AN EXAMINATION OF THE STABILITY OF THE ACADEMIC

SELF-CONCEPT OF STUDENTS WHO WERE IN THE

TOP TEN PERCENT OF THEIR HIGH SCHOOL CLASS

THESIS

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Knowledge has always been a pursuit of mine. Learning, though, is not always easy. There have been many times I have had to question what I really know. Through these times, I have had many people near me that have assisted me in my journey and to whom I owe many thanks.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The transition from high school to college can be challenging for students. Some students adjust well and excel in the new environment, but for others, the transition can be difficult. Because graduation is a concern among students, educators, and society, researchers have tried to identify factors associated with educational achievement (Strodtbeck 1958; Brookover 1959; Sexton 1961).

From this research, two general approaches have emerged. The first approach concentrates on school characteristics. For example, in a study of Detroit-area schools, Sexton (1961:154) categorized schools based on the income in the school area. Sexton (1961:211-222) found that an area's average family income is directly related to a school's resources. In other words, schools that were located in low-income areas had older facilities, larger classes, fewer after school programs, and less qualified teachers. Furthermore, students in these low-income area schools scored lower on reading tests than students in high-income area schools (Sexton 1961:155-157). Thus, these findings suggest that school characteristics, determined by financial resources, are associated with academic performance.

The second approach concentrates on factors related to the student, namely attitudes. There are attitudes toward education and attitudes toward one's abilities. For

example, Strodtbeck (1958:151-158) proposed that positive attitudes toward education explain why Jewish students have more academic success than Catholic Italian students. To verify this, Strodtbeck (1958:158-168) administered questionnaires to identify occupational choice, parental control, parental expectations, and educational aspirations to 1,151 public and parochial high school students and their parents. After comparing the attitudes from each group to the class grades and scores on achievement tests, Strodtbeck (1958:186-188) found that differences in educational achievement could be explained by the values emphasized at home, namely positive attitudes toward education.

Brookover (1959:84-85), however, contends that the attitude or perception an individual has of their abilities, or self-concept, can better explain academic achievement. Brookover (1959:85-86) explains that when applied to a specific learning situation, the self-concept is what leads an individual to succeed or fail. The self-concept, therefore, should have a strong relationship with academic achievement.

In short, there are various ways to approach issues related to academic achievement. Each approach, however, does not give a complete picture and there are issues within each approach that remain unresolved. For example, from the approach that examines attitudes toward the self, there is a question of stability of the self-concept when expectations are not met. This study will focus on this issue by examining the self-concept of students who entered Southwest Texas State University in order to form a more complete picture of the relationship between academic achievement and attitudes toward the self, or self-concept.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Theoretical work on the self-concept can be traced back to several key figures. James ([1890] 1981:378-379) proposed that consciousness of self involves a stream of thought where an individual is a thinker and a perceiver, as well as an object to be thought about. Recognizing the importance of social interaction, Cooley (1902:151-153) suggested that the process of knowing the self is also one in which we come to view ourselves as we believe others view us. Mead (1934:204) complements this view by adding that this process occurs through interactions with others; other people point out to the actor that she or he exists as an object. Lecky (1945:150-151) contributes to the understanding of the self-concept by proposing that once individuals form a self-concept, it remains consistent over time.

Moving on to how the self-concept is formed, Sears and Sherman (1964:10) suggest that the self-concept is shaped by multiple factors. Sears and Sherman (1964:10-11) contend that the factors that make up the self-concept are how individuals perceive their physical abilities, mental abilities, school relations with the same sex and other sex, social relations with teachers, work habits, mastery of school subjects, social virtues, happy qualities, and appearance. Quantifying how students rate their self-concept based on these factors led to the development of the Self-Concept Inventory (SCI). The SCI is

comprised of 100 items, ten for each factor (Sears and Sherman 1964:66-69). Each item

is a phrase, such as "Getting my school work in on time." For each description, students

indicate if they are satisfied with themselves by marking yes or no, whether or not they

expect improvement by indicating yes or no, and rating themselves compared to others by

selecting one of five choices from very good to not very good. Sears and Sherman

(1964:8-9) administered the SCI to 195 fifth grade students at four different times over a

two-year period and conducted eight case studies from the same group of students. The

eight case studies were interviewed, responded to incomplete sentences, reacted to

problem stories, and wrote freely on specific topics, as well as completed the SCI with

their classmates (Sears and Sherman 1964:13). Responses from the participants suggest

that some factors have a greater impact on one's overall self-concept than other ones. For

example, how individuals perceive their relations with other students and teachers has a

greater impact on one's overall self-concept than how one perceives their social virtues

(Sears and Sherman 1964:73). Thus, the self-concept can be viewed as being shaped by

multiple factors, with each factor holding a differing level of significance for each

individual.

     Piers and Harris (1964:91) also contend the self-concept is shaped by multiple

factors. Piers and Harris (1964:92) however, suggest the self-concept is shaped by

slightly different factors than Sears and Sherman (1964) suggest. Piers and Harris (1964)

propose eleven factors: physical characteristics and appearance, clothing and grooming,

health and physical soundness, home and family, enjoyment of recreation, ability in play

and sports, ability in school, intellectual abilities, special talents, self-happiness, and

personality. To test the significance these factors have on shaping the self-concept, Piers

and Harris (1964:92) developed The Way I Feel About Myself Inventory (WIFAM). The original inventory consists of 100 statements, such as "I am a happy person," to which respondents indicate yes or no. After administering the inventory to four third grade classes, four sixth grade classes, and four tenth grade classes, Piers and Harris (1964:95) contend that the self-concept is primarily shaped by six factors. The factors are behavior, general and academic status, physical appearance and attributes, anxiety, popularity, and happiness and satisfaction. Like Sears and Sherman (1964), Piers and Harris (1964:95) also contend that individuals, when considering their overall self-concept, place more emphasis on some factors than on other ones. In this study, the factors most strongly related to overall self-concept were perceptions of behavior and general and academic status.

Rosenberg (1965:12-15) contends that the perception or image one has of oneself is shaped by the interactions with and evaluations from parents, teachers, peers, coworkers, etc. To determine how these different social experiences shape self-concept, Rosenberg (1965:16-17) developed the Self-Esteem Scales (SES). The SES consist of eleven scales: the Self-Esteem Scale, with items like "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself," the Stability of Self Scale, with items like "I have noticed that my ideas about myself seem to change very quickly," the Faith in People Scale, with items like "Human nature is really cooperative," the Sensitivity to Criticism Scale, with items like "Criticism or scolding hurts me terribly," the Depressive Affect Scale, with items like "On the whole, I think I am quite a happy person," the Daydreaming Scale, with items like "I daydream a good deal of the time," the Psychosomatic Symptom Scale, with items like "Are you bothered by nervousness," the Interpersonal Threat Scale, with items like "I

think I would prefer to say nothing at all than to say something that will make people angry with me," the Intensity of Discussion Index, with items like "Would you say you discuss international matters," the Parental Interest Index, with items like "Does your mother know most of your friends," and the Relationship with Father Scale, with items like "When your parents disagree, whose side are you usually on" (Rosenberg 1965:305-319). Rosenberg (1965:32-33) administered the SES to 5,024 high school juniors and seniors from ten randomly selected public high schools in New York. Rosenberg (1965:63,106,126,146,167) found significant relationships between self-concept and ethnic origin (students associated their self-concept with how prestigious or accepted their ethnicity is in broader society), perceived relationship with parents, academic performance, and feelings of anxiety. Furthermore, people act on their assumptions of what they are like based on these factors (Rosenberg 1965:187).

Also refining the factors that shape the self-concept, Gordon (1966:55) proposes it is shaped by one's attitudes toward school, peers, physical body, and emotions. Furthermore, each factor has different degrees of importance to each child, whereby they all shape the overall self-concept. Gordon (1966:55) developed the How I See Myself Scale (HISM) as a way to quantify self-concept and illustrate the impact each factor has on the overall self-concept. The HISMS is a 40-item instrument in which participants select a number that indicates to what extent they agree with a statement. For example, "I like school...1 2 3 4 5...I don't like school." After administering the scale to 328 students in grades 3-12, Gordon (1966:58) found that overall self-concept is most strongly related to a student's attitudes toward school.

Coopersmith (1967:6) also contends that the self-concept is shaped by multiple factors, such as how individuals evaluate their relations to school, family, peers, self, and general social activities. Coopersmith (1967:6), however, contends that the family relationship is more strongly emphasized by adolescents than the other factors. To discover whether or not this is the case, Coopersmith (1967:9) developed the Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI) to quantify self-concept. The SEI contains 50 statements, such as "I'm proud of my schoolwork," to which respondents indicate if the statement is like them or unlike them. Coopersmith (1967:10-16) administered the inventory to 1,748 students attending public schools in Connecticut as well as interviewed their teachers and the mothers of 85 students selected from the group. Coopersmith (1967:236) concludes the perception a student has of their relationship with their family generally shapes their overall self-concept. Coopersmith (1967:244-246) explains this factor is emphasized by adolescents because interactions with family members is where one learns values, aspirations, and defenses to failure or unfamiliar situations.

