ABSTRACT

THE DIFFERENCES IN SOCIAL SKILLS AND SOCIAL SELF-CONCEPTS OF GIFTED STUDENTS BY AGE AND GENDER

by Kaitlin M. Cross

The purpose of the present study was to assess the social skills and self-concepts of gifted children from a homogeneous gifted program in order to examine age and gender differences. Elementary students were included in order to assess differences in these constructs throughout different developmental stages. Results suggest that gifted students in a homogeneous environment report high self-concepts that may lower during pre-teen years, and then begin to improve before high school. No significant gender differences were found between overall self-concepts. Gifted students from homogeneous settings struggle with social skills in their younger years. However, social skills improve by the end of middle school years and gifted students reportedly “act more like adults” than average students. Implications of these results suggest that schools may need to provide social skills training for young gifted students. Further research should be directed at examining these constructs of gifted students in other educational settings.
THE SOCIAL SKILLS AND SOCIAL SELF-CONCEPTS OF GIFTED STUDENTS BY AGE AND GENDER

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Introduction

Gifted education programs began emerging across U.S. cities in the early 1900s (VanTassel-Baska, 2010). Over the next several decades, special schools for the gifted were developed and researchers began studying the effectiveness of these schools and programs. Early researchers began using the term “gifted” to describe students who had the ability to work significantly faster through the curriculum than average students (NAGC, 2012). By 1972, the federal government had taken an interest in gifted education and issued a broader definition of giftedness. More varied gifted programs began to develop in the late 1970s. In 1983, A Nation At Risk (U.S. Department of Education, 1983) reported scores of bright children in the U.S. and their inability to compete with international counterparts. This report included new standards in gifted education on raising the bar and promoting appropriate curriculum for gifted students.

Unfortunately, no government agency collects exact statistics on the number of gifted children in American classrooms (NAGC, 2012). However, the National Association of Gifted Children estimates there are approximately three million academically gifted children, or six percent of the population. This estimate is from a report to congress, dating back to 1972, which estimates 5-7% of the students were highly capable and in need of extra services not normally provided by the school.

Unfortunately, these numbers do not accurately describe the number of children who are identified as gifted. Most decisions on gifted education happen at the state or local level which creates an inconsistency across the country in identification practices and gifted accommodations (NAGC, 2012). The NAGC lists common problems plaguing gifted identification throughout history as: disproportionate underrepresentation of minority students, disregard for theoretical knowledge of intelligence, inappropriate use of statistical formulas, and mismatch between identification and services. The use of multiple criteria should be applied when identifying gifted students; these criteria should include assessments of the student’s cognitive abilities, assessments of the student’s achievement abilities, test scores, school grades, and comments from the student’s teachers and parents. There are three phases in the suggested identification process, provided by the NAGC: general screening or student search, review of students for eligibility, and matching the appropriate services to the needs of the student.

Similar to variations in definitions of giftedness state to state, the services provided to students also vary. The most common types of gifted education models are provided in Table 1.
Currently, there are no federal regulations on the education of gifted learners. Funding and regulations vary by state (NAGC, 2008). The new federal Common Core standards were written to uphold and advance all students with no specific standards for advanced learners (Common Core Standards, 2010). However, suggestions for identification and provision of

(NAGC, 2012)

**Table 1. Gifted Program Type and Definition of Gifted Programs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Type</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability Grouping</td>
<td>Group assignment based on observed behavior or performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accelerated Learning</td>
<td>Progressing through education faster than average students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Placement</td>
<td>Courses offered in high school that meet criteria of institutions of higher education, typically offering college credit for successful completion of an AP exam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster Grouping</td>
<td>Grouping students in a regular heterogeneous classroom based on similar needs, abilities, or interests to allow teacher to more effectively differentiate assignments and teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnet Schools</td>
<td>Public school programs that offer advanced learning in specific areas, such as math, science, technology, and performing arts, that have been established to meet specific needs of gifted students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pull-Out Program</td>
<td>A program which removes students from the regular classroom for special programming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools for the Gifted</td>
<td>These homogeneous environments, typically private schools, provide special programming for the needs of gifted students.</td>
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services are provided by the National Association of Gifted Children and the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented.

Much of the literature on gifted children focuses on specific aspects of giftedness, such as minority underrepresentation and unique characteristics of the gifted, rather than on gifted program evaluation. Because of this, little is known about the overall impact of program structure on the effectiveness of gifted education. Some research posits that just simply training teachers to appropriately accommodate gifted children in the classroom provides overwhelming positive effects (Lichtenwalter, 2011). Research collected by the NAGC suggests that gifted programs have a positive effect on the postsecondary plans of students (NAGC, 2012). Another study reviewed by the NAGC illustrated positive impacts on the cognitive, affective, and social development of participating students in a gifted program. Overwhelmingly positive results have been found in connection to gifted learners’ ability when enrichment and acceleration of learning are available.

While there is a general consensus among students, parents, and teachers regarding the importance of gifted programs, gifted programs are few in number especially at the elementary level (Colangelo & Kelly, 1983). Little research has been conducted on the impact of homogeneous gifted programs on the social development of gifted adolescents. The literature on the self-concepts and peer relationships of gifted students is inconsistent, as well. Some evidence suggests that gifted children are perceived positively by peers, whereas other research indicates they exhibit unfavorable social behaviors (Janos, Fung, & Robinson, 1985). Social skills and self-concepts may vary by gender and across grade levels. This study examines whether children educated in a homogeneous gifted setting exhibit differential self-concepts or social skills status across age or by gender. Information gained from this study can help examine vast inconsistencies in the literature concerning the gender-laden and age-based development of social skills and self-concepts among gifted students. This may also lead to information regarding how self-concept and social skills vary by age and gender and the implications of this knowledge. This study has implications for both parenting and education. Self-concept is essential to academic motivation and success. Because social skills are key to a child’s adjustment, gifted children’s adjustment is potentially inhibited if social skills are hindered.
Review of Literature

Self-Concept

Hoge and Renzulli (1993) define self-concept in general terms, as “the image we hold of ourselves” (p 449). Self-concept is often structurally delineated into several sub-components (academic, social, physical, relational). Self-concept, whether academic or social, is developed in a social context and is a product of social interaction with others (Coleman & Fults, 1982). Therefore, the structure and composition of the social environment, where children are receiving information about their capabilities, is important in the development and maintenance of self-concept. A significant and positive correlation has been found between self-concept and academic performance (Brookover, Thomas, & Paterson, 1964). Thus, one would hypothesize that gifted students would demonstrate a higher self-concept than non-gifted students, as a product of their high academic ability. Many research studies have supported this hypothesis. Academic self-concept is reported to be very high among gifted children (Hoge & Renzulli, 1993). Maddux, Sheiber, and Bass (1982) found that students enrolled in gifted classes in the sixth grade reported a higher self-concept than their non-gifted peers. However, Marsh, Chassor, Craven, and Roche, (1995) found contradictory results. They found that gifted children exhibited high nonacademic self-concept, but participation in gifted and talented programs led to negative effects on academic self-concept. Behavioral self-concept has also been shown to be higher in gifted children than their non-gifted peers (Marsh et al., 1995).

