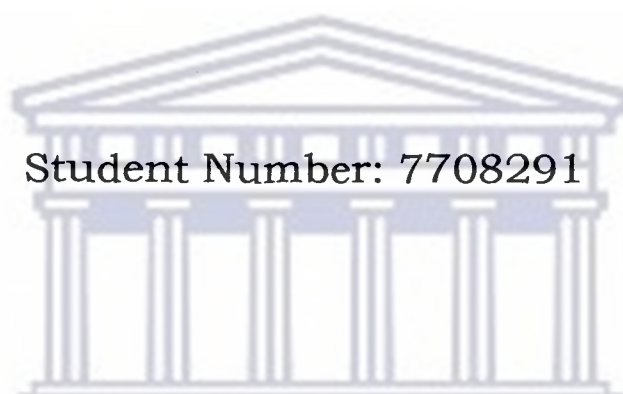# The self-concept and academic achievement of high school students in a working class environment.

Ivan Leedenberg

Student Number: 7708291

Mini-thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the M.Ed (Educational Psychology) degree.
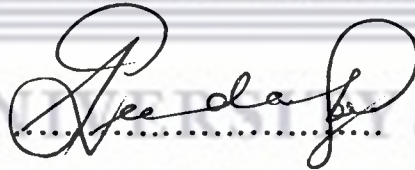University of Western Cape, Bellville.

Supervisor: Mrs Lilian Lomofsky

April 2000

Declaration

I , the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this study is my own work and has not previously in it's entirety or in part been submitted at any university for a degree. All sources I have quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Ivan Leedenberg

April 2000

SUMMARY

In this present study an attempt was made to investigate the relationship between the self-concept and the academic achievement of high school students in a working class environment.

The sample consisted of 202 adolescents from Standards 8 - 10 who attended Lavender Hill High School, in Lavender Hill, Cape Town. The students' ages ranged from 16 to 20 years old.

The measuring instrument used in determining the self-concept scores of the students was the Self-Description Inventory of Dr M M Mboya. This scale consisted of 8 sub-scales i.e. (1) Relations with Family, (2) General School, (3) Physical Abilities, (4) Physical Appearance, (5) Emotional Stability, (6) Music Ability, (7) Relations with Peers and (8) Health. For the student's academic record the end-of-year examination results for individual subjects were taken as an indication of their academic achievement. This consisted of the percentages of six subjects and the percentage of the aggregate score.

The statistical analysis of the raw data was done by means of calculating an ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) and the Pearsons Correlation Co-efficient. Comparison of means of the self-concept and the school subjects were analysed to determine if a significant difference exists between male and female students in the sample. The Pearsons Correlation was computed to establish the relationship between the self-concept scores and the academic achievement scores of the students.

As the results show, no conclusive evidence was found to categorically state that there is a definitely strong relationship between the self-concept and the academic achievement of these students, even though there is more than enough evidence in the literature to prove there should be a relationship. In this study the sub-scale of the SDI, i.e. the second set of items relating to General School, did not feature in any of the strong positive relationships that the researcher expected.

This study recommends that because the self-concept plays a significant role in a student's academic performance , the development and the enhancement of a positive self-concept should be explicitly stated and pursued in the school curriculum.
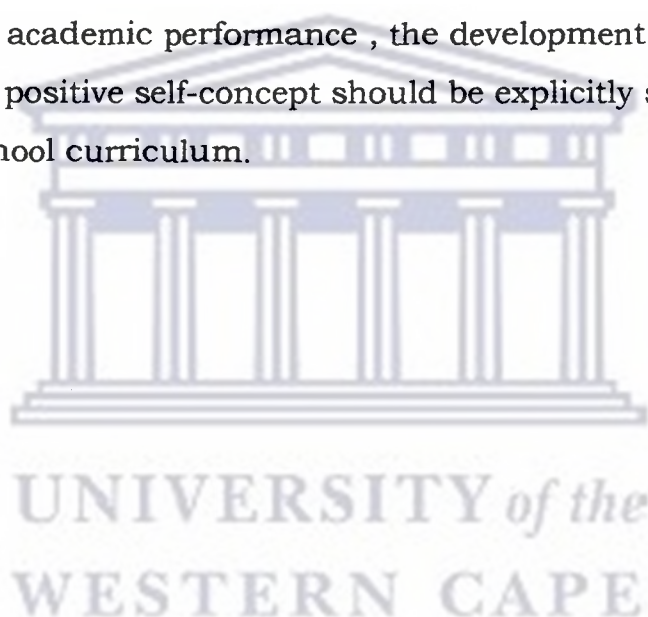
OPSOMMING