Becker et al. (1968) took a strictly qualitative approach to identifying factors that shape the self-concept. Rather than administer questionnaires, Becker et al. (1968:13-14) attended classes at the University of Kansas with their subjects, spent time at their residences, accompanied them to organization meetings, and participated in their social life. Forming generalizations from their observations, Becker et al. (1968:33-36) found that academic achievement is the factor most students base their self-concept on. In other words, the higher one's grades, test scores, and class ranking, the higher the overall self-concept.

Bilby et al. (1972:507-508) also focus on factors related to the self-concept. Bilby et al. (1972:509), however, suggest that the self-concept of adolescents is cumulatively shaped by interactions with significant others, educational aspirations, and perceived ability and worthiness of various skills. To support this suggestion, the Self-Concept of Ability Scale (SCA) was used by Bilby et al. (1972:509-510) to examine the relationship between self-concept and significant others, educational aspirations of students, and perceived abilities in skill areas. The SCA contains eight items, such as "What kind of grades do you think you are capable of getting," to which students respond by selecting a choice between "Mostly A's" to "Mostly F's." Bilby et al. (1972:509) administered the instrument to 2,072 fourth, fifth, and sixth-grade students from sixteen schools throughout Michigan as well as interviewed 120 parents. Bilby et al. (1972:510) found that parental attitudes, educational aspirations, and perceived ability and worthiness of learned skills have an impact on overall self-concept.

Research on the self-concept took a new direction with the work of Shavelson et al. (1976). Shavelson et al. (1976:412) contend that the self-concept should be divided into two general dimensions, academic and non-academic. Shavelson et al. (1976:413) suggest that the academic self-concept is shaped by how individuals perceive their abilities in school courses and by how they are evaluated by others in their schoolwork. The non-academic self-concept is shaped by how individuals perceive their social relations, emotions, and physical appearance and abilities. Thus, research that has examined what factors shape the overall or general self-concept should be reviewed to find what factors are more strongly related to academic self-concept and what factors are more strongly related to the non-academic self-concept. To support their view,

Shavelson et al. (1976:421-434) reviewed data obtained from five major self-concept scales: the Self-Concept Inventory (Sears and Sherman 1964), the Way I Feel About Myself Scale (Piers and Harris 1964), the How I See Myself Scale (Gordon 1966), the Self-Esteem Inventory (Coopersmith 1967), and the Self-Concept of Ability Scale (Bilby et al. 1972). Shavelson et al. (1976:421-434) compared the responses indicating the relationship between academic achievement and general self-concept with the relationship between academic achievement and academic self-concept. Shavelson et al. (1976:435-437) found that the relationship between academic achievement and academic self-concept is stronger than the relationship between academic achievement and general self-concept. In other words, a change in academic performance might not show a change in general self-concept, but it can show a change in academic self-concept. The self-concept, therefore, should be divided into academic and non-academic dimensions.

With new measures needed to better differentiate factors related to the academic self-concept and non-academic self-concept, Marsh et al. (1983:63-64) developed the Self Description Questionnaire (SDQ). The SDQ has 62 items to which students indicate if the statement is "False," "Mostly False," "Sometimes False/Sometimes True," "Mostly True," or "True." The factors included on the questionnaire include physical abilities, physical appearance, relationships with peers, relationships with parents, reading abilities, math abilities, and overall ability and enjoyment of school subjects. Scores from the SDQ indicate non-academic self-concept, academic self-concept, and overall self-concept. Marsh et al. (1983:62-63) administered the SDQ to 960 fifth and sixth graders and compared the scores for each dimension of the self-concept to standardized achievement test scores and IQ test scores. Scores from the SDQ were also compared to

how teachers perceived each student's overall academic ability, ability in specific subjects, and self-concept. Marsh et al. (1983:71) conclude that the self-concept can be divided into two dimensions and that factors related to each dimension show stronger relationships than when comparing them to overall self-concept.

In summary, difficulty finding which factors are more strongly related to self-concept may be resolved by splitting the self-concept into two dimensions. The focus of this study is the academic self-concept and the factors that shape it. Thus, the remainder of this section will concentrate on factors related to the academic self-concept.

The Academic Self-Concept

The factors most commonly associated with academic self-concept are academic achievement (Mboya 1989; House 1996; Gigliotti and Gigliotti 1998), academic achievement in specific subjects (Marsh et al. 1988; Byrne and Gavin 1996; Marsh and Yeung 1997), socioeconomic status (Rosenberg and Pearlin 1978; Marsh and Parker 1984; Trusty et al. 1994), reference groups (Rogers et al. 1982; Yong and McIntyre 1991; Wisely and Jorgensen 2000), ethnicity (Ogbu 1985; Gerardi 1990; Hurtado 1994), gender (Rosenberg and Simmons 1982; Marsh et al. 1988; Sotelo 2000), and locus of control (Maqsud and Rouhani 1991; Yong 1994). Under consideration in this study is the stability of the academic self-concept and how each factor is associated with it during the transition from high school to college. The following section is a discussion of these factors and the stability of the academic self-concept.

Academic Self-Concept and Academic Achievement

Support for the relationship between academic achievement and academic self-concept is evident in Mboya's (1989:40) study of 229 high school students from five public high schools. Mboya (1989:40-41) administered the portion of the Self-Concept of Ability Scale (Bilby et al. 1972) that measures academic self-concept and the Self-Esteem Inventory (Coopersmith 1967) to measure general self-concept. After comparing the results to scores from standardized tests taken by the students, Mboya (1989:43) concludes that academic achievement has a strong positive correlation with academic self-concept.

In a study of 126 college freshmen at Northern Illinois University, House (1996:679-680) compared the responses from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program Survey that indicated academic self-concept and achievement expectancies (what the students expect to earn in their classes) with prior academic achievement (scores on college entrance exams) and the final grades in the students' courses. House (1996:680) concludes that academic self-concept is not only related to prior academic achievement, but also related to subsequent academic achievement. In other words, once students form a perception of their abilities, their behavior and achievement remain consistent over time as Lecky (1945) suggested. Thus, the academic self-concept has behavioral consequences in which individuals are motivated to meet their expectations as Rosenberg (1965) suggested.

Gigliotti and Gigliotti's (1998:299) examination of the academic self-concept of non-traditional students (ages 25 and older) at the University of Akron and Mount Union College supports House's (1996) work. Gigliotti and Gigliotti (1998:300) administered

the Self-Concept of Ability Scale (Bilby et al. 1972) and the Self-Esteem Scales

(Rosenberg 1965) to 508 participants to identify academic self-concept. After comparing

the scores from these measures to cumulative GPA, current GPA, total credits earned,

and current hours enrolled in, Gigliotti and Gigliotti (1998:302-303) not only found that

previous academic experience is related to academic self-concept, but also that academic

self-concept is related to how many hours students are enrolling in. In other words,

students with high academic self-concepts enroll in more hours than students with low

academic self-concepts. Thus, academic self-concept has behavioral consequences.

In summary, support for a positive relationship between academic achievement

and academic self-concept exists. Furthermore, the self-concept is considered a

motivational system that drives individuals to meet expectations, which are based on

prior success. This study, therefore, asks if students who had positive academic self-

concepts in high school continue to achieve in college and as a result, continue to have

positive academic self-concepts.

Academic Self-Concept and Academic Achievement in Specific Subjects

Along with the view of a positive relationship between academic self-concept and

academic achievement exists a view of a positive relationship between subject-specific

self-concept and academic achievement in that subject. For example, Marsh et al.

(1988:368) reviewed data gathered from research utilizing the Self-Description

Questionnaire (Marsh et al. 1983), the Self-Concept of Ability Scale (Bilby et al. 1972),

the Self-Esteem Scales (Rosenberg 1965), and the Affective Perception Inventory (Soares

and Soares 1979) administered to 991 public high school students. Marsh et al.

(1988:368) compared the responses that indicated perceived math, verbal, and overall academic ability with achievement indicators, such as class grades in math, English, and all subjects combined. Not surprisingly, Marsh et al. (1988:379) conclude that a stronger relationship exists between the self-concept of math/verbal abilities and grades in math/English than the self-concept of overall academic abilities and overall academic achievement.

Byrne and Gavin (1996:217) also propose that the relationship between academic achievement and academic self-concept is weaker than the relationship between the grades in specific subjects and the self-concepts students have in those subjects. To support this, Byrne and Gavin (1996:217) administered the Self-Description Questionnaire (Marsh et al. 1983) to 877 public school students. After the responses were compared to academic achievement, Byrne and Gavin (1996:225) found that achievement in specific courses is more strongly related to the self-concept in that subject area than overall academic achievement and the academic self-concept as a whole.