Many research studies have found correlations, and even causal ordering, between academic self-concept and academic achievement (Guay, Marsh, & Boivin, 2003). Two contrasting theoretical models have posited the direction of the causal ordering between these two constructs. The self-enhancement model postulates that academic achievement is determined by self-concept, whereas the skill-development model implies that academic achievement contributes to academic self-concept. The reciprocal-effects model applies both of these theories, proposing that achievement has an effect on self-concept and academic self-concept has an effect on achievement. Guay et al. (2003) found support for the reciprocal-effects model. Self-esteem, or evaluative self-concept, has been examined in relationship to ability grouping. Research shows that gifted children educated in homogeneous environments have higher self-esteem (Lou, Abrami, Spence, Poulsen, Chambers, & d’Apollonia, 1996).
Research on social perceptions may shed some light on the topic of self-concept. Research shows gifted children often think of themselves as being “different” from their same-age peers (Janos, Fung, & Robinson, 1985). Generally, they describe these differences in positive terms, such as feelings of being “bigger,” “stronger,” “more mature,” or “smarter,” or neutral terms, such as “I can’t really explain it.” These descriptions are consistent with research that shows that self-concept is also positively correlated with the perceived evaluations that others hold of the student (Brookover, Thomas, & Paterson, 1964).

Researchers have investigated the social self-concepts, attributions for social success and failure, and peer relationships of gifted students (Bain & Bell, 2004). The results from intellectually gifted students receiving special education services under this category, who were identified based on state special education criteria, were compared to results from high achieving, non-identified students. Four socially related self-concept areas were investigated: physical ability, physical appearance, peer relations, and parent relations. The only area where gifted and non-gifted students did not differ was parent relations. Gifted students scored higher in their perception of physical ability, physical appearance, and peer relations. Gifted students also attributed their social success to ability and effort. These results support a body of literature purporting that gifted children are no more vulnerable to socially related self-concept problems than the general population, or even, high-achieving students.

Coleman and Fults (1982) investigated the effects of classroom environments on highly intelligent children. They studied the self-concepts of fourth, fifth, and sixth grade gifted children, some who participated in a pull-out, segregated program and some who remained in regular classes. Gifted students who remained in a regular classroom demonstrated higher self-concepts than the pull-out students. This illustrates the effects that social environments have on the self-concepts of children. A positive self-concept results when gifted children compare their abilities to their less-capable peers. Therefore, gifted children in a regular classroom may tend to have inflated self-concepts compared to their less capable peers, while gifted children in enriched, homogeneous classrooms compare their abilities to equally capable peers. This finding was further investigated and later called the “big-fish-little-pond effect” (Zeidner & Schleyer, 1998). Essentially, gifted students are the “big fish” and the regular classroom refers to the “little pond.” Researchers investigated the self-concept of gifted children, specifically academic self-concept, participating in homogeneous gifted classrooms or mixed ability classrooms. They,
too, found that gifted students in regular mixed-ability classrooms had higher self-concepts than
gifted students in homogeneous classes for the gifted.

A recent study found a pattern between grade point average (GPA) and peer rejection
(Bellmore, 2011). Rejection predicted lower GPAs throughout elementary and middle school.
In contrast, during middle school years, high GPAs predicted unpopularity. Researchers found
that in the last grade of elementary school, peer rejection and unpopularity were predictive of
GPAs in the first year of middle school, suggesting that these social effects carry over from one
year to the next and in different school contexts. Peer rejection has been correlated to loneliness,
aggression, and submissiveness, possibly leading to low self-concept and poor social skills
(Parkurst & Asher, 1992).

**Age Differences and Self-Concept**

Researchers have proposed that the self-concepts of young children are typically positive
and not highly correlated with external indicators, such as skills and accomplishments (Marsh,
1989). However, with increasing life experience, self-concepts become more differentiated and
highly correlated with external indicators. Also, self-ratings are more strongly correlated with
teacher ratings as children grow older. Guay et al. (2003) found that the academic self-concepts
become more reliable, more stable, and more strongly correlated with academic achievement as
children grow older. Initial research on overall self-concepts using the Piers-Harris instrument
found a decline in self-concept from grade three to grade six (Marsh, 1989). Other researchers
have found a general decline in self-concepts from preadolescence to adolescence using a variety
of self-concept scales. Declines have specifically been noted in the areas of reading,
intelligence, and physical ability.

Research has documented a positive correlation between achievement and self-concept
(Black, 1974). This correlation is found even stronger for children who exhibit academic
difficulty, such as children who are identified as learning disabled. Negative correlations for
self-concept scores, chronological age, and school grade were noted in this study. Black (1974)
reported these findings for both average and learning-disabled students, although the correlations
were stronger in the learning-disabled students. Thus, as children age and transition from
elementary to secondary school, studies have shown their overall self-concepts decrease across
all ability levels.
Other research has found a general drop in reported self-concepts specifically during middle school grades (Piers & Harris, 1964). In an attempt to develop a standardized measurement of self-concept that can be used with children of varied ages, Piers and Harris (1964) were led to interesting information on the correlated differences in self-concept across ages. Researchers found that children in grades three and ten reported significantly higher self-concepts that were not significantly different from each other. However, children in the sixth grade reported significantly lower self-concepts. This study did show that correlations between self-concept and achievement were much higher for sixth grade students than correlations for third grade students.

**Gender Differences in Self-Concept**

The literature on gender differences in global, or total, self-esteem varies greatly (Kling, Hyde, Shower, & Buswell, 1999). A meta-analysis, by Kling et al. (1999), was conducted to quantitatively summarize the research aimed at deciphering the existence of a difference between male and female total self-esteem. In this meta-analysis, a small mean effect size was found, slightly favoring males. However, some researchers argue that self-concept cannot be adequately understood if only the global component is observed (Marsh, 1989). Some posit that weak effects of gender on total self-concept are due to counterbalancing gender differences in more specific domains, some favoring boys and some favoring girls. Age, country in which the research was conducted, and ethnicity, all played a role in the gender differences (Kling et al., 1999). Researchers found that the effect sizes in gender differences were largest in late adolescence. Although the main focus of the meta-analysis was gender differences in global self-esteem, significant gender differences were found in specific domains of self-concept. Female adolescents scored higher in domains such as reading and relationships with same-sex friends, whereas male adolescents scored higher in physical abilities, math, and appearance.

Another meta-analysis also found some gender differences in specific domains of self-concept (Wilgenbusch & Merrell, 1999). There were no significant gender differences among the total population in overall academic self-concept, social self-concept, and relations with parents. Male participants in the total sample reported higher levels of global self-concept, self-concept of mathematical ability, self-concept of physical appearance, athletic self-concept, and emotional self-concept. Females from the total sample reported higher levels of self-concept in only one domain: verbal. Among elementary grade participants, female students reported
significantly higher levels of self-concept in some domains, including verbal, musical, and the throwing tumbling areas of the athletic/psychomotor coordination domain. Results were similar for secondary-grade female participants. Much like elementary grade females, secondary-grade females also reported higher levels of self-concept in the verbal area. They also reported higher levels of self-concept in close friendship, same sex peer relationships, honesty, and religion, when compared to males their same age. Among elementary grade participants, male students reported high levels of self-concept in global self-concept, academic, mathematics, family/relations with parents, and overall psychomotor coordination. At the secondary-grade level, males similarly reported significantly higher levels of self-concept in global self-concept, mathematics, and overall psychomotor coordination. Secondary-grade males also reported higher levels of self-concept in the domains of music, job competence, physical appearance, emotion/affect, and freedom from anxiety.