In hierdie studie is 'n poging aangewend om die verhouding tussen die selfkonsep van hoërskoolleerders uit 'n werkersklasomgewing en hul akademiese prestasie te ondersoek.

Die steekproef het bestaan uit 202 adolessente uit Standerds 8-10 wat die Hoërskool Lavender Hill in Lavender Hill, Kaapstad bygewoon het. Die studente se ouderdomme het gewissel van 16 tot 20 jaar oud.

Die meetinstrument wat gebruik is om die leerders se selfkonseptellings vas te stel, was die Self-Beskrywingsvraelys van dr. M.M.Mboya. Die skaal het bestaan uit 8 subskale, naamlik (1) Verhoudings met die gesin, (2) Algemene Skool, (3) Fisiese Vermoëns, (4) Fisiese Voorkoms, (5) Emosionele Stabiliteit, (6) Musikale Vermoë, (7) Verhoudings met Portuurs en (8) Gesondheid. As die leerder se akademiese rekord is die eksamenuitslae vir individuele vakke aan die einde van die jaar geneem as aanduiding van akademiese prestasie. Dit het bestaan uit die persentasies van ses vakke en die persentasie van die gemiddelde puntetelling.

Die statistiese analise van die rou data is gedoen deur berekening van 'n ANOVA (Analise van Variansie) en die Pearson se Korrelasiekoëffisiënt. Vergelyking van die gemiddeldes van die selfkonsep en die skoolgemiddeldes is geanaliseer om vas te stel of daar 'n beduidende verskil is tussen die manlike en vroulike studente in die steekproef. Die Pearson-korrelasie is bereken om die verhouding tussen die leerders se selfkonseptellings en hul akademiese prestasietellings vas te stel.

Soos aan die resultate gesien, is geen afdoende bewys gevind om kategorieë te kon verklaar dat daar definitief 'n sterk verhouding tussen hierdie leerders se selfkonsep en hul akademiese prestasie bestaan nie, selfs al is daar meer as genoeg gegewens in die literatuur om te bewys dat daar wel so 'n verhouding behoort te wees. In hierdie studie het die subskaal van die SBV, dit wil sê, die tweede stel items wat met Algemene Skool verband hou, nie in enige van die sterk positiewe verhoudings wat die navorser verwag het, voorgekom nie.

Hierdie studie beveel aan dat die ontwikkeling en uitbouing van 'n positiewe selfkonsep eksplisiet in die skool se kurrikulum gestel en nagestreef moet word, aangesien die selfkonsep 'n beduidende rol speel in 'n leerder se akademiese prestasie.
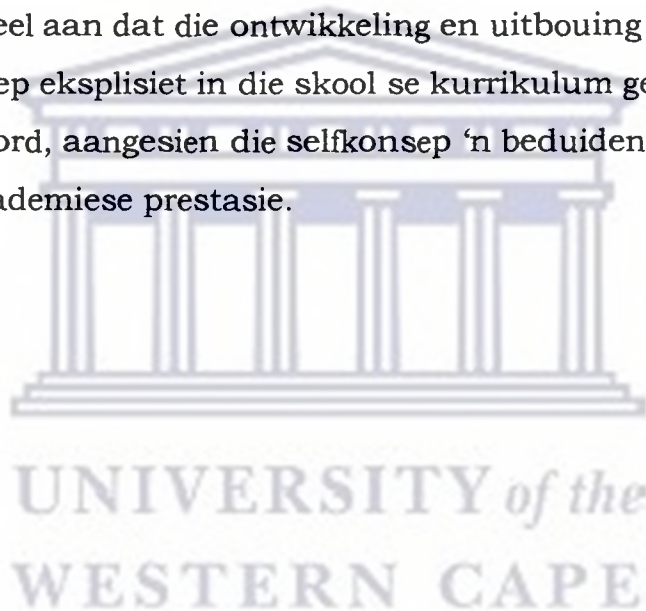
Acknowledgements

