

# THE SELF-CONCEPT OF GIFTED CHILDREN

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# The Self-Concept of Gifted Children

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by

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To Graduate and Research Council


I am submitting herewith a Research Paper written by Susan E. Hohman entitled "The Self-Concept of Gifted Children." I have examined the final copy of this paper for form and content and I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Science with a major in Guidance and Counseling.

  
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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

In the 19th century, the English biologist Sir Francis Galton (1869) began the scientific study of exceptionally bright or gifted individuals. Galton focused his studies on heredity and recognized the need for measuring the characteristics of related and unrelated persons. He discovered that the incidence of superior intellectual ability occurred more frequently in some families than in others and concluded that the trait of genius was worthy of scientific investigation.

Terman initiated the gifted movement in the United States during the early part of this century with the introduction of the Stanford Binet Intelligence Test and Genetic Studies of Genius (Terman, 1925; Terman & Oden, 1959). When Russia launched its first Sputnik in the 1950's, American educators began to pay serious attention to instructional environments and programs for the gifted. The desire to maintain military superiority by preparing competent students for careers in the sciences provided the impetus that educators needed to establish formal procedures for the identification, selection, and placement of gifted students.

In the past century, the research on gifted children has focused primarily on their cognitive development. Significantly less attention has been devoted to the social

and emotional aspects in the maturation of gifted students. Today programs for gifted children are becoming more comprehensive in nature. Educators have realized the importance of developing diverse areas of human potential; academic, physical, and social. This type of approach requires school personnel to respond to intellectual as well as nonintellectual factors in the development of the gifted child. Educators need to explore and understand the social and emotional adjustment of gifted children.

There has been continuing controversy over the relationship between high intelligence and personality adjustment. Early research (Lombroso, 1891) indicated that high intelligence was associated with adjustment problems and insanity. Other investigators have suggested that some gifted children are susceptible to interpersonal isolation (Delisle, 1980, 1984), low self-esteem (Monaster & Powell, 1983; Hall, 1978), depression, suicide, and hypersensitivity (Monaster & Powell, 1983; Whitmore, 1980).

This negative stereotype of the gifted child was largely refuted by Terman's longitudinal studies (Terman, 1925-1959). Terman's studies revealed that children with Stanford Binet IQ scores greater than 140 were better adjusted both physically and psychologically than their more average peers.

Even at the time of Terman's extensive research, authorities in the field (Hollingworth, 1942) continued to



maintain that children of high intelligence were more prone to developing social and emotional adjustment problems.

As a result of this controversy, in the past two decades more attention has been given to the social and personal components of the gifted child's development. Much of this attention has been directed toward gifted children's self-perceptions. There is extensive agreement that self-concept is an important variable in an individual's development (Yauman, 1980). Research suggests that self-concept is significantly related to important components of a child's educational development including academic achievement (Anderson, 1978), interpersonal behavior patterns (Winne & Walsh, 1980), and self-attributions about success or failure (Ames, 1978). As a psychological construct, self-concept has been defined to include different kinds of self-perceptions such as self-recognition and self-esteem (Harter, 1983).

For many people it would seem quite likely that gifted children would have superior self-perceptions because of their frequent success in school. Researchers have identified intelligence as just one of several factors affecting the development of self-concept (Coopersmith, 1967; Purkey, 1970; Yamamoto, 1972). Torrance (1968) has maintained that one's self-perception is a composite of reflected appraisals of significant others in a child's life. Although gifted children have scored significantly

higher on academic measures of self-concept (Colangelo & Pfleger, 1978; Tidwell, 1980) the results have been inconsistent in comparisons made of non-academic self-concept measures.

The present review will concentrate on three areas of the research on gifted children's self-perceptions: (a) academic versus social self-concept, (b) gifted program effects on self-concept, and (c) comparisons of self-concept between gifted and nongifted. How do gifted children's self-perceptions compare to their more average peers and what are the effects of gifted programs on the self-concepts of gifted children? This question will form the central focus of the research paper.