Social Skills of the Gifted Child

Gifted children often report feeling different from their same-age peers (Janos, Fung, & Robinson, 1985). This can lead to negative descriptions of their relationships with other children. Children who view themselves as different from their peers often report more difficulties in their friendships. These children often report they have too few friends, they play with other children infrequently, or that being smart makes it harder to make friends. A potential social stigma may be placed on gifted students, causing challenges in developing social relationships for gifted students (Wood, 2010). Highly intellectual students often feel pressure to achieve. This may lead to unhealthy perfectionism and anxiety, creating challenges in social settings and relationships. Gifted children often make friends with older children, other gifted children, or adults more often than non-gifted children (Janos, Fung, & Robinson, 1985). Other studies show that students who have high verbal ability have more difficulty interacting with their peers (Brody & Benbow, 1986). In one study, gifted girls were found to be the least popular group in a pull-out program, when compared to gifted and non-gifted classmates (Luftig & Nichols, 1990).

While a large portion of empirical literature reports positive social adjustment of high ability children, some researchers find that a large minority, larger than is found in the general population, experience significant social difficulties (Janos, Marwood, & Robinson, 1985). Evidence suggests that children with a high-IQ have fewer friends than their non-gifted peers and
feel as if being smart makes it harder to develop friendships. Some researchers have found that the level of intelligence among gifted students may actually be a factor in their peer relations. In one such study, gifted students were divided into “modestly gifted” and “extremely gifted” based on SAT scores of middle school students (Dauber & Benbow, 1990). Researchers found no differences in the group activities or personality traits between the two groups. However, peers rated the modestly gifted group higher than the extremely gifted group in athleticism, popularity, and social standing. Self-perceptions of modestly gifted students were also higher on traits such as extroversion and social adeptness. The verbally gifted students in the extremely gifted group received the lowest scores leading researchers to hypothesize that verbally precocious students may be at greater risk for developing problems in peer relations.

One research study investigated the social coping strategies used by gifted children to develop social relationships and prevent difficulties in peer group membership (Swiatek, 1995). Highly gifted students were identified by the Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth and participated in a summer academic program. These children were asked to reflect on their coping strategies through a survey, The Social Coping Questionnaire for Gifted Students, developed specifically for this study based on coping strategies described in literature. Based on an analysis of the survey results, five types of coping strategies were identified: denial of giftedness, popularity/conformity, peer acceptance, fear of failure, and activity level. The most capable students were those most likely to deny their giftedness, possibly to avoid being the focus of high expectations. Students with extremely high verbal abilities reported lower levels of peer acceptance than those with high mathematical abilities, and were more likely to feel different from their peers.

On the contrary, some research indicates that gifted children in pull-out programs are less likely to be rejected by peers than average children (Luftig & Nichols, 1990). They are also no more ignored than their average counterparts. Interestingly, Luftig & Nichols (1990) found gifted boys to be the most popular in a pull-out program compared to gifted and non-gifted classmates. In elementary classrooms of inclusion, Adler and colleagues found that gifted students were more often chosen as “helpers” by their peers than non-gifted students (Adler, Mueller, & Avy, 1987). One study revealed that accelerated students and students enrolled in gifted classes have better perceptions of their social relationships and emotional development.
Accelerated and gifted students were also reported to have fewer problems with school behavior than average students.

Another study found similar results in pull-out programs. Fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students in a pull-out enrichment program (CLUE) were evaluated by their non-gifted peers as having greater social acceptability and competence (Cohen, Duncan, & Cohen, 1994). These students were judged to be more popular and less controversial. When given a class roster and asked to mark which peers they liked and disliked, CLUE students received fewer dislike ratings. Gifted students were found to be less aggressive and less likely to be victims of aggression. The pull-out students also demonstrated greater awareness of reciprocity in friendship relationships than their non-gifted peers. However, the CLUE students maintained a higher percentage of friendships with other CLUE students.

Many gifted programs have admission standards based on teacher nominations. In past research, a correlation was found between teacher nominations for admission into a gifted program and later achievement of the child nominated (Hunsaker, Finley, & Frank, 1997). In the Hunsaker et al. (1997) study, classroom teachers that had been trained to recognize characteristics of gifted children from culturally diverse and/or low income populations, were asked to nominate students to a gifted program. Following nominations and a committee review, nominated students were admitted into a gifted program. These students exhibited high academic achievement in a later analysis. These students were also found to exhibit successful social skills in the area of group skills, language abilities, and enthusiasm. These results indicate high validity in teacher ability to identify gifted students.

Another study used teacher ratings to measure peer relationships in gifted children and high-achieving non-identified students (Bain & Bell, 2004). No significant differences were found in the peer relationships of gifted students compared to the peer relationships of high achievers. However, a gender difference was found. Teachers rated the peer relationships of male students higher than the peer relationships of female students in both groups. This is reflective of previous findings, as well (Rimm, 2002).

**Role of Program Type: Homogeneous Gifted Programs**

While program type has been shown to influence gifted children’s sense of self, peer perception, and possible achievement, a greater focus on the impact of program type needs to occur. Gifted schools, or selective schools, are designed specifically so that all academics and
activities are designed for gifted children. These gifted schools are typically private or require tuition payment, and are completely homogeneous according to ability level. Admission into these schools can be based on a formal intelligence or ability assessment. Very little research has been conducted on the effects of fully immersing gifted students into an environment consisting exclusively of gifted peers and advanced curriculum.

Although research on these programs is limited, studies do suggest homogeneous grouping of gifted students leads to greater academic gains (Adams-Byers, Whitsell, & Moon, 2004). Also, gifted children educated in homogeneous environments tend to have higher self-concepts and describe themselves in very positive terms (Brookover et al., 1964; Lou et al., 1996). However, perceptions of the influence of homogeneous programs on social skills is somewhat mixed. Gifted students seem to value both the social diversity of heterogeneous programs and befriending students who are similar to them in homogeneous programs.

Rationale and Purpose

Overall, the literature reveals that students viewed as “gifted” clearly have areas of strength, processing and problem-solving. However, they may face challenges in the social aspects of their development. Because of the varied empirical outcome, it is important to continue examining the difference among genders or across the developmental life span that may relate to differences in how gifted children adjust socially. Also, many studies examining the social skills or self-concepts of the gifted are dated. More recent information in these areas is needed, as society and education has changed drastically in the past few decades. This study was designed to look more at the connection between being gifted and a child’s social and emotional well-being.

Since more extensive and clear assessment is needed regarding the relationship between self-concept and social skills in gifted children educated in a homogeneous setting, this study was designed to examine this relationship. The study aims to measure the perception that gifted students, their parents, and their teachers have about their social skills and self-concepts. The research questions guiding this study are:

1) What is the status of self-concept and social skills for the gifted population in a homogeneous program setting?

2) Is there a difference between gifted males and females on self-concept and social skills perceptions?
3) Is there a difference between gifted students in early academic years (2nd), middle academic years (5th), and late academic years (8th) in school on self-concept and social skills perception?