Marsh and Yeung (1997:697) further refine the subject-specific self-concept view by proposing that students select courses based on subject-specific self-concept. For instance, students with positive self-concepts in science will continue to enroll in science courses; students with negative self-concepts in math are less likely to pursue that field. To test this, Marsh and Yeung (1997:699) administered the Self-Description Questionnaire (Marsh et al. 1983) to 246 junior high and high school-aged students from a Catholic boys school. Marsh and Yeung (1997:699) also asked the students to list courses they would be interested in taking. After comparing the responses, which identified self-concept in specific subjects and the courses students want to study, to

actual course selections and class grades, Marsh and Yeung (1997:709) suggest that self-concept in specific school subjects is significantly related to subsequent course selection.

In summary, students perceive their academic abilities by their performance in certain subjects, such as classes considered difficult or classes they enjoy. Furthermore, the presence of a positive or negative self-concept in regard to a certain academic skill area can be a factor in the future development of that skill, such as choosing to enroll in a course that emphasizes that skill area. Thus, this study asks if students base their academic self-concepts on how they perceive their abilities in classes they consider difficult or classes they enjoy and whether or not students choose college courses based on their subject-specific self-concept.

Academic Self-Concept and Socioeconomic Status

Because social class is associated with prestige, respect, possessions, and power, researchers suggest it may have an impact on the self-concept of individuals who can distinguish social classes. For instance, Rosenberg and Pearlin (1978:54-56) administered the Self-Esteem Scales (Rosenberg 1965) to 2,300 adults in Chicago and a similar scale to 1,988 students from public Baltimore schools. Rosenberg and Pearlin (1978:54-56) compared the responses to data identifying the social class of each individual. Rosenberg and Pearlin (1978:55-57) found that by the time students are in high school, they are aware of their socioeconomic position and attach much importance to it.

Marsh and Parker (1984:215) applied this view to academic self-concept by suggesting there is also a positive relationship between academic self-concept and

socioeconomic status. Marsh and Parker (1984:219) administered the Self-Description

Questionnaire (Marsh et al. 1983) to 305 public middle school students and compared the

responses to data indicating the socioeconomic status of the students' families. Marsh

and Parker (1984:226) conclude that academic self-concept is positively correlated with

socioeconomic status.

Trusty et al. (1994:284) also proposed that a relationship between academic self-

concept and socioeconomic status exists. Trusty et al. (1994:285-287) administered the

Self-Observational Scales (Stenner and Katzenmeyer 1979) to 392 public elementary

school students and compared the responses, which indicate self-concept, to scores on

standardized tests, parent educational levels, and school lunch data, which identified the

income of a student's family. Trusty et al. (1994:289) found that students of lower

socioeconomic statuses have significantly lower and more negative academic self-

concepts and lower academic achievement than students of higher socioeconomic

statuses.

In summary, there is support for a positive relationship between academic

achievement and socioeconomic status. There is also support for a link between

socioeconomic status and academic self-concept. Thus, this study asks if there is a

positive relationship between socioeconomic status and academic achievement as well as

a positive relationship between socioeconomic status and academic self-concept.

Academic Self-Concept and Reference Groups

Sociologists also contend that the forming and shaping of the academic self-

concept largely occurs during interactions within reference groups, which are social units

that shape our attitudes and behavior. For example, Rogers et al. (1982:327) proposed that academic achievement and academic self-concept can best be understood within the context of a person's immediate social environment. Rogers et al. (1982:328-329) administered the Way I Feel About Myself Inventory (Piers and Harris 1964) to 159 students from different classrooms and different schools and compared the responses to standardized test scores, class grades, and the socioeconomic status of each student and each classroom. Rogers et al. (1982:332-333) found that self-concept of academic abilities is manifest most strongly within the context of the social comparison group or classroom. In other words, a student compares her or his own level of achievement to the achievement levels of others in the classroom, and to the extent that the results of such a comparison are favorable, her or his academic self-concept is enhanced (Rogers et al. 1982:335).

In another example, Yong and McIntyre (1991:443-444) administered a revised version of the Way I Feel About Myself Inventory (Piers and Harris 1964) to 40 public middle school students identified as gifted by the Illinois State Board of Education and 40 public middle school students identified as average. Yong and McIntyre (1991:444-445) compared the academic self-concepts of each group and found that students identified as gifted did not have a significantly higher academic self-concept than the students identified as average. Thus, this study suggests that students compare their own level of achievement, regardless at what level it is, to the achievement levels of others in the classroom, their reference group, to shape their academic self-concept.

Further support for the relationship between reference groups and academic self-concept is a study of students living in college residence halls at Stephen F. Austin State

University. Wisely and Jorgensen (2000:20) examined the effects on the academic self-concept of students living with other students in environments that emphasize academic success. Wisely and Jorgensen (2000:22-24) compared the grade point averages and probation statuses of students living in residence halls with students not living in residence halls, as well as interviewed students living in the residence halls. Wisely and Jorgensen (2000:25-26) conclude that academic success and academic self-concept depend on how well students learn to play the student role, which is a socialization project that partially occurs during peer interactions within the residence halls. This, Wisely and Jorgensen (2000:25-26) conclude, is why students living in the residence halls they examined had a higher grade point average and academic self-concept than students living off-campus.

Thus, the groups individuals belong to and compare themselves with exert strong guiding influences on attitudes and perceptions. In the academic setting, the groups that students belong to include: classmates, roommates, family, and teachers. Thus, this study asks if there is a relationship between a student's academic self-concept and the values emphasized by her or his reference groups.

Academic Self-Concept and Ethnicity

Ogbu (1985:864) contends that minority students have different ways of responding to adults that lead to misleading conclusions of their academic abilities and self-concepts. From his two-year ethnographic study of schools in Stockton, CA, Ogbu (1985:864-865) found that minority students tend to distrust the educational system. Because of the mistrust, minority students possess styles of learning, communicating, and

interacting with adults that are different from those expected in the classroom. Thus, these differences are what lead some researchers to evaluate responses as negative attitudes toward education or negative academic self-concepts.

Rather than assuming minority students have low or negative academic self-concepts, Gerardi (1990:403) contends that academically successful minority students have positive academic self-concepts. Gerardi (1990:403-404) compared indicators for academic self-concept, obtained by the Self-Concept of Ability Scale (Bilby et al. 1972), ethnicity, socioeconomic status, GPA, and standardized test scores of 98 freshman engineering majors at the City University of New York. Gerardi (1990:405-406) found that successful minorities have strong positive academic self-concepts. The findings suggest that minority students do not necessarily compare themselves to non-minority students. Instead, because identification with reference groups is strongest among minority students, successful minority students indicate positive academic self-concepts because they are elite within their reference group. Thus, the link between academic self-concept and academic achievement exists among minority students, as it does for non-minority students, but is enhanced by comparison to one's reference group.

Along this line, Hurtado (1994:330-331) contends that the academic self-concepts of minority students are shaped by different factors than non-minority students. Hurtado (1994:336) reviewed data gathered by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program in 1971 and the follow-up survey in 1980. Hurtado (1994:336-337) selected to examine the academic self-concepts of 510 minority students who were working towards a master's, doctorate, or professional degree at the time of the follow-up survey in 1980. Hurtado (1994:337) compared portions of the data indicating academic self-concept with

socioeconomic status and gender. Hurtado (1994:344-346) found that socioeconomic status, writing ability, and gender were all related to the academic self-concepts of the students in her sample.

In summary, the relationship between academic self-concept and academic achievement among minority students may not be as reliable as the relationship is among non-minority students. For instance, minority students may base their academic self-concepts on different factors than non-minority students. Thus, this study asks if there are differences between the academic self-concepts of minority and non-minority students with similar grades.

Academic Self-Concept and Gender

Rosenberg and Simmons (1982:242-243) suggest that males and females perceive their abilities differently because of gender socialization differences. To compare differences in the self-concepts of each sex, Rosenberg and Simmons (1982:243) administered the Self Esteem Scales (Rosenberg 1965) to 2,625 adolescents from Baltimore-area schools. Rosenberg and Simmons (1982:248) found that the self-concept of females depends much more on how they think others perceive them rather than on actual ability. Thus, academic achievement may not accurately reflect the academic self-concept of female students.

Refining the conclusions from Rosenberg and Simmons' (1982) study, Marsh et al. (1988:367-368) contend that the academic self-concept in certain subjects may be higher for one sex than the other because stereotypes suggest males have better math achievement than females and females have better verbal achievement than males.