## CHAPTER II

### Review of the Literature

#### Academic and Social Self-Concept

Self-concept has been defined as a person's expectations of success in solving problems and completing tasks (Marx & Winne, 1978). Academic and social endeavors represent two primary areas in which individuals develop these expectations. Gifted students have attained consistently high scores on academic measures of self-concept (Colangelo & Pfleger, 1978; Tidwell, 1980). Not surprisingly, most of these children have a positive image of themselves as bright, talented, and successful students.

The research on nonacademic measures of self-concept has not been as consistent. Some of this research has revealed a discrepancy between the academic and social self-concepts of gifted children with superior scores on academic measures. For example, Ross and Parker (1980) conducted a study to ascertain the academic-social self-concept relationship with a gifted population. The subjects were 147 fifth through eighth grade students identified as gifted by their school system. The Sears Self-Concept Inventory was administered to each student. Items were grouped into a social self-concept scale which combined the physical abilities, physical appearance, social



relations, social virtues, and happy qualities subscales, and an academic self-concept subtest which combined the convergent mental abilities, divergent mental abilities, and school subjects subscales.

The results revealed a significant difference between academic and social self-concept scores for the total population of gifted males and females grades five through eight. The students scored significantly higher on the academic self-concept subscales supporting the hypothesis that gifted students possess significantly lower expectations for their social versus their academic endeavors. This discrepancy was statistically significant for both sexes. In addition, there were no significant differences among grade levels on academic and social subtest difference scores indicating that this discrepancy does not appear to change over time.

The authors suggest two complementary hypotheses for the discrepancy. Gifted students may focus their attention on improving their advanced academic skills at the expense of interpersonal skill development. This focus on academic development may be a result of the disproportionate attention these students receive for their academic excellence. Alternatively, gifted students may experience discomfort in determining their place in the peer group and this

ambivalence is then reflected in lower social self-concept scores.

In 1987, Colangelo and Brower compared students identified as gifted with their nongifted siblings on academic and personal/social self-esteem assessments. The participants were 25 matched pairs of siblings, one of whom had been identified as gifted at least five years prior to the study. To assess personal/social self-concept the authors used the Adjective Check List (ACL). The ACL consists of 300 adjectives commonly used to describe attributes of a person. The Academic Self-Concept Scale was used to assess self-attributions of academic ability.

The results indicated that even after at least five years, the students identified as gifted still held significantly higher self-concepts regarding their academic ability than did their nongifted siblings. The siblings scored significantly higher than the gifted on the Personality Adjustment and Endurance scales on the ACL indicating a possible discrepancy between the two aspects of self-concept, academic and social. Higher scores on the Personality Adjustment scale indicate a positive attitude toward life with a sense of optimism, cheerfulness, interests in others, and a readiness to adapt. The gifted did not score significantly higher than the siblings on any of the ACL's 24 scales.

Winne, Woodlands, and Wong (1982) studied the comparability of self-concept among learning disabled, normal, and gifted students using the Sears and Coopersmith self-esteem inventories. Statistically reliable differences emerged among the three groups in terms of academic self-concept. The scores of the gifted children were superior to the other two groups on academically labeled self-concept subscales. This was not the case with scores on the social self-concept subscales. On the Sears subscales of Physical Ability and Social Virtues, both the learning disabled and average students scored significantly higher than the gifted. However, on the Coopersmith Home and General subscales and on the Sears Happy Qualities subscale no statistically reliable differences emerged among the three groups of students.

In 1980, Tidwell conducted a comprehensive study to provide a modern psychoeducational profile of the gifted minor. The sample consisted of 1,593 tenth grade students from 46 high schools in a large metropolitan urban California school district. Among the instruments used in their study, three assessed self-concept. Two of these provided general measures of self-esteem while the third, Self-Concept as a Learner Questionnaire, measured self-concept with regard to learning and school behaviors. On the general measures of self-esteem the gifted scored either



within the range of means reported by the norm group or slightly higher. On the questionnaire measuring self-concept as learner the gifted scored significantly higher than the norm group, providing additional evidence for superior academic self-esteem.

