to be reduced, according to Smith, etc. (Tindall, 2009)¹³ Then, after reduction, it is continued with description (Tindall, 2009)¹⁴. The validity test of the data is done on both the subjective experiences and the object’s essences. (Tindall, 2009)¹⁵ The next step is to do a reflection aided with the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis stated by Smith and Osborn (Smith & Osborn, 2015)¹⁶ as a way to uncover how respondents interpret various experiences, perceptions, or personal opinions about objects or events. The data analysis in phenomenological research starts from observations and interviews (in-depth interviews), then analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis with these steps: 1) Reading and re-reading; 2) Initial noting; 3) Developing emergent themes; 4) Searching for connections across emergent themes; 5) Moving the next cases; and 6) Looking for patterns across cases. The next step is developing the pattern of relationship of meanings to obtain an intuitive observations through phenomenological, eidetic, and transcendental reduction. The research subjects consist of 6 people, with performance indicators used as follows: (1) a student is considered afraid of failure if their questionnaire score is >75; (2) a student is considered intellectually gifted if their IQ score is >110; (3) said student also shows at least one of the several indicators of academic gifts; (4) and said student has both academic and non-academic achievements. Subjects are determined based on identification results obtained from a questionnaire on fear of failure scale distributed among students. Students who are indicated as having high levels of fear of failure and fulfills the criteria of intellectually gifted students are then grouped to become the research subjects.

After psychological tests, 6 (six) students who meet the criteria are found and made into the research subjects. The 6 subjects are: first subject is BWS, 12th year, 18 years old, IQ 121 (superior), FF 95%. Second subject is SNH, 11th year, 17 years old, IQ 121 (superior), FF 99 %. Third subject is KH, 11th year, 17 years old, IQ 119 (high average), FF 88%. Fourth subject is NDZ, 12th year, 18 years old, IQ 113 (high average), FF 87%. Fifth subject is


J.A. Smith, P. Flower And M. Larkin. Interpretive: 17.
RNA, 12th year, 18 years old, IQ 119 (high average), FF 100 %. Sixth subject is DAM, 11th year, 17 years old, IQ 113 (high average), FF 88 %.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS: CONTEST BETWEEN STEREOTYPES AND NEW IDEAS ABOUT FEAR OF FAILURE IN ACADEMICALLY GIFTED STUDENTS

3.1 Phenomenologically Case Description of Fear of Failure in Academically Gifted Academic

Based on subjective case analysis, in general all research subjects show the same psychological expressions when experiencing fear of failure, indicated by the following symptoms: first, achievements as the only way to protect their social existence and acceptance, particularly as a reason for friendship. Second, the most feared thing is losing the trust of their precious people. Third, feeling worthless. Fourth, fears being avoided and unnoticed. Fifth, actually not really obsessed of extraordinary academic achievement, but only wanting a balance of academic achievement and social life. Sixth, failure would motivate them to be better. Seventh, feeling unneeded and fears being abandoned by those close to them. Eighth, assuming the future would be worse than what they wanted when they failed. Ninth, feeling meaningless and empty. Tenth, feeling the burden to pay back all that has been sacrificed by many people for them to succeed. Then, based on the IQ and FF scores range of the research subjects (113 to 121 IQ score; 87% to 100% FF score), it can be seen that high IQ score (and thus, academic gift) has significant correlation with the emergence of fear of failure. This research’s finding is supported by the research done by Kathryn L. Fletcher and Kristie L. Speirs Neumeister (Fletcher & Speirs Neumeister, 2012), which confirms that perfectionism is often connected to rigid obedience to overly high standards, irrational importance of reaching that standard, and tendency to overgeneralize on all cases of failure. The conclusion of Fletcher and Neumeister is supported by Jane O’Connor (O’Connor, 2012), who stated that those children labeled as academically gifted tend to be treated negatively by others, which affects the formation of their self-worth and motivation to succeed. O’Connor’s research exploring the social attitude of academically gifted students found that those academically gifted tend to be treated more negatively than those who achieve in music or sports. There is an interesting fact concerning this negative attitude. The research done by the researcher found that this negative attitude is not only expressed by other students, but also from teachers. Data shows that most teachers don’t like academically gifted students. This finding strengthens Marlene R. Tanudjaja’s (Tanudjaja, 2011) statement, which mocked teachers who lived in fear of failure would trigger the same thing in their students. For Marlene, a good teacher will not see either themselves or their students as victims, but will try to free their students from fear. This can happen because according to Nurhidayah and Adi Atmoko (Nurhidayah & Atmoko, 2014), the symptoms of fear of failure in students has not received enough attention from various parties, particularly teachers, until now. This has been predicted by Thomas S. Greenspon (Greenspon, 2014), who stated that in a competitive culture, perfectionist students can adjust themselves well. Thus, academically gifted students should not have been vulnerable to fear of failure.

