Self-Perception


Negative self-perceptions and feelings that one is different make academically talented students at risk for social problems and underachievement. One-hundred seventy-four academically talented eighth grade students (47% males) completed the Multidimensional Self-Concept Scale and the Adjective Check List. Relative to a normative group of adolescents, these students had significantly higher academic self-concepts but similar social self-concepts. Academically talented females had stronger needs for achievement, dominance, and endurance, but weaker needs for succorance and abasement than a normative group of females. Students were grouped by their SAT Math and Verbal scores: Moderate Math/Moderate Verbal, Moderate Math/High Verbal, High Math/Moderate Verbal, and High Math/High Verbal. High verbal students had weaker needs to be nurturant and had less interest in relationships with opposite-gender persons than students moderate in math and verbal areas. Academically talented students vary in their self-perceptions and needs; thus, they are likely to vary in their academic and social adjustment. When identifying students who might be at risk for adjustment problems, gender, degree of ability, and type of ability should be considered.


Academically talented students vary in their reasons for achievement, variation that may provide insight into differences in achievement-related behaviors (e.g., effort and avoidance of challenge) and future underachievement. There were 425 students (at or above the 97th percentile) who completed questions assessing achievement goals and personal beliefs about intelligence. Students ranged widely in learning goals that focus on understanding material and performance goals that focus on doing better than others. As learning goals became stronger, so did beliefs that intelligence can increase via effort. Of all students, 4.4% embraced performance goals and had low confidence in their intellectual ability, a combination of beliefs that can place them at risk for later underachievement.

Beliefs about intelligence can vary from the view that it is stable to the view that it is unstable. Third-11th grade academically talented students (60% male), n=153, completed a questionnaire that requested them to describe the stability of intelligence on a six-point scale. They were also asked to describe themselves in terms of their effort expended on academic tasks, preference for challenging tasks, and ability. High school students believed intelligence was more stable than elementary school students. No gender differences were found for perceived stability of intelligence. Females perceived themselves as harder workers than males. Findings may account for long-term achievement differences among academically talented students.