The final instrument used in this study was a survey inventory designed by Tidwell to secure a range of personal information from the subjects. The inventory offered some insight into the social self-esteem of the subjects. Inquiries were made regarding how popular the gifted students felt they were. A total of 64% saw themselves as either very unpopular or unpopular. Only 35% of the students saw themselves a popular or very popular. Nevertheless, when asked "overall, do you consider yourself to be a happy person," 74% of the subjects reported that they were happy or very happy, and 26% reported that they were unhappy or very unhappy. One may conclude that for this group of gifted students feelings of happiness were not contingent upon being popular with peers. In the future, it would be valuable to use this survey with a nongifted group of students to compare their responses to those of the author's gifted population.

The research on the social self-concepts of gifted students has not been consistent. Other studies have indicated that both the academic and social self-concepts of

gifted students are superior to those of regular students. For example, Kelly and Colangelo (1984) compared gifted children with their nongifted agemates on both academic and social self-concept measures. Three groups of children: those identified for a gifted program, general students, and those identified for a special learning needs program, were compared on two self-concept measures. The subjects were 266 students comprising 90% of the total population of a consolidated junior high school grades seven through nine.

The results indicated significantly higher scores on both academic and social self-concept measures for the gifted students. The authors found a definite relationship between academic ability and academic and social self-concepts with the gifted learners scoring higher than the general students, and the general students scoring higher than those students with special learning needs.

Colangelo, Kelly, and Schrepfer (1987) reported similar findings. They also compared gifted, general, and special learning needs students on academic and social self-concept measures. The participants were administered two self-concept measures at the beginning and end of an academic year. By taking the assessments at two points in time the researchers hoped to establish some baseline data regarding the stability of self-concept.

The results revealed significant differences among the three groups on both academic and social self-concept measures. The gifted students tended to score highest on both measures. The special learning needs students scored lowest on both variables. There were no significant differences in self-concept scores attained in September and May supporting the contention that self-concept is a stable variable, well-established by the time of early adolescence.

In conclusion, there may in fact be a discrepancy between the academic and social self-concepts of gifted children. The literature does support the belief that these students possess higher academic self-esteem (Ross & Parker, 1980; Colangelo & Brower, 1987). Nevertheless, it would be a false assumption to believe that gifted children hold poor images of themselves socially. For most gifted children, this "lower" social self-concept is still at least as high, and at times, significantly higher, than is the social self-concept of their nongifted peers (Kelly & Colangelo, 1984; Colangelo et al., 1987).

#### Gifted Program Effects on Self-Concept

The effectiveness of various types of programs for gifted learners is of great concern to parents, educators, counselors, and funding agencies. Does participation in an enrichment program have an effect on the self-perceptions



of gifted students? The research on this question continues to yield mixed results. Some researchers have discovered that the placement of gifted students in homogeneous groups corresponds with a decrease in self-concept. Coleman and Fults (1982) measured the self-concepts of fourth, fifth, and sixth grade gifted children who were either in a segregated gifted program or the regular classroom. Students in both groups were administered the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale at three points in time. The first assessment took place four to six weeks after the experimental group began participation in the gifted program. Time two corresponded with the end of the academic year. Time three data were collected 18 months after the initial assessment. Sixth grade gifted students were in the seventh grade at time three and had returned to regular classrooms approximately eight months earlier.

At time one and time two, gifted children in the segregated program, although only a one day a week pull-out program, had lower scores on the Piers-Harris compared to the gifted children who were not participating in the program. The sixth graders showed a substantial increase in self-concept after they had returned to regular classrooms. To account for the difference in self-concept scores, the authors point to social comparison theory

(Festinger, 1954). This theory speculates that in the absence of objective standards of comparison, people will employ significant others in their environment as bases for forming estimates of self-worth. Furthermore, given the choice of similar or dissimilar others, people are more likely to choose similar others as a basis for social comparison. This theoretical perspective suggests that for gifted children the move from regular classrooms to gifted and talented programs is the transition from a more heterogeneous to a more homogeneous comparison group. Within the regular classroom, the capabilities of the gifted are likely to be exceptional. Within a gifted program these same capabilities may be only typical. Thus, social comparison theory would predict the transition to lower self-esteem.