Consequently, these attitudinal differences in academic ability affect subsequent academic performance in certain subjects. To test this, Marsh et al. (1988:368) administered the Self-Description Questionnaire (Marsh et al. 1983) to 991 public high school students in Canada and compared the scores indicating academic self-concept with class grades. Marsh et al. (1988:376) found that female students have higher verbal self-concepts than male students and male students have higher math self-concepts than female students, regardless of actual achievement. This suggests that gender socialization plays a role in shaping the academic self-concept.

Sotelo (2000:731) also suggests gender is related to academic self-concept and self-concept in general. Sotelo (2000:731-732) administered the Self-Esteem Scales (Rosenberg 1965) and the Self-Esteem Inventory (Coopersmith 1967) to 125 high school students and compared the scores between each sex. Sotelo (2000:732-733) found that males had lower feelings of inadequacy than females and higher self-concepts. This finding supports Rosenberg and Simmons' (1982) conclusion that the self-concept of females depends much more on how they think others perceive them rather than on actual ability.

In summary, gender socialization plays a role in the formation of academic self-concept. Females and males are guided by different sets of gender-based norms, roles, and expectations, which lead to differing perceptions of abilities, even if actual abilities are similar. Thus, this study asks if there are differences between the academic self-concepts of female and male students with similar grades.

Academic Self-Concept and Locus of Control

Nowicki and Strickland (1973:148-149) developed the Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Scale (NSLCS) to quantify locus of control. Locus of control ranges from internal to external. For example, individuals with an internal locus of control perceive a causal relationship between effort and outcome. Individuals with an external locus of control do not perceive a causal relationship between their effort and the outcome. The NSLCS consists of 40 questions, such as "Do you believe that if somebody studies hard enough he or she can pass any subject?" Respondents indicate yes or no. Nowicki and Strickland (1973:151) administered the survey to 1,017 students in elementary through high school and compared the results to data indicating the socioeconomic status and scores on intelligence tests. Nowicki and Strickland (1973:154) conclude that socioeconomic status and academic achievement are positively related to internal locus of control.

Nowicki and Strickland's (1973) conclusion led Maqsud and Rouhani (1991:107-108) to propose that internal locus of control is also positively related to academic self-concept and academic achievement. Maqsud and Rouhani (1991:109) administered the Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Scale (Nowicki and Strickland 1973) to 135 high school students in Batswana and compared the scores to self-concept, determined by the Bhatnager Self-Concept Scale (Bhatnager 1969), socioeconomic status, and scores from achievement tests in school. Maqsud and Rouhani (1991:110-112) conclude a positive relationship exists between internal locus of control and self-concept of academic abilities and academic achievement.

Yong (1994:192) also suggests there is a positive relationship between internal locus of control and self-concept of academic abilities. Yong (1994:192-193) administered the Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Scale (Nowicki and Strickland 1973) to 169 middle school students identified as gifted by their school district in Chicago and compared the results to scores obtained by the Self-Concept Scale for Gifted Children (Feldhusen and Kolloff 1981). Yong (1994:193-194) found a positive relationship between self-concept of academic abilities and internal locus of control.

In summary, there is support for a positive relationship between internal locus of control and academic achievement. There is also support for a positive relationship between academic self-concept and internal locus of control. Thus, this study asks if students with an internal locus of control are academically successful and have a positive academic self-concept.

Stability of the Academic Self-Concept

The last issue remaining is whether or not the academic self-concept remains in tact over time once an individual has a generalized notion of their abilities. Rosenberg (1979:236-237) suggests that the self-concept stabilizes once consistencies in environments and expectations are met, which for most individuals, occurs in high school. Thus, because Rosenberg (1979:54) considers the self-concept a motivational system, young adults, as well as older adults, will constantly strive to maintain, protect, and enhance their self-concepts, regardless of outcomes.

Fitts (1981:261-262), drawing from previous experience and research, also proposes that the self-concept is resistant to change. Similar to Rosenberg's (1979) view,

Fitts (1981:270-271) contends that people want to view themselves in a positive manner; they want to like themselves. Because of this, they are motivated to act in manners consistent with their self-concept rather than adapt a new self-concept. Even when outcomes do not match expectations and individuals experience dissonance, they usually resolve it by changing their behavior (Fitts 1981:271).

Others, however, contend that the academic self-concept is malleable and adapts to new evaluations of ability. For example, in their review of two decades of educational research, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991:174) conclude that college students realize that they cannot be above average in all areas. Students accept that they may excel in some areas while doing poorly in others. Consequently, college students develop more realistic perceptions of their abilities. Thus, this suggests that students modify their academic self-concepts.

There is also a view that is in the middle of both extremes. Reviewing the findings from past research, Demo (1992:303-306) argues that the self-concept is both structural and adaptable. In other words, self-concept is relatively stable from one situation to the next, but is also continually active and shifting. For example, self-concept is susceptible to change as an individual encounters new roles, situations, and life transitions. At the same time, however, the individual maintains a rather static general sense of one's abilities.

In summary, there is debate regarding the stability of the academic self-concept. Some sociologists suggest that the academic self-concept becomes stable and resists change. Others, however, contend that the self-concept continues to be modified to fit

new experiences. Thus, this study asks whether or not the academic self-concept of students undergoing a difficult transition remains stable or changes with new experiences.

The Present Study

The issues discussed above can be illustrated with the experiences of most students. The last issue, stability of the academic self-concept, however, can best be understood through the experiences of college students because entering college is usually the first major life transition for many students in the United States. This transition presents students with demands they may or may not be ready to adapt to or handle successfully, which may or may not affect how students perceive their academic abilities.

Adapting successfully to college depends on many factors. One of the factors is the level of preparation students receive while in high school, usually indicated by course grades. A relatively new college admission policy in the state of Texas is based on this idea. Under Texas House Bill 588, passed by the 75th Legislature in 1997, students who are in the top ten percent of their graduating class are eligible for automatic admission to any public university in Texas (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board 2000). This policy implies that success in high school, based on class grades, can be replicated in college.

Despite of their class ranking, students are not all equally prepared by their high schools. For example, the Office of Research, Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the US Department of Education (1994) compared class grades and standardized test scores of students from schools with different socioeconomic

backgrounds. One of the findings from the study was that grades in one school do not reflect similar achievement in other schools. In other words, not all schools equally prepare their students. Due to these differences, students from different high schools may enter college with different levels of preparedness.

Students who graduated in the top ten percent of their high school class and admitted under the Top Ten Percent admission policy can be expected to have positive academic self-concepts because they base their academic self-concepts on academic achievement within their school and interactions with their reference groups. The positive academic self-concept that some of these students possess, however, may not endure in a more academically rigorous setting because their actual abilities or level of preparation might not match their perception of their ability. In fact, 39% of the students at Southwest Texas State University who were in the top ten percent of their high school class have less than a B average in college (see Table 1).

This study, therefore, will examine the academic self-concept of students at Southwest Texas State University who were in the top ten percent of their high school class and compare it with the socioeconomic background and quality of education at their high school. For the purpose of this study, the academic self-concept refers to a student's perception of her or his academic abilities. Furthermore, the academic self-concept encompasses self-esteem in the academic setting and self-efficacy in scholastic endeavors. The findings from this particular group of students should illustrate whether or not the academic self-concept remains stable or is modified with new experiences and to what extent high school preparation plays a role and, therefore, add to the literature regarding the stability of the academic self-concept.

In summary, the following research questions are asked:

1)   Do students who had positive academic self-concepts in high school continue to achieve in college and as a result, continue to have positive academic self-concepts?

2)   Do students base their academic self-concepts on how they perceive their abilities in classes they consider difficult or classes they enjoy and do they choose college courses based on their subject-specific self-concept?

3)   Is there a positive relationship between socioeconomic status and academic achievement and is there a link between socioeconomic status and academic self-concept?

4)   Do the values emphasized by a student's reference groups influence her or his academic self-concept?

5)   Are there differences between the academic self-concepts of minority and non-minority students with similar grades?

6)   Are there differences between the academic self-concepts of female and male students with similar grades?

7)   Are students with an internal locus of control academically successful and do they have a positive academic self-concept?

8)   Does the academic self-concept of students remain stable or does it change with new experiences?

9)   Does the academic self-concept and academic achievement of students relate to the quality of education at their high school?

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Method

Numerous quantitative measures have been used to indicate which factors are most commonly related to the academic self-concept (Sears and Sherman 1964; Piers and Harris 1964; Rosenberg 1965; Gordon 1966; Coopersmith 1967; Bilby et al. 1972; Marsh et al. 1983). Mboya (1989:44), however, contends that limited choices on quantitative instruments do not allow researchers a comprehensive understanding of the factors related to the academic self-concept. Instead, instruments that encourage open-ended responses should be employed to better understand individual perspectives (Mboya 1989:44). A qualitative approach, such as in-depth interviews, allows individuals to explain their feelings, thoughts, intentions, and perceptions of the world better than instruments with limited choice response items. Thus, in-depth interviews are used in this study to determine how and why individuals perceive their academic abilities as they do perceive them.