3.2 Stereotypes and Fear of Failure among Academically Gifted Students

The phenomenon of fear of failure should not have been a cause of worry. At least Gordon L. Flett and Paul L. Hewitt (Flett & Hewitt, 2014) have proven from their latest findings that perfectionism is very common among children and teenagers, and perfectionism can be quite destructive, triggering anxiety, depression, and even suicide. Fear of failure can also lead to destructive tendencies and resistance to changes. This article also proves that there is a gender-based discrepancy of fear of failure level among male and female students. However, all [intellectually] gifted students are prone to suffer fear of failure. This article also manages to explore the symptoms of this fear, particularly among women, deeper. Besides fearing failure, women are also afraid of success, because it is viewed improper by the traditional norms. Thus, this “fear of success” is built on gender roles stereotypes: men must be strong, dominant, and assertive, while women must be attentive, sensitive, and expressive. Thus, hard work, competition, and achievement is something closely associated, even identified with the world of men, not women. Thus, women’s accomplishments are often ignored, even if they have reached peak achievements. If this discussion is redirected into the topic of the relationship between fear of failure and (academic or non-academic) giftedness, then this article proves that there is a basic difference between children who are academically gifted and children who are just gifted in relation to fear of failure symptoms: data shows that academically gifted students are very vulnerable to fear of failure. This conclusion matches with Reni Akbar-Hawadi’s


statement that there is a basic difference between children who are academically gifted and children who are just gifted. There are two differences: academically-gifted students have managed to prove their capabilities through their academic achievements. Meanwhile, those labeled as “gifted students”, are distinguished by: first, “only” managing to achieve high marks, and only limited in the field of general intellectual capabilities. According to Reni Akbar-Hawadi, the criteria of “gifted students” is having an IQ score between 125 and 140, adequate creativity and good dedication to tasks, and second, their academic potential has not been actualized. This article also proves that academically-gifted students, despite neing able to learn at an accelerated rate, tend to have a lot of social problems during their teenage years, compared to “regular kids”. This article also show that in order to avoid negative effects, those who have managed to achieve above the average prefers to “level down” their capabilities to normal levels, in order to ensure acceptance by their social environment. This tendency is obviously unhealthy for the nurturing of an atmosphere of competition in achievements. This article also shows that students gifted in non-academic fields also do not receive enough attention and facility to develop.

3.3 New Ideas Concerning Fear of Failure among Academically Gifted Students

Related to the above theme, this article disagrees with Reni Akbar-Hawadi’s statement that the fear of failure that emerges from high expectations from self, parents, teachers, and the society is also a trait of academically gifted students, which can pressure and limit them in building their future. This article proves that academically-gifted students are not shown to experience fear of failure, particularly in the “fear of future” aspect. This might be explained by the fact that these academically-gifted students are relatively multi-talented, thus they have a lot of possible paths for their future. Thus, they have no strong reason to fear failure, or its effects to their future. This finding is what differentiates this research with previously stated theories concerning fear of failure, such as the one stated above by Conroy et.al. In contrast to Akbar-Hawadi’s statement above, Sylvia Rimm (Rimm, 2000)24 defends those children who failed to achieve much academically, by saying that it’s less because they are unable to do it, but more because they are not well suited for competition. These children tends to view everything in a lense of competition, and they fear failure due to desire for victory. Meanwhile, Barbara Prashnig (Prashnig, 1998)25 tries to trace the origin of the nonsynchronicty between the actual achievements and potential capabilities of academically-gifted students, especially when supported by above-average IQ. Prashnig found that there are a lot of students who failed to adjust and thus failed. These failed students are characterized by severe social and psychological problems, feeling afraid and threatened. (Prashnig, 1998)26 In contrast to Prashnig, Mike Robbins (Robbins, 2007)27 stated that the deepest fear is not of inadequacy, but rather of overachievement. To explain the results of this research better, here are some of the most urgent aspects to be discussed:

a. The Most Expressive Symptom in the General Pattern of Fear of Failure among Academically Gifted Students

This article found that some of the most common symptoms of fear of failure among academically gifted students are fear of losing their closest friends, fear of inability to payback other people’s good deeds, fear of disappointing their closest people, fear of burdening them, and fear of being mocked. All this can ultimately destroys their self-confidence. According to Napoleon Hill (Hill, 2008)28, the origin of this locus of fear of failure lies in other negative factors beyond fear. In agreement with Hill, Agung Webe29 accuses that failure happens basically because it is what is desired. For Joseph Murphy (Murphy, 2009)30, this symptom is caused by habitual thoughts that transformed into fuel for illnesses, sadness, failure, and misery. Gabriella Cacciotti&James C. Hayton (Cacciotti & Hayton, 2015)31 stated that fear of failure is caused by a dualistic fear. Meanwhile, Marco Estêvão Correia and António Rosado (Correia & Rosado, 2018)32 adds that the fear of failure is permanent, difficult to eradicate and will continue to haunt them. For James A. Cunningham (Walsh & Cunningham, 2016)33, failure would be a huge source of

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trauma. Meanwhile, in contrast with the previous ideas, F. Gulruh Gunduz, Hande Sinem Ergun, Begum Samur Teraman (Ergun, Samur-Teraman, & Gurbuz, 2017)\textsuperscript{39} considers the meaning of failure as often underestimated. Gunduzet al.'s statement above needs to be stressed, because failure is always unpleasant. Related to this, Kollmann, Tobias & Stöckmann, Christoph & Kensbock, Julia M. (Kollmann, Stöckmann, & Kensbock, 2017)\textsuperscript{35} concludes that fear of failure serves as a responsive avoidance motif as well as a psychological process to anticipate failure, which ultimately results in self-withdrawal. Thus, according to Tom Clancy (Clancy, 1991)\textsuperscript{36}, fear of failure would always haunt one's mind, leading to a decrease in academic performance. A drastic change would occur: someone who actually has very good potential for success would suddenly become a coward. To explain this problem more clearly, William George Jordan (Jordan, 2011)\textsuperscript{37}’s opinion, which contrasts cowardice with awareness, responsibility, failure, doubt, fear, and sadness is interesting to consider. However, despite all these similarities, there are some variance in fear of failure symptoms that is very different from the norm among academically gifted students: it is not true that fear of failure would prevent someone from achieving success. There are many kinds of successes that can be achieved without academic achievements. According to Robert Holden (Holden, 2005)\textsuperscript{38}, this fact might be based on a “false” sense of guilt. If this is investigated further, this is based more on the strong desire to be labeled “gifted” by people, according to Michele Boyba (Boyba, 2009)\textsuperscript{39}. To clarify the comparison illustration presented by Boyba above, Conroy and Elliot’s statement becomes relevant in this segment, because they considered that fear of failure does not always have a negative/destructive effect. David E. Conroy & Andrew J. Elliot (Conroy & Elliot, 2004)\textsuperscript{40} stated that fear of failure (FF) gives a very powerful energy in each effort to achieve something. Meanwhile, Aslak Hjeltnes, Per-Einar Binder, Christian Moltu & Ingrid Dundas (Hjeltnes, Binder, Moltu, & Dundas, 2015)\textsuperscript{31} stated that there are 5 notable patterns in fear of failure, which are: (1) source of spiritual calm, (2) sharing of struggle, (3) focus on study, (4) movement from fear to curiosity, and (5) feeling more able to accept self when facing difficult situations. In contrast to the writers above, Richard C. Woolfson (Woolfson, 2004)\textsuperscript{42} stated that failure is not the end of everything. In some situations, failure can be used positively as opportunity to develop new abilities. Failure and success are only a matter of perspectives. Fear of failure is experienced by a lot of people. (Woolfson, 2004)\textsuperscript{43}

b. New Study Area/Domain Discovered among Academically Gifted Students for the Development of Fear of Failure Concept