In a different study, Coleman and Fults (1985) assessed the self-concepts of gifted children either before or after placement in a gifted program. They discovered that the children whose self-concepts were measured prior to participation in the one day a week segregated program had higher scores than students measured after placement in the program. The children in the gifted program with the lowest IQs showed the lowest self-concept scores when assessed during the program. Again, Coleman and Fults attributed their findings to social comparison theory.

Before program participation when social comparisons were limited to the regular classroom, self-concept scores for the gifted were equivalent regardless of differences in IQ. It was only when the social comparison group became other high ability students that differences in IQ began to differentiate self-concept scores. The gifted students with lower IQs had to make the transition from a reference group in which they were generally superior to a comparison group in which they may have been the least capable. This may account for the fact that these students earned the lowest self-concept scores.

Schneider, Clegg, Byrne, Ledingham, and Crombie (1989) examined the self-concepts and social relations of gifted children as a function of age and school program. Students in grades five, eight, and ten took part in the study. At each grade level there were students in self-contained gifted classes, gifted students integrated in regular classes, and two comparison groups drawn from the classmates of the integrated gifted students who did not meet identification criteria for giftedness. For each integrated gifted subject, one classmate was chosen at random to serve as a control and another nongifted classmate was matched in terms of age, sex, and number of years in school. The subjects completed self-report instruments on self-concept and feelings about school.



The results revealed a significant difference among groups on only one aspect of self-concept. In all three grades the integrated gifted group scored higher on Perceived Cognitive Competence than did the matched or random controls. Only in grade eight did the self-contained gifted have higher Perceived Cognitive Competence scores than the controls.

In a comparison of the self-contained and integrated gifted, the only significant difference was also found on Perceived Cognitive Competence. In grades five and eight the integrated gifted had higher academic self-concept scores than did the self-contained gifted. For the grade ten students differences were nonsignificant, but in the same direction. It is important to note that both the self-contained and the integrated gifted students had met the same identification criteria for giftedness. Thus, although equally talented, the integrated gifted tended to view themselves as more academically competent than did their self-contained gifted peers.

In 1987, Olszewski, Kulieke, and Willis examined changes in gifted children's self-perceptions over the course of two summer enrichment programs. The subjects were two groups of gifted adolescents who were attending different summer programs sponsored by a university. One program was a three week residential program characterized



by a fast-paced proficiency model of instruction. The second program studied was a commuter program characterized by a laboratory based, hands-on participatory instructional model.

Students in both programs completed a differentiated self-concept measure on three occasions: prior to the program, on the first day of classes, and on the last day of classes. With multiple measurement points, the authors' intent was to evaluate change as a result of the program experience.

The results indicated significant changes in different domains of self-concept over the course of the two programs. In both programs, academic self-concept scores declined from preprogram to the first day of the program and from the first day to the last day of the program. These results are generally consistent with those of Coleman and Fults (1982, 1985) cited earlier.

A decrease in social self-concept by the first day of the program followed by an increase by the last day was found only for the residential program students. The students' initial anxiety over living away from home combined with the challenge of meeting a new peer group may have produced this initial drop in social self-esteem. Not surprisingly, a commuter program is less likely to impact on social self-perceptions. Students return home at the

end of the day to interact with friends and family where their social acceptance has been previously determined.

Not all of the research on the effects of gifted programs has indicated significant changes in students' self-esteem. Other studies have yielded no significant differences in self-concept between gifted students who participated in a program and equally gifted students who did not. For example, Maddux, Scheiber, and Bass (1982) examined the self-concepts of fifth and sixth grade gifted children enrolled in a totally segregated or partially segregated program and a control group of gifted students not enrolled in any program. The authors hypothesized that self-concept would be higher for gifted children not enrolled in a program than for those that were, and that self-concept would be higher for those students in a partially segregated program than for those in a totally segregated program.

All three groups were administered the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. No statistically reliable differences emerged among the three groups of students, suggesting that whether or not gifted children are identified and placed in special programs, and whether they receive integrated or segregated education may be relatively weak variables with regard to self-concept. The

authors emphasize that what occurs in the classroom may be much more important than a particular grouping arrangement.