**Method**

**Setting**

This study was implemented at a private suburban school designed for children identified as academically gifted. It serves children from preschool through eighth grade and is located in a Midwestern city. Admission to this school is based on multiple criteria: 1) a full-scale IQ score at or near the Very Superior range on the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence, Third Edition or Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, Fourth Edition; 2) a parent recommendation indicating characteristics of giftedness; 3) a current teacher recommendation; 4) a classroom visit; 5) current report cards (if applicable) and achievement test scores; and 6) age appropriate social and emotional development and behavior that would enable the child to function effectively in a classroom environment, assessed by the applicant’s current teacher and gifted teachers when the applicant comes in for an observation. In addition to the core curriculum, the school provides many courses in the arts, foreign language programs, and multiple extracurricular activities.

There are approximately 386 students enrolled at this target school. Males account for 48% of students (n=185), while females account for 52% of students (n=201). Caucasians account for 65% of the population (n=251), African Americans account for 4% (n=16), Hispanics account for 1% (n=3), Asian Americans account for 18% (n=72), and 12% of the population identify as multi-racial (n=44). Therefore, 35% of students at the participating school are considered multicultural students or students of color (n=135). Family income of the school’s families range from under $50,000 to over $400,000 (school representative, personal communication, August 27, 2012). Tuition is required, but 12% of students received financial aid for the 2011-2012 academic year. There were no children receiving free and reduced lunch. Tuition for a student in first through eighth grade is $14,500 annually. Bussing is not provided through the school. School officials reported that carpooling is the most common choice of transportation for students. Excluding the cost of childcare and extracurricular activities, the cost of educating each student is approximately $15,900.
The participating school administers the Educational Record Bureau’s Comprehensive Testing Program, Fourth Edition, to grades one through eight. These are compared with national, suburban, and independent school norm groups. In all subject areas, at all grade levels, students outscore the norm groups, as reported by the school which is provided with median percentile charts for each grade level by subject from the Educational Record Bureau.

There are thirty-three lead teachers employed by the participating school. They are required to hold a minimum of a Bachelor’s degree in education with a subject level emphasis appropriate to the course or grade level they teach, have knowledge of differentiating and writing curriculum, have demonstrated lead teaching experience, and hold high ability licensure. At each grade level, there are two classrooms. There is one lead teacher and one full-time instructional assistant per twenty children, on average.

Participants

Second, fifth and eighth grade elementary students at the school participated in this study. Participant ages ranged from seven (second graders) to thirteen (eighth graders). For the purpose of this study, giftedness is defined as exceeding above average performance on an intelligence assessment administered by the school. In order to be admitted into this gifted school, students must score in the Superior range on the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-IV. Students from all second, fifth, and eighth grades were invited to participate in the study and provided both consent and assent forms, and all who returned consent and assent forms were selected for the study. Twenty second grade students, eleven fifth grade students, and thirteen eighth grade students participated with parental consent and student assent. Eighth grade students were targeted for a focus group in order to provide an in depth look at how gifted students make sense of their social development. Eighth grade students have more of an ability to take an introspective look at their social development than second or fifth graders and make social comparisons of themselves and their non-gifted peers. This qualitative data further compliments the quantitative aspect of this study. Eleven of the thirteen eighth grade students, who had previously completed self-concept questionnaires, participated in the focus group. Teachers and school staff were also included in this study. Eight members of the school staff were interviewed about their opinions and observations of the social skill development at various ages and between genders. One of the interview participants was the Director of Student Services. This person coordinates the socio-emotional programs in the school and works closely with professors at a
local university to develop these programs, and also teaches at the middle school level. The remaining participants in the interviews were teachers. Six of these were currently teaching or had previously taught fifth grade students. Four teachers had taught other middle school grades (sixth through eighth.) Two participants were currently teaching second grade, but had experience at other grade levels. Seven of the educators had experience in public schools, as well.

**Materials and Measures**

For this study, the researcher primarily employed the use of surveys and interviews. Each child, whose parent or guardian granted permission to participate, was asked to complete the Piers-Harris Children’s Self-Concept Scale, Second Edition (Piers, Harris & Herzberg, 2002) in order to assess self-concept. Six sub-scales were completed: Physical Appearance and Attributes, Freedom from Anxiety, Intellectual and School Status, Behavioral Adjustment, Happiness and Satisfaction, and Popularity. Sixty items are presented as descriptive statements in which the child responded yes or no, indicating whether or not each statement applies to the individual. The Total Score from the scale reflected how each child perceived him or herself overall. Because social self-concept is the primary focus, the Happiness and Satisfaction, and Popularity sub-scales were calculated and described, as well. The Piers Harris Children’s Self-Concept Scale required approximately 20 minutes to complete. The reliability and validity measures obtained through the standardization process for this survey are high (> .70) (Piers, Harris & Herzberg, 2002).

Educators of the student sample, described in the “Participants” section, were later interviewed by the researcher to assess their perceptions of the social skill development and status of groups of children, based on both age and gender. These interviews were each between 35 and 55 minutes in duration. Teachers were interviewed in pairs by the researcher. The interviews were focused around a series of five focus questions based upon gifted student social skills literature:

1) Do you notice a difference between the social skills of gifted students and their non-gifted counterparts?

2) Is the development of social skills as gifted students age similar to the development of their average peers?
3) What are the most noticeable social skill deficits in second; fifth; eighth grade gifted students? What are the most developed social skills of second; fifth; eighth grade gifted students?

4) How does the school accommodate gifted students in their social skill development or deficits.

5) Are there often parent reports for concern over their child’s social skills? What are these concerns?

Relevant follow-up questions were added as the discussion developed on the topic of social skills and socio-emotional development of both gifted and non-gifted adolescents. In addition to the teacher interviews, a focus group was implemented with the eighth grade participants. After data collection, a debriefing was held with all students and an invitation to partake in a focus group was provided to eighth grade participants. The 8th grade focus group centered around a series of four focus questions:

1) Do you notice a difference between your social behavior at school and your social behavior outside of school?

2) Do you use a different way of speaking between school and social events outside of school?

3) Are you self-conscious about your social behaviors here at school or outside of school?

4) Do you believe the unique gifted program at the participating school has impacted your social behaviors?

Relevant follow-up questions were added as the conversation developed on the topic of social behaviors and self-concepts.

Design and Procedure

All human protection guidelines were followed for this study and approval was obtained from the institutional review board. The present study was designed to be a mixed methods study design in order to observe, quantitatively and qualitatively measure, and describe behaviors already in existence, specifically examining perceived social skills and self-concepts of gifted children from various ages and genders. Mixed method designs are considered beneficial when studies desire to obtain a more comprehensive view of a construct (Creswell, 2003). The intent was to explore the status and relationship among these variables. The gender and grade of the
students were the independent variable and the self-concept and social skills assessment measures were the dependent variables. All of the rating scales used in the present design have been employed in past research involving the self-concepts and social cues of gifted students.

With approval of the school officials, parents or primary caregivers of all second, fifth and eighth grade students were presented with a letter of consent that provided a description of the study and asked for permission for the student to be able to participate in the study. All children from each grade were asked to be involved and sign an assent form. Forty-four students returned assent and consent forms and therefore, participated in the study. The students completed the Piers-Harris Children’s Self-Concept Scale. This was administered by the researcher trained in test administration at the school during a time designated by the school. A summary of all data gathering tools is outlined in table 2.