With humility and a grateful heart I acknowledge the greatness and goodness of God Almighty, for his grace and faithfulness towards me in the completion of this mini-thesis.

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WESTERN CAPE

APPENDICES

DEDICATED:

To all the students I've taught,
who,
in spite of their environment
achieved their goals,
because they believed
they could do it!

REMEMBER:

He who brings sunshine to others,
cannot keep it from himself.

READ:

Romans 8:31-39

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction to the Study

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce this study of the relationship between the self-concept and academic achievement of high school students in a working class environment. This includes the background, statement of the problem, the aim and motivation for the study. The procedure and an overview of the chapters are also presented.

1.2. Background to the Study

In today's world education plays an important part in the life of any human being. An essential function of education in development and learning is to help the growing child to understand himself and develop healthy attitudes of self-acceptance (Silvernail, 1985; Woods, 1990). Therefore the self-concept is a critically important factor in the educational and social adjustment of children.

Numerous studies (Gergen, 1971; Spears & Deese, 1973 ; Mboya, 1989) which have attempted to determine the relationship between self-concept and academic achievement have been inconclusive, mainly due to an inability to have a clear, concise, universally accepted operational definition of self-concept. Another problem with definitions of self-concept has been vagueness and imprecision (Hamachek, 1995). A detailed survey and discussion about definitions of the self-concept follows in Chapter 2.

Phillip Brown (1987) writes that a belief in oneself is linked to success or failure and some adolescents fail in school purely because they lack the self-confidence or self-belief to pass an examination. This study focuses on children from a working class background and there are certain assumptions about the development of self-concept in these communities. Conditions in disadvantaged communities are not conducive to children developing positive self-concepts nor a high level of motivation. Parents who have a low level of education themselves do not value education for their children. Therefore children from working-class backgrounds are at a distinct disadvantage educationally because at home there is a great lack of educational resources, like books, toys and other aids. The children are not stimulated at home and do not get encouragement to achieve when at school. The general environment of children of the working-class in most cases, is not conducive to stimulating educational thinking, and on the contrary, encourages anti-educational behaviour such as bunking classes and school absenteeism (Woods, 1990).

It has been well documented (NICRO, 1990) that youngsters who join gangs suffer from low self-esteem and a negative self-concept.
Thus the adolescent in a working class environment may be at great risk of becoming a gang-member because the pressure to join a gang is life-threatening (If you do not join, you're in danger of being killed for not wanting to join. If you do join a gang, you are in danger of being killed by rival gangsters.) The adolescent in such an environment should be strong of character to resist joining a gang and a strong positive self-concept would help greatly to resist this pressure.

The person who knows what his purpose in life is, will have direction and reach his goals in life. It is the person with a positive self-concept that has a clear vision of the way forward and knows his strengths and abilities to achieve his goals in life (Burns, 1982). This is where education generally, but teachers specifically, can help children in a working-class environment, not to blame their surroundings, but to achieve in spite of the environment by harnessing their strengths and abilities.

The single greatest factor is self-control and the development of self-determination and therefore "feeling great about yourself" should be a catalyst to "doing great things for yourself" (Hamachek, 1995).