In 1981, Karnes and Wherry examined differences between self-concept scores of students enrolled in a gifted program and students of equal ability but not enrolled. The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale was administered to both groups of students. The authors found no significant differences between gifted students enrolled and those not enrolled. Both groups of gifted children scored significantly higher than the standardization group.

Kolloff and Feldhusen (1984) studied the effects of enrichment on the self-concept of gifted elementary students. Children identified as gifted were randomly assigned to either an experimental or a control group. Students in the experimental group participated in a pull-out program in which they left their classrooms twice each week for one hour to meet with a trained resource teacher. The program lasted for six months. The control subjects remained in their regular classrooms.

To assess the effects of the program, two self-concept instruments were administered to students in both groups at the end of the program. There were no significant differences between the gifted program participants and the gifted students who remained in regular classes, suggesting



that enrichment programs for the gifted may not affect self-concept either positively or negatively.

Additional research has revealed increases in gifted children's self-perceptions after participation in an enrichment program. Kolloff and Moore (1989) examined the self-concepts of gifted students in grades five through ten who participated in one of three summer residential programs. Although the programs took place in different locations and served different ages, they were very similar in structure. All three programs brought together students for a two-week period of academic, social, and recreational interaction with their gifted peers.

The students were administered two self-concept measures at the beginning and at the end of each of the programs. Self-concept scores were significantly higher at the end of the programs. This was true regardless of grade level or program. The authors suggest that this rise in self-concept may occur because students view the programs as "safe" environments. In program evaluations, students comment that they can "be themselves" and do not have to worry about appearing "too smart."

Feldhusen, Sayler, Nielsen, and Kolloff (1990) also demonstrated significant gains in self-concept for gifted students participating in an enrichment program. The subjects of this study were students in grades three to eight



who were identified by their school system as gifted. Forty of these students were placed in an enrichment program and formed this study's experimental group. The twenty subjects who did not participate in the gifted program became the control group. Both groups of students completed two self-concept measures as pretests at the beginning of the school year and as posttests at the end of the school year.

Significant differences were found between the self-concepts of participants and nonparticipants in the enrichment program indicating higher self-esteem for those enrolled in the program.

Does participation in an enrichment program affect the self-concepts of gifted students? The answer is still not clear. Researchers have found decreases in self-concept scores upon placement in a homogeneous program for the gifted (Coleman & Fults, 1982, 1985). Other studies have produced no significant differences between the self-concept scores of gifted students who participated in a program and equally gifted students who did not (Kolloff & Feldhusen, 1984). Additional research has revealed increases in self-concept scores after participation in enrichment programs (Feldhusen et al, 1990).

These conflicting results may be explained in part by differences in programs. Variables such as the amount of

time spent in the program, the program activities, and the intensity of the experience, may be expected to influence the self-concepts of the program participants.

Finally, studies finding lower self-esteem among gifted students participating in an enrichment program should not be taken as an indication of low self-concept on the part of gifted children. These children still have a very healthy image of themselves with average scores of both gifted program participants and gifted nonparticipants far exceeding the mean of the Piers-Harris standardization sample (Coleman & Fults, 1982, 1985; Karnes & Wherry, 1981). In all, these studies on program effects support the contention that gifted children have very positive self-concepts.

#### Comparisons of Self-Concept - Gifted and Nongifted

The literature on the self-perceptions of gifted children contains many studies that examine differences in self-concept between gifted children and their nongifted agetates. The majority of these studies have found significant differences in self-concept scores in favor of the gifted.

O'Such, Havertape, and Pierce (1979) compared four groups of students: educatable mentally retarded, educationally handicapped, average, and gifted on the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. Their findings

suggest a positive relationship between intelligence and self-concept. Both groups of handicapped children obtained lower scores than the gifted children and the children of average intelligence. Self-concept appears related to intelligence in that the gifted scored higher than the average children and the average children scored higher than the handicapped learners.

