ACADEMIC SELF-CONCEPT AND POSSIBLE SELVES OF HIGH-ABILITY AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES ATTENDING A SPECIALIZED SCHOOL FOR GIFTED AND TALENTED HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION/THESIS/RESEARCH PAPER/CREATIVE PROJECT: Academic Self-Concept and Possible Selves of High-Ability African American Males Attending a Specialized School for Gifted and Talented High School Students

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This study has looked at the temporal and multidimensional self in high-ability African American males attending a specialized school for high-ability youth. Interviews were conducted with 9 students. Results provided details about the hoped-for and feared selves the young men envisioned as well as the strategies these youth utilized to realize and avoid these possibilities for their future. The interviews also demonstrated the impact of family, the specialized school’s culture, their neighborhoods, and racism on the possibilities the young men envisioned for themselves. Interrelationships between the attempt to attain possible selves, academic self-concept, socioeconomic status, race, and year in school were assessed via a path model with data from 253 high-ability male students attending the specialized school. The nature of the relationships amongst the variables revealed that older students better able to attain or avoid possible selves had higher academic self-concepts. Higher academic self-concepts resulted in higher grades and SAT scores.
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“You did then what you knew how to do. And when you knew better, you did better.”

Maya Angelou

There are a number of people to thank for allowing me the space to pursue what mattered to me so wholeheartedly.

I would first like to thank my family. They have demonstrated to me time and again the hopefulness of loving with a short memory for broken promises and hurt feelings. The example of their humanity is what I lean upon when striking out for territories unknown.

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Finally, the love of my life has been a prod in my backside/shoulder to lean upon since moving away from him to the wilds of Indiana. As he likes to tell me, he didn’t send me up here to fail. Him saying that never failed to get on my nerves, but in his own special way, he claimed ownership of my goals and aspirations. As I hope he knows, his success is mine, and my success is his.
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Chapter I
Introduction

Though the self has been part of philosophical theorizing since the time of the Greeks, William James is credited with ushering in the study of self-concept in 1890 (Harter, 1996). Self-concept as a flashpoint of inquiry is relatively robust, as evidenced by the 11,000 entries devoted to the examination of self-concept within PsycInfo database alone. From 1890 to the present day, researchers have been wrestling with questions about the self as subject and object, the impact of others in the creation of a perception of self, the model (unidimensional vs. multidimensional vs. hierarchical) of the self, and discrepancies in the report of the self (Harter, 1996).

Considering the complexity of these questions and the variety of voices from distinct disciplines contributing to resolving these questions (Harter, 1996), the study of self-concept has been (Wylie, 1974, 1979) and is muddled. This confusion was and is especially evident in definitions, and thus measurement, of self-concept. Specifically, Ruth Wylie (1974, 1979) opined that researchers routinely created instruments to measure self-concept that were particular to their study rather than driven by theory. Plus, researchers were not as invested in exploring the construct validity of the instruments that were developed to measure self-concept. Wylie (1974, 1979) concludes that these two characteristics of then-current research culminated in a slippery foundation for intervention protocols meant to ameliorate poor self-concept.

Shavelson, Hubner, and Stanton (1976) helped self-concept research come into its “second generation” of study by advancing an influential definition of self-concept. They argued that self-concept is multifaceted, hierarchical, organized and structured,
descriptive, evaluative, and stable. Self-concept is made up of academic self-concepts and nonacademic self-concepts (this language is especially apropos for children and adolescents; Bryne, 1996), with general self-concept at the apex. Though general self-concept is considered stable, as one moves away from a general self-concept to self-concepts influenced by interaction with the environment and significant others, self-concepts become more situation specific. Finally, they posit that self-concept is influenced by and influences action. These claims have marked the study of self-concept for three decades.

Shavelson and Bolus (1982) note that self-concept is integral to education because of the purported connection between academic performance and self-concept. Due to this connection, educators are invested in bolstering self-concept, especially in those youth who may labor under societal prejudicial practices and beliefs (Marsh, n.d.). Marsh (n.d.) further states that the desire to enhance self-concept is part of educational policy development worldwide. Marsh (1990) supplies that academic and nonacademic self-concepts are independent of each other, such that changes in academic self-concepts will not impact nonacademic self-concepts and vice versa. Thus, the study of self-concept in schools would necessarily turn on the examination of academic self-concept.

Academic Self-Concept

The study of academic self-concept has manifested the same troubling characteristics as the study of general self-concept (Bryne, 1996). Due to the lack of methodological rigor, academic self-concept research has been muddled by inconsistent findings. And, as with the study of general self-concept, inquiry into academic self-concept is recently benefiting from instruments that are more theoretically consistent.
Bryne notes that a seminal definition for academic self-concept has not been advanced. Some common elements across strands of research include academic self-concept being operationalized as unidimensional and multidimensional, descriptive, evaluative, and based upon academic prowess. Reliable findings support the hierarchical nature of self-concept by demonstrating that academic self-concept has a stronger relationship with grades than general self-concept. Moreover, subject-specific self-concepts are even more strongly related to subject grades than a general academic self-concept (Bryne, 1996).

Though a great deal about the structure of self-concept has been unearthed, Bryne (1996) states that the this line of inquiry has not often included the possibility of group differences based on race, socioeconomic status (SES), ability, and age to name a few demographic variables. She concludes that future study of academic self-concept must include these markers of potential human variability to further delineate the uniformity and mutability of academic self-concept.

Possible Selves

Ten years after Shavelson et al. (1976) postulated a multidimensional self that increases in stability as one ascends upwards from situation specific self-concepts to a general self-concept, Hazel Markus and Paula Nurius (1986) advanced the theory of possible selves to reflect a self that is not only multidimensional, but dynamically so. The creation of possible selves is associated with the future-oriented aspect of self-concept. The theory of a possible self permits the assumption of a self-concept that is fluid rather than static due to a possible self providing the link between one aspirations for one’s self in the future and potential action to realize those aspirations that enhance and even transform one’s life (Markus & Nurius, 1986). In light of this concept, possible selves
one would like to become (expected selves) and would like to avoid (feared selves) provide the means of explaining who one is at the present moment (Markus & Nurius, 1986). This is in part due to possible selves being aspects of the self believed to be the most influenced by environmental and social interactions. Possible selves make way for the consideration of a working self-concept, or a self-concept that is most accessible to consciousness at any given moment. Thus, possible selves provide the lens through which life events are interpreted (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

**Academic Self-Concept and Possible Selves**

Researchers have only recently begun to examine the potential impact or relationship between possible selves and more stable self-conceptions. Knox, Funk, Elliott, and Bush (1998) argue that possibilities for the self are the most available during adolescence in large part due to the new intellectual capacity to create hypotheses. This newly acquired skill to consider possibilities for the self when contrasted against a stable, current sense of self can highlight whether a distance exists between what one feels one’s self capable of and behaviors one is actually engaged in. The researchers contend that placing possible selves alongside a global measure of self-concept, self-esteem in their case, allowed for a more in-depth analysis of adolescent “self-views”.

**Problem to be Studied: Academic Self-Concept and Possible Selves in High-Ability African American Adolescent Males in a Selective School**

Gill (2003) explored academic self-concept in a sophomore cohort of high-ability students at a 3-year Midwestern residential academy for students gifted and talented in math and science. He utilized the Self-Description Questionnaire (SDQ)-II developed by Marsh (1992) to conceptualize self-concept as multidimensional and hierarchical.
Consistent with Marsh’s theory that academic self-concept falls for students who attend programs for the gifted and talented (Marsh & Hua, 2003), the average value for academic self-concept decreased from 52.02 to 47.13 during the course of their first semester at the Academy. Surprisingly, however, decreases in academic self-concept were the greatest for a group of African American males (and several Latinos). The average value for academic self-concept in this group traveled from 45.29 to 22.58. This represents a very significant reduction in academic self-concept. Can this troubling drop in academic self-concept in high-ability African American males be explained via the academic self-concept and possible selves literature currently in existence?

Studies examining academic self-concept in African American adolescents have consistently revealed a positive relationship between grades and academic self-concept (House, 1993; Mboya, 1986; Witherspoon, Speight, & Thomas, 1997). Research has also revealed the impact of discrimination (Chavous, Rivas-Drake, Smalls, & Cogburn, 2008), course selection (Signer, Beasley, & Bauer, 1997) and maternal optimism coupled with family routine (Seaton & Taylor, 2003) on academic self-concept. Yet, despite continued scholarly attention to the academic self-concept of African American students, the literature about this population is plagued with methodological trouble spots. As mentioned previously, self-concept research and academic self-concept research is characterized by atheoretical instrument development and questionable construct validity. Thus, though researchers have pursued exciting questions examining variables like maternal optimism, community support, and racial identity and academic self-concept, due to the penchant of haphazardly creating instruments to answer novel research
questions, one cannot trust that academic self-concept is the construct being examined. These concerns constitute gaps within the literature that require attention.

An intriguing new approach to investigating self-concept in African American students is the study of possible selves. When considering possible selves in African American adolescents, several researchers have linked differing academic goals to the possible selves of different ethnic groups and speak to academic possible selves being hampered by racial and gender stereotypes (Kao, 2000; Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006; Anderman, Anderman, & Griesinger, 1999). For example, Kao reported that the fear of being seen as incompetent can comprise the possible selves of African American high school adolescents. Yet, their peers frowned upon going “overboard” in pursuit of academic excellence.

Kao’s (2000) findings notwithstanding, much of the research that examines possible selves in African American students generally and males specifically focus on the experience of delinquent youth and youth not identified as gifted. Though these studies offer promising insight, one cannot be sure that the experience of these youth is represented in the experience of high-ability African American males and vice versa. Likewise, as mentioned previously, a new development in self-concept research is the placement of possible selves alongside a more stable self-concept. Exploring both academic self-concept and possible selves in youth should provide a more nuanced exploration of beliefs about the academic self in high-ability African American males.

The study of academic self-concept in high-ability youth has benefited from discussions debating the impact of selective schools. Herbert Marsh has been the seminal figure in this area of inquiry and has convincingly argued that academic self-concept in
high-ability youth may be made more fragile by participating in selective, rigorous programs (Marsh, n.d.). He further argues that academic self-concept decreases for high-ability youth the longer they remain in selective schools (Marsh, Hua, & Craven, 2004). Marsh has termed the decrease in academic self-concept for high-ability youth in selective programs the big-fish-little-pond effect (BFLPE). This decrease was reflected in Gill’s (2003) study.

Unfortunately, very little research exploring academic self-concept in high-ability youth disaggregates the data based on race or gender. Therefore, the experience of high-ability African American males is not well represented. Two possible reasons for this blind spot within the gifted literature base include convenience sampling and the contemporary desire to control for race. Further, self-concept research for gifted or high-ability students has been typified by methodological concerns, and very little research speaks to the possible selves of gifted youth.

Returning to Gill’s (2003) study, the literature base offers some promising insight in explaining academic self-concept in African-American high-ability adolescent males, but it does not address their experience directly. The drop in academic self-concept was not the focus of Gill’s study; yet, the severity of the decrease for some African American males call for additional research within similar settings to more fully explore self-conceptions held by high-ability African American males who attend specialized schools.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is the examination of academic self-concept and possible selves in high-ability African American males. Students were recruited from the same locale and similar milieu from which Gill (2003) completed his research.
This investigation will extend upon Gill’s methodology by conceptualizing self-concept as temporal as well as multidimensional.

With the previous discussion about academic self-concept and possible selves in mind, the research questions for the proposed study are as follows:

- What possible selves will be identified by high-ability African American males attending a specialized school for gifted and talented students?
- Will there be consistencies in the possible selves identified by African American students across students and/or across grades? If so, what will these consistencies consist of?
- What strategies will be identified to realize or avoid possible selves?
- Will significant others influence possible selves in African American males? How?
- Will possible selves and strategy use differ based on ethnicity?
- Will possible selves be a significant predictor of academic self-concept?
- Will possible selves be a significant predictor of academic performance above and beyond the impact of academic self-concept?

Significance of the Study of Academic Self-Concept and Possible Selves in High-Ability African American Males

It is critical that studies explore and explain why students of color struggle in schools. It is likewise important for researchers to analyze the effectiveness of intervention strategies that aim to make participation in schools worthwhile. These studies have shed light on the impact of institutional racism, poverty, and sexism, to name a few, in the academic lives of students of color. At the same time, an
overemphasis on this line of inquiry can greatly mask variability in how schooling is experienced and approached by these students.

A limited body of research dissects the academic experience of African American students who excel in school (Newman, Myers, Newman, Lohman, & Smith, 2000). Oyserman and her colleagues (Oyserman, et al., 2006; Oyserman & Markus, 1990; Oyserman & Saltz, 1993) have done the important work of exploring possible selves in African American males, but they have focused their exploration on delinquent and nondelinquent youth. The study herein will not only add to a sparse body of research that explores academic self-concept and possible selves of African American males, it will add to the limited body of research that details the experience of African American males who have a history of excelling in school. The scholarly discussion about the academic experience of African American males as well as the discussion regarding self-concept should benefit from incorporating the diversity and richness of the academic lives of African American high-ability males.

Likewise, the findings will contribute to a developing body of literature that not only explores possible selves in African American youth but in other ethnic males as well. It is expected that the students contributing to the study will represent a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. Considering a predominate focus in the investigation of possible selves in African American adolescents has been the selves of inner-city, low-income youth, this study will broaden the literature base and contribute an important and novel perspective.

Finally, the study will augment a developing body of literature of a temporal self. The temporal nature of the self is a new and exciting approach to analyzing self-concept
(Bryne, 1996). Likewise, by addressing the potential for possible selves to predict academic self-concept, it will respond to Harter’s (1996) call to explore process-oriented examinations of self-concept to better inform our understanding of human behavior.

Assumptions Undergirding Study

Several assumptions serve as the foundation for this study. At the most elemental level, students are expected to supply adequate answers and complete the instruments to the best of their ability. Students interviewed are expected to articulate their dreams and how they plan to reach them. Likewise, the SDQ-II is expected to be a valid means of assessing academic self-concept in this sample, and the Possible Selves Questionnaire developed by Oyserman is assumed to adequately operationalize possible selves in these youth.

The admissions requirement for the Academy serving as the setting for this study mandate the submission of indicators of academic performance such as grades and SAT scores. Students also submit personal essays and recommendations from parents and faculty. Approximately 800 to 1000 applications are submitted for a sophomore cohort of approximately 200 students. Students who are accepted to attend the Academy have demonstrated academic excellence and/or academic ability above and beyond peers at their home school and youth in the applicant pool. Moreover, due to the school’s charter to serve the state, selection of students is influenced by the desire to represent state-wide demographic variables. Because of the rigorous application process, entry into the Academy substantiates the label high-ability for these youth and delineates what behaviors constitute high-ability status.

Definition of Terms
Definitions for academic self-concept and possible selves will be grounded in the literature completed on these concepts to date.

- Academic self-concept is defined as influenced by social comparisons, evaluative, descriptive, multidimensional, and hierarchical. Academic self-concept is also conceptualized as both stable and situation specific. Due to multidimensionality and hierarchy in self-concept, self-concepts in school subjects are more strongly related to academic self-concept than general self-concept and are unrelated to nonacademic self-concepts. Academic self-concept is both responsive to the environment and influences understandings of the environment.

- Possible selves are considered possibilities for the self that one hopes for or fears. They are manifestations of a future-oriented self-concept. The conceptualization of a working self-concept rebuts the notion of stability in self-concept in favor of dynamism. The working self-concept is responsive to environmental cues and the influence of significant others. Due to possible selves being housed within a working self-concept, they are also subject to and reflective of the influence of the environment and significant others. Possible selves are considered another means of determining meaning about the academic self and the link between aspirations and eventual action.
Chapter II

Literature Review

Though the “self” has been a philosophical flashpoint, arguably since the time of the Greeks, the study of self-concept took a contemporary turn through the work of William James (Bracken, 1996). Explorations into self-concept began as theorizing about the Me-Self, or the self as object (i.e., self-concept), and the I-Self, the self as subject and the creator of the Me-Self (Bracken). Discourse about self-concept has grown to span thousands of articles in the last 30 to 40 years. In 1979, Ruth Wylie announced that she combed through 4500 articles for one of her seminal texts deconstructing the nature of then-current research on self-concept. Fast forward 17 years to 1996, and articles discussing aspects of self-concept numbered at 11,000 in the PsycINFO data base (Bracken). Articles currently devoted to exploring self-concept seek to analyze topics as diverse as gender-role self-concept (Athenstaedt, Heinzle, & Lerchbaumer, 2008), empowerment and social self-concept in Chilean youth (Dreyer, & Guzman, 2007), the relationship between participation in sports and a multidimensional self-concept in gifted youth (Rinn & Wininger, 2007), the role of self-concept in pain management of youth struggling with juvenile idiopathic arthritis (Herlin & Thastum, 2008), and the management of self-concept in pregnant women seeking to monitor their prenatal diets (Copelton, 2007). Suffice it to say, self-concept as an area of inquiry is robust and interests researchers across disciplines and from around the globe.

Wylie (1974, 1979, 1989) undertook the monumental task of characterizing and critiquing self-concept research and advancing theory development, subsequently
contributing to the groundwork that made its study more theoretically and
methodologically rigorous. The absence of these qualities in the “first generation” of
self-concept research contributed to inconsistent findings and poor intervention strategies
in clinical settings aimed at ameliorating a poor self-concept. Richard Shavelson, Judith
Hubner, and George Stanton (1976) are credited with ushering in the “second generation”
in self-concept research, a generation noteworthy for sounder instruments purporting to
measure self-concept and pivotal theory development of what self-concept is and is not.

Shavelon and Bolus (1982) contend that self-concept, or beliefs about the self, is
multifaceted, hierarchical, organized and structured, descriptive and evaluative, stable yet
increasingly situation specific as one descends down the hierarchy, and distinguishable
from other constructs. These are contentious claims that are currently being debated
and/or validated. Likewise, there is disagreement as to whether self-concept is part of a
self-system or one aspect of self-knowledge (Bracken, 1996). Because these debates
have not been resolved, quite a few terms are advanced synonymous to self-concept.
Some of these terms include self-esteem and self-efficacy (Hattie & Marsh, 1996). Hattie
and Marsh argue that self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-concept are distinguishable from
each other, but practical application when utilizing these concepts has resulted in findings
where the opposite (i.e., the constructs are not distinguishable from each other) proves to
be true.

When Wylie (1979) undertook to further articulate the issues that are concomitant
with studying a construct that has been hypothesized to have both conscious and
unconscious elements, she too had to wrestle with inconsistent and confusing
terminology. For an analysis that spanned thousands of articles and texts, she crafted a
definition for self-concept, irrespective of the terminology being used, which best meshed with the aims of her study. Likewise, researchers purporting to study self-concept must also stake a position. Part of the assumption of this study is that self-concept is, in fact, distinguishable from self-esteem and self-efficacy. Several studies used to develop the foundation for this literature review will not always bear this out, but the assumption undergirds this review nonetheless. Moreover, self-concept is multifaceted, or multidimensional; hierarchical; organized and structured; and is a means from which the self can make evaluations. This basis permits the study of a particular aspect of self-concept, namely academic self-concept.

Markus and Nurius (1986) alternatively define the self. Again with reference to the work of William James in 1890, these researchers tackle the ramification of multiple selves. Rather than conceptualize the self-concept as readily accessible at all times, therein privileging a definition of self-concept as fixed and stable, Markus and Nurius contend that the information available at any one time is housed within a working self-concept. Within this self-concept are not only now-selves but future or possible selves. As implied by a working self-concept, a possible self manifests social context. Youth and adults reflect the impact of social context through the selves that are chosen as ones to fear and ones to hope for.

The purpose of this study is the examination of possible selves and academic self-concept in high-ability African American males attending a selective school. The constructs possible selves and academic self-concept together have not served as the foundation for the study of self-concept in this population. Moreover, researchers have not addressed these areas together in African American youth generally. Thus, the
presentation of literature in this chapter will encompass these constructs in African American students, high-ability students, or the general student population, when appropriate.

**Acting White**

The exploration of beliefs African American students hold about themselves in academic domains is part of a larger conversation about academic achievement and African American students. An influential theory meant to capture the academic beliefs held by African American students is advanced by John Ogbu and Signithia Fordham, two researchers who employed ethnographic research techniques to explore the educative experience of African American adolescents. In response to the overwhelming evidence that African American students do not achieve at the same levels as their White and Asian peers, they argue that the educative experience of African American students cannot be comprehended in a vacuum (i.e., narrow focus on school and student performance in class or on standardized tests). Racism in the greater culture that serves to proscribe possibilities for the self, academic expectations, school culture, generational understandings about the import of education on their loved one’s experiences in the workplace (Fordham, 1996) and a cultural frame of reference that is in ethical conflict with mainstream culture (Ogbu, 2004) has served as productive lenses in explaining the choices some African American youth make about emotional investment in school. Many researchers have made much of their assertion that high achievement can be considered “acting White” by some African American students. Ogbu (2004) despaired of the simplistic understanding by many of Fordham’s and his theory that some African
American students may duck or eschew academic notice as a reflection of their internal conflict about the cultural values espoused in academic settings.

Irrespective of Ogbu’s (2004) intent, Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, and Harpalani (2001) contend that Ogbu’s arguments contribute to a greater narrative about African Americans and schooling. Rather than seek to explicate the fullness of Black youth’s experience with school, both positive and negative, they argue that researchers are apt to reduce their experience to comparisons with their White or middle-class counterparts, with much of the literature about Black students in school positing that these students are pathological or deviant. The depth of Ogbu’s theory about academics and African Americans has been replaced with the catch phrase “acting White” and repeated ad nauseam by the media to become a powerful tool with which to ignore rather than highlight stereotyping within schooling contexts and the complexity of coping mechanisms utilized by Black students.

Suffice it to say, researchers that have explored academic self-concept are operating under the weight and/or contribute to the dialogue that has occurred and continues to occur about African Americans and school.

**Academic Self-Concept in African American Students**

The study of academic self-concept in African American students mirrors the study of self-concept generally. In particular, the construct has been operationalized in a myriad of ways including via instruments (The Self-Concept of Academic Ability Scale, Mboya, 1986; The Academic Self-Concept Scale, Cokley and Witherspoon et al.; The Self-Concept of Ability Scale, Jordan, 1981); interviews (Signer et al.), or through proxies for academic self-concept in national surveys about youth (i.e., items from the
American Council on Education’s Freshman Survey, House, 1993; items from the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972, Allen, 1980). The lack of consistency in measuring this construct in African American students raises questions as to how reliably the construct has been assessed in this sample.

The examination of academic self-concept in African American adolescents has taken three routes. One route examines the factor structure of academic self-concept with African American students. A second approach focuses on discovering which variables predict academic self-concept or which variables are predicted by academic self-concept. A third approach to examining academic self-concept in African American students explores relationships between academic self-concept and other variables purported or hypothesized to explain academic performance. Of the three, the latter approach appears the most researched. All three offer intriguing insight into the psychology of the self of African American youth and young adults.

Factor Structure of Academic Self-Concept with African American Samples

Two studies have questioned the construct framework of academic self-concept in African American youth, with one demonstrating that the assumptive framework underlying the make-up of self-concept may not reflect the organization of the construct for African American students. Rouse and her colleagues (2000, 2002) argue that motivation systems theory (MST) best conceptualizes goals, personal agency beliefs (i.e., self-concept), and emotions when explaining why youth are motivated to perform in certain ways. Within this theory, academic self-concept is one of many constructs to help explain performance. Rouse and Cashin (2000) sought to analyze the construct validity of the Academic Self-Concept and Motivation Scale (AASCM) cross-culturally.
The AASCM was administered to 179 African American youth, 170 White youth, and 123 Latin youth. Three factor analyses were conducted: one with the whole sample with every item, one for the 16 subscales, and a final factor analysis with four domains of high school environment (personal, cognitive, extracurricular, and social) identified in the literature to influence self-concept development. Unfortunately, factor analyses by ethnic group were presented for the dimensions and the subscales but not at the individual item level. The relative consistency in the factor structures across groups for the subscales provides preliminary evidence that the AASCM may be operating similarly for the three groups, but the lack of an item-based factor analysis for the three groups precludes further examination.

Cokley, Komarraju, King, Cunningham, and Muhammad (2003) gathered a sample of 687 college African American and White college students that attended historically Black colleges and universities and predominately White colleges and universities. He compared the factor structure of the two ethnic groups on a unidimensional measure of academic self-concept, the Academic Self-Concept Scale, and compared the findings to the results of the norming group. He found that the factor structure was similar between the two groups on 6 factors. A seventh factor for the White sample (Satisfaction With Grades) was split between a seventh and an eighth factor (Discouragement With School and Negative Performance Expectations) for the African American sample. Additionally, the Self-Doubt Regarding Ability factor, a factor shared between both the White students and the African American students, included four more items for the White sample. Rewarded Effort contained an additional 5 more items for the White sample.
Based on the results, Cokely et al. (2003) concluded that subscale scores and the total scale score (to a lesser degree) may be more internally consistent for the White sample. They also argue that the scrutiny of the factor structure between the two groups revealed differences in what constitutes academic self-concept for the two groups. For example, self-doubt about abilities in the White sample was defined by items describing lack of faith of abilities in classes for a major. For the African American sample, doubt about abilities encompasses doubts about academic preparedness for college.

