

field note

ODD SYMPTOMS

My conviction that children's school behavior was becoming widely explained and understood as a matter of *individual* children's pathology extracted from any social context deepened when, in 1994, children's disobedience was officially classified as a mental illness by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). This classification, designated as Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), appeared in the official diagnostic reference book of the American Psychiatric Association that contains classifications of all mental disorders recognized that year.¹ The following description of the symptoms of the disorder is excerpted from the APA's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*:

Code 313.81. "Oppositional Defiant Disorder" (ODD). The essential feature of Oppositional Defiant Disorder is a recurrent pattern of negativistic, defiant, disobedient, and hostile behavior toward authority figures that persists for at least 6 months (Criterion A) and is characterized by the frequent occurrence of at least four of the following behaviors: losing temper (Criterion A1), arguing with adults (Criterion A2), actively defying or refusing to comply with the requests or rules of adults (Criterion A3), deliberately doing things that will annoy other people (Criterion A4), blaming others for his or her own mistakes or misbehavior (Criterion A5), being touchy or easily annoyed by others (Criterion A6), being angry and resentful (Criterion A7), or being spiteful or vindictive (Criterion A8). To qualify for Oppositional Defiant Disorder, the behaviors must occur more frequently than is typically observed in individuals of comparable age and developmental level and must lead to significant impairment in social, academic or occupational functioning (Criterion B). The diagnosis is not made if the disturbance in behavior occurs exclusively during the course of a Psychotic or Mood Disorder (Criterion C) or if

1. American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th ed. (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

criteria are met for Conduct Disorder or Antisocial Personality Disorder (in an individual over 18 years).

Negativistic and defiant behaviors are expressed by persistent stubbornness, resistance to directions, and unwillingness to compromise, give in, or negotiate with adults or peers. Defiance may also include deliberate or persistent testing of limits, usually by ignoring orders, arguing, and failing to accept blame for misdeeds. Hostility can be directed at adults or peers and is shown by deliberately annoying others or by verbal aggression (usually without the more serious physical aggression seen in Conduct Disorder). Manifestations of the disorder are almost invariably present in the home setting, but may not be evident at school or in the community. Symptoms of the disorder are typically more evident in interactions with adults or peers whom the individual knows well, and thus may not be apparent during clinical examination. Usually individuals with this disorder do not regard themselves as oppositional or defiant, but justify their behavior as a response to unreasonable demands or circumstances.²

2. Ibid., 91–92.