The in-depth interview consists of three sets of open-ended questions (see Appendix A - Interview Guide). The first set of questions deals with high school experiences. The second set of questions is about college experiences. The third set of questions contains general items. The items in the interview guide were developed by

adapting appropriate items from the Self-Concept Inventory (Sears and Sherman 1964), the Way I Feel About Myself Scale (Piers and Harris 1964), the How I See Myself Scale (Gordon 1966), the Self-Esteem Inventory (Coopersmith 1967), the Self-Concept of Ability Scale (Bilby et al. 1972), the Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Scale (Nowicki and Strickland 1973), and the Self-Description Questionnaire (Marsh et al. 1983).

The items in the interview guide were selected to reveal how individuals perceive each factor commonly associated with academic self-concept discussed in the literature review. For instance, responses to items 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 10, 16, 17, 22, 24, and 28 reveal the relationship between academic achievement and academic self-concept. Items 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 15, 17, 22, and 23 reveal the relationship between academic self-concept and academic achievement in specific subjects. Items 1, 2, 11, 17, 19, and 20 reveal the relationship between socioeconomic status and academic self-concept. Items 2, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18, 29, 30, 31, and 32 illustrate the relationship between academic self-concept and reference groups. Items 1, 2, 11, 12, 13, 19, 30, and 31 reveal the relationship between ethnicity and academic self-concept. Items 5, 6, 14, 19, 23, 28, 30, and 32 illustrate the relationship between academic self-concept and gender. Items 6, 8, 9, 10, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, and 37 reveal locus of control. Items 2, 3, 4, 6, 19, 20, 22, 25, and 33 reveal high school preparation and its relation to academic self-concept.

The interview is constructed in this manner so participants can respond in their own words to express their personal perspectives and illustrate how each factor has shaped, modified, or stabilized their academic self-concept. The advantage to this method is that it makes data more comprehensive and data collection more systematic by

setting out the issues to be explored (Patton 2002:344-347; Marshall and Rossman 1999:108-110).

Qualitative Data Analysis

Patton (2002:463) suggests, "identifying, coding, categorizing, classifying, and labeling the primary patterns in the data" as the first step of qualitative data analysis. For instance, responses relating to the relationship between academic self-concept and academic achievement were sorted into one category. Responses relating to the relationship between academic self-concept and reference groups were sorted into another category. Responses relating to the relationships between academic self-concept and socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, and locus of control were sorted into categories as well.

The next step was to compare and analyze the responses within each theme. For instance, the responses from each participant were compared to the responses from all the other participants as well as previous findings from the literature review regarding the relationship between academic achievement and academic self-concept. Likewise, the responses from each participant regarding the relationship between academic self-concept and reference groups, socioeconomic status, gender, etc were compared to the responses from all the other participants and previous findings from the literature review.

Quantitative Method

The collection and analysis of quantitative data strengthens and/or verifies data gathered during the interviews. The quantitative data used in this study includes the

participant's family income, mother's and father's education level, ethnicity, gender, grade point average, the quality of education at the high school attended, and the socioeconomic background of the high school attended.

The family's income, mother's and father's education level, ethnicity, gender, and grade point average were obtained from official school records. The quality of education at the high school attended by the participant was assessed by using the Texas Education Agency's Rating System. Schools' ratings are based on three main indicators: Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) performance in reading, mathematics, and writing, the dropout rate, and the attendance rate. Schools may also receive additional recognition for college admission testing results, Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP) test performance, participation in the Texas State Board of Education's recommended high school program, and comparable improvement for reading and mathematics (Texas Education Agency 2000). Based on these ratings, scores for high school quality of education were assigned from 0 to 18. A score of 0 indicates a school averaged a rating of *low performing* for each year between 1995 and 2000. A score of 6 indicates a school averaged a rating of *average* for each year between 1995 and 2000. A score of 12 indicates a school averaged a rating of *recognized* for each year between 1995 and 2000. A score of 18 indicates a school averaged a rating of *exemplary* for each year between 1995 and 2000. The socioeconomic background of each school was assessed by using three factors: each school district's per student expenditure (PSE), percent of students in poverty (PIP), and per capita income (PCI). These data were obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics (1997).

Quantitative Data Analysis

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) is used to compare the means between groups (Moore and McCabe 1993:714). Thus, a one-way ANOVA was used to find if there is a difference between the mean GPA's of each sex and each ethnicity (Tables 5 and 6). A Spearman correlation is used to find if there is a relationship between variables measured on an ordinal scale of measurement (Gravetter and Wallnau 1999:407). Thus, a Spearman correlation was used to find if there is a relationship between GPA, which was converted to a rank order between 1 and 25, and high school quality of education, family income, and parents' education level (Tables 4 and 7). The Pearson r is used to find if there is a linear relationship between variables from an interval level of measurement (Sharp 1979:312). Thus, a Pearson r was used to find if there is a linear relationship between GPA and each variable comprising the high school's socioeconomic background (Table 3).

Participant Recruitment

The Office of Admissions at Southwest Texas State University provided a list of students who were in the top ten percent of their high school class. The list consisted of 998 students enrolled at the time this study began. Along with the name and contact information for each student, the list included: GPA, gender, ethnicity, name of the high school attended, mother and/or father's education level, and family income.

The list of students in this population was categorized into five GPA groups, below a 2.0, 2.0 - 2.4, 2.5 - 2.9, 3.0 - 3.4, and 3.5 - 4.0. From each GPA group, students were randomly selected for contact using a table of random numbers to match the last

digit of their social security number. Students were telephoned and/or contacted by electronic mail and given a brief description of the study. If a student declined to participate or could not be contacted, the next random number was matched with the last digit of a social security number. A total of 25 students (14 females and 11 males) participated in the study (See Table 2).

Reliability and Validity

Reliability means that similar instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions (Silverman 1993:145). In other words, various researchers using the same instrument should have similar results. Thus, to ensure a high level of reliability, the interview guide was structured and worded so all participants understood questions in the same way and would be able to answer without uncertainty.

Validity means that an account represents what it claims to describe (Silverman 1993:149). To ensure valid results, selected items were adapted from the Self-Concept Inventory (Sears and Sherman 1964), the Way I Feel About Myself Scale (Piers and Harris 1964), the How I See Myself Scale (Gordon 1966), the Self-Esteem Inventory (Coopersmith 1967), the Self-Concept of Ability Scale (Bilby et al. 1972), the Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Scale (Nowicki and Strickland 1973), and the Self-Description Questionnaire (Marsh et al. 1983). To ensure validity, therefore, the items in the interview guide were taken from widely used instruments whose findings have been replicated and repeatedly shown valid.

Assumptions and Limitations

This study assumes participants are truthful and can clearly express their thoughts, feelings, and intentions. Furthermore, this study also assumes that the researcher can understand and clearly depict the perspectives of the participants and form accurate generalizations based on these assumptions. A limitation with this study, however, is the small sample size. This small sample prohibits generalizations of findings. Nevertheless, trends from this sample can be compared to previous studies to form a more complete picture of academic self-concept.

Rights of Human Subjects

In accordance with the policies of the Institutional Review Board at Southwest Texas State University, the Application for Review of a Project Involving Human Subjects was filed. All participants agreed to and signed the Research Consent Form (see Appendix B); those who desired a copy were provided with one. Each participant also consented to the audio recording of her or his interview. In addition, participants were explicitly told that the audio recordings of their interviews would remain anonymous and information gained from the interview would remain confidential. All participants understood they could refuse to answer any question without fear of reprisal and they could also stop the interview at any time if they chose to do so.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Academic Self-Concept and Academic Achievement

The responses from each participant indicate they had positive academic self-concepts while in high school. Participants based their academic self-concept on their class grades. For example, Participant 6 stated, "When I got that A back, it was so nice...[it] made me feel real good when I got an A in something that was real hard." Participant 10 expressed, "I was always getting good grades...they made me feel good." Similar to these sentiments, Participant 16 stated, "I graduated with a 3.8 GPA in the top ten percent of my class. Basically I made all A's and B's. I was relatively happy with all my grades and assignments."

The responses from participants indicated that academic achievement in college had an impact on academic self-concept. Responding to how she feels about her grades, Participant 13 stated, "I'm real proud of them because I've only made like 3 B's and the rest are A's. I made A's in the classes that I never thought I would...I have a 3.87 GPA and I'm taking upper level hard classes, which I've taken since my sophomore year." However, because not all participants continued to have the academic success they experienced in high school, some participants' responses indicate that their academic self-concept is lower in college. For example, when asked how he feels about his grades,

Participant 1 stated, "Sometimes I think I did real good and I try really hard and I study and I find out I failed the exam or whatever. It kind of makes me feel like I'm stupid."