Of the three approaches to exploring beliefs about academic competency held by African American youth, an exploration of the construct validity of instruments that have demonstrated sound psychometric properties in the measurement of academic self-concept has not often been attempted. Of the two studies cited herein, one study sought to establish construct validity rather than actively assess it. One must assume this paucity to be due to the rigor of doing factor analysis before the technological advances of the last 10 to 15 years. A closer examination of the arrangement of items said to assess academic self-concept through exploratory or confirmatory factor analysis procedures could reveal a great deal about the meaning-making process in this sample.

*Prediction and Academic Self-Concept in African American Youth*

Picou, Cosby, Curry, and Wells (1977) proposed a framework for academic self-concept that included the educational level of the father and mother, verbal aptitude, academic performance, influence from significant others to aspire to college, and SES. The researchers conclude that academic self-concept was more related to grades for black youth. Significant others are important in the development of academic self-concept, and verbal ability operates differently with academic self-concept for black and white youth.
Academic self-concept in black youth seems to reflect actual performance in school rather than performance on standardized measures of achievement. The lack of impact of significant others on grades highlighted a weak area in theorizing about academics for this population of African American males. These variables accounted for more variance in the white male youth (.49 vs. .33), the relationships between the variables were stronger for the white youth, and consistency of the effects was realized more often with the white youth. Picou and his colleagues conclude that the variables chosen may more accurately predict academic self-concept for the White youth.

Cokley (2000) sought to determine which variables predicted academic self-concept in two cohorts of Black college students: students attending historically Black college and universities (HBCUs) and students attending predominately white colleges and universities (PWCUs). Variables included gender, school type, and year in school. This was also a commentary on what types of environmental factors (setting, the quality of student-faculty interaction, and social environment) best support academic success in Black students, with HBCU’s doing a more credible job graduating Black college graduates than PWCUs.

Academic self-concept was positively correlated with grade point average (GPA) and the quality of faculty-student interactions. The researcher conducted separate regression analyzes to predict academic self-concept based on institution type by differences in GPA, estimations of fairness and judgment of interactions with faculty. At the HBCUs, academic self-concept was predicted by GPA, the quality of interaction with faculty, and class status. Academic self-concept was predicted by GPA and quality of student/faculty interaction at the PWCUs. He examined the relationship between GPA
and academic self-concept more closely in the two populations and found there was an overall significant difference in academic self-concept based on GPA category at the PWCU. This difference was evident amongst the five categories created to demarcate levels in GPA. Conversely, though GPA was significant overall, post hoc analysis showed no real differences across the five categories for students attending HBCUs.

Cokely concludes that significant differences in academic self-concept do not exist in Black youth attending HBCUs and PWCU. Academic self-concept increased with GPA, and GPA was the best predictor of academic self-concept. However, the quality of student/faculty interactions was a more significant predictor of academic self-concept for students attending HBCUs. The finding that academic self-concept is affected by more than just GPA at HBCUs along with the lack of difference in academic self-concept for students with differing GPAs at HBCUs substantiates the noteworthy conclusion that aspects of the environment can play an important role in a Black youth’s estimation of their academic aptitude.

Two studies (Awad, 2007; Witherspoon, Speight, & Thomas, 1997) explicating how well racial identity, academic self-concept and self-esteem (or a global measure of self-concept) predicted GPA. Awad also included items from the verbal portion of the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) with two college samples. Interestingly, Awad discussed the difficulty inherent in measuring racial identity as a means of responding to arguments put forth by researchers that racial identity impacts academic performance. Though both the Racial Identity Attitude Scale (RAIS) and the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS) were used, neither instrument performed as hoped. The RAIS performed poorly with a
sample of African American high school students, and the CRIS did not demonstrate a relationship with GPA. A more complete review of these studies follows.

Two African American college samples were part of Awad’s (2007) study. Sample 1 completed the measures that operationalized self-esteem and academic self-concept and supplied their GPA. Sample 2 also completed the measures and responded to items from the verbal portion of the Graduate Record Exam. The only predictor of GPA for Sample 1 was academic self-concept, while with Sample 2, predictors of GRE performance were academic self-concept and age. Older students answered more verbal items correctly than younger college students, and students with higher academic self-concepts performed better. Though the researcher trumpets that this study is the one of a few to seek to predict standardized test performance in an African American college sample by including academic self-concept, the researcher does not consider conflating variables that could potentially impact performance on standardized test items. Future research that seeks to predict this variable need also assess the impact of test anxiety.

Witherspoon, Speight, and Thomas (1997) assessed how well the combination of racial identity, academic self-concept, and a global measure of self-concept predicted GPA in African American high schoolers. The reliability estimates for the RAIS were .53, .42, .64, and .44. Despite these problematic indicators of instrument consistency, the researchers concluded that the Immersion subscale along with academic self-concept predicts GPA in the sample. Students with high estimations of academic self-concept evinced higher GPAs. Students with higher values on the Immersion subscale of the RAIS had lower GPAs.
Tashakkori (1993) was interested in learning whether there were racial and gender differences in the make-up of self-esteem. Utilizing a sample of 299 African American and 338 White seventh and eighth grade youth, he found that general competency was a significant predictor for self-esteem for both groups. However, when examining academic dimensions that may predict self-esteem, he found that one academic domain of the four assessed, Reading, was only important for African American males. Unfortunately, though items like “I am less intelligent than most of my classmates” or “I can learn new things quickly” were part of the general competency scale, Tashakkori did not conceptualize general competency as academic self-concept. Thus, he engages the unnecessary worry that the lack of predictive value of self-concept in academic domains is indicative of apathy toward school.

**Academic Self-Concept in Relation to Other Constructs**

The desire to explore relationships between academic self-concept and a myriad of other constructs is informed by an array of theoretical approaches seeking to explain academic performance generally or within African American youth particularly. This diversity notwithstanding, a consistent finding across several studies is that academic self-concept is more strongly related to academic performance than global self-concept (i.e., self-esteem; Mboya, 1986; Jordan, 1981) for African American students. Likewise, students with higher academic self-concepts had higher grades (House, 1993; Rouse & Austin, 2002). Mboya noted that “the values placed upon ‘self’ by black adolescents are quite separate from academic performance” (p. 694). Awad (2007) argues, “Theories that depend on reflected appraisals and social comparisons have not been sufficient in explaining self-esteem processes for African Americans (Demo & Parker, 1987; Van
Laar, 2000). Findings that African Americans tend to have higher self-esteem than Whites support the inadequacy of reflected appraisal and social comparison theories…” (p. 192). Awad goes on to point out that academic self-concept may more accurately reflect academic performance because it is a more proximal variable.

Along with the relative consistency detailing the import of academic self-concept with grades, researchers (Jordan, 1981; Medley, 1995) examining gender differences have unearthed that verbal ability may be more integral to the academic performance of African American females than males. Jordan surmises that interventions to enhance academic performance should bear this difference out. African American girls may need tools that encourage reliance on tools other than verbal acumen as well as boost academic self-concept, while African American males may need explicit focus on boosting academic self-concept.

Johnson and Medley (1978) sought to explicate the nature of academic self-concept in a sample of African American high school seniors and the degree of relationship between the students’ estimation of their ability and significant others’ estimation of their ability. The sample of 189 students from a predominately Black urban school completed Brookover’s General Self-Concept of Ability Scale. They found that only 5.3% of the total sample had low estimations of their ability in school. They also found that mothers were in the most agreement with their children about their academic self-concept, with greater agreement between mothers and sons.

Aspirations. The role of the mother is also partly reflected in studies examining aspirations of African American youth. Allen (1978) sought to understand the impact of the family on the achievement orientation of Black and White males. Achievement
orientation is conceptualized as multidimensional, with academic self-concept “clustering” with aspirations, values about achievement, and a sense of control over the environment. Families are theorized as originators of adolescent aspirations. Though there were no differences in the father’s aspirations for their sons, African American mothers had higher aspirations than White mothers, and the African American son’s academic self-concept correlated with the mother’s aspirations. For both African American and White males, the higher the father’s aspirations for the son, the higher the academic self-concept. Closeness and parental approval was also related to academic self-concept for both groups of males. The father’s emphasis on attending college was also related to academic self-concept for the son, irrespective of ethnicity. Despite these findings, the author concludes that academic self-concept is a function of the academic domain and performance in school rather than familial influence. Aspirations rather than academic self-concept are more influenced by family.

Carter, Little, and Barabasz (1972) hypothesized that there would be race and sex differences in aspirations. These differences would be due to differences in attitudes towards school and academic self-concept. The authors were also intrigued by the high aspirations of Black females. Theorizing that this was due to African Americans valuing women more than Whites, the researchers also conjectured that there would be racial differences in valuing women. The subjects were seventh and eighth graders participating in the Buffalo Campus School at State University School. Brookover’s Self-Concept of Ability Scale operationalized academic self-concept. The only difference realized between the groups was a gender difference in valuing women and men, with more young girls saying women are more valuable and more young boys saying men are more
valuable. There were no differences realized in academic self-concept or attitudes towards school. Further, educational aspirations were related to the self-concept of ability scale.

Dawkins (1981) corroborates the relationship between educational aspirations and academic self-concept through a sample of 3119 African American participants in the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Graduating Class of 1972. A youth’s confidence in his or her ability to complete college was a significant predictor of educational aspirations, albeit the strength of this effect was higher for females than males. Though confidence in completing college was a significant predictor of occupational aspirations, the beta values for this variable and others in this model were below .08.

Socioeconomic Status. Researchers analyzing academic self-concept in relation to SES have realized intriguing outcomes. Signer et al. (1997) examined the impact of the SES of the school community and math self-concept to test the impact of coursework on beliefs about math competency. Students were either enrolled in noncompensatory math courses (upper level math courses) or compensatory math courses. They found that Black students from low-SES schools taking compensatory math classes and Black students from high-SES schools taking noncompensatory math classes were 7 times more likely to desire more advanced math classes than White students in the same courses. The authors note that SES increases the aspirations of Black students, and Black students from low-SES courses desiring upper level math courses may feel they are being denied an opportunity. The low amount of variance accounted for with this finding mandates caution in interpreting this result.
According to Signer, Beasley, and Bauer (1997), their discovery of a robust math self-concept was in contradiction to theories that strip African American of much academic self-concept. Instead, Signer and her colleagues conclude that African American students prove resistant to performance driving beliefs about the self or aspirations. For example, in their study, African American students in upper and lower level math classes equally anticipated going to college. Moreover, Black students taking lower level math courses were six times more likely to anticipate going to college than White students taking the same courses.

Sullivan and Evans (2006) and Sullivan and Sullivan, Evans and Johnson (2005) found that academic self-concept is lower in youth living in low-income housing than with norming groups for the instrument selected for their studies. Youth with higher grades endorsed higher values for academic self-concept (Sullivan & Evans) and urban youth endorsed higher values than rural youth (Sullivan, Evans, and Johnson).

Seaton and Taylor (2003) were intrigued by prior research that demonstrated that poor families that do a sound job establishing familial routines were inculcating their youth with a powerful coping mechanism. To test this further, the researchers sought to understand the impact of a familial perception of financial resources on routine, maternal optimism, maternal depression, and adolescent adjustment (with academic self-concept being one form). They found that, though 59% of the families interviewed had family incomes below the poverty threshold, the average family felt their income adequate. The researchers further revealed that establishing family routine enhances academic self-concept within the adolescents in the family. Maternal optimism is also associated with the development and maintenance of routine. Thus, no matter one’s actual income, an
estimation of financial adequacy and optimism can play a role in the beliefs youth may
hold about their academic competency. Seaton and Taylor also point out that these
results may be particular to the sample.

Likewise, Campbell, Pungello, & Miller-Johnson (2002) revealed that academic
self-concept in poor African American youth is influenced by the environment in the
home. Considering their study examined the ramifications of involvement in early full-
time child care, youth involved in this type of programming in kindergarten were not as
subject to the influence of family environment on academic self-concept. And for all
children in Campbell et al.’s study, the influence of the family lessened for youth at 15.

Studies that have compared youth in academic self-concept and examined the role
of SES for African American youth have done so through an examination of
discrimination, course selection, support, and interactions between race, class, and
gender. Continuing with the theme that families can be protective influences on
academic self-concept in African American youth, Sanders (1998) was interested in the
effect of school, family, and church involvement on this construct. Parent support and
church involvement were moderately influential in predicting academic self-concept, but
their true significance is in combination with each other. Sanders argue that the impact of
teachers, parents and supportive community members on academic achievement is
through their impact on academic self-concept. He demonstrated this latter point through
interviews with high-achieving youth.

Allen (1980) adds that family SES accounts for 5% of the variance in academic
self-concept. Grades and school context variables like peer plans explain 17% of the
variance for African American males and 13% of the variance for African American
females, and the mothers’ educational aspirations for her son or daughter explain nearly the same amount of variance at 15%. It should be noted that these same variables explain more variance in academic self-concept for White youth.

Discrimination can have a differential impact on academic self-concept for African American students. Chavous, Rivas Drake, Smalls, Griffin and Cogburn (2008) report that the academic self-concepts of poor male youth are more egregiously affected by classroom and peer discrimination than high SES boys and girls, irrespective of SES. The researchers conjecture this difference is due to differential school and class climates and report that race centrality has been a protective force in the lives of these teens.

Wong, Eccles, and Sameroff (2003) arrive at similar conclusions about racial identity as protective with a sample of middle class African American teenagers. Greater levels of discrimination in schools were related to smaller decreases in a youth’s self-concept of ability. The more highly youth identified with their ethnic group, the higher their sense of academic competency.

Richman, Clark, and Brown (1985) report that there are no significant gender differences in academic self-concept in African American students, even when SES is controlled, and Signer, Beasley, and Bauer (1997) corroborated this finding via their sample of high- and low-income African American students equally anticipating attending college. In their study examining math competency beliefs, Black students, irrespective of income, were more uniform in their desire for upper level math courses. The only African American students reluctant to take more challenging math courses were students from high-SES schools in lower level math courses.
Banks (1984) was interested in the relationships amongst several attitudinal variables for a sample of middle-class youth living in predominately White suburbs. He found that academic self-concept was positively related to internal locus of control, self-esteem, attitudes toward school, valuing one’s physical appearance and attitudes towards other African Americans. Academic self-concept was not related to ethnocentricism or family type.

Concluding the examination of SES and its relationship to academic self-concept, two studies report on differences between resilient and nonresilient youth. Gordon (1995) argues that self-concept consists of 4 characteristics: beliefs about ability, environmental support beliefs, beliefs about control, and importance of specific goals. These facets of self-concept are reflected in motivation systems theory (MST). Resilient Black youth had a GPA of at least a 2.75 and had responded positively in measures part of the study despite stressors being in their lives. Though data was gathered from a larger sample, the study consists of 40 youth. All 40 youth had socioeconomic levels in the 2 lowest levels of Hollingshead Two Factor Index.

The two measures used in the study to operationalize MST were the High School Assessment of Academic Self-Concept and The Assessment of Personal Agency Beliefs. Utilizing ANOVAs, Gordon (1995) found that there were differences between the resilient and nonresilient youth in the cognitive domain; the resilient youth were significantly stronger in all four areas (ability, environmental support, importance, and control) than nonresilient youth.

Huang and Waxman (1996) argue that enhancement of the learning environment enhances outcomes in youth and sought to understand the nature of perception of learning
environment in their math classes. They used scales from the Multidimensional Motivational Instrument (to operationalize achievement motivation and academic self-concept), the Classroom Environment Scale (to operationalize involvement and affiliation), and the Instructional Learning Environment Questionnaire (to operationalize satisfaction and parent involvement) with 360 Asian, African American and Latin students from the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. Half of the youth were identified as resilient based on performance demonstrated through standardized assessment and grades.

There were no statistical differences based on ethnicity. They found that resilient students exhibited behaviors that would make them successful in school (i.e., higher academic self-concept, more academic motivation, higher attendance, more on-task behavior, longer time studying, less time watching TV during the week). They also found that the resilient students had better grades in math and were more likely to see college (and graduate school) in the future. However, both resilient and nonresilient students were unsatisfied with their math classes and demonstrated high academic self-concept.

*School Ability.* Finally, to round out the discussion of academic self-concept in African American youth, Marsh (1987) examined the impact of the ability level of a school on the academic self-concept of students. In particular, he sought to corroborate his theory that school ability negatively impacts academic self-concept for a more diverse sample of youth. Researchers were also puzzled by African American youth endorsing higher values in general self-concept, and they were apt to dismiss these findings as a
reflection of response bias. Though he warned that his findings would not address the finding about general self-concept, his results could address a piece of this riddle.

Marsh (1987) did find that the collective ability of the school environment has a negative impact on an individual’s academic self-concept, such that youth of the same ability that attended lower ability schools had higher academic self-concepts than youth that attended schools were the ability of the student body was equal to the youth or higher. He has termed this finding the big-fish-little pond effect or the BFLPE. Moreover, he discovered that the system of grading supported the BFLPE; youth of the same ability who attended schools where their ability was near the top of the student body received better grades than students who attended high-ability schools. Within this frame, the endorsement patterns of African Americans in regards to academic self-concept are largely due to the students with which they compare themselves rather than reflective of response biases. As mentioned previously, Awad (2007) contended that social comparisons theories have been insufficient in explaining self-esteem. Marsh’s findings demonstrate the importance of conceptualizing self-esteem, or self-concept, as multidimensional.

Academic Self-Concept in High-Ability Students

The examination of academic self-concept in gifted or high-ability adolescent youth is similar to the examination of this construct in African American adolescents. Specifically, the literature demonstrates an evolution in the types of research questions asked and the means of addressing said questions. To chronicle this evolution, the following is a chronological exploration of the study of academic self-concept in gifted youth. Before beginning this discussion, however, special mention must be made of
Herbert Marsh’s examination of academic self-concept. He has been an influential voice within self-concept inquiry generally, and he has been a particularly powerful voice in gifted education because of his critique of academically selective programs.

A noteworthy contribution Herbert Marsh has made to the study of the self is the operationalization of a model proposed by Shavelson and his colleagues (1976) that is multidimensional and hierarchical. Marsh’s scale, the Self-Description Questionnaire (SDQ) and its two iterations (Versions II and III), has been subject to a number of tests assessing the reliability and validity of the instrument. In 1989, Wylie wrote that the scale is a promising addition to a field seeking to reputably study self-concept. Seven years later, Bryne (1996) notes that the SDQ-II, the instrument developed for use with adolescents, has been the most validated instrument of self-concept in this age group to date. Via his instrumentation and others, he has convincingly argued that appropriate study of self-concept must account for its multidimensional nature (Marsh, 1984a, 1984b; Marsh & Parker, 1984).

He has also argued that self-concept is receptive to social cues. When considering one’s academic competence, youth are apt to understand their competence via comparison with peers in their learning environment, thus validating Festinger’s (1954) social comparisons’ theory. The frames used for reference are thus key to the development of academic self-concept in gifted youth. Marsh argues that youth surrounded by peers who are just as able or more able will have lower academic self-concepts than if they were part of learning environment where they were the ones deemed the most academically competent. Using this frame of reference model, he was able to explain the “paradoxical” finding that youth from schools with wealthier peers and who
also had higher IQs endorsed lower academic self-concepts than youth who attended schools with youth who were relatively less wealthy and had lower IQs (Marsh, 1984b). He has termed this frame of reference model the BFLPE. Beliefs about the self in nonacademic domains are not lowered due to a lowering in beliefs about the self in academic domains (Marsh, 1984a, 1984b), and, thus, the BFLPE may not have any impact on a general self-concept (Marsh, 1991).

Using data from 4000 youth contributing to the High School and Beyond database and a series of path analyses, Marsh (1991) reported that school ability negatively impacted most of the 23 academic outcomes of youth assessed in the 10th and 12th and 2 years after high school graduation. The two outcomes most egregiously affected were academic self-concept and educational aspirations, mediators for many of the academic outcomes in the study. Even when Marsh controlled for outcomes in the 10th grade plus academic self-concept at Time 1 and Time 2 and educational aspirations at Time 1, school ability remained a negative, albeit smaller, effect on outcomes like effort, course selection, grades, and occupational aspirations, to name a few.

The BFLPE as a frame for the academic experience of high-ability adolescent students in academically rigorous programs was bolstered by a study examining academic self-concept in youth from 26 countries (Marsh & Hua, 2003). Utilizing an international database called the Program of Student Assessment (PISA), he was able to use data from over 103,000 students. The students completed various measure of academic achievement and three items from the academic self-concept scale from the SDQII; he demonstrated support for the understanding that highly able students part of learning environments where the average level of achievement was higher than the mean
had lower self-concepts than highly able students in learning environments not so typified.

To summarize then, Marsh has contributed a reputable instrument that measures academic self-concept in adolescents. He has advanced the argument that Festinger’s (1954) theory of social comparisons is a powerful lens from which to build theory about self-concept, and he has extended a frame of reference model that suggests that academic self-concept is not only responsive to Festinger’s theory, the model is generalizeable and poses a threat to the assumption that high-ability youth benefit from classes with other high-ability youth. Thus, when considering the scope of academic self-concept literature for gifted or high-ability adolescent youth, the critique of self-concept literature generally and the studies of academic self-concept by Marsh may serve as the backdrop. With this in mind, the discussion will now turn to an examination of academic self-concept literature in gifted studies. As promised previously, chronology will serve as the basis for organization.

1970’s-1980’s

Studies examining academic self-concept in gifted adolescents were largely descriptive during in the 70’s and 80’s. Many researchers were preoccupied with explaining the nature of this construct in this population and comparing academic self-concept in gifted youth with academic self-concept in nongifted youth. The operationalization of academic self-concept vacillated between using more reputable measure like the Brookover Self-Concept of Ability Scale and measures not as often used.
Three of the eight studies examining academic self-concept in gifted youth were
devoted to describing this construct. One of the first studies examining academic self-
concept in gifted youth was conducted by Colangelo and Pfleger (1978). A sample of
151 9th-12th graders revealed that 90% of the responses to the items of Brookover’s Self-
Concept of Ability Scale were either A or B, choices that signify the highest or second
highest levels of academic self-concept or beliefs about academic ability. The
researchers conclude that gifted youth are aware of their ability in this domain, and the
lack of difference between youth based on grade and gender indicated that by the 9th
grade academic success was adequately apprehended enough to stabilize self-concept in
this area from then on.

Tidwell (1980) was interested in presenting a multidimensional portrayal of
1,593 gifted adolescents from an urban area in California. To assess academic self-
concept, she used the Self-Concept as Learner Questionnaire and the Attitude Toward
School Questionnaire developed by the Teacher Development Division of the Far West
Regional Laboratory for Educational Research and Development in San Francisco and
found that the students were more positive than negative about school and believed they
were “good” or “very good” learners.

Finally, Ross and Parker (1980) proposed to determine academic self-concept and
social self-concept in gifted youth, to ascertain the presence of gender differences, to test
whether a discrepancy exists between academic self-concept and social self-concept, and
to test whether this discrepancy increased over time. The examination of academic self-
concept and social self-concept is in keeping with the desire to urge the research and
educative community to see gifted adolescents as more than their academic acumen. If
the situation warrants, attention must be paid to the social well-being of gifted youth. Tidwell (1980) hoped to accomplish a similar task though her study, and the examination of social self-concept in gifted youth is one that is ongoing to this day. (However, due to the focus of this analysis, an examination of social self-concept falls outside the purview of this review.)

This first foray into this area of inquiry utilizing the Sears Self-Concept Inventory, a scale whose structure had not yet been determined, revealed that there was a significant difference between academic self-concept and social self-concept, with the 147 fifth through eighth graders endorsing higher values for academic self-concept. There were no gender differences in the two self-concepts for the 63 boys and 84 girls, and there were no differences in the self-concepts by grade. Instead, the researches argue that a discrepancy between academic and social self-concept was established by the fifth grade (Ross & Parker, 1980).

Two studies by Kelly and Colangelo (1984) and Colangelo, Kelly, and Schrepfer (1987) responded to Ross and Parker’s (1980) findings by comparing the academic and social self-concept in gifted youth with these self-concepts domains in general education students and students with special needs. Kelly and Colangelo administered the Self-Concept of Ability Scale to 266 youth from rural schools in the seventh through ninth grades. A main effect for gender encouraged the researchers to analyze the findings separately by gender. The findings revealed that though the high-ability young men endorsed higher values for academic self-concept, there was no difference between gifted girls and nongifted girls in academic self-concept. Due to the small sample size for the girls with special needs, they were not included in analysis. Unfortunately, no
explanation is offered for the lack of difference between gifted and general education girls.