Milgram and Milgram (1976) compared gifted and nongifted Israeli children on the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale. The participants were in grades four through eight attending public schools in the greater Tel-Aviv area. The results indicated that the gifted children had greater feelings of personal adequacy in the family, were less guarded and defensive, and gave fewer indications of psychological disturbance than same-aged average IQ students. However, not all differences favored the gifted group. The older nongifted students had a more positive body image, described themselves more positively, and reported a greater sense of personal worth and self-confidence than their gifted peers. The authors suggest that giftedness may not be a virtue at all ages. In the elementary grades, giftedness may evoke approval from teachers, parents, and the child's peer group. As the gifted child grows older, the discrepancy between his or



her talents and interests and those of peers may increase, resulting in somewhat lower self-esteem.

In contrast to the Milgram and Milgram (1976) study, Kelly and Colangelo (1984) found that seventh through ninth grade children enrolled in a gifted program had higher academic and social self-esteem than both general students and students enrolled in a special learning needs program. Similarly, Colangelo et al. (1987) found seventh through ninth grade gifted children scoring higher on academic and social self-concept measures than their nongifted and learning disabled peers.

In an earlier study, Ketcham and Snyder (1977) examined the self-perceptions of intellectually and socially advantaged students. The subjects were gifted children who attended the elementary division of a large, independent college preparatory school. The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale was administered to all participants at the beginning of the school year. The results revealed that this sample of high IQ children, grades two through four, had higher self-concept scores than the same-aged norming group on the Piers-Harris. Unfortunately, a confounding factor in this study was the influence of socioeconomic background on self-concept scores.

Karnes and Wherry (1981) compared high IQ fourth through seventh graders enrolled in a gifted program with

students of equal ability not enrolled. The Piers-Harris was administered to both groups of students. No significant differences were found between the two groups of gifted students. However, both groups of gifted children scored significantly higher than the normative group.

Brown and Karnes (1982) analyzed responses on the Piers-Harris to determine items which were most representative or non-representative for a group of gifted students. The participants were students in grades two through nine enrolled in a program for the intellectually gifted in a rural southern city. The results indicated that there were some consistent self-perceptions among this group of gifted children. Over 90% of the subjects saw themselves as happy, smart, and behaviorally competent. The factors of anxiety, popularity, and physical appearance were responded to with less group concurrence, suggesting that individual gifted students respond with more variability in these areas.

In 1985, Davis and Connell compared four groups of upper elementary-aged students: gifted achievers and under-achievers, and average achievers and underachievers. Four self-report measures were used to compare these students on different aspects of self-esteem. The gifted group, regardless of achievement status, was significantly higher

than the average group on self-evaluations of competence, feelings of mastery, and preference for independent decision making. No interaction effect was found for aptitude and achievement indicating no joint effects from these variables on the self-esteem of these children.

Chan (1988) compared the perceived competence of gifted students in full-time segregated special programs and those in part-time special programs with that of nongifted students in regular classes. Four areas of perceived competence were examined: cognitive competence, social competence, physical competence, and general self-worth. The results indicated that the gifted students had higher perceived competence than their nongifted agemates, particularly in the cognitive and general self-worth areas. This was true regardless of sex or the type of program in which the gifted student was placed.

Certain sex differences were found in perceived competence. Boys, regardless of grade level or ability, scored higher on perceived physical competence. This finding was observed in grade five, six, and seven. Gifted girls in grades five and six had higher scores on perceived cognitive competence than the gifted boys in this age group. This was not the case for the grade seven data. Chan suggests that this difference may be attributed to the earlier maturation of girls and their subsequent discovery



that intellectual competence may be a disadvantage in middle school male-female relations. No significant differences were found in perceived social competence between the gifted and nongifted groups or between males and females.

Loeb and Jay (1987) compared gifted nine to twelve year old children to nongifted agemates on three measures of self-concept. Additional personality and behavioral information was obtained from the children's mothers and teachers. All dependent variables were analyzed in two-way (gifted-nongifted, male-female) analyses of variance.

Contrary to the Chan (1988) study, giftedness appeared to be more of an asset for girls than for boys. Gifted girls described themselves as having a more positive self-concept and a more internal locus of control than did nongifted girls. No such group differences were found for the boys in this study. The mothers and teachers reported fewer problem areas for gifted girls, but no differences for gifted and nongifted boys.