In summary, the participants in this study based their academic self-concepts on their academic achievement. In other words, the higher one's grades, the more positive one's academic self-concept. This supports findings from Mboya (1989), House (1996) and Gigliotti and Gigliotti (1998). Not all of the participants, however, continued to succeed in college and, as a result, they had lower academic self-concepts than they had in high school.

Academic Self-Concept and Academic Achievement in Specific Subjects

In high school, participants based their academic self-concept, in part, by how well they did in classes they liked and/or perceived as more challenging. For example, Participant 8 stated,

> "I was in honors classes in high school and my science classes were really rigorous. I also had classes that really prepared us for college and advanced placement classes and stuff and so it made me feel real good when I got an A on something that was real hard or challenging."

Participant 1 states, "Most of the classes I found easy. There were maybe like three classes that were difficult. The teachers were more strict in my math and science classes...they demanded more. Chemistry was the best."

The responses from the participants who have selected a major and minor indicate that they have selected their major based on how well they did in it that subject area while in high school. Furthermore, participants base their academic self-concepts by how well they are doing in their major and minor. For instance, Participant 4 attributes her exposure to Shakespeare in high school as her reason for choosing theater as a major.

She goes on to say, "I'm very happy with the work that I've done in theater, which I think is where I should be the most happy, seeing as that's my degree. I am pretty happy." Other participants, however, have lower academic self-concepts because they are not as successful in their major as they had hoped. For example, Participant 15 describes his difficulty in his chemistry classes. He states,

> "I get frustrated because in high school I was used to doing good and being the one on the top and then I come here and I don't understand it and I actually have to put a lot of effort to understand it. To see people that are sitting back and falling asleep and they're just acing classes. That frustrates me because it shouldn't be that hard for me to learn it, but yet it is."

In summary, the participants in this study partially based their academic self-concepts on how they perceived their abilities in certain subjects, which supports findings from Marsh et al. (1988) and Byrne and Gavin (1996). The responses from the participants in this study also indicated that they chose a major or minor in college based on how they perceived their abilities in high school, as Marsh and Yeung (1997) suggested.

Academic Self-Concept and Socioeconomic Status

The responses from the participants about their high school experiences did not indicate a connection between academic self-concept and socioeconomic status. Once in college, however, several participants indicated that their high schools were located in areas they considered as good or bad neighborhoods and that it had an impact on how they perceived their abilities once they were in college. For example, Participant 22 states,

"In San Antonio, you see a bunch of differences in how everybody grows up. Like there are some schools that have all the money like Alamo Heights and stuff and then you see other schools that have like no money at all on the other side of town like Edgewood. And it's like it makes you think like people from one school, are they more valuable than people from another school? Why do they get all the money and stuff? You hear about kids from those schools going to like Rice and Stanford and Yale. Most of the kids from my school don't even get into college. They end up going to community colleges and stuff, if they go at all. You know, it kind of messes with your head and gets you to thinking about how much you really learn and are worth to college recruiters going to a school like mine."

Participant 17 states,

"I did not like my high school at all. It wasn't on the bad side of town, but it wasn't the nicest kids that went there. There were a lot of thugs because the neighborhoods around my school were starting to become lower-class neighborhoods and stuff...The quality of education we got wasn't great."

These perceptions were supported by results measuring the relationship between the school's socioeconomic background (PSE, PIP, and PCI) and GPA (see Table 3). For instance, participants with higher GPA's attended schools that had a lower percentage of students in poverty (PIP). Furthermore, participants with higher GPA's attended schools that were in areas with higher per capita incomes (PCI). School districts that had higher per student expenditures (PSE) were also located in areas with higher per capita incomes (PCI).

The responses from the participants regarding their college experiences also suggest that they did not base their academic self-concepts on their socioeconomic status. These responses are supported by results measuring the relationship between the participants' socioeconomic level and their GPA (see Table 4). Perceived socioeconomic

differences, however, did affect several of the participants' general self-concepts. For instance, Participant 20 states,

> "College is more diverse than high school was. I mean, like a lot of the people I hung out with in high school were all like me. Here in college, people are from all over the place. Some are rich, some are poor. I guess it depends who you hang out with, but what I see is that a lot of students ask where you're from, what your parents do, what kind of car you drive. It's like some people don't want to hang out with you unless you have a lake house to use on the weekends and stuff. You know? It's like I can't change what my parents make. I think I'd still be the same person, but you don't get treated that way."

With a similar sentiment, Participant 5 states,

> "I felt like people were looking at me differently or like I didn't have enough, enough money. I don't know, it was just weird, like I felt weird and uncomfortable because I had grown up with something completely different."

In summary, analysis of quantitative data and responses from participants did not reveal a relationship between GPA and the participant's socioeconomic status nor between academic self-concept and the participant's socioeconomic status. This is contrary to what Rosenberg and Pearlin (1978), Marsh and Parker (1984), and Trusty et al. (1994) have found. The responses from the participants, however, did reveal a bond between their general self-concept and their socioeconomic status. The responses from the participants also revealed a link between their academic self-concept and the perceived socioeconomic background of their high school. Supporting this relationship, an analysis of quantitative data revealed a negative relationship between GPA and PIP as well as positive relationships between GPA and PCI and between PSE and PCI.

Academic Self-Concept and Reference Groups

Participants indicated a strong tie between their academic self-concept and their reference groups by crediting their friends, classmates, family, and/or teachers for much of their motivation and drive to succeed in their high school classes. For example, Participant 24 states, "My friends and I were real tight in high school. We pushed each other to do well in school. We sort of fed off of each other and stuff." Crediting her mother for her good grades, Participant 2 states, "My mom was so happy for me. It was never like pressure or anything. I try to do more for her than she even expects." Participant 11, however, claimed classmates and friends were distracting to his studies. He states, "I thought some of them were kind of distracting because a lot of kids in there didn't do their work...I kind of looked at them as spoiled brats because they were just looking for easy answers here and there." Participant 11, though, did credit his teachers. He states,

> "This teacher, she was maybe two or three years into it so the ways she was explaining it was kind of at my level so I understood it a little bit more. It got easier as the class went along. I still needed help here and there, but it got easier. She kept me into it."

The responses regarding college experiences from participants implied a connection between academic self-concept and friends, classmates, and parents that emphasize doing well in school. For example, Participant 12 states, "We all used to sit in a row. Whenever we used to get our test back, it was like I got an 80, well I got a 90, I got a 92. It would just go up trying to see who got the better score." Participant 1 remarks how his friends did not encourage academic success, which ultimately resulted in lower expectations and perceived abilities. He states,

> "I pushed myself much harder in high school than in college. I think I slacked off because there's more options, people, peer pressure, and just more things to do...I just

kind of went with what everyone else was doing. I had a
good time. It was fun. I just got wrapped up in it...the all
night parties and stuff."

In summary, responses from participants revealed that they evaluated their
abilities based on the performance of those around them. This supports the findings from
Yong and McIntyre (1991). The responses from participants also indicated that those
who have friends, roommates, classmates, parents, and/or teachers that emphasize
academic success have positive academic self-concepts, as Rogers et al. (1982) and
Wisely and Jorgensen (2000) found.

Academic Self-Concept and Ethnicity

As suggested by Ogbu (1985), Gerardi (1990), and Hurtado (1994), the responses
indicating the academic self-concepts of the minority participants were considered more
closely using additional factors, such as responses about socioeconomic status and
gender. Contrary to their suggestions, however, academic achievement did appear to be
the factor that minority participants, as well as non-minority participants, based their
academic self-concepts on. Furthermore, the responses from participants about their high
school experiences did not indicate that non-minority participants had higher academic
self-concepts than minority participants had. For instance, Participant 7 states, "I was
very competitive in high school, so getting good grades meant a lot to me...I felt proud
that I was doing well." Participant 13 states, "I took a lot of hard classes like AP classes
and stuff. I took pretty hard classes and the highest level I could." The responses from
non-minority participants were similar. Participant 25 states, "I was happy with my
grades. I graduated in the top ten percent of my class." Participant 21 states, "I did really
well in high school. There wasn't anything I ever had much trouble with. Sometimes it

was challenging, but I liked that. I liked knowing that when I had to apply myself, I could."

Regarding college experiences, there was not a significant difference between each ethnic group's academic achievement, measured by the mean GPA (see Table 5). Furthermore, responses from participants do not indicate that non-minority participants have a higher academic self-concept than minority participants have. Participant 23, for example, states, "I am pretty happy with my grades because I know I'm learning and applying the stuff not just repeating it back to the professors like we did in high school." Participant 8 remarks, "I feel pretty good about my grades. I mean like when I get a B in class, I'm like, I should have spent more time studying to get an A. I think I'm a good student." Some minority and non-minority participants also had lower academic self-concepts than they had in high school. For instance, Participant 3 remarks, "After my first semester, I realized I can't get straight A's all my life…I haven't gotten any grades to brag about." Similarly, Participant 19 states,

> "High school wasn't that bad. I thought most of the stuff was easy and figured I must have been smart to have such an easy time when there were other students around me who always seemed to flunk and stuff. But here I think that's changed you know. It's like I'm not as smart as I thought I was. School has been a lot harder than I thought it would have been."