Colangelo et al. (1987) utilized the School Attitude Measure (SAM) to determine not only if ability, as specified by group membership, impacted academic self-concept, but to describe academic self-concept in gifted and general education students and students with special needs and ascertain whether academic self-concept changed during an academic year. Here again, the sample consisted of seventh and ninth graders from rural schools. Students endorsed similar values in September and May, so the authors concluded academic self-concept is stable. Gifted girls endorsed higher values for all subscales of the SAM, but there was no significant difference between the high-ability and general education boys on the SAM. There was a difference between the high-ability boys and the boys in classes for students with special needs on the Performance-Based Academic Self-Concept and Reference-Based Academic Self-Concept subscales.

Interestingly, the results were reversed for the two studies. The explanation provided for the lack of difference between the high-ability males and the rest of the male students part of the study were that the post-hoc analysis chosen was conservative, the group of girls who were part of special needs courses was so small that they were dropped from analysis, thus decreasing the number of comparison groups for the girls, and the magnitude of the difference between gifted and general education girls and boys were similar. A further explanation not offered by the researchers could be instrumentation. One must also wonder about the impact of social comparison on estimations of academic self-concept.
A pair of studies acknowledged the relevance of social comparisons theory on academic self-concept. Olszewski, Kulieke, and Willis (1987) utilized the Self-Perception Profile for Children to ascertain what aspects of self-concept would be influenced by participation in a residential summer program or a commuter summer program. A cohort of students (n = 360) participated in a summer program at Northwestern University. The ages ranged from 11 to 15, and the average grade level was 7.9. Household incomes ranged from $50,000 to $59,000, and a majority of the students were White (64.4%). The other large ethnic group represented was Asian students at 29.7%. A second set of students were involved in a program held at Argonne National Laboratory. Students ranged in age from 11 to 14, the average grade level was 7.0, and the household incomes for this group were in the same range. The ethnic groups part of this sample was White students (60.9%), Asian students (27.2%) and African American students (8.7%).

The researchers predicted the program would negatively impact academic self-concept. Based on prior research, they anticipated that academic self-concept would decrease from before the programs began until the programs ended. They found that scholastic competence was significantly lower during the preprogram period (scores from preprogram assessment were significantly lower than scores for the first day of the program) and scores were significantly lower from preprogram assessment to the last day of the program, but differences in scores were not significantly different during the program. Though the authors celebrate that the scores did not lower during the program, it does not appear that academic self-concept recovered during the program.
Schneider, Clegg, Bryne, Ledingham, and Crombie (1989) were interested in the determination of differences in self-concept (academic, social, physical, and global) between gifted and nongifted youth. They also wanted to determine whether schooling context, gender, and IQ were significant contributors to difference in gifted youth. They had four samples part of this study. One set of youth came from a self-contained gifted program. For some to all of the day, gifted youth were in classes with each other. The second group of gifted youth was the integrated gifted sample. These students were not involved in self-contained classes. The comparison groups for the gifted youth came from the same classes as the integrated gifted students. For each gifted child chosen from the class, a child at random was chosen (random control sample) and another child was chosen that was matched based on gender, age, and grade in school (matched control sample). The students were in the 5th, 8th, and 10th grades. One hundred fifty youth were from the self-contained program, 204 were integrated gifted youth, 197 were in the matched control group, and 193 were in the random control group.

The fifth and eighth graders were administered the Perceived Competence Scale for Children. The 10th graders were administered the Self-Description Questionnaire-III. They found that academic self-concept was higher in the integrated group for the 5th graders, 8th graders, and 10th graders when all youth were compared. For the eighth grade youth, the self-contained gifted youth had higher academic self-concepts than the matched control group.

When they looked at the impact of school setting, the integrated group had higher academic self-concept than the self-contained group in the fifth and eighth grade. Though the difference was not significant in the 10th grade, the authors note that the
integrated group had higher academic self-concept scores. Among the four subscales compared, the only significant differences were realized in the academic domain.

A final study (de K. Monteith & de Wet, 1984) sought to map out differences between gifted achievers and gifted underachievers and between gifted youth and average achievers and underachievers on personality factors, school outcomes, and academic self-concept. de K. Monteith and de Wet used the Self-Concept of Ability Scale and a scale that measured feelings about school. The sample consisted of 2,511 standard-10 students from South Africa.

To assess their research questions, they created standardized discrepancy scores, with negative scores equaling performing under ability and positive scores meaning the opposite. Out of the larger sample size, they chose 50 who were true representations of the four groups (50 of the highest or lowest in the discrepancy scores). Along with comparing the two gifted groups together, the researchers also compared gifted underachievers to average underachievers.

They found that gifted underachievers have lower academic self-concept (i.e., these students perceive themselves as less successful in school and less able against peers). Average youth had even lower scores in academic self-concept than the gifted youth. They concluded that the greatest difference between the two gifted groups is in academic self-concept, feelings about school, and study habits. The greatest difference between the gifted and nongifted youth was in academic self-concept and whether one was a concrete or abstract thinker, with gifted youth being abstract thinkers more often.

1990’s
As with research in the 70’s and 80’s, the literature in the 90’s is partly characterized by researchers contrasting academic self-concept in gifted youth with youth not so identified. There was also the growing tendency to compare different types of gifted youth, be they moderately or highly gifted, male or female, African American or White. The first self-conscious examination of the state of self-concept research with gifted youth also occurs during this time, and other researchers lean upon theory developed by Marsh to consider facets of academic self-concept and moreover utilize more sophisticated tools of analysis to generate their conclusions. Lastly, two unpublished studies by Verna and her colleagues (1997, 1998) supply inconsistent findings that could be the function of unproven instrumentation.

Six studies compare and contrast gifted youth with nongifted youth and/or other gifted youth, with a predominate focus on analyzing differences within gifted youth. Cooley, Dewey, and Courtland (1991) study is the lone study across the three decades of research in academic self-concept in gifted adolescents that examines academic self-concept in high-ability African American youth. By comparing 35 African American adolescents with three groups of 35 White youth on the Self-Competence for Children Scale, they determined that African American youth did not differ in academic self-esteem (using their parlance). Moreover, academic self-concept mirrored general findings about this construct in other gifted youth in that academic self-concept was high and positive.

Worrell, Roth, and Gabelko (1998) were interested in determining whether there were age and gender differences in aspects of self-concept. The sample consisted of 311 students from the 7th-11th grade. There were 155 males and 156 females. Ages ranged
from 12-18, with the mean age being 14.53. The instruments used were the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (for global self-esteem) and Harter’s Self-Perception for Adolescents. Utilizing a factor analysis, the constructs operationalized in the study were scholastic competence, (low) peer support or social competence, and athletic self-concept.

The researchers hypothesized the younger students would be the most affected by the BFLPE. This hypothesis was not supported, as there were no gender or age differences in scholastic competence. Moreover, scholastic competence was correlated with social self-concept and global self-esteem. The authors partly credit a lack of difference in age and academic self-concept to their decision to collect one data point for the sample.

Kelly and Jordan (1990), Van Boxtel and Mönks (1992) and Ablard (1997) wondered whether academic self-concept would be impacted not only by whether a student was gifted or nongifted, but whether a student was gifted in different domains (Ablard), or whether the student was achieving or underachieving (Van Boxtel & Mönks). Kelly and Jordan sought to learn whether there would be differences in academic self-concept and social self-concept in students that were highly gifted, moderately gifted, and average as delineated by performance on standardized assessments of math and verbal ability. The students came from neighborhoods that ranged from economically disadvantaged to upper-middle class. They used The ME: Self-Concept Scale for Gifted Children to operationalize academic self-concept and found that highly gifted students, both male and female, endorsed significantly higher values for scholastic competence, and the moderately gifted youth had higher academic self-concepts than average youth.
Ablard (1997) theorized that type of giftedness (verbal or math) would have a bearing on social versus academic self-concept, especially for females. Utilizing a sample of 174 eighth grade gifted students, she demarcated the group based on SAT scores and constructed 4 groups for comparisons: moderate performers in math and verbal ability, high performers in math and verbal ability, high math performers, and high verbal performers. She used Bracken’s subscales (Academic and Social) from the Multidimensional Self-Concept Scale. She mentions that the total score from this indicator is well correlated with several self-concept instruments, including Piers-Harris Scale and the SDQ-II. The three groups of gifted youth endorsed higher values for academic self-concept than the norming sample for the instrument and there were no differences in academic self-concept based on gender or group.

Van Boxtel and Mönks (1992) wondered if there would be differences in gifted achieving and underachieving youth in general, social and academic self-concept. Their sample of 772 youth were also divided into four groups: youth who were highly (or above average) intelligent, highly creative, high in GPA (many-sided gifted youth); youth who were highly (or above average) intelligent, not as creative, high in GPA (unidimensional gifted youth); youth who were highly (or above average) intelligent and low in GPA (gifted underachievers); and youth average in intellect, creativity, and GPA (the control group). Academic self-concept was operationalized with the most highly reliable items of a German scale (no name given) and an evaluation of one’s cognitive functioning subscale.

Both gifted groups endorsed higher values for academic self-concept than the other two groups. The academic self-concept scores for the underachievers were lower
than average peers. They conclude that IQ does not directly affect academic self-concept. Utilizing path analysis, they found that general self-concept and academic self-concept have relatively the same effect on the academic self-concept items used in the study. Academic achievement is highly and directly related to academic self-concept but not general self-concept. So, the items in academic self-concept represent general self-concept, but general self-concept is impacted by other variables. Finally, intelligence negligibly impacts general self-concept. They conclude that academic achievement mediates the relationship between IQ and general self-concept. GPA also heavily impacts academic self-concept.

They argue their results support a strong correlation between general self-concept and academic self-concept. Academic self-concept is impacted heavily by achievement in school and not as much by intelligence. They conclude that not only is self-concept multidimensional, “It is not high intelligence that seems to play the most important (and direct) role [on academic self-concept], but the actual academic achievement level” (p. 183).

Verna and her colleagues (Verna & Campbell, 1998; Verna, Campbell, and Beasley, 1997) were interested in exploring family structure, family process, and SES on academic self-concept in gifted Asian and White students in one study (Verna & Campbell, 1998) and gifted adolescents in the second study (Verna et al., 1997). Verna and Campbell utilized the Self-Confidence Attribute Attitude Scale with White and Asian youth who were Westinghouse Talent Search finalists and semifinalists. Verna et al. did not specify where they obtained their academic self-concept items. In both studies, paradoxical findings were realized. Verna and Campbell found that math and science
self-concepts were not significant predictors of achievement in these two areas, and Verna et al. reported that academic self-concept did not predict GPA in math and science course or math and science scores on standardized measures. Other findings include SES was a large effect on academic self-concept in the White youth, and academic self-concept were negatively influenced by parental pressure and parental help for White youth.

It is noteworthy that the Verna studies are unpublished contributions to the literature. Though these papers were presented several years after Hoge and Renzulli (1993) conducted their meta-analysis of self-concept research, the inconsistency represented by the Verna studies along with the variability in assessment of self-concept generally (and academic self-concept specifically) are reflective of the findings from their work. Three driving questions guided Hoge and Renzulli’s inquiry:

1 – Are there differences in self-concept between gifted and nongifted youth?
2 – What impact does labeling have on the self-concept of gifted youth?
3 – Does placement in special programming impact self-concept in gifted youth?

Effect sizes served as the basis for the results in the study. They constructed them by subtracting the mean self-concept score for nongifted youth from the mean self-concept score for gifted youth. They took this number and divided it by the standard deviation for the nongifted youth. This process transformed their g scores to a g’ scores. The g’ scores were converted to d scores to account for sample size variability. Positive scores mean higher self-concept scores for gifted youth; negative scores were high self-concept scores for nongifted youth.
They report that the difference between gifted and nongifted youth in academic self-concept is pretty robust (ES = .47) and is in favor of gifted youth. There are no gender differences when the comparison is between gifted and nongifted youth. Caveats offered are that the studies were few in number, the results varied widely, and giftedness and self-concept were measured variably.

When considering special programming, higher self-concept scores are realized for youth in “regular” classes versus youth in four types of gifted programming – special class, a special school, enrichment in-class, and pull-out programming (ES = -.51 across the four comparisons with regular classes). For gifted youth in different types of gifted programming, three studies show that academic self-concept is higher in youth who participate in pull-out programs in regular classes over youth in self-contained classes (ES’s range from -.47 to -1.43). Two studies have reported on changes in academic self-concept before and after participation in gifted programming. Academic self-concept lowered for youth after movement into homogenous classes for gifted students (ES = -.51), with one study realizing an interaction between IQ and group: Change in academic self-concept was mostly in gifted youth with (relatively) lower IQs (ES = -.81) than the higher IQ group (ES = .02). They did not find a study that addressed their second question directly.

At the conclusion of their paper, they offer four recommendations to improve self-concept research in gifted studies:

- Longitudinal studies should be employed
- The gifted variable needs to be more explicit; the means of selecting gifted youth must be more sound and related to the definition of giftedness guiding the study
- Sounder instrumentation must be used. They encourage the use of the SDQ by Marsh, the Piers-Harris Children’s Self-Concept Scale, and the Perceived Competence Scale for Children by Harter

- Research designs should account for variables like labeling, programming, social comparison, performance, and expectations from significant others (i.e., peers, teachers, parents, etc.)

Essentially, the meta-analysis appeared to be urging the research community interested in gifted studies and self-concept to engage in a more substantive and sophisticated examination of what is occurring with this construct with gifted children and adolescents. A more wholesale acceptance of multidimensionality and thus distinct aspects of self-concept required specific investigation of aspects of the self. Moreover, prior research in academic self-concept to this point, though important, was largely descriptive and mostly driven by the implicit assumption that a high IQ in and of itself implies some advantage. Van Boxtel and Mönks’s (1992) assertion that academic self-concept is reflective of academic achievement rather than an intelligence quotient exhorted researchers to begin examining the processes inherent in an academic self-conception of a gifted or high-ability youth. A focus on process would help researchers interested in this population contribute to the greater body of literature about academic self-concept by making findings amenable to theory development (Harter, 1996).

Though one of the final studies for this decade is before the Hoge and Renzulli (1993) study, the remaining studies for this decade are reflective of the charge they issued to transform the way self-concept research generally and academic self-concept research specifically is conducted. Pyryt and Mendaglio (1994) used a sample of 98 gifted and
nongifted eighth and ninth graders to validate an instrument they had developed to assess self-concept. As expected and consistent with prior research, academic self-concept contributed the most to differences in self-concept. Hoge and McSheffrey (1991) also validated Harter’s revised Self-Perception Profile for Children by assessing the theory underpinning this instrument, namely that self-concept differentiates with age and there are distinct self-concept domains. They also questioned the makeup of general self-concept in gifted youth and whether there would be gender differences.

Students endorsed higher values for scholastic competence than the norming sample, with girls endorsing higher values than boys. Based on this evidence as well as lack of difference in global self-worth, they contend that enrichment classes may be extra beneficial for girls. They were able to substantiate the independence in the constructs based on moderate correlations between the self-concept domains, with values ranging from -.05 to .42. All of the subscales were correlated with global self-worth; the highest correlation between subscales was of .42 between scholastic and social competence.

Utilizing multiple regression to predict global self-worth in the students based on gender and grade in school, scholastic competence was a significant predictor for girls and boys, and scholastic competence was more important for girls. They note that this is not typical with average youth at these grade levels. Scholastic competence was also a significant predictor of global self-worth in sixth graders. Lastly, they conclude that though they did not believe they established proof of developmental change, they used an ineffective (narrow age range, cross-sectional analysis) design for truly addressing that question.
Williams and Montgomery (1994, 1995) sought to examine the frame of reference theory with gifted youth. According to Williams and Montgomery (1994, 1995), Marsh stipulates that students’ self-concept is influenced by an internal comparison within the student of relative ability in classes (comparing English and math to help delineate the math self-concept) and a external comparison with others about a particular subject matter (comparison with others in math class to delineate the math self-concept). The frame of reference used, whether internal or external, can influence the direction of academic self-concepts. This theory is statistically represented by a strong positive relationship between math and verbal achievement, significant positive direct effects between verbal self-concept and verbal achievement and significant positive direct effects between math self-concept and math achievement. The impact of verbal achievement on math self-concept is low and negative, and the same holds true for math achievement and verbal self-concept.

The sample consisted of 103 ninth graders. The majority of the students were White and middle class or upper middle class. The students completed the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the math and verbal total scores were used to operationalize achievement. The students also completed The ME: Self-Concept Scale for Gifted Children, a scale developed to measure self-concept in gifted youth. Some items were changed to reflect a focus on math and verbal areas, and 5 of the 40 items were deleted.

Utilizing path analysis, they reported positive significant correlations between the verbal and math achievement and near zero correlations between math and verbal self-concept. Verbal achievement positively affected verbal self-concept, and math achievement positively affected math self-concept. This sufficed as proof of the external
arm of the theory. Verbal achievement had a significant negative effect on math self-concept, but the path from math achievement to verbal self-concept did not quite reach significance though it was negative – support for the internal frame of reference.

They conclude that the internal/external (I/E) frame of reference is an accurate means of explaining the development of math and verbal self-concept in gifted youth. Because the path from math achievement to verbal self-concept did not reach significance, a finding replicated in studies with nongifted youth, they further state that verbal self-concept is more influenced by internal comparisons than math self-concept. Practically speaking, this means that for two youth who achieve at the same level in math, the gifted youth who endorses lower verbal self-concept will have a higher math self-concept. For two youth who exhibit strong verbal achievement, low achievement in the math domain does not necessarily lead to a more robust verbal self-concept.

Williams (1996) also examined congruence between performance and academic self-concept in gifted adolescents. The sample consisted of 103 students, 49 males and 54 females. The students were administered the ME: Self-Concept Scale for Gifted Children and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. The bases of the study were math and verbal self-concept and language and math scores. The academic self-concept and achievement scores were converted to z-scores and subtracted from each other. A congruence classification system was used to determine congruence between beliefs about ability and actual performance.

She reports that the students were more congruent in math (45% of females and 39% of males) than verbal areas (26% of females and 27% of females) and concludes that a majority of the students fall outside of the “congruent range” – 55% of females and
61% of males in math and 74% of females and 73% of males in verbal areas. She warns that talented students may be at risk of unrealistic perceptions of the self in relation to actual performance and recommends practitioners bolster performance for youth who believe they are more able than they demonstrate or bolster academic self-concept for youth who perform at levels higher than their academic self-concept would predict.

2000’s

With the exception of one comparative study between high-ability and nongifted youth and youth with learning disabilities (Montague & van Garderen, 2003), the studies examining academic self-concept in high-ability youth utilized comparisons as part of the basis for process-oriented studies investigating this construct. Researchers during this time were validating instruments, examining the internal/external frame of reference effect, and/or examining the BFLPE with gifted youth. Considering the applicability of the I/E frame of reference model was the most researched, findings from those studies will be presented first.

Five studies examined the I/E frame of reference model with gifted youth, with three of the five utilizing gifted adolescents from China as the sample. As a review, Marsh (1986) makes the following predictions about math and verbal self-concept via the I/E frame of reference model:

(a) Math and verbal achievement are highly correlated with each other

(b) Achievement in the domain will have a strong, positive effect on the self-concept in that area and a negative, direct effect on self-concept in the alternate area.

(c) The competing effects of an internal frame of reference for evaluating competence (estimation of math ability based on comparison of performance in
English) and an external frame for evaluating competence (estimation of math ability based on comparison with peers in math courses) will cancel each other out, such that the two self-concepts will not be related to each other, even if achievement in the two domains may be similar.

Mui, Yeung, Low, and Jin (2000) were interested in the factor structure of math, school, verbal and general self-concept in Chinese adolescents. Plus, they also wanted to determine whether the I/E model generalized to Chinese youth. The sample consisted of seventh through ninth grade students ($n = 245$ boys and $n = 250$ girls). They compared two sets of gifted youth, the “average” gifted and gifted students being accelerated through coursework in middle school.

The SDQ-II was used to operationalize the self-concept variables in the study. Exam scores from Chinese and math obtained a month before the SDQ-II was administered were used to operationalize achievement for the I/E model. They surveyed school attitudes through the School Attitudes Measures to establish discriminate validity, and they surveyed teacher perception of student school work.

Through the use of a CFA, Mui et al. (2000) found that the self-concepts theorized by the SDQ-II fit the data from the students. They ascertained the I/E model three ways: once with the entire group, once with the accelerated youth, and once with the average gifted youth. With the entire group, the data performed as theorized except the path from verbal achievement to math self-concept did not reach significance (though it was negative). With the accelerated group of gifted students ($n=160$), the exceptions to the I/E model were the paths from Chinese to verbal self-concept and from Chinese to math self-concept were not significant, though they were in the direction theorized. The values for
the path coefficients were also smaller. The researchers conjecture that the internal frame of reference may not be as strong for these youth. They also note the results could be due to the sample size, as the number of youth in the accelerated program was below the cutoff value for best practice in performing a CFA. For the average gifted youth ($n = 335$), the data performed as theorized and the values of the paths were large.

Finally, due to the exceptions to the I/E theory proposed by Marsh (1986), Mui et al. (2000) examined factor invariance to make sure the paths were similar for the two groups. By constraining the factor loadings and the path coefficients, the data were a good fit for the model. So, despite the differences in the way the I/E model performed for the two groups, it indeed explained the development of math and verbal self-concept.

Dai (2001, 2002) reported findings from two studies examining this model with Chinese gifted adolescents. In 2001, he conducted a study and a replication study to ascertain whether there were gender differences in academic self-concept generally and based on subject area, self-esteem, and motivation between high-ability and general education youth. The sample consisted of 208 10th graders, with 90 being from the “key”, or gifted, school. He used the SDQ to operationalize self-esteem, academic self-concept, math self-concept, and verbal self-concept, though he did not use all of the items from these self-concept domains.

He used a MANOVA to analyze the results, and he controlled for prior ability in math and Chinese. When comparing the students, he found a main effect for gender in verbal self-concept, with girls endorsing higher values, and a main effect for gender in math self-concept, with boys endorsing higher values. There were no differences based on school type; however there was a significant interaction between gender and school
type in math self-concept. Boys endorsed higher values for math self-concept in the general education school, but this did not occur in the key school. There was a significant interaction of gender by school type on general academic self-concept, with girls rating themselves higher in overall academic self-concept than boys at the key school and the opposite being true at the general education school. There was also a significant correlation between academic self-concept and academic motivation that replicated findings from American studies. The exception was that the relationship between verbal self-concept and academic motivation was not significant for participants at both schools.

Considering the unanticipated finding that the gifted girls were as confident as their male peers in math self-concept that Dai (2001) says was inconsistent with prior research, Dai conducted a replication study, wherein he compared a second set of gifted and general education youth from the same school \((N = 208)\) 10th graders). Based on entrance exams, the top 50 students were placed in self-contained classes.

There were gender effects for verbal and math self-concept. Girls endorsed higher values for verbal self-concept, and boys endorsed higher values for math self-concept. Findings did not realize an interaction for gender and class type. Hence, the finding about high-ability girls having comparable math self-concepts was not duplicated. Dai (2001) concluded by wondering whether the findings were due to school type rather than gender.

In his second study, Dai (2002) investigated whether parents also used an internal and external frame for evaluating their child’s ability in math and verbal domains, whether the students and parents operated under the same stereotypical assumptions
about competence based on academic domain, and whether parent perceptions of ability and academic self-concept mediated achievement. The sample consisted of 266 youth, 125 male and 141 female. He had achievement data (exam scores) for 253 of these youth. The majority (94%) were in two-parent homes. The education level of the parents was variable, and the students were selected from two schools, with one practicing ability grouping. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), structural equation modeling, and meditational analyses (a subset of analyses within structural equation modeling) were utilized to analyze the data. Verbal, math, and general academic self-concepts were operationalized with the SDQ-II. Three items from each subscale were translated into Chinese for the study. These nine items are the basis of analysis.

He did find the BFLPE. For the 50 youth who were in the high-ability group in their school, the gifted youth had higher general academic self-concept scores but did not differ from the general education youth in verbal or math self-concept. Through a CFA, the factor structure fit the data, so there were indeed verbal, math, and general academic self-concepts represented by the data.

The I/E model proposed by Marsh (1986) fit the data, with one exception. Rather than there being no relationship between math and verbal self-concept, there was a negative relationship. Gender did moderate the fit of the model, and he demonstrated that academic performance in the verbal domain significantly effected verbal self-concept for girls. The I/E model was slightly modified for the parents: The internal reference effects were eliminated from the model to enhance parsimony. Dai (2002) reasons parents hold more objective views of their child’s ability than the youth, and they are less likely to be influenced by the perspective of their child’s sense of their ability.
Gender had an impact on self-concept, such that gender was a larger effect for girls and verbal self-concept, and gender was a larger effect for boys and math self-concept. Parents perceptions were also impacted by the gender of their child, but not as greatly as with the girls and boys themselves. Despite these differences, Dai (2002) feels these findings support societal biases impacting beliefs youth develop about how they are able.