1.3. **Problem Statement**

Most often success or failure at school has an enormous impact on the self-concept of children and it contributes greatly to the aspirations of these children (Purkey, 1970). By the time these children reach adolescence, they may have had many positive and negative experiences which affect their desire for excellence and their expectations as to what they will accomplish. As the self-concept develops, it is influenced by social conditions, schooling, home circumstances, significant others and the peer group (Felker, 1974; Burns, 1982).

In the working-class environment, it is not uncommon to find families which are single-parent families, where the mother is the head of the home. The father's absence could be for a number of reasons, such as incarceration for criminal activities, divorce or death due to gang-related violence in the area where they live. Therefore if the male role model for

boys is absent and they do not have a father figure to identify with, many boys would have problems with authority figures at school. These boys are in constant conflict with teachers and do not know how to relate to male authority figures. Their self-concept is damaged from an early age, not being able to accept authority because the authoritative figure, the father, at home is non-existent. They pick up the "nobody-cares-about-me"-syndrome and develop a careless, sometimes aggressively destructive, attitude towards themselves and society. They believe that the world owes them something and they would rob and hurt other people to get what they want.

This negative attitude influences every part of their lives and at this early stage, their education at school suffers the most. Developing a positive self-concept is of extreme importance in order for them to attain educational success and perform academically.

1.4. **The aim of the study**

The primary aim of the study is to investigate the relationship between the self-concept and academic achievement of adolescents in a high school in a working-class environment. A secondary aim is to determine if there is a significant difference between males and females concerning their self-concept and academic achievement.

1.5. **The motivation for the study**

The motivation for the study is to establish whether there is a high or low relationship between self-concept and academic achievement of adolescents in a disadvantaged community. The assumption is that,

they need to know the importance of a healthy positive self-concept and how they can cultivate it in order for them to be successful at school. When referring to success at school, it means being able to pass all your subjects in order to move on to the next grade in school. "Success after school" refers to the plans they have made for life after school and how they are going to fulfil the requirements for these plans, while still at school.

Research evidence shows that low performance in schoolwork and academic disengagement are due in part, to negative attitudes towards the self (Burns, 1982; Purkey, 1970; Weis, Farrar & Petrie, 1989). Many adolescents join gangs because of a poor self-concept, coupled with the belief that by joining a gang and being involved in gang-related activities, gives them some self-esteem and a measure of identity. Even though this relationship may have negative consequences, in a working-class environment it is even more pronounced that these youngsters are searching for an identity, which they could not get on their own and are thus looking for a group with whom to identify. They believe that they can find an identity within the gang and the consequences for their educational development and success is destructive and catastrophic.

The present researcher believes that, if children can be kept from joining these destructive gangs by developing a strong positive self-concept, they can be helped to lead a constructive and productive life. They need to implement and act upon their positive beliefs about the self in order to overcome the obstacles and problems they encounter in their life.

1.6. **Research Procedure**

1.6.1. **Theoretical Study and Literature Review**

The relevant and recent literature pertinent to self-concept theory and academic achievement is reviewed. A review of the literature reveals factors that play a significant role in the influence of the self-concept on academic achievement.

1.6.2. **Empirical Study**

The Self-Description Inventory (SDI) (Mboya, 1993) which is a self-concept measuring instrument was used. The SDI was administered to 202 students between the ages of 14 and 20 years old at Lavender Hill Secondary School in Cape Town in the Western Cape. The reliability and validity of the SDI was calculated and the reported reliability or internal consistency varied between 0.76 and 0.92. (Mboya, 1993). The end-of-year results were taken as the most recent academic achievement of each student in the study. These results consist of the percentages obtained in each school subject and the aggregate score percentage.

Chapter 1 introduces the topic, the aim and the method of research. A statement of the research problem is given and a motivation for the study. Finally an overview of chapters is presented.

Chapter 2 is fairly detailed because the chapter is both a review of the literature and a basis for the placing the theoretical insights which inform this study.

Chapter 3 sets out the methodology adopted in the study. The research design, aim and hypotheses are discussed.