In summary, minority and non-minority participants based their academic self-concepts on academic achievement, for which there was no significant difference. Furthermore, the responses from the participants do not indicate there are differences in the academic self-concepts between ethnic groups. In other words, minority participants did not have lower academic self-concepts than non-minority participants had.

Academic Self-Concept and Gender

The responses from participants about their high school experiences did not

indicate that male participants had a higher academic self-concept than female

participants had. For instance, Participant 4 states,

> "I worked construction with my dad for my co-op so a lot
> of people were like you should do secretary or receptionist
> stuff. It was just because I was a girl. It didn't bother me
> though. I'm very happy with what I've done. I made very
> good grades."

Participant 10 states, "I don't think anything is difficult in high school. I was always

getting good grades. I was always happy with my work. I guess it meant more because I

was always in honors and this and that."

Responses from participants about their college experiences do not indicate that

male participants have a higher academic self-concept than female participants have. For

example, Participant 18 states, "I'm a pretty good student. I hardly ever skip class. I've

had A's and B's the whole time. I made the dean's list 3 out of 4 semesters I was here."

She continues, "I definitely want to finish in 4 years and I don't want to get any bad

grades in any classes so that really motivates me to study in the end." Similarly,

Participant 8 states, "I feel pretty good about my grades. I mean like when I get a B in a

class, I'm like, I should have spent more time studying to get an A. I think I'm a good

student." Furthermore, there was not a significant difference between each sex's

academic achievement, measured by the mean GPA (see Table 6).

In summary, Rosenberg and Simmons (1982), Marsh et al. (1988), and Sotelo

(2000) have found that gender socialization is related to the academic self-concept. In

this sample, however, females and males did not differ in their grades, in their

perceptions of their abilities, nor in the majors they pursue. Instead, the responses from

participants indicate that academic achievement is the basis for their academic self-concept.

Academic Self-Concept and Locus of Control

The responses from participants about their high school experiences revealed a link between academic achievement and internal locus of control. Furthermore, responses also revealed a bond between academic self-concept and internal locus of control. For instance, Participant 7 states,

> "I was very competitive in high school, so getting good grades meant a lot to me...I felt proud that I was doing well. I thought a lot of the stuff was hard, but I just stuck with it and kept doing it without giving up."

Participant 24 states,

> "I was proud that I got good grades, but it wasn't like I got them because the work was easy. I felt I got my grades because I tried hard and put effort into my homework. I studied probably more than most other people did and I think it paid off because I didn't have to do as much catching up when I got to college."

The responses from participants about their college experiences also indicated a bond between academic achievement and internal locus of control, as well as academic self-concept and internal locus of control. In other words, participants who had high grades expressed an internal locus of control and participants who had low grades expressed an external locus of control. For example, Participant 9 states,

> "I would consider myself a pretty good student. I've improved my grades a lot in the past two years and I'm really proud of that because like the classes are tougher as opposed to the freshmen level classes...which is kind of tough because you have to discipline yourself."

Participant 21 states, "No matter how hard I try, I'll still wind up with like a C."

In summary, a connection between internal locus of control and academic achievement was found in this sample. A link between internal locus of control and academic self-concept was also found for this sample. In other words, participants with high grades expressed an internal locus of control and a positive academic self-concept. This supports Nowicki and Strickland (1973), Maqsud and Rouhani (1991), and Yong (1994).

Stability of the Academic Self-Concept

The responses from the participants in this study indicate that the academic self-concept, influenced by academic success in high school, did not remain consistent for all participants as Rosenberg (1979) and Fitts (1981) suggested. Instead, change in the academic self-concept occurred for participants who did not continue to academically succeed in college, as Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) suggested. For example, Participant 15 states,

> "My biggest thing was academic wise. Just comparing the education I received over there and from what I've heard from other people and their high school education. I just feel we got robbed really bad. So I guess that affected us. Like I came to my lab, my first chemistry lab, and just simple stuff like how to turn on the Bunsen Burner, I didn't know. It took me time to figure it out and people would look at you like you didn't know anything. It's difficult because nobody will want to be your partner with you because they know you're the weakest student in the class."

Participant 2 also feels that the level of preparation she received in high school was not adequate. She states,

> "My classes were really interesting and fun, but toward the end, I was just hoping to pass. There were times I felt discouraged because I didn't comprehend the material,

which made me feel dumb sometimes. I didn't feel
prepared. I think my high school could have done a much
better job."

Analysis of quantitative data does not support the view that the quality of education

received in high school is related to GPA (see Table 7).

In summary, participants who continued to succeed academically in college

continued to have positive academic self-concepts. Participants who did not continue to

succeed academically in college had lower perceptions of their abilities than they had in

high school. Participants suggested that the level of preparation they received in high

school was a reason they did poorly. Contrary to their perceptions, however, there was

not a positive relationship between GPA and high school quality of education. Thus, this

finding supports the view that the academic self-concept continues to be modified to fit

new experiences, but fails to support high school quality of education as a factor that can

be used to predict stability of the academic self-concept.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study found: 1) Participants based their academic self-concepts on their academic achievement. Not all of the participants, however, continued to succeed in college as they had expected to and, as a result, had lower academic self-concepts than they had in high school. 2) Participants also based their academic self-concepts on academic achievement in their major or other subjects they enjoyed and/or considered difficult. 3) A positive relationship between socioeconomic status and academic achievement was not found nor was a link between socioeconomic status and academic self-concept. There was, however, a tendency for participants to base their academic self-concepts on the perceived socioeconomic background of their high school. 4) Participants were influenced by the values emphasized within their reference groups, which had an effect on their academic self-concepts. 5) There was not a significant difference in the grade point averages between ethnic groups. Furthermore, responses did not indicate a difference in the academic self-concepts between ethnic groups. 6) There was not a significant difference in the grade point averages between sexes nor did responses indicate a difference in the academic self-concepts between sexes. 7) Responses revealed that a positive academic self-concept was related to an internal locus

of control. 8) The academic self-concept is susceptible to change. 9) There is not a

positive relationship between academic achievement and the high school quality of

education. Responses, however, did reveal that the academic self-concept is partially

influenced by how participants perceived their high school quality of education.

Conclusions

The most substantial finding from this study was that the academic self-concept is

malleable. As an explanation, students establish an identity in high school by comparing

their performance with their peers' performance. In other words, a student's perception

of her or his abilities revolves around success in the high school classroom. Once in

college however, students reevaluate their perceptions of their abilities based on their

GPA. For some students, previous perceptions of ability do not always match reality;

they question and doubt their abilities. When there is conflict between the academic self-

concept formed in one environment and the academic self-concept in a new environment,

an adjustment must be made. No longer high school students, college students must now

define themselves as college students. These new definitions will either be associated

with feelings of adequacy or inadequacy and consequently, can result in the change of

one's academic self-concept.

A second substantial finding in this study came from the examination of three

factors that could be used in future research to predict which students will be more likely

to struggle in college and, consequently, which students will redefine their academic self-

concepts. The three factors examined were the socioeconomic status of the individual,

the socioeconomic background of the high school, and the high school's quality of

education. The only factor supported in this study was the socioeconomic background of the high school. In other words, students who come from school districts with a low percentage of students living in poverty and from areas that have a high per capita income can be expected to have high GPA's in college and, consequently, positive academic self-concepts. Thus, school characteristics are associated with academic performance and play an important role in subsequent success.

A third substantial finding is that regardless of ethnicity or gender, academic achievement was the main factor that participants used to base their academic self-concepts. As an explanation, the attitudes and experiences of men and women, and among members of each ethnic group, are closer to equal in college than they are in many other settings. The college environment, in other words, provides females and minorities with the social and intellectual opportunities that are absent from other settings. Thus, academic achievement is viewed as an impartial measure of ability and, consequently, academic self-concept.

In conclusion, this study contends that students, regardless of sex or ethnicity, base their academic self-concepts on their academic achievement. Furthermore, this study contends that the academic self-concept is malleable. This study also contends that socioeconomic background is positively related to a student's academic success in college.

Recommendations

An issue with this study was accurately determining change in the academic self-concept over a period of time with just one interview. Although more time consuming, a

longitudinal study would be better suited for this purpose. For example, future studies should identify high school students seeking to enter a university and survey them once while in high school, a second time after their first semester, and a third time after they have completed a few semesters. This method would produce data much better suited to compare factors associated with change in the academic self-concept over time.