The data gathered by this article proves that fear of failure in the academic field has the implication of failure to be a good person, fear of sinking into wrongness and becoming worthless, fear being labeled as having “low IQ”, to the point that the fear seeps into the dream world. These data seems not so different from what has been described by many theories concerning fear of failure. However, there are several data which are far different from the existing theoretical frame, such as the fact that failure does not always lead to despair. This is proven by the existence of respondents who faced failure by turning into religion, or making substitute plans and diverts their attention to achieve in non-academic fields. These data are obviously very interesting, showing a quite far divergence from the mainstream theories concerning fear of failure. These data shows that there are several anticipative steps taken when facing failure, even involving the emotional and spiritual dimensions. A quite noticeable divergence is in the gender

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This article proves that gender does not correlate at all with fear of failure, rejecting Albert B. Carballosa et al.'s statement that fear of failure, fear of success, and gender role orientation is deeply correlated. This article also rejects Sanjeevini Dixit's statement that there is a relation between fear of failure and delaying of motivation in working women. In order to dissect the reasons for fear of failure, this article supports Tamás Gruborovics & Tuomas Kolehmainen's statement that fear of failure is proven to be related to achievement goals, tenacity, effort, and achievements, as well as quality of social relations. Fear of failure often damages and hinders achievement, and it often causes drop outs. Getting back to the problem of fear of failure in schools, Prakash Singh (Singh, 2013) concludes based on their research results that class graduation correlates with rising anxiety, stress, and uncontrolled nervousness. To explain the phenomenon of fear of failure, Anand Krisna (Krisna, 2007) explains that the fourth layer of consciousness is where fear caused by anxiety over failure in an activity is located. There is a paradox present in the context of fear of failure; the fear is proof that one's intelligence is growing, because someone who has never failed has not experienced meaningful growth of intelligence. To nurture intelligence, failure is one of the several paths available.

Meanwhile, Eko Jalu Santos (Santoso, 2004) describes that fear of failure is based more on a wrong life model. In contrast to that, Gordon L. Flett and Paul L. Hewitt (Flett & Hewitt, 2014) have another perspective about fear of failure. According to them, the newest findings show that perfectionism is very common, and even typical among children and teenagers. Perfectionism can become quite destructive in relation to anxiety, Depression, and suicide. Thus, when fear of failure happens to an individual with high IQ and academic talent, it can be guaranteed that it will always result in negative effects and excesses. When all three combined, it will always ends up destructive, which is worrying because the symptoms of all three have become typical traits of teenagers, especially, those with superior IQ and academic talent.

4. CONCLUSION
This article concludes:

a. These data seems to be not so different from what have been described by various existing theories concerning fear of failure. However, there are several data which are quite different from the existing theoretical frame, such as: failure does not always lead to despair, as shown by the fact that some faces failure by turning to religion, while some others make a replacement plan and divert their energy to achieve in non-academic fields. These data is clearly very interesting, showing a quite far divergence from the mainstream theories about fear of failure. These data also whos that there are several anticipative steps that can be taken when facing failure, even involving the spiritual and emotional dimensions.

b. A quite far divergence from existing theories can also be seen in the gender aspect. This article proves that gender has no correlation with fear of failure.

c. Someone who has never failed actually has not yet undergoes significant development of intelligence. To nurture intelligence, failure is one of the paths available.

d. When someone with high IQ and academic talent suffers from fear of failure, it is sure to result in negative, even destructive effects and excesses.

5. RECOMMENDATION
A special inclusive religious school for academically gifted students, which can facilitate their multi-talented superiority is needed.

REFERENCES