Chapter 4 outlines the results of the study. It gives the statistical procedure and discusses the significant and non-significant statistical analyses.

Chapter 5 summarises the discussions of the results, the limitations of the study, recommendations and the way forward for future research.

CHAPTER 2

THE SELF-CONCEPT IN EDUCATION

2.1. Introduction

The quest for self-understanding is one of the aims of education in the nineties and thus we find that the study of human behaviour, and in particular self-concept, has grown in immense proportions (Marsh,1992; Weiner, 1992). The construct of the self-concept is considered to be a major outcome of education, childhood socialisation, and the child-rearing practices as well as influencing consequent responses to these influences - improvement of an individual's self-concept is being valued as a construct in it's own right (Purkey, 1970; Gergen, 1971; Rosenberg & Kaplan, 1982; Brown, 1987).

Psychologists and educationalists are becoming more aware of the fact that people's self-concept, or their attitudes to and perception of themselves, are intimately related to how they learn and behave. Evidence suggests (Trowbridge, 1972; Shavelson et al, 1976; Beane & Lipka, 1980; Burns, 1982) that low performance in school work, poor motivation, misbehaviour and academic disengagement - so characteristic of the underachiever, the early school-leaver, the disadvantaged and the delinquent - are due in part to negative self-attitudes and perceptions.

Many students have difficulty in school, not as a result of low intelligence or physical impairment, but because they have come to perceive themselves as unable to do academic work. Success in schoolwork and life appears to depend as much on how a person feels about the qualities

and attributes they possess as on those qualities itself. While nothing succeeds like success, the expectation of failure reaps it's poor harvest.(Glasser, 1969; Brown, 1987)

For personal happiness, adjustment and effective functioning, a favourable and positive self-concept is essential. Those children with a negative self-concept tend to encounter difficulties in almost every area. They have a high level of anxiety and find difficulty in making friends, adjust less easily at school and tend to be hampered in school achievement.(Silvernail, 1985)

It is essential to acknowledge the highly important part played by parents in the early development of the self-concept, before the significance of the teacher's judgements come to bear. Teachers' perceptions are very important in this regard and can reinforce the poor opinion a child already has of himself when he begins school, but they can also, in fact, help to reverse this opinion and create in the child a more positive view of himself and his abilities.(Burns, 1982)

Having a positive self-concept seems to depend, according to Felker (1974) on possessing well-grounded feelings of acceptance, competence and worth. There is a need with every human being to be accepted or belong to a group, starting with the family. Such acceptance implies that others regard one as of worth and competent in some relevant behaviours. As a valued member of a group, a person derives a sense of self worth.

Behaviour has a purpose and the ability to achieve that purpose brings with it a sense of competence (Burns, 1982). For most learners, school

behaviour has it's purpose in the mastery of the subject matter; for most teachers, school behaviour has it's end in the mastery of the science of controlling and teaching students to a required standard. Successful achievement of these aims will encourage learners and teachers to evaluate themselves as competent, a very necessary element for a positive self-concept. The third element, that of self worth, derives from the overall valuation the individual attaches to himself through his acceptance and competence (Beane & Lipka, 1980). So, by way of introduction, we see the importance of the self-concept in education and in this chapter this present researcher will be giving an overview of various theorist's viewpoints about the self-concept.

2.2. **The Development of the Self-concept in Psychology : Some Self-theories**

Since the writings of the Greek Philosophers, we find references to the importance of the self. Aristotle distinguished between the physical and non-physical aspects of the human being, where he referred to the "soul" as an aspect of the non-physical "self" (Gergen, 1971). The self was thus first debated in Philosophy, but it's real study in Psychology must be attributed to William James.