Future studies examining the stability of the academic self-concept should also consider the relationship between GPA and a school's rating from the Texas Education Agency. Although no relationship was found between a high school's quality of education and GPA in this study, participants cited academic preparation as a factor associated with their level of success in college.

Lastly, another direction that future studies should consider is examining if and why there is change in students with negative academic self-concepts. In other words, just as there are some students that fail to meet their expectations in college, are there students that exceed their academic expectations? Do their academic self-concepts improve as they begin to succeed? If the findings from this study are any indication, students who struggle in high schools that are recognized as preparing their students well for the academic rigors of a university may end up seeing that when they get to college, they were much better prepared than they thought they were. As a result, this group of students may reconsider their perceptions of their abilities in a more positive manner.

Table 1. Academic Performance of Students at Southwest Texas State University who were in the Top Ten Percent of Their High School Class.

Grade Point Average	Number	Percentage
3.51 - 4.00	321	32.16%
3.01 - 3.50	287	28.76%
2.51 - 3.00	204	20.44%
2.00 - 2.50	125	12.53%
Less than 2.00	61	6.11%
TOTAL	998	100%

Table 2. Participant Characteristics: Sex, Ethnicity, and Grade Point Average (GPA).

Participant Number	Sex	Ethnicity	GPA
01	M	Hispanic	1.24
02	F	Hispanic	1.13
03	M	White	1.71
04	F	White	2.86
05	F	White	2.29
06	F	Black	2.82
07	F	Black	2.20
08	F	White	3.38
09	F	Oriental	3.51
10	F	White	3.51
11	M	Hispanic	3.65
12	F	Hispanic	2.77
13	F	Oriental	3.90
14	F	Hispanic	2.20
15	M	Hispanic	2.95
16	F	Black	2.34
17	F	White	3.02
18	F	Oriental	3.58
19	M	Black	2.60
20	M	Hispanic	1.60
21	M	White	1.97
22	M	Hispanic	2.30
23	M	Black	3.14
24	M	Hispanic	3.30
25	M	White	3.45

Table 3. Pearson r Correlation Between Grade Point Average (GPA) and the Socioeconomic Background of the Participants' High School Districts using Per Student Expenditure (PSE), Percent in Poverty (PIP), and Per Capita Income (PCI).

	GPA	PSE	PIP	PCI
GPA	-	.082	-.446*	.424*
PSE	-	-	-.227	.563*
PIP	-	-	-	-.840*
PCI	-	-	-	-

*P<.05

Table 4. Spearman Correlation Between Grade Point Average (GPA) and
Socioeconomic Status using Family Income (FI), Father's Education Level (FED), and
Mother's Education Level (MED).

	GPA	FI	FED	MED
GPA	-	.250*	.567*	.226*
FI	-	-	.355*	.332*
FED	-	-	-	.329*
MED	-	-	-	-

*P>.05

Table 5. One-Way ANOVA Comparing Mean Grade Point Average (GPA) and Ethnicity.

Ethnicity	Number	Mean GPA	F
Black	5	2.62	
Oriental	3	3.66	
Hispanic	9	2.35	
White	8	2.77	
TOTAL	25	2.70	2.637*

*$P>.05$

Table 6. One-Way ANOVA Comparing Mean Grade Point Average (GPA) and Gender.

Gender	Number	Mean GPA	F
Female	14	2.82	
Male	11	2.54	
TOTAL	25	2.70	.821*

*P>.05

Table 7. Spearman Correlation Between Grade Point Average (GPA) and High School Quality of Education (HQE).

	GPA	HQE
GPA	-	.052*
HQE	-	-

*P>.05

APPENDIX A - INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction to the study and the interview: I am interested in how students have adjusted to college after their first few semesters. I have a set of questions regarding your high school experiences, a set regarding your college experiences, and a third set regarding some general information.

High School Experience & Perceived Ability
1. What high school did you graduate from? Where is that?
2. Tell me about your high school. What did you think about it? Did you like it, dislike, why, etc?
3. Tell me about your classes in high school. Were your classes or schoolwork hard, fun, easy, challenging, difficult, etc.?
4. Were there some classes you liked more than other classes? Why?
5. Were you usually happy with or proud about the work you completed?
6. Did you ever have difficulty finishing your schoolwork? Did you ever feel like it was useless to try or feel like giving up? Did you ever get help with your schoolwork?
7. What kinds of grades did you make?
8. Did you feel when you put in the effort, you usually got what you expected?
9. When it came to grades, did you feel you got them because of being smart or lucky?
10. Did getting good grades mean a great deal to you? How did your grades make you feel or how did you feel about your grades?
11. Tell me a little about your family. What do your parents do? Do you have any brothers or sisters? How do you think your parents/family felt about your grades?
12. Tell me about your friends. What kinds of interests did you all have or what kinds of things did you all do after school? Were you involved in any sports, clubs, band, etc.? How did your friends feel about or react to your grades? Were you academically competitive with them? Did your friends or other students look to you for help or ideas? Did you look to your friends or other students for help or ideas?
13. Tell me about being a minority/non-minority student. What was or wasn't expected of you? How did that relate to your high school experience?
14. Tell me about being a female/male student. What was or wasn't expected of you? How did that relate to your high school experience?

College Experience & Perceived Ability
15. How long have you been at SWT? What's your major?
16. So far, what's your impression of SWT? San Marcos?
17. Tell me how you chose to come here and why you chose your major. Were you offered or have you received any loans, grants, or scholarships?
18. Were your parents, friends, or teachers influential in your decision to come to college or this school in particular?
19. Think back to your first couple of semesters. Tell me what sticks out in your mind, your first impressions, what do you most remember? Were you excited? What did you anticipate?

20. Did anything catch you off-guard or did you get into the flow of things pretty easily? Any other unexpected surprises or difficulties?
21. Were there any people or services you found helpful?
22. Tell me about your classes. Have they been or are they hard, fun, easy, challenging, difficult, etc.? Have you felt prepared?
23. Are there some classes you like more than others?
24. Are you usually happy with or proud about the work you have completed?
25. Have you had any difficulty finishing your schoolwork? Have you ever felt like it was useless to try or like giving up? Did you ever seek tutoring for your classes?
26. Do you feel if you put in the effort, you usually got what you expect?
27. When it comes to grades, do you feel you get them because of being smart or lucky?
28. Does getting good grades still mean a great deal to you or not? How do your grades make you feel now or how did you feel about your grades in college? Compared to others, evaluate yourself as a student.
29. How do you think your parents/family feel about your grades?
30. Tell me about your friends here in college. What kinds of interests do you all have or what kinds of things do you all do after school? Are you involved in any sports, clubs, band, etc.? How do your friends feel about or react to your grades? Are you academically competitive with them? Do your friends or other students look to you for help or ideas? Do you look to your friends for help and ideas?
31. Tell me about being a minority/non-minority student. What is or isn't expected of you? How has that impacted your experience here?
32. Tell me about being a female/male student. What is or isn't expected of you? How has that impacted your experience here?
33. In what ways has college changed you or how have you changed since coming to college?
34. What do you plan to do after you graduate?

General Questions
35. How many semester hours have you completed so far?
36. What is your cumulative GPA?
37. If you could start over again, how would you change your first couple of semesters or school choice?
38. Is there anything SWT could do to help students with the transition to college, to help students adjust better?
39. Is there anything else about your adjustment or transition that you would like to say that I haven't asked you about or do you have any questions for me?

APPENDIX B - CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a study of student adjustment and transition from high school to college. I am a graduate student working on my thesis in the Sociology Department at Southwest Texas State University. I hope to learn what obstacles students face when they arrive at college and how they overcome them, if any. You were selected as a participant because you graduated from a public high school in Texas. Your name was provided by the university's admissions office. You will be one of approximately 25 individuals chosen to participate in this study.

If you decide to participate, I will ask you three sets of questions, one set regarding your high school experiences, another set regarding your college experiences, and the third set consists of some general questions. The interview should take no more then 45 minutes.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relations with Southwest Texas State University. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

If you have any questions, please ask me. If you have additional questions later, Dr. Anderson (245-2113) or I will be happy to answer them.

You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice after signing this form, should you choose to discontinue participation in this study.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Investigator   Date

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VITA

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Experience

08/2000 – 06/2001   Southwest Texas State University   San Marcos, TX
          Teaching Assistant - Develop course website and syllabus, present concepts through lectures, discussions, and group activities, and evaluate student progress.

08/1999 - 07/2000   Southwest Texas State University   San Marcos, TX
          Instructional Assistant - Maintain grade sheets, proctor exams, assist with special classroom presentations, and research topics of interest for professors.

06/1997 - 08/2001   Camp Shane   Ferndale, NY
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