Coleman and Fults (1982) compared the self-concepts of fourth, fifth, and sixth grade gifted children who participated in a one-day-per-week segregated program to those of equally intelligent children who remained in regular classes. Although the segregated children had lower self-concept scores than those who remained in regular classes,

both groups of gifted children far exceeded the mean for the Piers-Harris standardization sample.

In 1985, Coleman and Fults assessed the self-concepts of gifted children either before or after placement in a specialized program. The results indicated lower self-concept scores after program placement. Nevertheless, at both points in time the gifted children had significantly higher self-concept scores than the normative group.

Other studies have found no significant differences in self-esteem between gifted children and their nongifted peers. Bracken (1980) investigated the self-concepts and attitudes toward learning of fifth grade students enrolled in a two-week program for the intellectually gifted. The gifted children demonstrated significantly more favorable attitudes toward learning than did the standardization sample, but did not differ significantly on the measure of self-esteem.

Chiu (1990) compared gifted, average, and mild mentally handicapped learners on the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory. The results revealed significantly higher self-esteem for the gifted and average learners in comparison to the handicapped learners. However, there were no significant differences in self-esteem between the gifted and average children.

In 1989, Whalen and Csikszentmihalyi compared the self-esteem of a group of adolescents talented in one of five areas: mathematics, science, music, athletics, and art to that of a normal group of teenagers. The results indicated no significant differences in self-concept scores between the two groups. According to this study, talent does not have a predictable impact on the gifted adolescents' psychological well-being, feeling of ability to cope with challenges, or sense of moral responsibility. Talent did have a somewhat negative impact in the area of social and sexual competence. The talented teenagers demonstrated some uncertainty about sexual behavior and their physical attractiveness to members of the opposite sex. It is important to note that the talented adolescents in this study constitute a more heterogeneous sample than the gifted samples from other studies.

Finally, Tidwell's (1980) extensive investigation of gifted high school students produced mixed results with regard to self-concept. The gifted sample scored higher than the norm group on one measure of self-concept (the Piers-Harris) and within the range of means on another (the Coopersmith).

Although some of the studies previously cited have found no significant differences in self-concept scores between gifted and nongifted children, the vast majority of



the research has confirmed the belief that gifted children hold higher levels of self-esteem than do their nongifted agemates. It appears that most gifted children are inclined to see themselves as happy, competent, and well in control of their own destinies.

## CHAPTER III

### Conclusion

The purpose of this research review was to examine the self-perceptions of gifted children. In particular, the review highlighted studies distinguishing between academic and social self-esteem, the effects of gifted programs on self-concept, and comparisons of self-concept between gifted and nongifted children.

The literature reveals a discrepancy between gifted children's academic and social self-esteem with higher scores on academic measures (Ross & Parker, 1980; Tidwell, 1980; Colangelo & Brower, 1987). Gifted children may hold higher expectations for their academic endeavors. This finding appears reasonable considering these students' past intellectual accomplishments. Although gifted children's social self-esteem may be somewhat lower than their academic self-esteem, in most cases "lower" is at least as high or at times significantly higher than the social self-esteem of children of average intelligence (Kelly & Colangelo, 1984; Colangelo et al., 1987).

Future research should continue to explore the discrepancy between academic and social self-perceptions. It would be valuable to investigate how early the discrepancy occurs in gifted children. Educators need to be aware of the age at which the discrepancy is established

and whether the school environment encourages the split or simply reinforces an already established pattern.

Longitudinal studies are necessary to ascertain whether or not this discrepancy increases over time. Researchers may want to examine whether the discrepancy between academic and social self-esteem is also reflected in a general school population. Replications must be done using cross-sections of schools and grade levels.

Teachers, parents, and counselors may help gifted children by giving them opportunities to explore, understand, and integrate their accelerated intellectual development with aspects of their social development.

What are the effects of gifted programs on the self-esteem of those who participate? The research in this area has been inconsistent. Studies have revealed increases in self-concept after program participation (Kolloff & Moore, 1989; Feldhusen et al., 1990), decreases in self-concept (Coleman & Fults, 1982, 1985), and no significant differences between the self-concept scores of gifted students who participated in a program and equally gifted students who did not (Kolloff & Feldhusen, 1984; Karnes & Wherry, 1981). As mentioned earlier, these conflicting results may be explained in part by differences in programs.