**Table 2. Measures obtained on the study sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level &amp; Measures Obtained</th>
<th>2nd graders N=20</th>
<th>5th graders N=11</th>
<th>8th graders N=13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Piers Harris Scale</td>
<td>Piers Harris Scale</td>
<td>Piers Harris Scale</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher social skills perception</td>
<td>Teacher social skills perception</td>
<td>Teacher social skills perception</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reported parent concerns</td>
<td>Reported parent concerns</td>
<td>Reported parent concerns</td>
<td>Student focus group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview data were reviewed independently by the thesis author and thesis advisor. The assessment rubric involved the researchers reading the eighth grade open-ended interview responses covering five social skills themes (1-difference between gifted and non-gifted students on social skills, 2- development of social skills same/different for gifted and non-gifted, 3- social skills deficits for 2, 5, 8, graders, and social skills strengths, 4-school accommodations levied, and 5- parent concerns about social skills). The researchers read the responses to derive whether the teachers agreed or disagreed with the proposition that there were differences or not (on these
various components). In addition, the researchers read responses to ascertain the teacher’s perspectives on these issues. The principle researcher looked for inter-assessor agreement aiming for a 2 out of 3 alignment. The teachers were queried in the following thematic areas: 1- compared gifted and non-gifted students, 2- compare gifted students in multiple settings, home-school-with gifted peers with non-gifted peers, 3- examine the activity portfolio of the children, 4- examine activity choices and 5- report the parent views of these issues. Two qualitative data points, one with teachers and the other with the eighth graders were completed. Each data set was examined for emerging themes and consensus.

**Analysis**

Quantitative results were obtained using the IBM-Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 9.0 (1999). Descriptive statistics were used to analyze results gained on the topic of social skills through interviews. Inferential statistics were applied to analyze results gained from self-concept data from the *Piers-Harris Children’s Self-Concept Scale – Second Edition*. Qualitative results were gained using a content analysis process to generate themes.

**Results**

To address research question 1, regarding the status of self-concept within the sample, the Piers-Harris means were analyzed. The *Piers-Harris* Manual normative sample overall mean was 44.60 (n=1387) (Piers, Harris & Herzberg, 2002). Second grade students reported an average total self-concept mean score of 72.40 (n=20), fifth grade students reported an average total self-concept score of 69.91 (n=11), and eighth grade students reported an average total self-concept score of 71.85 (n=13). Female students reported an average total self-concept score of 71.46 (n=24), while males reported an average total self-concept score of 71.80 (n=20). The average total self-concept score of all students was 71.61 (very high).

When the data were examined for gender differences, the average total self-concept score of male students in the second grade was found to be 64.43 (n=7), while the average total self-concept score of female students in the second grade was 76.69 (n=13). The reverse pattern was found with fifth grade students. Female fifth grade students reported an average total self-concept score of 52.75 (n=4), while fifth grade males reported an average of 79.71 (n=7). The differences in the total self-concept averages were very small between eighth grade male and females. Scores for female eighth grade students was 72.43 (n=7) and scores for male eighth grade students was 71.17 (n=6).
Self-concept scores were also broken down by subarea of self-concept. Means for all males and females in this study are described in table 3 below.

**Table 3. Mean Self-Concept Subset Scores for Males & Females**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Concept Subset</th>
<th>Male (n=20)</th>
<th>Female (n=24)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral Adjustment</td>
<td>54.85 (SD=9.5)</td>
<td>55.04 (SD=8.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual &amp; School Status</td>
<td>54.00 (SD=8.9)</td>
<td>53.92 (SD=8.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Appearance &amp; Attributes</td>
<td>47.85 (SD=9.1)</td>
<td>50.25 (SD=6.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom From Anxiety</td>
<td>56.50 (SD=9.6)</td>
<td>54.17 (SD=11.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popularity</td>
<td>49.00 (SD=8.7)</td>
<td>52.58 (SD=7.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness &amp; Satisfaction</td>
<td>50.15 (SD=7.9)</td>
<td>52.21 (SD=9.1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate the question of whether there is a difference in total self-concept scores between males and females. Using an independent t-test, the total self-concept score for each subject was stratified by gender and then gender groups compared. Then those same groups were bifurcated by grade level (2, 5, 8). The test was not significant, \( t(42) = -.082, p = .935 \) for gender. No significant difference was found in total self-concept scores between males and females \( (p > .05) \). However, there were significant differences in total self-concept scores between males and females across different grades \( (p < .05) \) \( F(2)=8.80, p=.001 \). A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between grade in school and total self-concept score. The independent variable, grade in school, included three grades: second, fifth and eighth. The dependent variable was the total self-concept score. The ANOVA was not significant \( F(2, 41) = .115, p = .89 \).

**Table 4. Mean Self-Concept (Total Score)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2(^\text{nd}) Grade</th>
<th>5(^\text{th}) Grade</th>
<th>8(^\text{th}) Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>76.69 (n=13)</td>
<td>52.75 (n=4)</td>
<td>72.43 (n=7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>64.43 (n=7)</td>
<td>79.71 (n=7)</td>
<td>71.17 (n=6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was no correlation between grade level in school and total self-concept scores \( (p > .05) \), nor was there a correlation between gender of total sample and total self-concept scores \( (p > .05) \).
**Qualitative Data Focusing on Social Skills.** Teacher Interview Data: The qualitative data shed light on the perceptions of the teachers from their close observation of the gifted students.

Theme One (No difference in social behavior between contexts) – Educators reported gifted students in their school do not differ in their social behavior between school and other social environments. For example, one teacher said, “I don’t really see them acting any differently. They are pretty genuine. What you see at school is what you always get.”

Theme Two (Social Engagement) – Parent and educator data revealed that gifted students are highly involved in diverse activities. In particular, one teacher explained, “In terms of giftedness, not only are these kids gifted intellectually, some are musically gifted, some are artistically gifted, some are athletically gifted, and the hard part when they’re in middle school is that they can do everything well, but there are only so many hours in a day.”

Theme Three (Comparison of gifted versus non-gifted) – Educators reported that students in middle grades, such as fifth are more socially advanced than public school counterparts, but are still self-conscious, gossipy, have transient friendships, and have more mature females than males. Educators described eighth grade children as “mini-adults”; they are self-confident, capable problem-solvers, and have established friendships.

Theme Four (Developmental lag for younger children) – Concerning very young gifted children (second grade), educators felt they are lacking more in social skills than older students. Much like past research, educators reported gifted children can communicate easily with adults and often relate to adults more than peers. When comparing young gifted students to young average students, an educator stated, “They are typically on the quirkier side and a lot of times they relate more to older kids and adults than kids their own age, and that can pose some challenges for them.”

Theme Five (Benefit of homogeneous gifted setting) – Educators felt that gifted students have a better school environment than those in public schools, encompassing social, emotional, and academic aspects. Specifically, an educator explained, “In public school, they will put them in the appropriate math class or they’re tracking or they have high ability; they’ll get some of that curriculum, but what they will not have addressed is the whole child. When kids leave here, they develop skills that their parents didn’t realize they had... When they leave here, they have a sense of confidence, a better sense of who they are, and they have gone to events that at a public school they may not have gone to.”
Theme Six (Parental Concern) – Along with concerns for academic achievement, educators reported the parents of students are concerned about their children’s social development, as well. One teacher stated, “In conferences, parents have said to us that one of their concerns is their child has yet to find that best friend.” Another teacher added, “In conferences, I had three parents express concerns about friendships of their kids.”