He also was able to enhance fit to a model demonstrating impact of self-concept measures from parents and their children on achievement at Time 2 through the mediation of self-concept and parent’s perceptions on academic grades at Time 2. Dai (2002) concludes that there is tentative proof that academic self-concept and parent predictions have a bearing on academic outcomes. Also parent perception and academic self-concept of ability accounted for variance above and beyond prior grades on grades at Time 2.

Plucker and Stocking (2001) and Rinn, McQueen, Clark, and Rumsey (2008) examine the I/E frame of reference model with American youth participating in summer programs. Though the sample is not well-described for the Rinn et al. study, Plucker and Stocking utilize a sample that is predominately (78%) White, and, in both studies, the students were in high school. Rinn an her colleagues were interested in the possibility of gender differences, while Plucker and Stocking questioned whether the model explained self-concept development in youth who are highly able in several domains participating in extracurricular gifted programming. In both cases, path analyses revealed that the model performed as expected. Exceptions include a near-zero relationship between math and verbal achievement (Plucker & Stocking) and a lack of relationship between math
and verbal self-concepts (Rinn et al., 2008). Rinn and her colleagues termed this finding negative interdependency and conjecture that beliefs in competency in one area can negatively impact beliefs of competency in the other domain.

Noteworthy is confirmation that gifted youth make internal and external comparisons about academic competency. It is not clear why some of these studies are realizing a negative interdependency between math and verbal self-concepts and others are not. Plucker and Stocking (2001) argue that inconsistent findings may be due to achievement measures with ceiling effects, Dai (2001) wonders about impact of schooling, and a general question about the studies with Chinese youth (Dai, 2001 2002; Mui et al., 2000) is the relatively incomplete operationalization of the self-concept constructs.

Turning to an examination of the BFLPE, Rindermann and Heller (2005) and Preckel, Zeidner, Goetz, and Schleyer approach addressing whether ability grouping is effective with gifted youth from two different perspectives. Rindermann and Heller question whether the point of schooling should be the bolstering of academic self-concept at the expense of academic achievement while Preckel and her colleagues wonder whether minority status influences the strength of the BFLPE. Both studies examine the impact of the BFLPE within gifted samples rather than across ability groups, an approach not often practiced (Preckel et al.).

Rindermann and Heller (2005) used two samples of students, students from an accelerated gifted program (G8) and students from the regular Gymnasium, or gifted, program (G9) for a total sample size of 715 students. The report of the design is incomplete, but they do mention that the study is part of an ongoing, longitudinal study,
the students completed the SDQ, the researchers ran a CFA, and they are all adolescents of high school age.

They did find the BFLPE, but they also found that academic self-concept was higher in the G8 program, and the effect is larger than the effect for class IQ (β = .19 and -.14 respectively). They also computed indirect effects and found that though the average intelligence for the G8 school was negative, the sum of effects of intelligence on ability at Time 2 was positive, and the sum total of effects of school level on ability at Time 2 was positive. Lastly, they computed a global effect of school level on ability at Time 2 and found a positive effect. They conclude that attending a G8 school is good for growth in ability in gifted students, especially youth with IQs between 105 and 124.

In his published rebuttal, Marsh (2005) questioned their procedure. He argues that a number of variables were not assessed, and others were treated as individual level data rather than school- or class-level data. This practice could have led to inflated p-values for the class- and school-level data.

Preckel et al. (2008) surveyed a sample of 330 fourth through sixth grade and 439 seventh through ninth grade Israeli youth. The researchers utilized items from the Multidimensional Self-Concept Scale that had been translated into Hebrew during an earlier study conducted by two of the authors. Descriptive analyses showed that girls earned significantly higher grades than boys, the difference between girls and guys on academic self-concept and social self-concept was not significant, and academic self-concept was positively related to social self-concept (r = .37) and grades in the three classes (r = .46).
Hierarchical linear modeling of the data revealed they were able to duplicate the BFLPE within this group. Therefore, though individual grades were positively related to academic self-concept, the average for class achievement was negatively correlated to individual academic self-concept. When they controlled for gender, they found that boys were less impacted by BFLPE than girls. This was a small, but significant effect. There was a significant interaction between gender and gender-ratio on classes. Because variability in grades were not controlled, the researchers caution the reader that one cannot make a determination about the mean value for this interaction. However, a graphical representation of the interaction provided evidence for the argument that the girls’ academic self-concept was more negatively affected the more outnumbered they were by boys in class. Finally, they found that the relationship between grades and social self-concept was mediated by academic self-concept. When they controlled for academic self-concept, the relationship between social self-concept and grades became negative. The more socially competent the students felt, the poorer their grades.

The final set of studies of academics self-concept in gifted youth are concerned with establishing the construct validity of self-concept instruments. In particular, McCook and Siegle (2002, 2003a, 2003b) were interested in creating a self-concept measure that identified gifted underachievers. One study (Marsh, Plucker, & Stocking, 2001) sought to confirm the appropriateness of the SDQ-II for gifted adolescents.

In a study conducted in 1997, Plucker, Taylor, Callahan, and Tomchin administered the SDQ-II to a cohort of 459 high school students participating in a 2-week summer program. The means for the subscales were large, and the data was negatively skewed, especially in the academic domains. Though the reliability estimates for the
subscales of the SDQ-II coincided with previous reports, it appeared the management of missing data impacted the model fit of data in CFAs, such that the data resulted in a poor fit to the construct model proposed by Marsh. The researchers concluded that the factor validity of the instrument had not been verified with gifted adolescents, so, though the SDQ-II is sound, researchers and practitioners should be wary of multiple administrations with this population. Ceiling effects could influence interpretation of the results.

Marsh et al. (2003) reanalyzed the data from the Plucker et al., (1997) study. Along with including the 459 youth from the summer program in Virginia, they added responses from 818 youth participating in Duke TIP, another summer program for high-ability youth. They researchers report that there may have been some difficult with the handling of missing data in the prior study that could have impacted the instrument’s performance. An alternative hypothesis they offer for the poor fit could be the lack of correction for the extreme negative skew in the responses.

Through a series of eight analyses, four means of dealing with missing data (i.e., substituting the mean for the items for missing values, imputation, expectation maximization algorithm, and no substitution but depending on Marsh’s (1990) recommendation of item pairs for factor analyses) were paired with transformed and nontransformed responses. In the course of analyses, they duplicated what occurred in the 1997 study. However, by normalizing the data, they were able to establish good fit not only with the Duke sample but with the Virginia sample as well. The four methods proposed for managing the missing data did not improve model fit. Also, they analyzed whether the factor coefficients, variances and covariances would be appropriate for both samples and found that to be true. The researchers conclude that the SDQ-II is indeed
appropriate for gifted adolescents, highly reliable, and apropos for practitioners seeking to diagnose social/emotional development.

Turning to the McCoach and Siegle’s validation studies (2002, 2003a, 2003b), in 2002, the researchers sought to understand whether the factor structure of the academic self-perceptions (ASP) subscale of the School Attitude Assessment Survey-Revised (SAAS-R) operated similarly for gifted and general education students. The gifted sample was 78% White (n = 210 9th – 12th grade students) and the nongifted sample (n = 160 9th graders) was more diverse (30% African American, 21% Latino/a, 6% Asian, and 42% White), with most of the students in the school from lower middle class and middle class backgrounds.

The students completed the academic self-perceptions subscale and provided their GPAs. They found that the gifted students had higher ASPs than the general school sample, and that academic self-perceptions was moderately and positively related to GPA. Irrespective of group membership, the higher the GPA, the higher one’s academic self-perceptions.

They used multigroup CFA and structural equation modeling to assess the fit of three models for the two samples. The fully constrained the factors, left them unconstrained, and partially varied the constraints. Items 2 and 37, “I am intelligent” and “I am capable of getting straight A’s”, were left to vary and the other items were constrained (i.e., made equal across the groups). The path from academic self-perceptions to GPA was also constrained in the partially variant model.

The partially variant and the fully invariant model were a better fit to the data than the fully constrained model, with the partially invariant model performing more
adequately than the fully invariant model. The authors conclude that the lack of variability in Items 2 and 37 for the gifted sample coupled with the variability in these items with the general sample caused the model to operate differently for the two groups. Moreover, the variability of the nongifted sample and the lack of variability in the gifted sample was a concern. As they themselves admit, it is not clear if the findings are reflective of their sampling protocol.

In a second study, McCoach and Siegle (2003a) explicated the process for establishing the construct validity of the SAAS-R. They presented their process for moving through three iterations of the instrument that included piloting the instrument with diverse samples from across the United States, conducting CFAs to verify how well the items in the instrument operated, and writing and rewriting items.

The scale includes factors that assess Academic Self-Perceptions, Attitudes Toward School, Attitude Toward Teacher and Classes, Goal Valuation, and Motivation and Self-Regulation. These last two factors are highly correlated with each other at $r = .741$. Based on this correlation, the argument could be made that the scale measures four rather than five factors, but the CFA results supported the five-factor structure for the data with a sample of 537 complete cases.

Considering their primary interest was in diagnosing gifted underachievers, they administered the instrument to 176 gifted high school students from a convenience sample of 28 school districts spread throughout the US. Of the five subscales, achievers and underachievers were significantly different on four of the five subscales. Academic self-perceptions was not the subscale on which the students differed.
In the final study, the researchers (McCoach & Siegle, 2003b) used the SAAS-R to attempt to identify the factors that differentiated gifted achievers from underachievers. They also sought to predict group membership. The sample was made up of 178 gifted youth, 56 of them being underachievers. The students were 9th through 12th graders, with 101 being male. A majority of the sample (78%) was White. They completed a series of t-tests to determine differences in the subscales, and they used logistic regression to predict group membership.

Academic self-perceptions were not significantly different between the achievers and underachievers, and responses to this subscale could not be used to predict group membership. Both the achievers and achievers had high mean values. For example, over 50% of the underachievers had mean values of 6 or higher on a scale of 1-7, vis-à-vis 62% of achievers with means values of 6 or higher. They argue that irrespective of being an underachiever, their ability (IQ) protected their sense of competency. Though this final assertion is debatable and requires further validation, the exhaustiveness of their process of validating the SAAS-R is commendable.

Conclusions

The presentation of literature examining academic self-concept in African American and high-ability youth demonstrate several patterns. When considering the choices researchers have made about the analysis of academic-self-concept in African American youth, little attention has been devoted to deconstructing how academic self-concept functions. This area has also been marked by variable definitions and assessments of this construct, even for more contemporary studies. A critical evaluation of the state of academic self-concept in African American youth has not been conducted.
Instead, in lieu of addressing the above areas, researchers have been predominately interested in the role of social context in the academic domain, an important dimension of study for youth potentially navigating prejudicial educational landscapes. Researchers have revealed the impact of discrimination (Chavous et al., 2008), maternal optimism and familial routine (Seaton & Taylor, 2003), level of urbanicity (Sullivan et al., 2005), community support (Sanders, 1998), school ability (Marsh, 1987) and social status (Banks, 1984) on academic self-concept. Depth seems to have been sacrificed in favor of breadth.

Researchers investigating academic self-concept in high-ability youth have predominately focused on aspects of the educative experiences and its impact on academic self-concept (e.g., Marsh, 1991; Olszeweski, et al., 1987; Preckel et al., 2006) along with comparisons with youth based on level of IQ (e.g., Kelly & Jordan, 1990; Pyryt & Mendaglio, 1994; Van Boxtel & Mönks, 1992) and gender (e.g., Ablard, 1997; Hoge & McSheffrey, 1991). The study of academic self-concept in high-ability youth has benefited from a call by Hoge and Renzulli (1993) to engage in inquiry that reflects best practice and to begin disclosing how academic self-concept may operate with this population.

With both areas of researches, scant attention has been paid to variability in African American youth based on academic acumen. Exceptions include Seaton and Taylor (2003), Cooley et al. (1991), and Marsh’s (1987) work, with Cooley et al. being the lone researcher to explicitly focus on African American youth identified as high-ability. This seems an unfortunate oversight that needs addressing.
Researchers examining possible selves in youth have defined possible selves in such a way that an examination of self-concept through this lens is necessarily an examination of context, with an emphasis on time and environment. It is also a divergent means of defining self-concept, as the theory of a possible self pays credence to both stability, as exemplified by academic self-concept, and instability. This review will now turn to an examination of possible selves.

**Possible Selves**

Markus and Nurius (1986) also make the argument that the self is more “dynamic” than what is presented in the literature. They struggle against the constraints of a unidimensional self and propose that the conceptualization of possible selves or constructs that encapsulate possibilities for the self help contextualize our understanding not only of the self but the link between the self and motivation. Though possibilities for the self are infinitesimal, the possible selves one is apt to generate are individual, personal, and connected to the self that one is now. These two are also shaped by comparisons with others: “What others are now, I could become” (p. 954). A person’s possible selves are the embodiment of one’s goals, aspirations, and fears. So, though I am a graduate student, I could be an ABD that fails out of a doctoral program or an eventual awardee of a doctoral degree. I could be the self who is athletic and powerful or the self who struggles with diabetes because of an inactive lifestyle. It is this aspect to possible selves that allows them to be the construct that links the self and motivation.

Consequently, Markus and Nurius (1986) argue that possible selves serve three cognitive functions. One, possible selves function as personalized representations of one’s fears, threats, and goals. They are selves that one seeks to approach or selves one
seeks distance from. Two, an understanding of one’s possible selves provides a context from which to make meaning of events. A person with a hoped-for possible self of a chemist would interpret an F on a chemistry exam differently from a person who does not have that particular possible self. Thus, possible selves are most influenced by day-to-day triumphs and trials. Though one may have a stable self that has certain characteristics, being buffeted by positive and negative information could impact possible selves and influence how one sees the self at the present moment, the third function of possible selves. Harkening back to the understanding that the self is involved in social comparisons and further adding that the self is influenced by social situations in which it is involved, two assumptions that undergird Markus and Nurius’s argument about the self, Markus and Nurius combine these three functions for possible selves within a working self-concept, or one’s conception of the self that is responsive to the situation, event, or experience of the moment. The self is both stable and unstable, static and dynamic.

Markus and Nurius (1986) go on to present how the construct of possible selves manifest change. They argue challenges to one’s understanding of the self can usher in a sudden and overwhelming flood of “bad feeling” and trigger personal fears and anxieties due to the activation of threatening and feared possible selves. Despite the powerful impact the possible selves and connected feeling have on the self, they question whether this up swell of sentiment could be captured by instruments that conceive of the self in general or “average” terms. To somehow miss capturing this aspect of the self glosses over the journey the self takes through momentary insecurities (and upswings) that could potentially predate long-term change.
Possible Selves and Motivation

Ruvolo and Markus (1992) found that people who imagined themselves as successful were quicker in endorsing successful possible selves and slower in endorsing negative possible selves, persisted longer on tasks of mild difficulty, and scored higher on tasks requiring mild effort. With a task that required more effort or concentration to complete, performance between the groups was not statistically different. The researchers hypothesized that this lack of significance was due to the difficulty of the task. People primed to see themselves as successful or to see themselves as failing did not have ready access to their possible selves because of the focus required to complete the task assigned.

Task difficulty can prevent people from running the mile in the time they set for themselves or getting that cherished graduate degree. Oyserman et al. (2006) addressed the dilemma implied by not having ready access to possible selves because of the distracting nature of taxing effort in school-aged children. Through the use of open-ended interview questions that asked the students in their study to list their academic possible selves (APS) and their strategies for realizing these APSs, they found that sustainable APSs are buttressed by strategies to ensure realizing the potential end state. Just having any strategy will not do. Rather, realistic plans have to be created, failures have to be framed in a way that do not hinder continued action, and social identities need to coincide with aspirations. If people do not take real action to buttress a possible self, if failure is allowed to obstruct execution, and/or if a social identity does not support the maintenance of an APS, the possible self will not be realized. The significance of this study is that the researchers make the argument that nonsustainable APSs are the
mechanisms that explain why, even in the face of self-expressed ambitious academic and career goals, young teens can be derailed.

Oyserman, Bybee, and Terry (2006) contend that strategies to realize possible selves must be part of the construction of possible selves to facilitate self-regulatory behavior. Without the creation of strategies, or concrete, detailed, realistic and reasonable plans, youth drift and waver in actualizing aspirations. Moreover, balance in possible selves, or the presence of fears for the selves and hopes for the self in the same domain (i.e., academics) help bolster self-regulatory behavior.

Possible Selves and Race

Oyserman has been a prominent voice in inquiry investigating possible selves with youth of color. She argues that though adolescence is a time when youth are encouraged to try on multiple selves to evaluate fit, the social context of youth could limit the possible selves that are pursued. Youth come to understand possible selves that are appropriate to them based on feedback from the world around them and via the lived experience of those they care for (Oyserman, Gant, & Ager, 1995). According to Oyserman (2007) then, “…motivation is identity based” (p. 432). Possibilities for the self may also be shaped by personal successes and failures one experiences and the interpretation of those successes and failures (Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006). Though a youth is not limited to the immediate environment in constructing possibilities for the self (Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006), a critical element in determining possibilities to pursue is the likelihood of attainment of the possible self (Oyserman & Fryberg). A youth pursuing unusual goals must therefore engage in savvy interpersonal negotiations with
important people that have the power to bolster or impede the strength and direction of goals (Oyserman & Saltz, 1993).

Moreover, investigators of possible selves have often chosen to couch analysis of possible selves within lenses that privilege context to showcase differential processes at work for youth and highlight the impact of societal biases. A research area that receives considerable attention is the variability in the ways school achievement is conceived and pursued by people of differing ethnicities. Several researchers have linked differing academic goals to the possible selves of different ethnic groups and speak to academic possible selves being hampered by stereotypes (Kao, 2000; Oyserman et al., 2006).

The possible selves of Latin youth involved avoiding the feared self of doing manual labor as an occupation (Oyserman et al., 2006). In an ethnographic analysis, Matute-Bianchi (1986) reported that some adolescents of Mexican descent were neither as savvy in choosing the right classes to get into prestigious colleges nor as definitive about what careers they would like to pursue compared to Japanese American students. Despite these boundaries, these students worked hard to succeed academically and socially, as defined by the culture of their school.

Other adolescents of Mexican descent were trapped by stereotypes held by others in the school and by peers they admired that achievement in school was synonymous with being a turncoat. Further, they were not seen as valuable members of the school community. Instead, they were to be feared and avoided. So, despite aspirations to graduate from high school, many of the students cut class and were overly involved in disciplinary action (Matute-Bianchi, 1986).

Possible Selves and African American Students
Several studies were found that addressed the possibilities for the self held by African American adolescents. Oyserman has contributed greatly to this area by examining possible selves in working-class or low-income inner city youth. Abrams and Aguilar (2005) evaluated whether a possible selves intervention was identifiable in counseling services for juvenile offenders; Hunter, Friend, Murphy, Williams-Wheeler, and Laughinghouse (2006) interviewed two groups of predominately low-income African American males about masculinity; and Richardson and Eccles (2007) selected six students who participated in the Maryland Adolescent Development in Context Study to examine the impact of voluntary reading on possible selves and academic attainment.

The six students part of Richardson and Eccles (2007) sample were middle class, as familial incomes ranged from $45,000 to $49,000 for the four African American youth and $50,000 to $54,999 for the White youth. Though it was not true for every student, for the youth who did engage in considerations for possibilities for the self through outside reading, their reading choices allowed youth to envision and live into possibilities for the self that rebutted racial and gendered stereotypes and reaffirmed or coalesced values and beliefs about the world. While with most of the students, outside reading was tangentially or indirectly related to educational attainment, involvement, and engagement, one student was explicit in her belief that outside reading directly related to the course of study she pursued in college and her eventual career as an English teacher.

Hunter et al. (2006) revealed the thoughts, beliefs and feelings of 20 teen youth and young adult males who grew up without fathers. In the course of discussing what the absence of a father meant to their understanding of manhood and the process of maturing into manhood, the young men talked of the possible men they would like to be and the
type of man they would like to avoid becoming. The manhood the young men valorized encompassed the following characteristics: a “sense of integrity and strength of self, a core sense of responsibility, and connections and obligations to family, community, and race, and a sense of faith…” – p. 443. The young men were unanimous in their desire to avoid being “deadbeat daddies”.

Abrams and Aguilar (2005) were interested in whether the self-concept and behavior change framework theorized by Stein and Markus was evident in the counseling services and student reflections of juvenile offenders detained in a residential facility. The framework stipulates that negative trends be acknowledged in a way that does not threaten a positive self-concept (will people accept negative feedback and wonder about how to change or will they deny the negative info they receive and instead engage in behaviors that protect self-esteem) and hoped-for and feared selves and strategies to live into the hoped-for selves and avoid the feared selves be created.

The sample consisted of 3 African Americans, 2 Hmong, 1 Native American, 2 Caucasians, and 1 Biracial youth aged 15-17. The facility was located in multicultural urban/suburban county in southeast Minnesota. Of the 10 students, 5 students were interviewed during a follow-up session 2 months after being released from the facility.

The counseling framework utilized by staff at the facility was cognitive behavior therapy (CBT). The staff also engaged in behavior modification techniques when students broke rules at the facility. The basis of reflection for the youth are treatment contracts; essays written by the students encouraged youth to reflect on behavior, trends, family, unresolved emotional issues, and new ways of being.
Seven students were able to envision both hoped-for selves and feared selves. Often, the feared selves were dramatic images like a self that was in a casket or imprisoned. When students were asked to generate strategies for approaching the hoped-for self and avoiding the feared self, very few strategies were created for avoiding the feared self, although some students were able to generate some concrete strategies for living into the hoped-for self.

Upon follow-up with five students, two were part of juvenile facilities or incarcerated, and three were going to school or working and living at home. The five students indicated that they struggled to identify facets in their environment that could encourage and support the change they envisioned while in the facility. The researchers conclude that more time be devoted to helping these youth generate concrete, tangible plans for leaving the facility and turning their lives around in positive ways. Based on the sample, this aspect of the counseling in the facility was a little haphazard and incomplete.

As mentioned previously, Oyserman has been a prominent voice in the dissemination of the make-up of possible selves of low-income, inner-city African Americans. She has focused on academic possible selves because she argues schooling is a significant part of an adolescent’s life (Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006). Oyserman and colleagues (Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006; Oyserman, Brickman & Rhodes, 2007; Oyserman, Terry, & Bybee, 2002) have conducted several interventions to enhance the salience of positive academic possible selves, assess balance in possible selves (i.e., positive and negative selves in the same domain), and help youth generate strategies to realize positive academic selves. Enhancement in these areas has resulted in better
grades, increased school involvement, concern for school, enhanced self-regulatory behavior, and more positive evaluations from teachers.

In light of Ogbu’s oft-repeated argument that Black youth struggle in schools due to the worry that academic achievement is perceived as “acting White”, Oyserman and her colleagues (Oyserman, Gant, & Ager, 1995; Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2003) weighed in on whether a salient racial identity enhances academic achievement or impedes it. In particular, they argue that gendered racialized socialization practices ask young men to focus on “action, struggle, and survival” (p. 1220; Oyserman et al., 1995) as a means of coping with racism while young women are asked to build relationships. Oyserman et al. (1995) argues that the emphasis on relationships may be more conducive to academic achievement, as young women couch academic acumen within a desire to honor family and fortify feelings of kinship with the African American community. As justification for this belief, Oyserman et al. (1995) found that connectedness, a facet of a racial identity measure they created for young teens, predicted increases in strategy use to attain academic possible selves from fall to spring and resulted in an increase in school involvement from fall to spring for young men.

Finally, Oyserman et al. (2003) suggest that balance in possible selves for young men is related to effort. Particularly, African American young women are more invested in doing homework and trying hard in school, and males who exhibit balance in possible selves are more likely to exert more effort in school. They conclude that

…when social context is limiting and group membership functions to subtly or not so subtly shape the selves one ‘tries on’ in the process of adolescent development, we propose that conceptualizing oneself as a group member,
becoming aware of stereotypes and limitations, and developing a perspective of oneself as succeeding as a group member, allows a way out. (p.1230)

Possible Selves and High-Ability Students

Two studies examine possible selves in high-ability youth. Both studies are reports from science enrichment programs, and Stake and Mares (2001) and Stake and Nickens (2005) are particularly interested in the effectiveness of these programs in impacting possibilities for the self in science careers for girls. Stake and Mares argue that effects of science enrichment programs may have gone undetected due to the methodology used to assess change in the students. To address this concern, the researchers used several measures of change not only at the completion of the program, but 6-months following the enrichment program. The researchers requested student comments regarding change, parent ratings of change, parent comments about change, and students’ ratings of change. The researchers also sought to determine which students benefited the most from the programs.