The studies finding a decrease in self-esteem after program participation should not be taken as an indication of low self-concept. These children still hold a positive image of themselves with their self-concept scores exceeding the mean of standardization samples (Coleman & Fults, 1982, 1985; Karnes & Wherry, 1981). Vaughn, Feldhusen, and Asher (1991) conducted a meta-analysis and review of the research on pull-out programs for gifted children. She concluded that the self-perceptions of gifted children are not likely to suffer or decline as a result of participation.

Future research on the effects of gifted programs should address certain questions. Is it simply the selection of students for a gifted program that results in a change in self-concept, or is it something that takes place during the period of program participation? In their studies, researchers need to include a baseline, preprogram set of data in order to assess change attributable to a program. They should also continue to study different programs to assess the reliability and replicability of patterns of change.

Do changes in self-perceptions persist over time, or are these changes only temporary? Follow-up studies of program participants are necessary several months and even years following participation in gifted programs. It is

important to determine whether changes in self-esteem disappear once a child returns to his or her home environment.

In considering program options for gifted students, school administrators, teachers, counselors, and parents need to think about the possible affective outcomes of different programs. School personnel should consider the individual student's affective characteristics and needs in relation to the possible influence of the composition of the instructional environment and social comparison group.

Gifted students with high self-esteem may benefit from competition with gifted peers in a segregated setting. This type of instructional environment may help to prepare these children for the competition they will encounter in college. On the other hand, gifted students with lower self-esteem may benefit from non-segregated programs that will give them more opportunities to demonstrate their superior intellectual capability.

How do gifted children's self-perceptions compare to their more average peers? Studies examining differences in the self-perceptions of gifted children and their nongifted age-mates have not been unequivocal. Nevertheless, the research has generally shown that gifted students as a group are better adjusted and have more positive self-concepts than students of average intelligence

(Tidwell, 1980; Kelly & Colangelo, 1984; Colangelo et al., 1987; Chan, 1988).

One should be aware of the problems inherent to this research. In most cases, researchers rely on pre-existing test data for the identification of gifted samples. Investigators often depend upon school systems' criteria for gifted program admission. As a result, different criteria have been used to identify gifted children.

The self-concept literature is replete with studies employing self-report questionnaires. Few investigations have employed either behavioral observations or parent/teacher ratings. These additional measures could improve the overall validity of self-concept assessments.

Many researchers have not considered the multidimensionality of self-concept. There is a need for finer discriminations among the different aspects of self-concept. Effort has been made in this direction with several researchers distinguishing academic self-concept from social self-concept (Ross & Parker, 1980; Colangelo & Brower, 1987; Colangelo et al., 1987). Discriminations such as this are necessary if useful implications are to be drawn from the self-concept literature.

Some studies have not compared gifted children with adequate nongifted comparative groups. Instead, researchers have contrasted data from gifted samples with



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normative data reported in test manuals (Ketcham & Snyder, 1977; Tidwell, 1980; Karnes & Wherry, 1981).

In addition, gifted subjects are often chosen from generally white, middle-class populations and compared to norming samples which tend to be more heterogeneous. This may result in confounding by factors such as socioeconomic status. The increased teacher recognition and adult involvement that gifted children receive may prove to be another confounding variable.

In studies examining the effects of gifted programs on self-concept, researchers may have trouble getting adequate control groups comprised of equally gifted students not participating in the programs. There is the ethical problem of withholding services from qualified students.

In conclusion, the literature on self-concept has largely refuted the negative stereotype of the socially misfit and maladjusted gifted child. Intellectual giftedness appears to be an asset in coping with life's many challenges. Nevertheless, positive self-concepts and superior adjustment should not be seen as an excuse to neglect the social and emotional components of the gifted child's maturation. These children represent a great resource for positions of leadership in our future society. Educators, counselors, and parents must strive to develop the full potential of gifted children. With this in mind,

there should be a renewed commitment to the importance of providing support and stimulation for social, as well as academic, areas of development.

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