Table 5 provides a summary of qualitative data collected from teachers regarding developmental differences and social skills of second, fifth, and eighth grade students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developmental Differences</th>
<th>2nd Grade</th>
<th>5th Grade</th>
<th>8th Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Self-conscious</td>
<td>• Emotional control still a problem</td>
<td>• “Mini-adults”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Less emotional control</td>
<td>• Boys and girls both emotional</td>
<td>• Socially mature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Self-directed learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Skills</td>
<td>• Transient friendships</td>
<td>• Girls more advanced than boys</td>
<td>• Good problem-solving skills in social disagreements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• No “best friend”</td>
<td>• Gossipy</td>
<td>• Less bothered by comments of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Gender does not matter in friendships</td>
<td>• Have a “best friend”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qualitative Interview Student Data: Eighth grade students reported they see themselves as different from their public school counterparts. All of the boys in the focus group stated that they act differently when around public school counterparts, but there was a mixed response from the girls. One male student said, “I’m a little bit less reserved with my school friends than my soccer friends.” A female student added, “I guess I would say I’m slightly different because everyone here, on average, is smarter and more intelligent than the kids in my [previous] public school, I feel like I’m around people who are the same.” On the contrary, one female student said, “I kind of stick to who I am, all around.” However, this same female student described using different ways of speaking between contexts, saying, “We can use bigger words here
because we’ve been [exposed] to that vocabulary since fifth grade and not with those other friends.” The students in the focus group described themselves as being different developmentally than in fifth grade, reporting they are more mature in the eighth grade. One student commented, “With age comes more responsibility.” Another male student added, “I guess its just maturity. You find something funny in fifth grade but you don’t find it funny now.” A female student contributed, “You have to be more careful of what you say. As you get older, you realize what you say may hurt someone else.” Both eighth grade boys and eighth grade girls conveyed they are self-conscious in school and feel their behavior has consequences. They stick to gender-specific groups and believe that the school puts pressure on them to “talk about adjustment issues” in groups unnecessarily. However, the gifted eighth grade students also reported their school exposes them to more academically than they would be exposed to in regular public school, and that they are better able to excel. In particular, one student said, “There are certain things in this school that you wouldn’t do in public school, just because the school is smaller.” Another student agreed and added, “We can also do a lot more because we are gifted.” They said the school keeps them from being isolated like gifted kids in public schools (heterogeneous environments), and because of this, they see themselves as very socially involved. The gifted eighth grade students reported their beliefs that their unique social behaviors are more a function of being in a small, private school environment, rather than a gifted environment.

Qualitative data revealed that both educators and students believe gifted students are socially mature by the eighth grade. Both groups also reported self-conscious behaviors were more common in younger gifted children. Students and educators agreed that social behaviors differ by gender and seem to be more problematic in middle school (fifth – seventh grades), while problems seem to be resolved some by the eighth grade. However, educators described their students as behaving socially the same in school and out of school, while students clearly described different behaviors between the two environments, in an attempt to fit into their surroundings. Table 6 provides a summary of qualitative data comparisons between eighth grade students and educators.

Table 6. Comparison of 8th grade Focus Group Data and Teacher Interview Data
Results from qualitative data reveal perceptions of adults closely working with and observing the gifted students in this academic and social environment. According to these educators, social skills are highly developed by the eighth grade and these students are very socially aware. However, at younger ages, gifted students have some difficulties in social skills and demonstrate very clear developmental differences.

**Discussion**

There were three research questions guiding this study: (a) what is the status of self-concept and social skills for a gifted population in a homogeneous program setting? (b) is there a difference between males and females on self-concept and social skills perceptions? and (c) is there a difference between grades on self-concept and social skills perceptions? Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Although small sample sizes pose a challenge to data analysis and interpretation, a few preliminary findings emerged.

In general, the results of this study document that the self-concept of gifted students included were high according to the *Piers-Harris* instrument, supporting the previous researchers
that found achievement and self-concept to be positively correlated (Black, 1974). Quantitative results support past research stating that self-concept is very high among gifted children (Hoge & Renzulli, 1993, & Maddux et al., 1982). The reported self-concept data from this study supports past research specifically concerning gifted children in a homogeneous setting. Previously, gifted children in homogeneous environments expressed high self-concepts (Lou et al., 1996), which was supported by the present study.

Self-concept scores for this sample resemble those of research that suggest a developmental shift in self-concept with a decline during middle school years, but slightly favoring males (Kling et al., 1999). Past research has shown some gender differences in overall self-concept, as well (Wilgenbusch & Merrell, 1999). No significant differences were found between the overall sample of males and females. However, significant gender differences were found across grade levels. Second grade self-concept data revealed that girls scored slightly higher on overall self-concept than boys. Fifth grade self-concept data illustrated the reverse finding; males scored slightly higher on overall self-concept than females. Many developmental differences may play a role in this discrepancy between male and female self-concept at the fifth grade level. For example, most girls around this age are influenced by the media. Female celebrities and models on magazines, television, movies, and music often illustrate an unhealthy and unlikely body image for these young girls. O’Dea and Abraham (1999) found the higher body weight in females negatively influenced their self-concept. Fifth grade is also around the age that many female students begin menstruation. This same study found that postmenarcheal females rated their physical appearance the lowest and had the lowest self-concept scores in a sample of middle school students. Also, in earlier grades, reading is more often emphasized than mathematics, while in middle school, mathematics beings to play a more important role in education. A study by Hyde, Fennema and Lamon (1990) found that there is little to no gender difference in mathematical ability in elementary or middle school grades, while slight gender differences in mathematical ability, slightly favoring males, were found at the high school level. Yet, there is a popular belief that males are stronger in spatial and mathematical abilities, while females are considered more skilled in verbal abilities (Howell, 2010). Girls talk earlier and use a larger vocabulary and grammar than boys. Occupations that have a focus in mathematical or spatial areas are typically male-dominated. All of these factors may be lending a hand to the drop in self-concept of females in the fifth grade, found in this study. However, self-concept
scores for both genders were still higher than the average population. Eighth grade scores were more balanced with little difference in self-concept scores between girls and boys.

Kling et al. (1999) also reported gender differences specifically in the subareas of self-concept. Girls scored significantly higher in domains such as reading and relationships, whereas male adolescents scored higher in physical abilities, math, and appearance. However, the present study revealed little to no gender differences in subareas of self-concept, such as popularity, physical appearance, or intellectual or school status, relating to previously examined subareas.

In addition to the quantitative data, qualitative data shed light on the perceptions of others on the social skills of gifted children, as well as their own self-perceptions on their social development. Similar to the findings of Janos et al. (1985), this sample of students suggest that gifted children feel differently from non-gifted counterparts. Overall, gifted students and their teachers felt they were socially adjusted. However, educators perceived the social behaviors of older gifted students to remain constant despite the environment, while students reported behaving differently depending on the environment and people around them. Eighth grade males agreed their behaviors differed in social contexts with non-gifted peers than in academic settings with gifted peers. There was some inconsistency among eighth grade females in their descriptions of their social behaviors across settings. Eighth grade students seem to have an awareness of their giftedness and even use strategies, such as using less sophisticated vocabulary to fit in with non-gifted peers, similar to findings in previous research (Swiatek, 1995). Also, Janos, Fung, and Robinson, (1985) found that gifted students reported feeling different than non-gifted peers. Because eighth grade students in this study exhibited an awareness of their giftedness and described strategies used to conform in social settings with non-gifted peers, it would seem that they do feel differently from those non-gifted peers. However, Janos et al. (1985) reported gifted students perceiving these differences negatively, whereas students in this study did not report negative perceptions due to differences.