They surveyed youth from three different versions of a summer program: a 4-week introduction, a 6-week program for students who completed the 4 week introduction and an additional 2 weeks to complete a science project, and a 6 week program that was the combination of these two. The researchers structured the three pools, such that students who completed the extra 2 weeks were not counted as participants in the 4-week introductory program.

One hundred fifty eight students participated in the 4-week program. Sixty-one additional students agreed to stay on for an additional 2 weeks to complete the science project, and 111 students were participants in the 6-week program. The sample was
made up of 165 girls and 165 boys. The ethnic makeup of the students was 74.8% White, 13% Asian, 8.5% African American and 3.6% other.

Stake and Noonan developed the items for the Performance Self-Esteem Scale (PSES) in 1985. It is a 15-item instrument reported as related to several outcome variables like career plans, response to success/failure on experimental tasks, and feelings about general achievement. The Science Self-Concept Scale was published in 1991. The two possible selves indicators (future personal self as scientist and future career self as scientist) were Likert-type scales developed by the researchers.

There were significant differences in the three groups in science confidence (science self-concept) and possible personal self as scientist. Scores were significantly higher at follow up for science confidence and marginally higher for personal self as scientist ($p = .07$). There were also significant differences in the three groups in personal self as scientist scores. The students who completed the 6-week program had lower possible selves scores at follow-up than the other two groups.

There was a significant quadratic effect for change over time for the three groups in assessment of possible selves and science confidence. Students at pretesting for the 4-week program and the 6-week program had lower scores at posttesting than at pretesting. However, there were also greater increases for these students between posttesting and follow-up 6 months later.

A series of hierarchical regression equations were also computed. The dependant variables was science attitudes (i.e., science confidence, the two possible selves, and motivation for a science career) at posttesting. Demographic variables, history with science support variables (family support, peer support, teacher encouragement, science
teacher as role-model, same-sex teacher vs. opposite-sex teacher as role model), and PSES scores at pretesting were the independent variables used in the analysis. The history of science support variables predicted science confidence and future career self as a scientist. PSES scores were also related to changes in future self-assessments. PSES was significantly related to future career self at $p = .0001$ significance level. Family encouragement and PSES predicted future career self at $p = .05$ level, and PSES predicted future personal-self at $p = .05$ level.

Stake and Nickens (2005) made the argument that the nature of relationships with peers has an impact on whether youth can come to see a future in the sciences. Though envisioning a future in science is important for young boys and young girls, the researchers were particularly interested in how well the nature of peer relationships influenced the possible self as scientist for young women. Women are often not welcomed by male peers, their friends are often not interested in exploring science in more depth, and girls participate in fewer science-based extracurricular activities. So, the researchers anticipated that involvement in a science program would be more important socially for females and would have longer lasting effects.

This study is the second part of a program evaluation study the two authors had published in 2001. One hundred sixty one females and 163 males participated in a summer science program. The sample consisted of 76.4% Whites, 13.2% Asians, 8.9% African Americans, and 1.5% Native Americans. The students were assessed the first day of the program, the last day of the program, and during a 6-month follow-up. They responded to three instruments: Science Social Niche and Postprogram Contacts ($\alpha = .85$ at posttesting, .83 at follow-up), Science Peer Relationships ($\alpha = .74$ at pretest, .70 at
follow-up), and Possible Personal Self as Scientist ($\alpha = .73$ at pretest, .79 at posttest, and .81 at follow-up). The Possible Personal Self as Scientist measure was created by the authors.

Hierarchical regression was used to evaluate the research questions. Three were completed, one for each assessment. The variables were entered based on when they occurred in time. For the first equation, possible self as scientist was the dependent variable, and gender and science peer relationships were entered. Peer relationships were significantly related to possible self.

At posttest, the dependent variable was possible self at posttest. Gender, peer relationships from pretesting, and social niche were entered (in this order). They also controlled for possible self at pretest by including it in the equation. Peer relationships at pretesting and social niche at posttesting significantly predicted possible self as scientist.

At follow-up, the dependent variable was possible self at follow-up. The variables entered were possible self at posttest, gender, and science peer relationships at follow-up. Science peer relationships was a significant predictor of possible self. Gender in interaction with the significant predictors of possible selves were then entered into the equation to see if these effects were specific to girls or guys. None of the interaction effects were significant.

To determine whether the impact of peer relationships was greater for girls in the 6-month follow-up, a hierarchical regression was computed with peer relationships at follow-up as the dependent variable. The variables entered were peer relationships at pretest, gender, social niche at posttest and social niche at follow-up. Peer relationships at follow-up were significantly predicted by peer relationships at pretesting. Gender was
also significant; girls had stronger peer relationships at follow-up. Finally, social niche at posttesting and follow-up significantly predicted peer relationships at follow-up. Moreover, gender ceased being significant once social niche was entered into the equation. The social niche scores for girls captured the gender difference.

*T*-tests were computed to see if there was a gender difference in social niche and postprogram contacts at follow-up. Girls’ social niche scores were significantly higher than guys. Postprogram contacts were also significantly greater for girls. And finally, they assessed whether there were gender differences in the peer relationships at pretesting and at follow-up. Time and the interaction between time and gender were significant. Girls had higher scores at follow-up than the boys.

The results demonstrate that peer relationships before and during the program impact the development of possible selves (irrespective of gender); by putting students in contact with other like-minded individuals, the program influenced the development of friendships and also the change in possible self as a scientist. The development of peer relationships was more impactful for girls and girls kept in contact more often 6 months after the program.

( Academic) Self-Concept and Possible Selves

There is a limited body of work that places a current conception of the self vis-à-vis a future conception of the self. The researchers who have attempted this task have demonstrated that the inclusion of possible selves provides clearer clues detailing the link between theoretical understandings of self-concept, academic self-concept, and eventual behaviors.
Utilizing a sample of 289 14 and 15 year-olds from low SES and lower middle class families, Leonardi, Syngollitou, and Kiosseoglou (1998) investigated whether possible selves impacted self-esteem, academic performance, and motivation. The students were asked to imagine themselves in a future that was marked by success or failure and write an essay describing who they were. They also completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory and the Task Persistence Questionnaire. The essays were coded and imported into chi-square analyses. Findings were that girls were apt to highlight optimism and a supportive environment when imagining a future marked by failure, and students who were clear and specific in describing their positive possible self and attributed success to hard work were significantly different from other youth based on academic achievement. Youth who attributed success to hard luck were significantly different from the other teens in task persistence.

Oyserman and Markus (1990) demonstrated that an analysis of possible selves of youth increasing in their levels of delinquency will tell you more about the way they perceive themselves and their futures than a global measure of self-esteem. The researchers operationalized self-esteem, optimism for the future, and possible selves. They also measured involvement in delinquent behavior at two points in time, once when data about self-esteem and possible selves were gathered, and again 3 months later. Oyserman and Markus noted that both the students who were not involved in delinquent behavior and youth most involved in delinquent behavior had high levels of self-esteem. With the inclusion of two measures of possible selves, an open-ended questionnaire and a close-ended questionnaire made up of the eight most commonly occurring feared and expected selves, an important finding was that students not involved in delinquent
behavior were apt to most fear doing poorly in school, while students with a history of delinquency feared becoming a thief or a murderer.

They also demonstrated that self-esteem and optimism for the future did not predict delinquency. When balance in possible selves was added (i.e., youth had both a positive and negative potential self identified in the same domain), balance helped the regression equation reach significance in predicting the students’ self-reported delinquency. Youth who were more balanced in their possible selves were less likely to have been involved in delinquent behavior 3 months later. They successfully demonstrated that a more complex model for the self contextualized self-concept in delinquent youth more completely and could more accurately predict behavior.

Knox, Funk, Elliott, and Bush (1998) sought to understand which possible selves correlated with global self-esteem measures for boys and girls. They argued that self-esteem measures may not measure the components of self that make up self-esteem for girls. They learned that the hoped-for possible selves that correlated with global self-esteem for girls were “self-oriented personal descriptors, education, occupation, material/financial descriptors, and relationships/interpersonal functioning” (p. 70). The feared selves that correlated with self-esteem for girls were “physical appearance and relationships/interpersonal functioning” (p. 70). For the young men part of the study, the hoped-for selves that correlated with self-esteem were “relationships/interpersonal functioning” (p. 70). None of the categories of feared possible selves correlated with self-esteem for guys. They conclude with the observation that self-esteem may be more multidimensional for females adolescents than males.
While an examination of self-efficacy beliefs and their relationship with possible selves revealed that significant predictors of efficacy in a particular academic domain (i.e., math, science, social studies, and English) were possible selves as a good or bad student in that domain for middle schools students (Garcia & Pintrich, 1995), Anderman, Anderman and Griesinger (1999) examined how a present and future self as a good or bad student affected GPA in a sample of sixth and seventh grade middle school students.

They utilized multiple regressions to determine which variables would be impacted or predicted by present selves and future selves. In the present-selves and future selves’ models, the academic and social selves, gender, and ethnicity predicted GPA. A positive academic self and being female in the present-self model and positive future-self as a student and being female in the future-self model predicted an increase in GPA.

Finally, they assessed whether differences between the present and future self would predict GPA. They found that when a youth’s present academic self was higher than their future academic self, GPA increased. When students endorsed present social selves higher than their future social selves, their GPA decreased. The authors conclude that GPA is likely to increase when students see themselves as good students in the present and the future.

Lips (2004) investigated the current and possible academic self-concepts of high school 11th and 12th graders and college students (freshmen through seniors were included in the sample) to address her hypotheses that the students would feel academically capable in stereotypical domains (reflected in current and possible self appraisals), and gender differences would be more pronounced in the possible selves endorsements. She found that there were stereotypical differences in the domains the
college students felt stronger academically in, with the college women feeling more capable in the culture, arts, and communication areas of study and the college men feeling stronger in science, math and business academic areas. Moreover, the gender gap in the science, math and business domain was greater in the possible selves evaluation than in the current selves evaluation.

For the high school students part of the study, though areas of competency fell along stereotypical lines, the differences between them were not as pronounced as with the college sample. The high school girls also had current and possible selves that were aligned. This was true for the university women in the “female” domains but not so in the “male” academic domains. For the guys, their possible selves outstripped their current estimations of themselves in high school, but became more aligned as they moved through college.

The discrepancy between the current and possible selves of the young women, with current selves being more positive than the possible selves in “masculine” academic domains and young college women feeling less able in the natural sciences the longer in college, caused Lips to conclude that the female college sample seemed to be backing away from possibilities for themselves.

The Present Study

When one considers placing Markus and Nurius’ theory about possible selves and a multidimensional self (academic self-concept, in this case) side-by-side, it allows for the analysis of a self that is a more accurate reflection of the self one experiences not only from hour to hour but day to day. The concept possible selves also critique a now-self that may be unrealistically stable, despite the theoretical allowance for
multidimensionality. When Dai (2004) introduced possible selves as part of a criticism of Marsh’s BFLPE, Marsh, Hua, and Craven (2004) allowed theoretical space for the possibility that not all students are impacted the same way, and then went on to reaffirm the robust nature of BFLPE. The argument is made here that possible selves can help contextualize what might occur for high-ability students who may be subject to BFLPE. Marsh argues that student aspirations are impacted by BFLPE. Possible selves could color in how that occurred.

Hence, the study being proposed is the examination of possible selves and academic self-concept in African American males participating in a selective school for high-ability youth. Though the BFLPE will not be directly assessed, the study should provide insight into how the context of the school is being interpreted and experienced. The pairing of academic self-concept with possible selves will also provide a more nuanced presentation of self-concept in the academic domain for these youth.
Chapter III
Methodology

The purpose of the study was to explore academic self-concept and possible selves in high-ability African American males attending a specialized school for gifted and/or talented students. The pairing of present and future selves in African American males allowed the consideration of self-concept as not only a multidimensional construct in African American male students but as a temporal construct. To fulfill this aim, the following research questions guided the investigation:

- What possible selves will be identified by high-ability African American males attending a specialized school for gifted and talented students?
- Will there be consistencies in the possible selves identified by African American students across students and/or across grades? If so, what will these consistencies consist of?
- What strategies will be identified to realize or avoid possible selves?
- Will significant others influence possible selves in African American males? How?
- Will possible selves be a significant predictor of academic self-concept?
- Will possible selves be a significant predictor of academic performance above and beyond the impact of academic self-concept?
- Will possible selves and strategy use differ based on ethnicity?

Setting

This study took place in a state-funded residential school for students gifted and/or talented in math, science, and/or technology in the Midwest. The school serves
10th through 12th grade students. A sophomore class of approximately 200 students is invited to attend every year. Students are reinvited for their 11th and 12th grade years based on their academic and behavioral performance during the preceding school year.

The Academy desires to be an exemplar for educative practice. Many faculty members have Master’s or PhD’s and have been teaching for a significant length of time. The community prides itself on their unorthodox or nontraditional approach to education, math and science education in particular. Faculty within the Academy put on workshops for other educators in the state about their methods, and teachers and administrators from the immediate area and further away (one group of teachers came from as far away as Korea) visit to observe their teaching methodology in action.

Students apply in their ninth grade year to attend the Academy. However, a significant percentage of students (28% in the 2008-2009 academic year; Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy [IMSA], 2008) come directly from the eighth grade, and some students have been younger. They submit SAT scores, their academic record from the previous year, and personal essays. They are also required to submit evaluations/recommendations from teachers and administrators from their “home school”. The average incoming SAT scores for the 2008-2009 class of sophomores was 637 for Math and 577 for Critical Reading (Buschbacher, 2008).

Sixty-eight percent of the 650 students from the 2008-2009 academic year are from a large city approximately 60 miles from the school (IMSA, 2008). However, the students hail from all over the state. Likewise, the SES is also variable. Thus, students who attended schools with a senior class of 25 students commingle with students with senior classes of 200 and larger. Because the institution is state funded, students must be
residents of the state in order to attend. Likewise, though fees are assessed to students, they are nominal. This is also due to the institution being state-supported. Fees range from $360 to $2,610 and are determined by family income and size (IMSA, 2008).

The student body is very diverse. At 36%, Asian students are overrepresented (according to a demographics report by the Illinois Economic and Fiscal Commission [2001], Asians are 3.4% of the state population). They are the second largest ethnic group behind White students (49% of the student population). African American and Latin students are deemed “minority” students, as they are significantly underrepresented in the student population (7% and 5% respectively) in comparison to the population of African Americans and Latinos in the state (15.1% and 12.3% respectively; Illinois Economic and Fiscal Commission, 2001). The population is equally male and female.

The students live in residential halls during the academic year. There are seven halls: three female halls, three male halls, and one coed hall. The students are paired with roommates and live in wings, one of four per building. Four adult staff in each hall supervises the students.

*Description of Instrument*

The instrument administered to the students was comprised of the academic self-concept subscales of the Self-Description Questionnaire (SDQ; Marsh, 1992)-II was created to measure self-concept in adolescents in the 7th through the 10th grade, though it has been used with adolescents in the 11th and 12th grade. The
instrument was normed with youth from Sydney, but Bryne (1996) notes that it has been used in a myriad of studies purporting to measure self-concept in the United States and beyond and is the most validated instrument to date measuring self-concept in this age group. The measure is grounded in the theory that self-concept is multidimensional and hierarchical. Thus, the measure consists of 11 subscales meant to capture this multidimensionality and hierarchy: Physical Abilities, Physical Appearance, Opposite Sex-Relations, Same-Sex Relations, Parent Relations, Honesty-Trustworthiness, Emotional Stability, Math, Verbal, School, and General Self. Likert responses range from 1 (False; Not like me at all; it isn’t like me at all) to 6 (True; This statement describes me well; it is very much like me). Total scores from the subscales are meant to capture general self-concept, but Marsh (1990) urges that this total score be interpreted with caution, as much of the research with the instrument has focused on the dimensions of self-concept rather than self-concept in totality.

Each subscale is made up of 8-10 items for a total of 102 items. The reliability estimates for each subscale range from .83 to .91, with the mean being .86. The total coefficient alpha for the entire measure is .94. Values from a test-retest reliability assessment ranged from .72 to .88, with the mean being .79.

To ascertain the factor structure of the scale, a factor analysis was completed with 51 items pairs instead of 102 individual items. The subscales were clearly delineated, with factor loadings ranging from .48 to .80 for correlated item pairs, and -.12 to .27 for noncorrelated item pairs (Marsh, 1990).

The Math, Verbal, and School subscales comprise academic self-concept. Sample items from these subscales include “I am hopeless in English classes,” “I enjoy studying
for mathematics,” and “If I work really hard I could be one of the best students in my grade.” Marsh (1990) reports that though these three subscales serve such a function within the scale, the three subscales do not form a higher order construct empirically. Instead, the math and verbal subscales are uncorrelated with each other, and the general school subscale is only moderately correlated with the math and verbal subscales. He goes on to conclude that though these subscales are meant to combine to form higher order self-concept estimations, the hierarchy is not as robust as theorized.

Possible Selves Questionnaire. Daphna Oyserman has developed a considerable body of work examining possible selves in predominantly low-income African American adolescents and has utilized both interview protocols and an open-ended questionnaire to assess this construct in these youth. The use of these approaches are appropriate in reflecting the possible selves that are most important at the time and in avoiding social desirability responses, a weakness of many self-concept measures (Bryne 1996). Her open-ended questionnaire was used to assess possible selves in this study (Oyserman et al., 2006; see Appendix A for a copy of the instrument).

The questionnaire asks respondents to report four expected selves and four feared selves. Oyserman and Markus (1990) noted that some students experienced difficulty responding without some frame of reference, so the questionnaire asks students to speak of these selves as happening “next year.” The students also generated strategies for realizing or avoiding the possible selves.

The reliability of open-ended responses is determined by consistency in coding (Montgomery & Crittenden, 1977), so Oyserman provides instructions for coding the possible selves and strategies developed by youth. This coding protocol served as the
basis for making the possible selves data amenable for use in quantitative analyses. She explains that there are six categories for expected possible selves (i.e., achievement, all negatively worded items, material/lifestyle, interpersonal relationships, and personality traits) and feared possible selves (i.e., interpersonal relationships, personality traits, physical/health related, material/lifestyle, achievement, nonnormative risky/delinquent behavior). She also provides examples of each of the categories. For example, under the achievement category, examples of expected possible selves include working for extra money, being involved with a basketball team, doing well in school, and being involved with activities not in school. Moreover, based on Oyserman’s coding protocol for the strategies students develop to realize or avoid possible selves, the strategies should receive the same code as the possible self (see Appendix B for the coding protocol).

A test/retest reliability study utilizing the instrument with introductory psychology students over a 3-week period showed that 90% of a sample (N = 63) generated two of the expected selves and 74% generated 2 of the feared selves (Oyserman & Markus, 1990). Further, 45% generated all of the expected selves after 3 weeks, and 25% generated all three feared selves. All 63 generated at least one of the expected selves, and 61 generated at least one of their feared selves at the end of the 3-week period (Oyserman & Markus, 1990).

Demographic variables. Along with providing information about possible selves, and academic conceptions about math, their verbal ability, and school generally, students were asked to supply demographic information. Based on personal communication with a staff member of the Academy (R. Gill, personal communication, October, 2008), students may worry that their SAT scores could serve to identify them, despite the
promise of anonymity. The construction of items requesting information about SAT scores and grades were influenced by this concern. Consequently, students were asked to specify a range in which their SAT scores fell (i.e., 400-499, 500-599) and to provide an estimation of their academic performance (i.e., I would describe myself as…: (a) An A student, (b) An A-B student, etc.). Students were also asked to provide their year in the school, the highest education level achieved by each parents, whether or not they are a recent immigrant to the country, and racial/ethnic identity.

**Description of Participants, Consent Process, and Sampling Protocol**

Due to the research aim to examine academic self-concept and possible selves within a unique schooling environment, convenience sampling was the most efficacious sampling protocol. Though the male student body provided data on their academic self-concept and possible selves, the focus of the study was a homogenous sample of students. Students matriculate into the 10th grade when accepted as students to the Academy; however ages will be variable due to the Academy’s proclivity for admitting students directly from the eighth grade (and younger), as will be their SES and level of urbanicity.

*American American Male subjects.* Of the students who agreed to be interviewed, 4 were sophomores, 3 were juniors, and 2 were seniors. According to school records, all but one of the students came from communities that surrounded a major metropolitan city 60 miles from the Academy. Six of the 9 students were from dual-parent homes, and the SES of communities in which the young men resided varied. Eight of the 9 students came from different communities. Median incomes for households in the eight communities ranged from approximately $32,000 to $79,000 (National Relocation, 2007). Per capita incomes for the eight communities ranged from approximately $17,000
to $34,000 (National Relocation, 2007). All of the young men anticipated being college bound, with both seniors having been accepted into and planning to attend reputable postsecondary institutions, the University of Massachusetts and Carnegie Mellon. The students’ ages ranged between 15 and 18. Of the 9 young men, 6 were anticipating careers in math, science, and/or technology related fields. One student was preparing for a career in sports management, and two young men were exploring the viability of careers in fine arts areas.

Sample selection and consent process for African American males. The consent process to interview African American males proceeded threefold. The Academy has its own research and evaluation office that reviews and provides permission for potential studies. I submitted a research proposal to the Academy to garner permission to interview their African American male students through this office. Considering the findings in some way spoke to the academic experience and thus can be seen as an evaluation of their program, a copy of the completed study may be requested by the research and evaluation office.

Parents of African American male students attending the Academy were sent a consent form to their home address and via an email address requesting the participation of their son in a study assessing nonintellective aspects of their experience at the Academy. On the consent form, parents had the opportunity to indicate whether they would like a copy of the findings.

Those students whose parents gave permission were asked to attend a student meeting in the hall commons area of their residential halls. At these meetings, I presented a sketch of the study. They were informed that participation is voluntary,
refusal will in no way harm them academically or otherwise, and they could withdraw at any time. Students gave consent via an assent form. On the assent form, students had the opportunity to indicate whether they would like a copy of the findings.

*Male Academy subjects.* The sample of male Academy students was made up of sophomores \((n = 112)\), juniors \((n = 75)\) and seniors \((n = 65)\). Students of Anglo descent made up 42.3\% of the students surveyed \((n = 107)\), students of Asian/Pacific Islander descent made up 37.2\% of the sample \((n = 94)\). Biracial students were 6.7\% of the group \((n = 17)\), students of Latin descent were 7.1\% of the sample \((n = 18)\), students of African descent were 4.7\% of the sample \((n = 12)\), and one student self-identified as American Indian/Alaskan Native. Four students did not specify ethnic or racial background.

*Sample selection – Academy males.* Due to internal interest in the academic struggles of some males attending the Academy, an employee proposed a study that examined academic self-concept and possible selves for all male students. He administered the instrument that contained the SDQ items, the Possible Selves Questionnaire, and the demographic variables to all males who consented to participate in the study. Thus, along with requesting to interview the African American males, the proposal to the research and evaluation office also included a request for this file data.

Many of the African American males interviewed also participated in the Academy employee’s study as well. However, the survey was administered confidentially. There was thus no way to connect an African American male’s survey responses with their interview.

*Ball State IRB Process.* The Ball State IRB board was approached once permission was granted from the Academy to access the archived data and interview the
students. Approval was granted, and notification of approval was forwarded on to the Academy for their records and to satisfy their requirement that permission for the study be provided via the university before data collection could begin.

Research Design

The Math, Verbal and General School subscales of the SDQ-II operationalized academic self-concept, and the Possible Selves Questionnaire operationalized possible selves. Students \((n = 253)\) were administered the instrument in February, 2009. Along with completing the instrument, African American males \((n = 9)\) participated in individual interviews examining influential others and possible selves in May, 2009.

Because the instrument was administered to youth in the school setting, the results are expected to generalize to other African American males in residential schools for gifted and talented youth. Consumers of this research will determine whether these findings also generalize to African American male youth in specialized schools for gifted and talented youth and high-ability African American male youth more generally. Possible threats to internal validity include history, location, and instrumentation.

Procedure

SDQ-II and Possible Selves. Students were asked to participate in the Academy employee’s study during attendance taken at 10pm (i.e., 10 check). Interested students were directed to their residence hall commons after 10 check to complete the instrument. Once in the hall commons, the Academy employee explained the broad purpose of the study. Students \((n = 253)\) assented to participate in the study via a student assent form. The instrument took approximately 15 minutes to complete. The employee collected the
completed instruments. I submitted a proposal and was approved access to this data after it was collected.

*Interviews.* Once parent consent for the interviews had been secured, a staff member from halls in which the African American males resided was asked to contact the students to request they meet me in their hall commons. During an initial meeting with each student, I briefly explained the study, requested their permission to participate, and set up a time and a place for the interview. Before each interview, I went over the student assent form and assured each young man that their comments would remain confidential and that their participation was voluntary. I asked again about willingness to participate in the study, and, upon confirmation, directed each student to sign the student assent form. Nine students agreed to participate in the interviews. Interviews ranged between 8 minutes and 43 minutes, with most interviews being approximately 25 minutes. Interviews were conducted in May during a lull week between end-of-year festivities like the prom and finals. All interviews were conducted at the school site in each student’s residence hall.

A semi-structured interview protocol (Spradley, 1979) was employed. This type of interview design ensures structure to the conversations, yet allows the interviewer the freedom to pursue areas of interest and to tailor each interview based on the dynamics of the conversation (Dearnley, 2005). As with the Possible Selves Questionnaire, interviews access salient possible selves and allow the students to articulate organic and individual aspects of their self-concept. The interview included in Appendix C demonstrates the interview process.
Two Academy males not part of the potential subject pool agreed to pilot an initial version of the interview questions. Based on those interviews, the interview protocol was revised. These questions served as the interview guide:

1) What do you believe is possible for you? What dreams did you have about who you could become or possibly do? How are you realizing those dreams?
2) What is the likelihood of these things happening for you? Why?
3) What kind of possibilities for yourself are you afraid of? How would you avoid these possibilities?
4) What could get in the way of you realizing your dreams? What could happen that could move you towards your fears?
5) Have you shared these possibilities for yourself with others? Who? What about them helped you feel comfortable talking to them about your dreams?
6) Are there people you would avoid sharing possibilities for yourself with? If so, why?
7) Does attending the academy fit in with your life plans? Is so, how? If not, why not?
8) Has there been a shift in possibilities for yourself that are hoped for or dreaded since attending the academy? If so, how and why? If not, why not?
9) Are there other types of institutions you are involved with that help you feel you can achieve the things that are important to you? If so, what are they? How do they help you stay motivated and believe in yourself?
10) Are there other things in your life that show you who you would want to be or would not like to be? What are they?
11) Have loved ones had their dreams deferred? If so, how? How has that impacted your own aspirations?
12) Do you think racism will have an impact on possibilities you hope to achieve and possibilities you fear? If so, how? Do you have any strategies for avoiding some of these issues?

13) Do you think there are stereotypes at play at the academy that have an impact on you? If so, how?

Data Analysis

The following discussion details how the data were analyzed. The research questions are presented first, then the data analysis protocol.

What possible selves will be identified by high-ability African American males attending a specialized school for gifted and talented students?

Will there be consistencies in the possible selves identified across students and/or across grades? If so, what will these consistencies consist of?

What strategies will be identified to realize or avoid possible selves?

Will significant others influence possible selves in African American males? How?

Similar to Kerpelman, Shoffner, and Ross-Griffin (2002), theoretical arguments about possible selves were used to frame findings from interviews. Oyserman’s work about possible selves (e.g., Oyserman et al., 2002; Oyserman et al., 2006; Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006) served as the theoretical basis for interview protocol development and data analysis of the descriptive data. Oyserman details that youth are able to generate hoped-for selves and feared selves. Students are also able to formulate strategies that enable them to realize their hoped-for selves and to avoid their feared selves. Lastly, students are influenced by context when determining whether to maintain possible selves or to abandon them. Race relations, influential others’ success or lack thereof in realizing
goals, school environment, and negotiation with loved ones, including peers, close friends, and parents, about atypical goals have a significant impact on possible self development.

This theoretical foundation served as the basis for some of the major and minor themes identified. Specifically, the interviews were transcribed and coded. To facilitate data analysis, the interviews were examined for any similarities, patterns, or consistencies. Items were grouped based on these similarities and codes were created to reflect the nature of the similarity (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Any unfamiliar phrasing was noted, as they constituted a separate code(s; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This process makes up the coding strategy. The interviews were searched for material that coincided with the codes and were marked. The data from the interviews will be reported based on the themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; see Appendix C for an example of the coding process).

Will possible selves and strategy use differ based on ethnicity?

Will possible selves be a significant predictor of academic self-concept?

Will possible selves be a significant predictor of academic performance above and beyond the impact of academic self-concept?

These questions were addressed through a path analysis. Ullman (2007) details that a path analysis is a special type of structural equation model (SEM). Structural equation modeling allows for the analysis of interrelationships between one or several independent variables that are continuous and/or categorical and dependant variables that are continuous and/or categorical. Path analysis, a simpler version of SEM, is being employed in this study as a type of multiple regression; paths between variables represent
regression equations. All variables are observed, there is only one observed measure per
variable, they are either exogenous or endogenous, and they are represented in the path
model via rectangles. Endogenous variables have paths leading to them; exogenous
variables are independent of causes.

Path analysis (and other forms of SEMs) is beneficial because it allows the
researcher to examine complicated relationships between variables, including indirect, or
intermediate, effects of one variable on another (Ullman, 2007). Likewise, the impact of
error or unaccounted for variance can be explicitly computed, resulting in more accurate
estimates of one variable’s impact on another. In multiple regression, error is assumed
but not necessarily assessed. The foundation of a path analysis is an a priori
determination of relationships between variables, the path model (Ullman, 2007). Thus,
theory about relationships serves a significant role in this process.

The path model for the data tests whether contextual variables like race, SES, and
length of time in the school have a bearing on grades and SAT scores via academic self-
concept and possible selves. The model also suggests that possible selves affect
academic self-concept. Race and SES lead to academic self-concept and possible selves
to test for differences based on race and SES. Length of time in school leads to academic
self-concept to test whether there are differences in academic self-concept between the
sophomores, juniors, and seniors in the study.

Though there is considerable debate about the direction between academic self-
concept and indicators of academic performance, Bracken (1996) argues that the more
rigorous studies that have measured directionality between academic achievement and
academic self-concept have found that academic self-concept precedes academic
achievement. Oyserman’s work investigating possible selves in youth (e.g., Oyserman et al., 2002) provides the rationale for possible selves leading to indicators of academic achievement. Finally, Markus and Nurius’s (1986) argue that the self is dynamically composed such that minor successes and failures are apt to impact possible selves development first and potentially filter to more stable conceptions of competence. This argument provided the rationale for possible selves leading to academic self-concept.

The open-ended items from the Possible Selves Questionnaire were coded for inclusion in the path analysis; students received a 1 if a category for a feared self and expected self was present and a 0 if that category of a possible self was not represented. Students received a 1 if a category for a strategy was present and a 0 if a category was not present. A new variable was created called “attempt to attain possible selves, avoid feared selves” by computing the mean from the values. The new variable ranged from 0 (no attempt to attain possible selves or avoid feared selves) to 1 (attempt to attain possible selves and avoid feared selves; Oyserman and Saltz, 1993).

Additionally, according to manual guidelines (Marsh, 1990), items from the academic self-concept subscales of the SDQ were recoded. The SAT Math and SAT Verbal items were also recoded to represent the midpoint of each range. Recoding the SAT items in this way allowed for the computation of an estimated total SAT score. The values for the mother and father’s level of education were combined in the variable parent education. Higher values denote higher levels of parental education, and values range from 0 (neither parent has earned a high school degree) to 10 (both parents have earned doctoral degrees). It should be noted that parental education as a proxy for SES may be insufficient. As Hauser (1994) notes, “there is no reliable evidence that income
dominates parental education…” (p. 1544). Race was dummy coded, such that 1 = Asian, African, Latin descent and 0 = Anglo-European descent. Finally, the grades variable was recoded such that higher values corresponded with higher grades.
Attempt to attain possible selves

Academic Self-Concept

Socioeconomic Status

Race/ethnicity

SAT Scores

Year in School

Grades

D1
1

0,
D4

D2
0,

0,
D3

D5
0,

1

1
Chapter IV

Results

The purpose of this study is to examine the self-system in African American high-ability youth attending a specialized school for gifted and talented students. Seven research questions have been advanced and two styles of data analysis (i.e., examination of interview data and a path analysis) have been utilized to address these questions. The research questions will precede each analysis protocol. Because the focus of the study is the African American students and because the interviews contextualize findings from the path analysis, the interview results will be presented first.

Possible Selves Interviews with African American Male Students

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 9 African American males who attended the specialized school that serves as the setting for this study. Using work by Oyserman and her colleagues as a guide (Oyserman et al., 2002; Oyserman et al., 2006; Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006) for the interview questions developed, students were asked to describe possible selves they would like to become and possible selves they fear becoming. The students were also asked to discuss strategies they employed to realize or avoid these future selves, and they were asked several questions that detailed environmental and contextual factors that influence the possibilities developed. The following research questions further frame the purpose of the interviews:

What possible selves will be identified by high-ability African American males attending a specialized school for gifted and talented students?

Will there be consistencies in the possible selves identified across students and/or across grades? If so, what will these consistencies consist of?
What strategies will be identified to realize or avoid possible selves?

Will significant others influence possible selves in African American males? How?

Interview Themes and Subthemes

Interview responses were divided into rough sections that discussed hoped-for selves, feared selves, strategies for realizing or avoiding future selves, and contextual factors that have influenced their decision-making. Table 1 presents the themes and their subthemes in more detail.
Table 1

**Major and Minor Themes From Student Interviews (n = 9)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hoped-For Selves</th>
<th>Feared Selves</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on now</td>
<td>No fears</td>
<td>Concrete experiences</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Feel loved</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Supportive of dreams</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• They talk, press them about goals</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Action taken to help students be successful</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Family as models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can be whatever I want</td>
<td>Selling drugs, being a “thug”, school dropout</td>
<td>More nebulous aims, less concrete</td>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Comparing schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Examples show who want to be and want to avoid becoming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career/Educational</td>
<td>Failure</td>
<td></td>
<td>Academy</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Support</td>
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<td>• Only institution involved with</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• More opportunities, resources</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Peers</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Hands-on experiences (Academy as strategy)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Experiences push students to understand potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success</td>
<td>Lack of material comforts</td>
<td></td>
<td>Racism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Money</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Beliefs about racism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Influence/Prestige</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Identification of stereotypes of African Americans within Academy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Authenticity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Being an exception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Positive standard bearer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>Poor relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Helping others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Friends and family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Development</td>
<td>Being around people without aspirations</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Context**

Four subthemes served to frame the creation of hoped-for and feared selves: the neighborhood, the family, the Academy, and racism. Interestingly and importantly, these
themes about context intertwine. It is difficult to talk about how students experienced their neighborhood and neighborhood schools without talking about the school they presently attend. Support to be involved with such a rigorous academic community requires support from a variety of people, with family members being some of those sources of support. Racism is not only present in the outside world but also manifest in the stereotypes African American male students wrestle against at the Academy. Having acknowledged the interconnectedness of some of the elements of the students’ contextual world, the discussion will turn to neighborhood elements.

*Neighborhood.* Several young men supplied that there were elements within their neighborhood that were object lessons demonstrating to them who they wanted to become and not become. One young man noted that his involvement with leadership development programs helped him feel he should continue to pursue leadership opportunities as a student at the Academy. Moreover, there were people in his community, particularly church members, who expressed pride in his achievements to date and were encouraging him to be bold in the pursuit of what mattered to him.

However, there were community elements that too easily demonstrate a path towards ennui and potential hopelessness. One young man noted that relationships he had developed were trending toward being unhealthy. He felt he needed a change to prevent being awash in disaffection. Friends were dropping out of school, and some students had witnessed or suspected drug use, gang activity and prostitution; they were on guard against losing their way:

And I always see like a lot of people in baggy pants, and I hear about
people selling drugs…. I always fear…becoming that type of person…selling drugs from my apartment. I don’t want to feel like I have to do that….it’s not a really bad neighborhood, but… every now and then I’ll see people fighting or police cars coming around, and I just never want to get involved with things like that. Student 3

Some young men felt pushed out of their home schools based on some of the above elements. However, other young men just wanted to feel excited about school. The previous schools that the young men had attended varied in the level of challenge provided, but students who compared their home school to the Academy felt their home school did not make the demands of them necessary to help them maintain interest in school in general and in their goals in particular. As Student 9 noted, “…I wouldn’t say I wasn’t learning anything at the school, but I wasn’t happy there, and I didn’t think that school was adequately challenging me….” Students left their home schools to pursue rigor and thus “realism”, considering the goals that were important to them. They worried that coasting through school could result in lost ambition or inadequate preparedness.

Family. Family members were very supportive of their sons, nephews, brothers, cousins being driven. One young man noted that his parents had been surprised at the level of intensity he had brought to bear in thinking about his future, but once they understood where his commitments lied, they pushed him to go wholeheartedly after his dreams. For some of the other young men, parents and family members were actively involved in framing where they felt their son’s strengths lied or protecting the direction of their aspirations, and other parents were nudging the more reticent sons to voice what
they were considering about their future. One young man noted that his parents had taken him to supplementary classes at a local community college to augment schooling.

Likewise, struggles to realize personal goals influenced how some parents reacted to the goals of their sons. Several young men noted that their parents had not had the same opportunities to transform their dreams into reality. To prevent the same things from happening to their children, they encouraged them to see their future as wide open, to apply to the Academy, and to do their best. One young man gave a generational example:

I know that my grandparents on my father’s side, both of them, they didn’t go to college, and, because of that, …at least my grandmother really put in a lot of effort so that all my uncles would go to college …and because of that, my father is really passionate about my education. …I don’t think his dreams are deferred, were ever deferred, nor do I think my dreams will be deferred. Student 5

Family members also modeled possibilities, both positive and negative. One young man noted that his cousins all wanted to do the same types of things but were consistently diverted by poor decision-making and lack of focus. Another young man had first learned of the Academy through the involvement of his brother. He does not remember much about his brother’s high school years, but he knows he attended the Academy. His brother used his experience as teachable moments and a framework for advice about potential mistakes while in attendance. His counsel helped his younger brother, a participant in this study, better understand what to expect from the culture of the Academy, thereby easing his transition into the new learning community.
Family members were examples of eventual contentment with life choices and material success. Parents have also been models for dreams deferred:

I know with my mom she went to college in Kentucky for 2 years, but…my grandmother wasn’t able to afford it, so she had to drop out, start working with McDonald’s and things like that….I know she said she wanted to do a lot with business, but her not being able to finish college…took her away from that. And even though she manages at different jobs, I always felt if she could have made it through college she could have done more with her life….she tried going back to school, but I know it was difficult cause she’s a single mom….So, seeing my mom not being able to complete college just makes me want to, I want to be able to achieve my dream and then repay her, I guess.

Student 3

*The Academy.* The young men who were part of the study welcomed their time at the Academy in part because it was a place of opportunity. Some of the young men were enabled to do things that their home schools could not support. For example, one young man noted that the Academy was giving him the money he needed to be involved with an expensive drama camp in the summer. Considering he was wrestling with whether to pursue a career in theatre, he seemed grateful for the opportunity to experiment with drama in this way. A second student noted that other students and faculty members part of the school were connected to organizations and programs, such that it made it easier to gain access to and simulate some of the activities that occurred in the professional fields they were considering.
It is noteworthy that the Academy was the only organization with which the young men were involved in any substantive way that helped them understand what they could achieve. The Academy appeared to be perceived as an important piece of the puzzle to moving towards future selves that mattered. Many of the opportunities of the Academy manifest in hands-on activities in which the students could engage. The young men believed that attending the Academy paved the way for admittance into good colleges and universities and was a stepping stone for future careers, particularly in math and science. The residential component helped the young men feel they could or would adjust more smoothly to being away from home during college, and enough variety in classes are offered such that the young men could try on different fields to gauge intellectual and dispositional fit.

Moreover, the rigor of the curriculum pushed the students in ways that further revealed to themselves their competencies. For one young man, he came to understand that he was not all that interested in a math or science career. Another young man states that he enacted certain choices, like doubling up in math courses during a semester, that helped him realize that he could in fact be focused and work hard. And other young men expressed the sentiment that the academic culture of the Academy helped positively address the worry that they could indeed achieve in areas that were important to them:

…at the beginning, …it just seemed…I could be a lot of things but…it didn’t actually seem like I could do it in reality, but I guess being here…now, a lot of things just seem like I could actually do that stuff. Cause you hear seniors doing this and they’re going off to college and studying this, it doesn’t seem …that you could actually do that but you can. Student 7
Implicit within this response is the import of peers. The young men were almost universal in acknowledging the importance of their peers supporting their dreams. As one young man stated, “…we find ourselves always talking about what we want to be in life and why we want to do that” (Student 3). The young men are surrounded by other young people creating and implementing strategies to get into certain colleges and pursue specific careers, a preoccupation that one young man noted he could relate to and felt comfortable with. Likewise, peers (and family, for that matter) have “…accepted my dreams, they’re ok with them” (Student 5). Their peers were people with “positive minds” and “positive ambitions.”

However, the young men were generally selective with whom they shared possibilities for themselves. In reference to peers and other adults in the community, people that the students could trust or respect were the ones with which they were willing to discuss their futures. For the young men invested in career paths that were outside of the cultural norm, their peers represented a status quo that they struggled to overcome in shaping individual ambitions. As one young man noted, “you kinda feel obligated to say you want to be some kind of doctor or engineer or something like that” (Student 2). Youth in the Academy appeared to be grading each other based on the types of future selves espoused. Youth who were considering professions outside of what was expected had to contend with the implication that they were less intellectually competent and were not as able to access some academic resources.

…I’ve kinda gone down a different path. I’m the first person to ever go to the University of Massachusetts…. none of my academic counselors had any idea about the sports management field, so I did all the research
on my own…they couldn’t really advise me too much. [I]f I tell someone I’m going to study sports management…some people think that I might be kind of taking a step back from my full potential…it must be because I didn’t do as well academically here, that I’m just settling, but I’ve actually done fairly well here….I haven’t really been afraid to tell them [about my goals], but…I’ve seen the looks and I realize what it comes from, what they’re thinking.

Student 1

True friends endorsed their choices as worthwhile; the young men sought to guard themselves against those who did not truly have their best interest at heart.

*Race Relations/Racism.* Along with navigating assumptions based on career choice, the young men were also navigating race-based assumptions from their peers, both at their home school, but particularly amongst their peers at the Academy. Some stereotypes about African American students at the Academy include being loud, cliquish, someone who hails from a ghetto, a thug or a gangster, cool, good daters, good at basketball, Oreos, and less intelligent.

…let’s see, people tell me all the time that I got in here because of affirmative action, because that’s the only way a Black person could be smart, and…because I’m good at basketball it’s because I’m Black and that’s all Black people can be good at, and …if I wear baggy pants, I must be in a gang because I’ve been told that the outfits I wear make me look like a gangster. I don’t know, I’ve never seen a gangster wear a polo. Student 8

Some young men may have also been deemed unamenable to race-based stereotypes others may hold. One young man, a Nigerian American, was labeled an European
African American because he did not seem similar to the other African American students on campus. A second young man noted that he resisted exclusively socializing with African American students. That choice would not mesh well with social behaviors he had engaged in at his home school. A third young man talked of how multiple identities rather than identification with one particular racialized experience, his being labeled an “anomaly”, and his intelligence prevented him from caring about race.

The young men offered up a myriad of explanations for the nature of race relations and the nature of stereotypes about African American students at the Academy. Racism was the result of fear, ignorance, or narrow mindedness. For the student anticipating a career in the theatre, racism was unconscious, maybe even subconscious. Playwrights created their work with certain people in mind, and African Americans are rarely mentally visible during that germinating process. A third young man argued

While out-and-out we-don’t-like-your-kind-around-here racism isn’t that big of an issue, …unconscious racism and xenophobia will pretty much always be prevalent in behavior. It’s just that sort of primal instinct of ‘One of these things is not like the other.’…it may affect interpersonal interactions, but it does not affect global interactions as much as it did. Student 6

With regards to stereotypes, responses varied in describing their impact on the young men’s academic experience at the Academy. Some of the young men felt put upon by negative prejudgments about their character or their potential. One young man noted that upon first joining the Academy, African American sophomores were engaged in performing Blackness (i.e., play fighting, yelling, blasting music) in ways that allowed
them to better fit in with peers at their home schools. Other students who hailed from suburbs or small downstate towns were unused to and looked down upon these behaviors. He stated that in the grand scheme of things, people from his neighborhood were not as worried about young people playing loud music or rough housing. However, students (and faculty and staff) at the Academy enforced different cultural mores. New students needed time to adjust to new expectations, to pursue other expressions of authenticity. In this vein, a second young man argued that the small number of African American students enrolled in the Academy prevented a great deal of differentiation. A Black youth behaving in ways that supported a racialized stereotype stigmatized all of the African American students. A third young man felt the stereotypes for African Americans were on par with stereotypes for Asian, Indian, and White students. Youth playfully trotted out these shorthand explanations for cultural differences as a way to poke fun at their universal experience at the Academy. No harm was intended.

When asked about the potential impact of racism on the possibilities they envisioned for themselves, the responses ran the gamut from expecting racism to impact them to not being sure to not expecting racism to hinder options available to them. A young man referenced advice from his father in navigating racialized mine-fields when seeking a job, a second young man contended that his skill set as a mathematician, especially if he was good in his work, would prevent him from being overly hampered by racism. A third young man said he had never experienced racism in his life to that point and thus did not expect to experience any in the future.

The young man considering a career in theatre was especially compelling in addressing this question. Most of the interview was taken up with him describing how a
playwright’s, a director’s, or the audience’s mental images about characters could serve to limit his options in performing on stage. For example, he told this story:

I was in Little Shop of Horrors…and I wanted to be like the main role for the guy, Seymour….as soon as I walked in the door, the director said, I want you to sing Feed Me. That’s the song that the plant sings, and the plant’s supposed to be like this big horrible creature, and it’s supposed to have an Ebonic voice….So, as soon as I walk in the door, they were like, ‘Sing that song.’ [I said] I’ve been practicing the song that Seymour sings for like a month now. And then they said you can sing Feed Me first and sing the other song later if you want to….And then I turned out being the plant….I did a really good job, but still, they didn’t give me a chance…. Student 2.

Of the young men interviewed, he provided the most salient imagery of the impact of racism on a possible future self. He wrestled with whether he should stay with acting or go for a back-up career in medicine.

For most of the young men who felt racism could potentially influence outcomes in their futures, a common sentiment was the belief that they could behave in ways that could change minds about other African Americans. The young men felt they could be the one that caused enough cognitive dissonance to be transformative catalysts.

…if I can change their mind, then maybe they’ll take that and try and change somebody else’s mind, so it’ll just help out Black people, the view that other races have on Black people. So, I just want to be the best that I can so I can show that Black people can be better than what they’re shown to be, what they’re thought to be. Student 8
Part of this process involved acting in ways that made a lie of potential stereotypes.

The previous discussion has explicated several components of the milieu that serve as the backdrop for the development of future selves these young men approached and avoided. These hoped-for and feared selves will now be analyzed in more depth. Strategies utilized to realize or avoid these future selves will also be presented.

**Hoped-For Selves**

On three occasions, the young men being interviewed noted that they felt they could become whatever they wanted as a preamble to relaying possible hoped-for selves. The students envisioned future selves that were college bound, with one student specifying pursuing a Masters’ degree as well as a Bachelors. The students were interested in careers in biomedical engineering, chemical engineering, sports management, acting, nanotechnology, mathematics or computer science, creative writing, marketing and economics.

Many of the young men were also invested in success. Success in this case was represented as prestige, money, and influence. As one young man stated, his future self involved “just being academically successful, winning awards, winning competitions, all-around excellence” (Student 9). A second student was interested in becoming the CEO of his own company, and a third student was striving for a job in a front office of a major NBA organization. Students hoped to be rich or well-off enough to support a family and role models for others.

Three of the students were unwilling to project too far into the future because they were more connected to the immediacy of now. One student argued that “the now is more important, and the sum total of your nows becomes your later” (Student 6), and a
second student, a youth who had applied and been accepted into the Academy in the eighth grade, noted

…I am starting to see how things could materialize now, because before in my old school [i.e., middle school], college was a far-off dream, and at this point now, it’s an immediate possibility and I need to be able to handle it more efficiently than I would have had I been a middle schooler. Now that things count towards that, I need to be able to react adequately.

Student 9

Finally, the students identified personal selves related to personal development and interpersonal relationships. Several of the young man wanted families, intact and healthy relationships with significant others, including spouses and friends; to be a man of God; and to be better than they were the year before.

Next year, I want to be me. I want to be the same person on the inside, but I want to be smarter, I want to be more, I want to know more about…different cultures and stuff, I just want to broaden my horizons for next year. But I still want to be the same person I was when I got here. Just better. Student 8

One young man had pursued leadership positions along with participation in the student organization Feed the Children because he ultimately wanted to use his company and his personnel’s technological skills to help people in third-world countries.

*Feared Selves*

Two young men did not seem to have possible selves they feared becoming. Likewise, some of the young men admitted to spending more time discussing who they would like to become rather than who they would not like to become. For those who
were able to articulate the nature of future selves they would like to avoid, one was a feared self who has failed. One young man had the immediate fear of failing a class and repeating his senior year, and a second young man worried that his propensity to be forgetful could potentially harm him academically at some later data. Other students’ mention of failure dealt with particular goals they had established for themselves, be it academic or career goals.