Qualitative data from educators suggested that gifted children in a homogeneous environment are highly involved in social activities both inside and outside of school. Young gifted children in a homogeneous environment may be lacking some social skills in terms of relationship building and are quite self-conscious. This was also reflected in teacher reports of parental concerns. Second grade teachers reported that parents often brought up concerns about their children not making many friends, only having friends of the opposite sex, or lacking a
“best friend.” Educators felt the social behaviors of gifted fifth graders to be similar to average fifth grade students. They reported typical social issues, such as gossiping, sensitivity, and insecurity. However, by the eighth grade, these students are reported to be socially mature and adjusted and much more self-confident, with fewer parental concerns about social skills. This is similar to findings by Hunsaker et al. (1997) who found that teachers perceived gifted students to have sufficient social skills.

Educators thoroughly explained the positive aspects of gifted children attending a school for the gifted. This particular school offered advanced academic opportunities, as well as opportunities in the arts and languages. Also, educators felt this particular school for the gifted provided more social opportunities for the students by creating an environment consisting only of gifted students. They felt the social skills of the gifted students were enhanced because they are surrounded by students just like them and they are given opportunities to discuss social issues in a safe environment. A very specific and well-researched social skills curriculum is provided at this gifted school. The director of student services pairs with researchers and curriculum developers at a nearby university to tailor this curriculum to gifted students based on research of their abilities and needs. Each week, a teacher leads a small group discussion of middle school students on differing topics, such as, bullying, sex education, and social skills. While students perceived these weekly discussions to be boring and unnecessary, educators believed these discussions as crucial to their socio-emotional development. Educators perceived gifted students at average schools to be singled out due to their unique skills. Gifted eighth grade students also felt their school provided them with unique social opportunities. They described similar positive aspects, such as having the opportunity to be educated with other children with similar strengths and weaknesses. However, they felt some opportunities they receive at their school were not a function of the school being designed for the gifted, but because the school was small and private. They explained they are given opportunities, such as field trips to other states and cities and advanced classes in the arts, which are generally not offered in average, public schools, but are not unheard of in private schools.

Initial research on self-concepts using the Piers-Harris instrument found a decline in self-concept from grade three to grade six (Marsh, 1989). Quantitative data from the present study supported this finding revealing a slight dip in overall self-concept scores in fifth grade students, although the difference was not significant. Other researchers have found a drop in self-concepts
during middle school grades (Piers & Harris, 1964) with improvements later on, as found in the present study, as well. Qualitative teacher data revealed a clear improvement in social skills from a developmental status. Both educators and students reported lacking appropriate social skills at younger ages and developing into socially mature students by the eighth grade.

In the present study, researchers first asked, what is the status of self-concept and social skills for a gifted population in a homogeneous program setting? Data revealed the self-concepts of gifted students are much higher than the general population. Educators and students perceived varying social skills and differences between grades in school.

Researchers also asked, is there a difference between males and females on self-concept and social skills perceptions? Overall, no gender differences were found in self-concept when examining the whole sample population. However, when the self-concept data were examined more closely, it was found that second grade males scored significantly higher than second grade females. This finding was reversed for the fifth grade, illustrating higher self-concepts in fifth grade males than fifth grade females. These differences seem to resolve by the eighth grade, where there were no significant gender differences in self-concept scores. Educators and students agreed that social issues seem to differ between gender. However, this does not seem to effect overall social skills of either gender. There were no gender differences discovered in terms of social skills, although some teachers reported slightly more mature females than males at the fifth grade level.

Lastly, researchers asked the question, is there a difference between grades on self-concept and social skills perceptions? Overall, there were no significant differences between grades in school on self-concept. Educators and students both perceived significant differences between grades in social skills. Second grade gifted students were perceived to have below average social skills. Fifth grade gifted students were perceived to have average social skills. Eighth grade gifted students were perceived to have above average social skills, exhibiting social awareness and maturity.

**Implications of the Study and Limitations**

Information gained from this study reveals how self-concept and social skills vary by age and gender and the implications of this knowledge. Because gifted programs often focus some efforts on the socio-emotional development of students, information from this study may help program developers better pinpoint some areas of development that may need to be addressed in
a gifted population. The students included in this study possessed high self-concepts. Students perceive their high self-concepts to be a function of the opportunities a homogeneous gifted program has to offer them. Both students and educators perceived the social development of gifted students to be adequate, possibly due to the school’s focus on development of the whole child, rather than just academic ability. Focusing on the social and emotional development of gifted students is important to gifted education. This emphasis may lead to adequate social skill development. By providing gifted students with a wide range of social, musical, and athletic opportunities, these students may maintain a high self-concept.

By informing educators, such as teachers, school psychologists, and curriculum coordinators, about the needs of the gifted, schools may better create or improve programs for gifted students. In some states, such as Florida, gifted students are served under Exceptional Student Education services, which are also known as special education services. General education and teachers of the gifted create educational plans, similar to the process of serving students who are learning disabled. For this reason, teachers and school psychologists must be informed about the needs of gifted students in order to provide services that are appropriate. By identifying gifted students and providing them services, possible socio-emotional problems may be prevented.

The self-concept data from this study leads to interesting information on the social construction of academic ability. Second grade female students exhibited higher self-concepts than boys. This may be due to the social beliefs that girls behave better at younger ages than boys. This may also be due to research that shows that females are more verbal than males, as reading and language arts are emphasized at younger grade levels. Fifth grade females exhibited a dramatic decrease in self-concept when compared to their second and eighth grade counterparts. This reflects other research on girls self-esteem decline due to social messages, physical changes, and educational experiences (Bolognini, Plancherel, Bettschart, Halfon, 1996). As discussed earlier, the belief that males are better at math and science may be at play. It is clear that social concepts of the genders has an affect on the self-concept of all students, including gifted. Teachers even described fifth grade girls as “gossipy” indicating that, even though both males and females at this school are given access to very advanced curriculum, gender construction is still in existence, affecting self-concepts, as well as social skills.
This structure of the school leads to interesting information on a rare population. However, it also leads to limitations. For example, the screening process for admission includes: age appropriate social and emotional development and behavior that would enable the child to function effectively in a classroom environment. Due to admission criteria, it is unlikely that any students in the present sample had disabilities, such as Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorder, or any other disability that would negatively affect their social skills. Therefore, this sample most likely only includes students with average to high average social skills.

Another aspect of the school structure that leads to limitations is the cost of tuition. While some students of this school may be from low-average income families, it is most likely that the majority of the students in the sample come from families of high-average to high socio-economic status. Families with high incomes are more likely to include their child in many extra-curricular activities, simply because they have the means to do so. Participation in these activities may strengthen social skills as they are primarily social in nature. Thorough discussions about feelings and opinions between parent and child, as well as organized activities are central to the upbringing of the middle class child. Author Annette Lareau calls this concerted cultivation (2). This differs drastically from the idea of accomplishment of natural growth which characterizes the upbringing of working-class children, who have more control over their leisure activities and are free to play with nearby friends and relatives. These working-class children, however, attend school and spend time in institutions where the concerted cultivation route of child-rearing is promoted. The home contexts and societal contexts of these families is out of sync. As a result, children whose families adopt concerted cultivation gain a sense of entitlement, thus creating higher self-concepts.