Two young men sought to avoid becoming involved with illegal activities like selling drugs or having a jail record. One young man in particular said he could see it happening, in part based on some of the modeling in his neighborhood. Related feared selves are poor, homeless, cut off from additional schooling either because of dropping out or expulsion, lonely or part of collapsed relationships, or men who have fallen in with a bad crowd. Bad crowds are

People who take life as it is and just leave it at that. And those who don’t desire the betterness of their environment and then those who aren’t pragmatic about things, those who are willing to accept where they are. And then one a more practical side is [sic] the people who do not apply their skills, people who don’t look to gain skills, people who don’t use what skills they already have to create something…. Student 9

Strategies

Strategies that the young men identified to attempt to realize their future selves took one of two forms. One type of strategy involved studying more, doing their best, improving their grades, and keeping themselves open to meeting new people as a means of becoming more familiar with networking.
However, a predominate focus was choosing to engage in concrete activities that allowed students to gain insider knowledge about some of the skills they would need to cultivate in order to be successful in their chosen fields. One concrete strategy was applying for and attending the Academy. Once there, students were choosing clubs to be involved with or maneuvering for leadership opportunities to grow leadership skills or because the focus of the group were connected to values they wanted to maintain. The student interested in computer science and mathematics had joined a student group that helped other students with their technological problems and the math team. Students were doing research in their fields and were active in or anticipating being active in research about their interests with faculty members or mentors in the greater area. Students were actively investigating college programs that meshed with their interests, acting in school plays, and preparing for summer classes at universities. The student who was interested in a career in economics had just completed the Federal Reserve Challenge, wherein a team travels to the Federal Reserve to present an analysis of a current economic problem area. As part of this presentation, students would also hypothesize the appropriate response by the Federal Reserve. “And we won State, so…” (Student 9).

Path Analysis with Current and Future Selves

An aim of this study is the examination of the temporal self in high-ability African American male students. Results from interviews with African American youth captured the possibilities for the self these young men approached and avoided and the strategies employed to achieve these ends. The final component of this study addresses whether a temporal self can have a bearing on academic performance indicators. Because
of the small number of African Americans in the population at the Academy, students of mainly Asian, African, Latin descents were contrasted with students of Anglo-European descent. Utilizing AMOS 16.0, the following path analysis was used to evaluate these questions:

Will possible selves and strategy use differ based on ethnicity?

Will possible selves be a significant predictor of academic self-concept?

Will possible selves be a significant predictor of academic performance above and beyond the impact of academic self-concept?

As mentioned in Chapter III, a path analysis allows for the testing of complicated interactions among variables, along with providing estimates of statistical levels of unaccounted-for variance. Researchers are encouraged to assess reliability of instruments utilized to determine whether items were consistently understood, thereby resulting in reliable scores (Kline, 2005). As mentioned in Chapter III, a test-retest reliability study for the Possible Selves Questionnaire with a sample of 63 Introductory Psychology students resulted in 90% of the sample being able to reproduce two of their expected selves after 3 weeks. Seventy-four percent of the students were also able to remember two of their feared selves after 3 weeks. All of the students were able to generate at least one possible self and 61 students were able to reproduce at least one feared self after 3 weeks (Oyserman & Markus, 1990). The alpha values for the academic self-concept subscales were also sound (SDQ Math $\alpha = .915$, SDQ Verbal $\alpha = .907$, SDQ School = .874).

Descriptive Results for Survey Data
Box plots for each variable were generated for each variable in the model to assess the presence of univariate outliers. Case #241 was identified as an outlier on the general school subscale. Review of the instrument revealed inconsistent and nonserious responses to the open-ended and academic self-concept items. Therefore this case was deleted from the data set. This decision adjusted the sample size to 253 students.

Marsh (1992) provides means from a norming group of 137 high school girls for each item within the SDQ-II. Means for the math self-concept items ranged from 2.76 to 3.88, means for the verbal self-concept items ranged from 3.72 to 4.49, and means for the general school self-concept items ranged from 3.24 to 4.41. In the current sample, means ranged from 3.62 to 5.17 for math self-concept, from 3.48 to 4.81 for verbal self-concept, and from 3.52 to 5.21 for general school.

Examples of hoped-for and feared selves and strategies based on Oyseman’s coding protocol are presented in Table 2. As mentioned in Chapter III, students received a 1 if a category was represented in their responses and a 0 if a category was not represented. Means were computed for each of the categories. The means are analogous to rates of occurrence, with higher means indicating more students generated a hoped-for or feared self or strategy for a category. Noteworthy are the high means for possible selves and strategy development in the achievement category.
Table 2

*Examples of Hoped-For Selves, Feared Selves, Strategies, and Rate of Occurrence*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hoped-For Selves (Mean)</th>
<th>Feared Selves (Mean)</th>
<th>Strategies (Mean)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Achievement</strong></td>
<td>The best student in my English class (.96)</td>
<td>Failing (.81)</td>
<td>Trying to better time management (.96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interpersonal</strong></td>
<td>Have a girlfriend (.27)</td>
<td>Not being social whatsoever (.42)</td>
<td>Hanging out with friends/meeting new people (.36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationships</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personality Traits</strong></td>
<td>Happy (.20)</td>
<td>Lazy (.45)</td>
<td>Constantly evaluating my personality (.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical/Health</strong></td>
<td>Be in shape (.31)</td>
<td>Being overweight (.33)</td>
<td>Working out (.39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Related</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Material/Lifestyles</strong></td>
<td>Working somehow and getting paid (.05)</td>
<td>Having a dirty room (.04)</td>
<td>Keep the room organized (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative</strong></td>
<td>Get No C’s (.07)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Study, don’t procrastinate, get teacher help (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Normative</strong></td>
<td>Drugs and alcohol (.17)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Just avoid it (.13)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Means are in parentheses.

As a precursor to the results of the path analysis, the correlation matrix is also provided (see Table 3). Means for attainment of possible selves, academic self-concept, parent’s level of education (i.e., SES), SAT scores and grades are also presented in Table 3.
Table 3

_Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Variables (n = 253)_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Attain Possible Selves</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Socioeconomic Status</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. SAT</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.16**</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Academic Self-Concept</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Grades</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Year in School</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.42**</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_M_ = Mean. _SD_ = Standard Deviation

**_p_ = .01 (one-tailed).

_Noteworthy findings are the relationships between academic self-concept and both grades and SAT that are not only significant but robust. Moreover, there are positive relationships between the attempt to attain possible selves and grades, SAT scores, academic self-concept, and year in school. Year in school is also positively related to the attempt to attain possible selves. Students who have been at the Academy longer are more apt to utilize strategies to attain their hoped-for selves and avoid their feared selves. Finally, SES is positively correlated with SAT scores and race. Parents of Anglo descent have higher levels of education than parents of Asian, African, and Latin descent, and students who have been enrolled in the Academy longer have higher SAT scores._
Cohen’s guidelines for interpreting effect sizes in the social sciences, wherein values between .1-.3 signify small effects, values between .3-.5 are medium effects, and values greater than .5 are large, the relationships between the indicators of academic performance and academic self-concept as well as the relationship between year in school and SAT scores are medium effects, and the rest of the relationships are small.

Examination of the correlation matrix encouraged the inclusion of paths between year in school and attainment of possible selves and year in school and SAT scores. Students are predicted to get higher SAT scores the longer they are in the Academy because of practice effects and due to older students being positively impacted to a greater degree by the rigor of the curriculum. Awad (2007) substantiates this conclusion with the finding that older students were able to answer more GRE verbal items than younger students. The direction of the path between attainment of possible selves and time in school is substantiated by studies examining the possible selves of youth during different developmental periods of adolescence (e.g., early adolescence; Anderman et al., 1999).
Attempt to attain possible selves

Academic Self-Concept

Socioeconomic Status

Race/ethnicity

SAT Scores

Year in School

Grades
Parameter Estimates

The inclusion of possible selves, academic self-concept, race, year in school, and SES explained 23.6% of the variance in grades and 25.4% of the variance in SAT scores. The variables in the model did not explain as much of the variance in possible selves or academic self-concept ($R^2_{\text{attain possible selves}} = .061$, $R^2_{\text{academic self-concept}} = .058$).

Turning to an examination of direct and indirect effects, academic self-concept demonstrated a direct significant effect on SAT scores ($b = 65.772$, $\beta = .287$, $p \leq .001$) and grades ($b = .629$, $\beta = .469$, $p \leq .001$), with academic self-concept being more impactful on grades. For every 1-point increase in academic self-concept, there is a 65.772 point increase in SAT scores and a .629 increase in grades. A third significant direct effect in the model was the path between attainment of possible selves and academic self-concept ($b = 1.267$, $\beta = .241$, $p \leq .001$). The result demonstrates that for every 1-point increase in attempt to attain possible selves, there is an increase of 1.267 points in academic self-concept. Year in school had a significant direct effect on the attempt to attain possible selves ($b = .034$, $\beta = .235$, $p \leq .001$) and SAT scores ($b = 70.469$, $\beta = .395$, $p \leq .001$). For every 1-point increase in year in school, there is a .034 increase in attainment of possible selves and a 70.469-point increase in SAT scores. No other paths, direct or indirect, were significant.

Standardized direct, indirect, and total effects for the attainment of possible selves, academic self-concept, grades, and SAT scores are included in Tables 4, 5, and 6. (Unstandardized values remain in the metric of the original variable; standardized values have been transformed and are comparable). Direct effects are direct pathways between
variables and are represented via the path coefficients included in the path models below, indirect effects are the product of direct effects leading to an exogenous variable (e.g., one indirect pathway between SES and SAT scores is through the attaining possible selves variable) and total effects are the sum of the direct and indirect effects, or the total “weight” of a path within the model (Kline, 2005).

Table 4

*Standardized Direct Effects for Endogenous Variables (n = 253)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socioeconomic Status</th>
<th>Year in School</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>PS</th>
<th>ASC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td>-.064</td>
<td>.235*</td>
<td>-.039</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASC</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>-.007</td>
<td>-.039</td>
<td>.238*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>.062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT Scores</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>.395*</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* PS = Attempt to attain possible selves, ASC = Academic Self-Concept. – = No direct effect between variables in direction specified. The standard error for each path is in parantheses. Causal variables head the columns. The endogenous variables head the rows.*p ≤ .001.

Table 5

*Standardized Indirect Effects for Endogenous Variables (n = 253)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socioeconomic Status</th>
<th>Year in School</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>PS</th>
<th>ASC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASC</td>
<td>-.015</td>
<td>.056</td>
<td>-.009</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>-.025</td>
<td>.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT Scores</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>-.014</td>
<td>.068</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* PS = Attempt to attain possible selves, ASC = Academic Self-Concept. – = No indirect effect between variables in direction specified. Causal variables head the columns. The endogenous variables head the rows.
Table 6

*Standardized Total Effects for Endogenous Variables (n = 253)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Socioeconomic Status</th>
<th>Year in School</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>PS</th>
<th>ASC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td>-.064</td>
<td>.235</td>
<td>-.039</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASC</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>-.048</td>
<td>.238</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>-.025</td>
<td>.173</td>
<td>.468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT Scores</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.412</td>
<td>-.014</td>
<td>.079</td>
<td>.288</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* PS = Attempt to attain possible selves, ASC = Academic Self-Concept. – = No total effect between variables in direction specified. Causal variables head the columns. The endogenous variables head the rows.

Below are two path models: the model with all path coefficients included and the model composed of the significant paths.
Conclusion

Semi-structured interviews with African American male youth attending a specialized school for gifted and talented youth were conducted to highlight the salient possibilities for the future that are hoped for and feared. Students identified strategies for realizing these possibilities, and they have provided information about four contextual factors - family, neighborhood, the Academy, and racism-that have supported the development of future selves to be approached and avoided. The path analysis incorporated data from the male student body, including many of the African American students that were interviewed. Interrelationships amongst contextual variables race, SES, and year in school as well as academic self-concept and possible selves were examined to determine whether a future and present self influenced academic performance. These results will be discussed more fully in Chapter V.
Chapter V

This study has provided the results of semi-structured interviews with high-ability African American males attending a specialized school for gifted and talented students. The purpose of the interviews was to describe the make-up of possible hoped-for or feared selves the young men might hold, their plans for potentially realizing these future selves, and the contextual factors that might have a bearing on possible selves being supported or abandoned. A path model assessed the relationships among academic self-concept, the attempt to attain possible selves, SES, race, length of time in school, grades, and SAT scores, with the primary aim being determining whether a temporal self would play a role in the grades students received and the scores students earned on a standardized test. The path model also examined whether contextual variables like SES, race, or length of time in the specialized school would flow through possible selves and academic self-concept to influence the academic outcomes.

Results provided evidence for a temporal self having a bearing on academic performance, and the African American males are ambitious agents in constructing their environment to support their future dream selves. They are supported in this endeavor by their parents and other family members, the academic culture of the Academy, and select peers. A discussion of the results follows.

Interviews Exploring Possible Selves

The broad argument that Oyserman and her colleagues (Oyserman et al., 2002; Oyserman et al., 2006; Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006) advance in their research about African American students and outcomes coupled with Markus and Nurius (1986) theoretical argument of a working self-concept is that the creation and cultivation of
possible selves is reflective of and buffeted by cultural experiences. Youth watch
significant others and learn from their life lessons, negotiate with others about possible
selves to avoid and to pursue, and interpret events based on current feedback. This
process bears not only on a self of the moment but is felt within a more stable
understanding of the self. The self is constantly in flux and is receptive to and pushing
against influential societal forces as it charts an individual path to and through
actualization.

The youth interviewed in this study exhibited this important work. The young
men hailed from a variety of backgrounds; however they seemed unified in the pursuit of
success, careers, additional schooling, and personal and interpersonal development – the
minor themes under the umbrella of the hoped-for self major theme. Noteworthy is that
the collective of their goals coupled with feared selves in roughly the same domains (i.e.,
becoming entangled in troubling behaviors like selling drugs, disconnecting prematurely
from school, a lack of material comforts, enmeshment with crowds that eschew personal
development, and poor-functioning relationships with others) represent balance.
Oyserman et al. (2006) contend that this balance is a necessary precursor to self-
regulation. The young men in this study were thoughtfully ambitious and driven.

Family, racism, the culture of the specialized school they attend, and lessons
learned from their home neighborhood have influenced the formation of hoped-for and
feared selves. These elements – family, racism, the neighborhood, and the specialized
school-constitute the minor themes within the major theme context. All of the young
men noted talking with their parents about their goals. Their families were not only
receptive of the possible selves the young men were envisioning, they cultivated them.
Parents and family members encouraged their sons to attend the Academy, thereby supporting their immersion in a rigorous and sometimes stressful intellectual lifestyle. As Marsh (n.d., 1987, 1991; Marsh et al., 2004) notes, this is a risky choice, as the fall in academic self-concept for youth attending high-ability schools could reveal itself in lower occupational and educational aspirations. They questioned their sons to have them voice possibilities they were considering, and they positively endorsed the behaviors that would be needed in order to realize success in fields that many Americans do not often pursue. The young men trusted and expected their parents to help them find their way, and the entirety of this work was buttressed by love. As Allen (1978) found, families can be sources of inspiration and guidance for African American young men.

The academic customs and traditions of the Academy were also important for the young men in envisioning possible selves. As with previous work (Stake & Nickens, 2005), peers were important in helping youth consider and hold onto possible selves in nontraditional fields. Several researchers maintain that one sure way of realizing possible selves involves implementing concrete strategies (Abrams & Aguilar, 2005; Matute-Bianchi, 1986). Youth of the Academy modeled to each other the concrete strategic steps needed to gain entry into their chosen careers.

Peers normalized what “we do” (Oyserman et al., 2006) to include conducting extensive research into areas of interest and seeking hands-on experiences that mimic work in fields they are curious about. Peers were also generally supportive of involvement in math, science, and technology disciplines. The strength of these mores was such that some of the African American males focused on the fierce urgency of now did not perceive applying for college as distinct from the current moment.
Youth who are negotiating with significant others about possible selves to pursue and let go of, especially when they are nontraditional (Oyserman et al., 2006), are dialoguing with family and peers and are engaged in grander negotiations with their neighborhoods and the academic cultures of their school communities. Negotiation with academic communities and the difficulty inherent in charting a path that deviated from the norm was reflected in the comments of youth who felt as outsiders because of their interest in fine arts and sports management. They appeared to have been patronized by some of their peers and were sometimes second-guessed by some of their teachers.

Moreover, one young man was not as able to access institutional supports that smoothed the college application process. A second young man seemed engaged in a profound search for his path. There were supports in place for him through involvement in the drama club, money for additional training during the summer, and commiserations with members of the Academy who were just as passionate about drama. However, he acutely questioned the viability of a possible self that really seemed to matter to him.

The expectations that communities hold appear to have a bearing on individual goals young people set. For these young men, the change from their home schools to the Academy was an important first step in affirming to themselves their potential, academic and otherwise. Similar to Cokely’s (2000) research with African American college students, a positive academic culture, construed more holistically to include support by different actors in these youth’s lives, can play a significant role in estimations of academic aptitude.

Racism was also implicated. The young men did not speak with one voice about the impact of racism or stereotypes at the Academy. Instead, along with noting that
stereotypes are painful and can potentially frame dreams of what is possible (Kao, 2000), the young man discussed whether race was an appropriate referent for self-construals, questioned whether stereotypes were that egregious, and implicated other African American students in part for their perpetuation.

The diversity of opinions about the relevance of racism in explaining aspects of their experience at the Academy may be reflective of the times. At the same moment in history in this country, there is an African American president and an 80-year old anti-Semite executing a security guard at the Holocaust Museum in Washington. The young men in this study are charting unique paths in uncovering how or whether racism will have any bearing on possibilities they envision. Furthermore, the young men’s ambivalence about racism further contextualizes Oyserman et al.’s (2003) contention that …when social context is limiting and group membership functions to subtly or not so subtly shape the selves one ‘tries on’ in the process of adolescent development, we propose that conceptualizing oneself as a group member, becoming aware of stereotypes and limitations, and developing a perspective of oneself as succeeding as a group member, allows a way out. (p. 1230)

This ambivalence is not well-represented in the literature about African American youth, academic self-concept and possible selves. It may do the research community in these areas and the people they hope to impact a disservice to represent Black youth so uniformly.

When describing the role of stereotypes on their futures, several of them noted that they intended to behave in ways that would reflect well on other African Americans.
They were shouldering the task of representing an entire population of diverse people in their engagements with others. This desire is both laudable and heartbreaking…and is similar to high-ability African American youth involved in accelerated classes at Capital High (Fordham, 1996). Fordham details many forms of resistance employed by African American youth attending Capital, the pseudonym for a high school in the Washington D.C area. One form of resistance involved turning away from activities that could endanger a self that privileged the values of their community, activities considered “acting White” or the antithesis to positive self-actualization. A second form of resistance was employed by youth bucking implicit low expectations for African Americans.

*Path Model*

The path model utilized in this study addressed Harter’s (1996) call for more theoretical process-oriented work in self-concept scholarship as the research community intentionally features youth of color. She argued that research that highlights youth not often part of the literature should further help develop theory development. This study promisingly demonstrates that for male youth attending a specialized school for gifted and talented students, the attempt to attain hoped-for possible selves and avoid feared possible selves positively influences grades and SAT scores through academic self-concept. Furthermore, youth who had been in school longer may be better able to engage the pathway between possible selves, academic self-concept and eventual academic outcomes.

Interestingly, the model may have also provided an explanation for youth who are subject to the BFLPE yet maintain high aspirations for the future, at least as demonstrated
by the interviews with the cross-section of African American youth. According to Gill (2003), academic self-concept decreases for sophomores within the first semester in this school setting. The lack of a difference between sophomores, juniors, and seniors in academic self-concept hints at the continued negative impact of social comparisons for youth attending a school for high-ability youth (Olszewski, Kulieke, & Willis, 1987). However, the positive relationship between attaining possible selves, academic self-concept and the academic outcomes, particularly grades implies that asking youth to hone in future hoped-for and feared selves could ameliorate that BFLPE to some degree. Dai (2004) hypothesizes as much in his rebuttal about the uniformity of the BFLPE.

Intriguingly, the model did not operate differently for youth based on race or SES. Though the implied lack of difference in academic self-concept for high-ability African Americans when compared to high-ability White youth is supported by a prior study (Cooley et al., 1991), the lack of difference in possible selves based on race or SES was surprising, considering the findings from the interviews and Oyserman and Fryberg’s (2006), Kao’s (2000), and Matute-Bianchi’s (1986) compelling argument that the sociocultural experiences of youth are represented in the future selves they envision.

It should be noted that the possible selves interviews and the open-ended questionnaire manifested time and the content of possible selves differently. The African American male youth during the interviews were apt to project further into the future, and links between hoped-for selves, feared selves, strategies and contextual factors were more explicitly highlighted via the types of questions posed. The open-ended interviews only asked youth to consider what they would like to become or avoid becoming next year.
Though some elements of the interviews were also captured in the survey responses, the questionnaire may not have elicited responses as rich as the interviews.

That being said, the results of the path analysis get the heart of the study, the impact of a specialized school for high-ability youth on the self-conceptions of African American males. When considering more immediate hopes and fears the young men held and strategy implementation, an explanation for the lack of differences could be that the academic culture of the Academy is pulling all possible selves and strategies towards certain compositions. This pull is reflected in the high rate of occurrence for possible selves and strategies in the achievement domain, as demonstrated in Table 2. There is great encouragement in such a possibility, especially when considering the interviews might provide compelling evidence for the academic culture ameliorating the impact of neighborhood SES. A second explanation for these findings could be that teenagers deciding to leave home to attend a high-ability residential school might do so because of similar goals and drive. These explanations are not mutually exclusive. As was demonstrated through the interviews, for many students, the decision to complete the last years of high school at the Academy represents a consequential milestone in reaching important goals they had set. These youth, along with other factors, may have helped create an academic culture that pushes students to pursue specific possible selves and implement similar strategies to realize them. Suffice it to say, despite the ills (i.e., racism, depressed academic self-concept) concomitant with attendance at the Academy, those involved with the institution may be doing the important work of developing all students’ talent, particularly talent in African American young men.

Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research
One of the limitations for this study is the number of African American males in attendance at the Academy. The low numbers made it difficult to assess the construct validity of Marsh’s SDQ with high-ability African American males specifically or the make-up of academic self-concept in high-ability African American males generally. Likewise, the construction of the race variable for the path analysis obfuscated the temporal self for the high-ability African American males surveyed. With reference to the interviews, claims of generalizability will not be made. It is expected that consumers of this research will determine whether the findings herein described transfer to populations of high-ability African American males specifically and African American and student populations more generally. Though the findings are compelling, caution should be employed.

The low number of high-ability African American males in this setting is indicative of the low numbers of African American students in programs for gifted youth generally. Future research in this area of inquiry could consider surveying African American youth from several settings similar to the Academy. Larger samples would allow for more robust examinations of research questions like the construct validity of academic self-concept (via confirmatory factory analysis or multitrait-multimethod studies) with high-ability African American males.

Equivalent models were not designed and compared against the final path model for this study. Kline (2005) notes that the lack of acknowledgement of equivalent models is a pernicious problem in structural equation modeling research and reinforces confirmation bias. Future research evaluating equivalent models would include a change
in direction between academic self-concept and possible selves. Likewise, one could test whether grades and SAT scores are influential drivers of possible selves and academic self-concept. Lastly, considering it is just as viable that students with higher attempts to attain possible selves and avoid feared selves might stay in school longer, the path between year in school and possible selves could also change direction. Model fit statistics along with theory would inform which models are viable representations of the academic experience for high-ability students generally and high-ability African American students specifically attending specialized schools for gifted and talented youth.

Moreover, path analyses can only assess the variables included. There is the possibility that variables that could have a bearing on the findings were not included in the model (Kline, 2005). Finally, paths that do not have a theoretical underpinning were not included in the model. It is therefore likely that significant paths are not included in the results.

The variables included in the model did not do a good job predicting academic self-concept and possible selves. Furthermore, the purpose of the study was focused on the interaction between academic self-concept and possible selves rather than predicting academic outcomes like grades and SAT scores. Studies that have examined academic achievement via grades or SAT scores have incorporated a number of outcome measures and demographic items. Future research would include components that might have a bearing on possible selves and academic self-concept as well as incorporate more of the constructs that have a bearing on academic achievement. For example, SES would not
only include estimations of parent education. Income, occupations, and ownership versus 
renting of the residence might also be included (Hauser, 1994).

Lastly, along with including African American females, cross-cultural groups, and 
students who enroll and later withdraw from specialized schools in future assessments of 
the temporal self for high-ability youth in specialized school settings, the concept 
possible selves might need further justification. As the process of assessing possible 
selves has focused on open-ended assessment, more researchers have sought to 
substantiate the coding of potential hoped-for and feared selves and strategies. When 
scanning the literature for estimates of reliability of the Possible Selves Questionnaire, it 
seemed that only one study reported on attempts to assess the reliability of the content of 
the instrument. Has anyone questioned the existence of the construct possible selves?
The answer appears to be no, as Bryne (1996) urges more examinations of construct 
validity. Along with constructing studies to examine validity, additional qualitative 
research in this area, maybe with grounded theory, phenomenological, or ethnographic 
lenses, might delve more fully into questions of salience as well as the possibility of a 
working self-concept amidst the tumultuousness of a dynamic yet mundane everyday 
reality to determine whether possible selves are real and distinct in the world or a 
thoretical argument.