The present study is limited to a small sample. A larger sample may yield more reliable means concerning self-concepts of gifted children. Also, the measurements of social skills in the present study were based on subjective interview data, rather than standardized assessment or an objective observation. Gifted programs vary greatly in their configurations. This research specifically focused on a homogeneous gifted environment. Results may vary by gifted program. Future research should be focused on the differences in self-concept and social skills according to program configuration, with much larger sample sizes.
References


preadolescence to early adulthood. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 81*(3), 417-430.


Appendices

Appendix A: CONSENT FORM

Dear parent/guardian,

My name is Kaitlin Cross and I am conducting research at [name redacted] School as a part of my graduate education at Miami University’s School Psychology Program. My study explores the social interactions of students at [name redacted] School. The purpose of the present study is to assess the social skills and self-concepts of gifted children from a homogeneous gifted program in order to examine age and gender differences. Information gained from this study can help in determining why there are vast inconsistencies in the literature concerning the social skills and social self-concepts of gifted students. The data collected is intended to provide insight for school personnel when enriching the education of gifted students.

Your son/daughter is being invited to participate in this project on “social skills and gifted children” which is open to all second, fifth, and eighth graders. Each student will be asked to complete a short self-concept questionnaire that will take less than 20 minutes to complete. This measure consists of 60 true-false items and is designed to aid in the assessment of the self-concept of adolescents. We will specifically be examining social self-concepts. The students will not be asked to include their names on the questionnaire once it has been submitted. The questionnaires will be confidential and locked in a file cabinet for security purposes. The questionnaire will only be accessible to the research advisor and the researcher. The student’s participation is completely voluntary and they may withdraw at any time without consequences.

Once the questionnaire has been completed, a small focus group of 5-8 participants from the 8th grade will be conducted after school for one hour. Members of the focus group will not be identified in the study. The members of the focus group will be selected by the research advisor and the researcher. The purpose of the focus group is to provide a more in depth explanation of how social interactions occur in their lives. Participation in the focus group will also be completely voluntary.
If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher, Kait Cross at (317-512-5453) or crosskm2@muohio.edu. You may also contact the researcher advisor, Dr. Susan Mosley-Howard at (513-529-1877) or mosleygs@muohio.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please call the Office of Advancement of Research and Scholarship at (513-529-3600) or humansubjects@muohio.edu.

Thank you for consideration and the approval of your child’s participation. Below is the consent form that needs to be returned to the researcher in order for your child to participate; you may keep the above portion. An assent form for you is also included in this bottom portion indicating you agree to participate by completing the questionnaire and checklist. Your child will be asked to sign an assent form, to confirm their participation in the study. We look forward to working with them.

________________________________________

I. ________________________________ understand the purpose, procedures and my parental rights in regard to the questionnaire and the focus group. I have contacted or will contact the Primary Investigator or Research Advisor if I have any questions or concerns in regard to my child’s participation in the questionnaire and focus group.

___ I agree to allow my child, _________________________ to participate in this study. I understand that her/his participation in this study is completely voluntary and he/she may withdraw at any time without consequence. I also understand that his/her name will not be associated with responses or participation in the focus group. By signing below, I acknowledge that I am the student’s parent or legal guardian.

___ I do not agree to allow my child, __________________________ to participate in this study. I understand that this decision will pose no negative consequences.
Parent/Guardian signature: ____________________________  Date: ____________________________

By signing above, I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older.
Appendix B: ASSENT FORM (8th Grade)

__________________________________________
Student’s Name

You are being asked to participate in a study that will help your teachers and other staff understand your views of yourself and your social experiences. Your part in the project will be to answer a questionnaire and there may be a possibility of participating in a focus group to discuss your individual social experiences. Members of the focus group will be chosen at random by the researcher and the research advisor. Your answers to the questionnaire and potential participation in the focus group will be confidential, which means that your answers and/or comments will only be shared with the researcher and research advisor and no one else. The purpose of this study is to provide insight to help school personnel improve your school experience. You may choose to withdraw at any time without any consequences.

Your parent(s)/guardian(s), teachers, and principal have approved your completion of the questionnaire and potential participation in the focus group. The questionnaire should take as long as 20 minutes to complete. The focus group will be held two weeks from today for an hour after school.

These questions are not a test and there is no right or wrong answer. Your participation is greatly appreciated and will provide great insight into things that influence your social interactions at school. By signing below, you are agreeing to participate in the project. While all students have the option to agree or decline to participate, your name may or may not be drawn at random or selected to participate in the study.

__________________________________________  __________________________
Signature                                      Date
I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without consequence by contacting the researcher using the contact information listed below. I understand that my name will not be associated with responses or participation.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher, Kait Cross at (317-512-5453) or crosskm2@muohio.edu. You may also contact the researcher advisor, Dr. Susan Mosley-Howard at (513-529-1877) or mosleygs@muohio.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please call the Office of Advancement of Research and Scholarship at (513-529-3600) or humansubjects@muohio.edu.
Appendix C: ASSENT FORM (2nd & 5th Grades)

_________________________________
Student’s Name

You are being asked to participate in a study that will help your teachers understand how you see yourself and your relationships with your friends. You will be asked to answer some questions. Your answers to these questions will be confidential, which means that your answers will only be shared with the researcher and research advisor and no one else. The purpose of this study is to help your teachers improve your school experience. You may choose to withdraw at any time without any consequences.

Your parent(s)/guardian(s), teachers, and principal have approved your completion of the questions. Answering these questions may take as long as 20 minutes to complete.

These questions are not a test and there is no right or wrong answer. By signing below, you are agreeing to participate in the project.

__________________________________  ________________
Signature                        Date

I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without consequence by talking to your teacher or calling the researcher using the contact information listed below. I also understand that my name will not be associated with responses or participation.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher, Kait Cross at (317-512-5453) or crosskm2@muohio.edu. You may also contact the
researcher advisor, Dr. Susan Mosley-Howard at (513-529-1877) or mosleygs@muohio.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please call the Office of Advancement of Research and Scholarship at (513-529-3600) or humansubjects@muohio.edu.
Appendix D: ASSENT FORM (8th Grade Focus Group)

____________________________________
Student’s Name

You are being asked to participate in a focus group to discuss your feelings related to the study in which you recently participated. The focus group will center on a series of four focus questions: Do you notice a difference between your social behavior at school and your social behavior outside of school? Do you use a different way of speaking between school and social events outside of school? Can you describe your social behaviors here at school versus outside of school? Do you believe the unique gifted program at [name redacted] school has impacted your social behaviors?

Follow up questions may be added as the conversation develops on the topic of social behaviors and self-concepts. Any and all information shared in the focus group must remain between the investigator and members of the group. Should you experience any distress due to the focus group, please contact the principal investigator (Kait Cross, crosskm2@muohio.edu) or your school counselor [name redacted]. You may choose to withdraw at anytime without consequence.

____________________________________  __________________
Signature                        Date

I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without consequence by contacting the researcher using the contact information listed below. I also understand that my name will not be associated with responses or participation. I understand that the information discussed in the focus group is confidential and may not be shared by the researcher or the participants.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher, Kait Cross at (317-512-5453) or crosskm2@muohio.edu. You may also contact the
researcher advisor, Dr. Susan Mosley-Howard at (513-529-1877) or mosleygs@muohio.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please call the Office of Advancement of Research and Scholarship at (513-529-3600) or humansubjects@muohio.edu.