Conclusion

Asking youth to linger with their future selves in order to positively affect a 
present sense of competency conceivable adds nuance to the representation of high-
ability African American male students and approximates research with other youth and 
the pairing of a future and present self (Anderman et al., 1999; Garcia & Pintrich, 1995).
The concept possible selves paired with a stable sense of self are an exciting new direction in self-concept research. A temporal as well as multidimensional self has the potential to more accurately represent how the self is experienced, as it privileges context and dynamism. What is more, as self-concept research and research into gifted studies has not often explicitly identified the experiences of students of color, the examination of a temporal self with these youth has the potential to have a profound effect on the future of research in these areas.

This study has also realized findings that are in similar vein to other researchers (e.g., Chavous, Rivas-Drake, Smalls, & Cogburn, 2008; Signer, Beasley, & Bauer, 1997) who have examined academic self-concept with African American youth. Incorporating interviews buttressed on possible selves theory development and including the findings from the path model that possibilities for the self positively influence academic self-concept may tangentially link the family, school culture, the neighborhood, and racism to academic outcomes like grades and standardized test scores. The study is novel in that it has presented a complex narrative on these elements of context. The students interviewed for this study articulated a dynamic process of trying to cope with and understand environmental forces ringing their experiences. This dynamism may also be represented in the lack of differential functioning of the path model based on race and SES in the present study.

Furthermore, Oyserman and her colleagues (Oyserman et al., 1995; Oyserman et al., 2006) have done the admirable work of showcasing how African American youth can potentially be shown to use visions for themselves to stave off narrowed possibilities. The African American males in this study extend and complete that narrative by
demonstrating that family, peers, and an academic culture that supports and encourages academic and personal excellence ensure the blossoming of what is possible. This is done in part by highlighting African American youth who have exhibited academic success in school. As noted in Chapter I, the academic experience of youth who excel in schools is not well-represented (Newman et al., 2000). Seeking their perspective can augment the literature by broadening the discussion of what occurs for all African American youth.
References


meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.

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Appendix A: Instrument Used in Study

SDQII©
Self-Description Questionnaire II

PLEASE READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST
This is not a test - there are no right or wrong answers. This is a chance for you to look at how you think and feel about yourself in school. It is important that you:
- are honest
- give your own views about yourself, without talking to others
- report how you feel NOW (not how you felt at another time in your life, or how you might feel tomorrow)

Your answers are confidential and will only be used for research or program development. Your answers will not be used in any way to refer to you as an individual.

Use the six-point scale to indicate how true (like you) or how false (unlike you) each statement is a description of you. Please do not leave any statements blank.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>False</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01. Mathematics is one of my best subjects</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02. I am hopeless in English classes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03. People come to me for help in most school subjects</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04. I often need help in mathematics</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05. I look forward to English classes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06. I am too stupid to get into a good university</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>07. I look forward to mathematics classes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>08. I do badly on tests that need a lot of reading ability</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09. If I work really hard I could be one of the best students in my grade</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I have trouble understanding anything with mathematics in it</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Work in English classes is easy for me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I get bad grades in most school subjects</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I enjoy studying for mathematics</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I am not very good at reading</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statement</td>
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<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>I learn things quickly in most school subjects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>I do badly in tests of mathematics</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>English is one of my best subjects</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>I am stupid at most school subjects</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>I get good marks in mathematics</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>I hate reading</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>I do well in tests in most school subjects</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>I never want to take another mathematics course</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>I get good grades in English</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>I have trouble with most school subjects</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>I have always done well in mathematics</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>I have trouble expressing myself when I try to write something</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>I am good at most school subjects</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>I hate mathematics</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>I learn things quickly in English classes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Most school subjects are just too hard for me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>I enjoy spending time with my friends of the same sex</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Student Activities

The next set of questions reference potential activities you may participate in after school.

Use the six-point scale to indicate the number of hours per week you engage in the after-school activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>32. Socializing with friends</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Gaming</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Talking with an RC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. Teachers outside of class</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Participating in student clubs and groups</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. Participating in sports</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. Studying/doing homework</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. Doing volunteer work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Possible Selves Questionnaire

Each of us has some image or picture of what we will be like in the future. Think about next year -- imagine what you'll be like and what you’ll be doing.

For example, you may want be the best student in your MI4 class or captain of a varsity sports team.

• In the lines below, write what you expect you will be like next year.
• In the space next to each expected goal, mark NO (X) if you are not currently doing something to get to that expectation or goal, and mark YES (X) if you are currently doing something to get to that expectation or goal.
• For each expected goal that you marked YES, use the space to the right (designated s40 s41 and so on) to write what you are doing this year to attain that goal. Use the first space for the first expected goal, the second space for the second expected goal and so on.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Next year, I expect to be</th>
<th>Am I am doing something to be that way</th>
<th>If yes, What I am doing now to be that way next year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(P40) ______________</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>(s40)________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(P41) ______________</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>(s41)________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(P42) ______________</td>
<td></td>
<td>(s42)________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(P43) ______________</td>
<td></td>
<td>(s43)________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition, we all have images or pictures of what we don’t want to be like. First, think a minute about ways you would not like to be next year -- things you are concerned about or want to avoid being like.

For example, you may want to avoid getting a C in Dr. Skinner’s class or being the lowest scorer on the chess team.

- Write those concerns or selves to-be-avoided in the lines below.
- In the space next to each to-be-avoided self, mark YES (X) if you are currently doing something to not be like the to-be-avoided self next year, and mark NO (X) if you are not doing something to become the to-be-avoided self.
- For each to-be-avoided self that you marked YES, use the space to the right (designated s44, s45, and so on) to write what you are doing this year to reduce the chances that this will describe you next year. Use the first space for the first concern, the second space for the second concern and so on.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Next year, I want to avoid</th>
<th>Am I doing something to avoid this</th>
<th>If yes, What I am doing now to avoid being that way next year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(P44)</td>
<td>______________</td>
<td>(s44)________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(P45)</td>
<td>______________</td>
<td>(s45)________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(P46)</td>
<td>______________</td>
<td>(s46)________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(P47)</td>
<td>______________</td>
<td>(s47)________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These last set of questions ask you to supply a little information about yourself.

Please circle the appropriate response.

48. I am in my _____________year at IMSA.
   a. Sophomore
   b. Junior
   c. Senior

49. What were your latest scores on the Math and Critical Reading sections of the SAT?

   SAT Math Section:
   a. 300-399
   b. 400-499
   c. 500-599
   d. 600-699
   e. 700-799
   f. 800

   SAT Critical Reading Section:
   a. 300-399
   b. 400-499
   c. 500-599
   d. 600-699
   e. 700-799
   f. 800

50. I would describe myself as the following type of student:

   a. An (A) student.
   b. An (A-B) student.
   c. A (B) student.
   d. A (B-C) student.
   e. A (C) student

51. The highest level degree my father completed was a(n)

   a. High school degree, GED
   b. Associate’s degree, degree from a trade school
   c. Undergraduate degree
   d. Master’s degree or equivalent (for example, law degree)
   e. Doctorate degree
f. My father did not complete or is currently working on his high school degree or GED

52. The highest level degree my mother completed was a(n)

_____________________

a. High school degree, GED 
b. Associate’s degree, degree from a trade school 
c. Undergraduate degree 
d. Master’s degree or equivalent (for example, law degree) 
e. Doctorate degree 
f. My mother did not complete or is currently working on her high school degree or GED

53. Are you a recent immigrant to the United States?

a. Yes 
b. No 

54. With which racial/ethnic group do you identify? (Please choose one)

a. American Indian/Alaskan Native descent 
b. African descent 
c. Hispanic/Latin descent 
d. Anglo-European descent 
e. Asian/Pacific Islander descent 
f. Biracial: __________________________________________(please explain)
Appendix B: Coding Instruction for Possible Selves Measure

A. CATEGORY LABELS
There are six main categories of Next Year Expected Possible Selves:

1. Achievement - relates to school and school interactions with teachers, achievement-related activities
2. Interpersonal Relationships - involves family, friends, relationships, and social interactions except with teachers
3. Personality Traits - relates to personality characteristics, self-descriptions of traits
4. Physical/Health-Related - relates to physical health, weight, height
5. Material/Lifestyles - relates to material possessions and living situation, including moving
6. Negative - includes all negatively worded responses

There are six main categories of Next Year Feared Possible Selves.

1. Achievement - relates to school and school interactions with teachers, achievement-related activities
2. Interpersonal Relationships - involves family, friends, relationships, and social interactions except with teachers
3. Personality Traits - relates to personality characteristics, self-descriptions of traits
4. Physical/Health-Related - relates to physical health, weight, height
5. Material/Lifestyles - relates to material possessions and living situation, including moving
6. Non-normative /Risky Behaviors - includes negative and illegal behaviors such as smoking, drinking, involved in fights, gangs, etc.

B. SUMMARY OF CODING
Categories of expected and feared possible selves are identical except that the sixth category for expected selves includes ANY negative reference (since the vast majority of expectations are framed positively) and the sixth category for feared possible selves includes behaviors or expectations that are either delinquent or risky behaviors (such as teen pregnancy or smoking). Each category includes subcategories that are listed below. These may be useful for analyses though in our work to date sample size has been such that we have focused on main categories only.

C. CODING AMBIGUOUS STATEMENTS
1. CONSIDER AGE OF RESPONDENT -- When coding for possible selves, one must first consider the age of the respondent. The same response e.g. “getting my license” may be either a codable or noncodable response depending on they respondent’s age (that is NEXT YEAR is this possible?). For example, when an eighth grader expects to be a doctor that
response is not coded. In a very few instances, age may also determine which category the possible self is placed. For example, when a twelve-year old respondent reports that next year he/she would like to avoid smoking, this feared possible self is categorized as non-normative. For an older person (16 and above), this same feared self would be coded in the health category.

2. CONSIDER CONTEXT OF RESPONSE -- When a possible self is ambiguous because too little has been written, read through the strategy provided for that possible self to see if it provides clues for the content intended.

D. EXAMPLES OF NEXT YEAR POSSIBLE SELVES

Achievement

Expected selves

Job- working for extra money, finding summer job, working, help mom save for school, babysitting, having a job, part-time job
Activities in school- cheer team, basketball team at school, playing instrument, school band, extra-curricular activities, playing sports, on a team, a better basketball player, getting a driver’s license
School- doing good in school, trying to do good in school, smart, getting good grades, going to the next grade, keep my grades up, not tardy or absent from school, more helpful in classroom, honor roll, good conduct, going to better/new school
Teachers- good relationship with teachers, getting along with teachers, respectful to teachers
Activities Not in School- basketball in neighborhood, guitar, deer hunting, reading a lot of books, boxing, (Note: Generally, if there is any doubt about activities put in school activities except for things not offered in school)

Feared Selves

Job- losing my job, without work
Activities in school- not on team, not making cheerleading
School- known as bad kid by teachers, a loser, dropout, flunking out of my classes, having bad grades, dumb, having bad schoolwork, not paying attention, not falling behind in class, in trouble in school, being a little punk, fighting in school, suspended, excluded, skipping, in same grade
Teachers- still getting trouble with teachers, back talking to teachers,
Activities Not in School- I don’t want to be home all the time
Interpersonal Relationships

Expected selves

General- shy, silly, nice, respectful, better listener, funnier
Family- obedient, getting along with parents/relatives, helping around house, better person towards mother, see relatives, doing things with family, closer to family, being a good/better son/daughter
Peers- having a steady boyfriend, getting along better with people, having lots of friends/same friends, making new friends, having lots of friends, hang with friends more, trying to be accepted at new school, being a better friend

Feared selves

General- as shy as I am, avoid being a recluse, mean person, rude, stuck up, mistrusted, stingy,
Family- having anything happen to our family, not listening to parents, being smart with parents, mean to sibling/relative, getting into arguments with parent/relative, without someone to turn to
Peers- enemies with other people, being a follower, being disliked by friends, not making friends, lying to people, boring, very talkative, breaking up with girl/boyfriend, bully, troublemaker, bad to my friends, without friends because of rumors, used just for my car-for rides

Personality Traits

Expected selves

Independence or Maturity- more mature, more responsible, more grown-up, helping her without complaining, A little more organized, Able to concentrate
Attitude- more serious person, being more open-minded, positive thoughts, positive attitude, to be a good person

Feared selves

Independence or Maturity- lazy, irresponsible, not trusted
Attitude- a bad attitude, silly, greedy, weak mentally, emotional mess, caring about nothing

Physical

Expected selves

General Body Descriptive-Hair looking different, as short as I am this year, taller, growing a few inches, Handsome, good-looking,
Physical Health- older, 15 years old

Feared Selves

General Body Descriptive- Getting my haircut, wearing dark lipstick like a devil worshipper, Short, I want to grow,
Physical Health- Sick a lot, so sick I can’t attend school, On medication again, Slower physically, weaker than I am, overweight

Material/ Lifestyle

Expected selves

Lifestyle-Still living at home with my mom, moving to Canada, living somewhere, going places I have never been,
Material-own a car, living in better new house

Feared Selves

Lifestyle- Moving from this house
Material- In the situation of money, not money confused

Negative

Possible selves responses that are worded negative or suggest an expected negative outcome should be placed in the negative category. The response could be categorized from any of the 6 possible selves categories. For example, students may respond “next year, I expect to still be involved in fights (negative-delinquent), or I expect to have few friends (negative-interpersonal relationships). However, these statements are sometimes worded in a negative form. For example, a student may respond “next year, I expect to be not fighting (negative-delinquent), or not to be getting picked on (negative-interpersonal relationships).

Non-Normative

Expected selves

Do not use for expected selves-Use Negative Category

Feared Selves

Non-normative- getting pregnant, cigarettes, being killed, hanging out with wrong people, troublemaker, having sex
Delinquent- shooting people, with gang members, getting involved in drugs, In a gang, gang banger, alcohol use, a druggie, drug dealer, jail
Instructions for Coding Strategies

When a strategy or strategies is/are given for each possible self, the strategy should be coded in the same category as the possible self. The categories are the same as the expected and feared possible selves categories: 1) Achievement, 2) Interpersonal relationships, 3) Personality Traits, 4) Physical/Health-Related, 5) Material/lifestyles, 6) Non-Normative, 7) Negative.

Examples of Strategies

Achievement
Working hard on assignments
Doing all my schoolwork
Paying more attention

Interpersonal Relationships
Doing what others tell me to do
Working with parents
Asking for help

Personality Traits
Controlling my attitude/actions
Trying new things
Disciplining myself

Physical
Lifting weights
Exercising
Eating healthy foods

Material/ Lifestyle
Working to save my money
Talking with parents about moving

Non-normative
Avoid being around negative/criminal people/activities
Walk away from negative pressure situations
Appendix C: Example of Semi-Structured Interviewing and Interview Coding

The major and minor theme will be placed in parentheses directly next to the interview portions. Personal reflections about the interview content are in brackets.

Student 9

What do you believe is possible for you? What dreams did you have about, do you have about who you could become or possibly do?

What dreams do I have?

Umhmm.

Can’t express those fully, I have plans, but I don’t, I guess I can’t say that I’ve dreams of what I could be. I’m just going along trying to do the best that I can. (hoped for selves, emphasis on the now)

What are some of your plans?

Plans…wanna get a good GPA, do well here at ****, then go to a good college, hopefully get a good degree and then from there on out (hoped-for selves, career/education), I really don’t have any solid plans (hoped-for selves, emphasis on the now), but I could say that I’d like to be influential (hoped-for selves, success).

Ok.

Do you have a sense of what you’d like to get your degree in?

Somewhere in economics (hoped-for selves, career/educational).

Somewhere in economics? Ok. What kinds of possibilities are you afraid of that could happen to you?

Possibilities? Hmmm. At this point, my biggest fear is not achieving my academic goals here.

Ok.

Nothing social, nothing…just that I can’t live up to goals that I’ve set for myself (feared self, failure).

What are those goals?

Just being academically successful, winning awards, winning competitions, all-around excellence. (hoped-for selves, success)
Ok. Are you involved in things that…

Umhmm.

What kinds of things are you involved with?

I just finished the Fed Challenge.

What is that?

Oh. It’s Federal Reserve Challenge where a team of five goes to the Federal Reserve and then presents an economic analysis of the current situation and then direct what could the Fed’s response to it (strategies, concrete).

Ok.

And we won State, so…

Ok.

And I’m involved in scholastic bowl and then there’s other things that come and go, as in yesterday there was… the entire sophomore class has this competition, we came second, my group (strategies, concrete).

Ok. So, just to restate then, the majority of your, the things you’d like to avoid would be failure academically and not being recognized through awards and stuff like that?

Umhmm (feared selves, failure).

Ok. Have you shared these things that are important to you with others?

Yes.

Who and what about them helped you feel comfortable about talking to them?

They’re students here, they’re generally kind people (context, academy). My parents, they’re my parents (context, family).

Ok.

And they, many of them are upperclassmen, they know what to do, they know which classes et cetera, how to get A’s, and then generally that I can help from them in case I feel as if I’m not reaching these goals. (context, academy)
Ok. And you parents, you said they’re parents. What is about them being parents?

I don’t know. I just think it’s the fact they’re my parents, I can say anything to them, they raised me, I, and there is nothing to counter the fact that I can tell them anything and generally they’re the only people in the world I can trust 100%. (context, family)

Ok.

Are there people you avoid sharing your possibilities with?

Umhmm.

Who and why?

Some students here generally because I don’t like them.

Why don’t you like them?

A whole host of things. Some people say things that I don’t like, and other people I just infer that I wouldn’t like (context, academy).

Ok.

Based on what?

Based on the other people they associate themselves with. Based on their habits, based on their, the way they carry themselves, based on a whole slew of observations (context, academy).

Ok. Ok. How has attending the academy fit in with some goals that you’ve set for yourself?

Well, I’ve had more opportunities than I would have had in my home town. I’ve been able to learn a lot more than I thought I would be able to. I’ve, I’ve been exposed to more things here. I’ve been able to challenge myself more and now I think I’m learning more than I ever had before. (context, academy).

Ok. What is your home town like, what is your home school like?

I came here out of middle school. Wheaton Illinois. The school is Monroe. It wasn’t a bad school, but most of my education came through other means (context, neighborhood). My parents regularly took me to College of DuPage to take supplementary classes (context, family), so I wasn’t, I wouldn’t say that I wasn’t learning anything at the school, but I wasn’t happy there, and I don’t think the school was
adequately challenging me, considering the fact that I had not been able to, that I, well, **** was a large change coming here, and I had to work harder than I had before (context, academy)..

Ok. Has there been a shift in how you consider your possibilities since the beginning..are you a sophomore?

Umhmm.

Since the beginning of your sophomore year to this point?

A shift?

Umhmm.

A change, growth, decline?

Well, the, it’s that I’m starting to be more focused on the immediate future (hoped-for selves, emphasis on now).

Ok

That I am starting to see how things could materialize now, because before in my old school, college was a far-off dream, and at this point now, it’s a immediate possibility and I need to be able to handle it more efficiently than I would have had I been a middle schooler. Now that things count towards that, I need to be able to react adequately hoped-for selves, emphasis on now, academy).

Ok. You said something what was a far-off dream? What was that?

College, that in middle school I was just thinking of college, I’ll go there but eventually. Right now, I don’t really care that much.

And that’s changed since coming here?

Umhmm. Because then I was rationally four years off from college, now I’m only…not 2. (context, emphasis on now, academy)

Ok. What immediate things have you honed in on?

(He said something I did not get). Refining my skills. That there’s some aspects that of my intellectual capabilities that I’m better at naturally than other parts and just being able to turn those into strong selling points of myself and then for all my other skills just keeping them as good as I possibly could but at the same time specializing myself (strategies, more nebulous aims).
Ok. Are there other types of institutions you’re involved with that help you feel you can achieve the things that are important to your or avoid being inconspicuous? Is that kinda the, if I were to describe a fear for you, would that be what you just said, being inconspicuous?

Umhmm.

Ok. So, are there types of institutions you involved with that help you feel that you can live into your goals or avoid being inconspicuous?

Institutions?

Umhmm.

I wouldn’t say that I’m involved with institutions. I’m involved with some organizations, not to heavily, but slightly involved. I wouldn’t say institutions.

Ok. And organizatoins would be?

Things like the Oversea Fed Challenge?

Oversea Fed Challenge?


Ok.

And then there’re clubs and et cetera like I’m involved with Free the Children and Model United Nations and in relation to institutions, I might get an internship at Loyola, but I’m not too involved with established institutions.

Ok. Did I ask you if you were going, if you were planning on getting a mentorship or your plans for your SIR?

Yes, I plan on getting a mentorship (strategies, concrete). And no, you didn’t ask me.

Ok. So how are you gonna to do that?

How am I going to do that? I’d, at this point, I’m open to it. Right now, my main goal for my SIR is simply to win awards and accolades (hoped-for self, success) and I think it matters whether or not I get this Loyola internship. If I get the internship and it looks like I might be able to go somewhere with it, I’ll probably stick with that. But if I don’t, then I’ll look for other alternatives (strategies, concrete).
Ok. Ok. Are there other things in your life that show you who you want to be or would not want to be?

Other things?

Umhmm.

Other people, other books,

Books…

Is there a TV show you watch, is it something about your neighborhood, is it all kinds of things…

Who do I want, who do I not want…

Umhmm.

I’m not sure. A lot of my visions of myself come from internal sources that can only be augmented by external sources. I’ve read many books on a bunch of concrete subjects that don’t have to deal with personal self-actualization, but I, I’ll say that my parents shape me a lot, that a lot of their values are values that I hold and I think that if I, the person who I wanna be is shaped by these values (context, family). At the same time, I also…I don’t know how to put it into words, but I have this strange feeling that somehow all the people I’ve met have, that some of them I don’t want to be like, some of them I do want to be like them. And all of those have some sort of subliminal affect on who I wanna be that generally I would say that the…can’t even describe it, but.. sorry I don’t think I can answer this question very well (feared self, being around people without aspirations).

That’s ok. That’s ok. For people you’ve met who you say you don’t want to be like, what is it about them that pushes you away from them?

Things like complacency, willingness to accept order as it is established without any oversight or any research. People who take life as it is and just leave it at that. And those how don’t desire the betterness of their environment and then those who aren’t pragmatic about things, those who are willing to accept where they are. And then on a more practical side is the people who do not apply their skills, people who don’t look to gain skills, people who don’t to use what skills they already have to create something, create things (feared self, being around people without aspirations).

[This is a really good summation of why kids who leave their home environments to come to **** do so. Some of frustrations with the thinking of neighborhood people or school peers that encouraged the kids to head out to****. I think some of this also resonates with me as well.]
Ok. And so the people who you, who you’re drawn to or the people you who you admire, are they like the opposite of what you just mentioned?

Yes.

Ok. Have you had, had there been people you’ve cared in your life who’ve had their dreams deferred?

Cared about? Define cared about.

Anyone, you parents, your cousins, best friend, grandmother…

Dreams deferred?

No, not really.

Ok. So everyone in your life, all the things that they envisioned for themselves came true.

All the things they’ve told me they envisioned for themselves.

Ok. Ok. How do you think that has impacted your own aspirations?

Well, I can’t be first out of all the people I know.

Huh?

I can’t be the first person to not achieve his goals. I have to be able to acquire the things and the education that I want, and I can’t be the person, the odd man out who does not achieve what he’s planned for himself, what he’s worked for (context, family).

Ok. Do you think racism could have an impact on possibilities you hope, possibilities that you fear?

No, not really. I haven’t experienced any real racism in my life, and I don’t think that I could look forward to any (context, racism).

[Loooove this answer….]

Ok. Do you think there are stereotypes at play at **** that have an impact on you?

An impact on me? Stereotypes? At ****? Slightly. Most of the time it’s just in the form of jokes but it’s not an actual phenomenon, but it’s more of just a social, that I’m a
social oddity as much as its not...people don’t really act upon it, but I’m just viewed as a social oddity, and that’s pretty much the greatest extent of that.

What do you mean by social oddity?

Let’s see. Let’s put it this way. My friends describe me, they describe me as a European Black person.

A European Black person. [Mildly annoyed here.]. Ok. What does that mean?

It means that I don’t fit the stereotype of the American African of the American African American.

Ok. So, you’re the exception?

Umhmm (context, racism).

Ok. And how does that, how has that impacted you?

In terms of sociability, none. In terms of academics, none (context, racism).

Ok.

It’s just a way that I’m characterized, and I’ve never paid attention to social constructs, so… [I wonder if my tension with this answer prompted this remark about social constructs?]