Burns (1982) states emphatically that William James was the first psychologist to elaborate on the self-concept. James considered the global self as simultaneously "Me" and "I". He divided the self-concept into the "I" as knower and the "Me" as known. He further divided the self into three constituent parts i.e. the Material Me, the Social Me and the Spiritual Me. The Material Me included the person's body, home, family

and physical possessions. The Social Me referred to a person's status or reputation in the eyes of others; and the Spiritual Me to a person's awareness of his own thoughts and feelings. These "selves" combined to form the individual's view of himself or his self-concept. James's highlighting of the individual's emphasis on social interaction in the development of his self-concept can be seen in the writings of Cooley (1902) who emphasised the relationship between the self and the social environment.

2.2.1. **The Symbolic Interactionist Theory**

The Symbolic Interactionist Theory is best represented by Charles Horton Cooley's "looking glass self".

> Each to each a looking glass
> reflects the other that doth pass.
> (Cooley, 1902, p.152)

Symbolic interactionists emphasise the individual-society relationship and Cooley maintained that an individual's self-concept is significantly influenced by what he believes others think of him. The relationship between self and the social environment is very important, because a person's feelings about himself were mainly feedback he received from others about himself. Cooley and George Herbert Mead (1934), were the major theorists of the self at this time. Mead regarded the self as a person's view of himself which is a product of his social interactions. Thus, the self is an object of awareness with a person coming to know himself and respond to himself as he sees others responding to him. The person's own identity is tied up in the views of those surrounding him. An individual can have as many selves as he has social roles or as there are a number of social groups in which he participates. To Mead, "no

man is an island", and all of us are inextricably linked to one another for us to know who we are.

2.2.2. **Psychoanalytic Theory**

The father of Psychoanalytic Theory, Sigmund Freud, did not use the term 'self', but the 'ego' in Freud's theory closely relates to the self-concept. He saw positive feelings developing when the ego maintained a healthy balance between the 'id' (instinctual) and the 'superego'(moral) forces. A weak ego would be the result if the conflicting demands between the id and the superego are not kept in balance(equilibrium). The ego is regarded as the core of personality which is influenced by unconscious dynamics in contrast to the concept of the self which is the product of conscious awareness and subjective interpretations.

On the other hand, Carl Gustav Jung described the self as being a central archetype representing man's striving for unity and wholeness in his self-development. It comprises both conscious and unconscious experience, which must stand in equilibrium with each other if selfhood is to be achieved.(Mussen, Conger, Kagan & Huston, 1984)

2.2.3. **Neo-Freudian Theory**

Erik Erikson (1963) used the concept of "identity" rather than the "self", and provided an extension of Freudian theory emphasising ego development in the cultural context cited in (Burns, 1982). He saw identity formation as an evolving process of self-awareness which occurs along a specific developmental sequence. There were eight stages of development of identity growth that Erikson postulated, each of which

entails conflict and life tasks to be dealt with during this period. Successful resolution of the conflicts have important implications for an individual's future development and the achievement of each life task produces new capabilities and adjustments. The eight phases of development and their life tasks are: (1) infancy - trust versus mistrust, (2) toddler age - autonomy versus shame and doubt, (3) early childhood - initiative versus guilt, (4) school-going age - industry versus inferiority, (5) adolescence - identity formation versus identity diffusion, (6) young adulthood - intimacy versus isolation, (7) adulthood - generativity versus stagnation, (8) old age - integrity versus despair. This perspective will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter regarding the self-concept and adolescence.

2.2.4. **Phenomenological Theory**

The phenomenological perspective in psychology is an approach which attempts to understand man through the eyes of the observer. It seeks to understand how the individual views himself; how his needs, feelings, values, beliefs and unique perception of his environment influence him to behave as he does. Behaviour is a function of the personal meanings attached to an individual's perception of past and contemporaneous experience. (Burns, 1982).

Lewin (1936) regarded the self-concept as being a core area of the individual's psychological universe. He saw it as arising from a person's experiences and his interpretations of those experiences, all of which in turn influence that person's behaviour. Combs & Snygg (1959) and Lecky (1945) viewed the self-concept as being the nucleus of a broader system which is made up of the totality of a person's experiences; his

personality characteristics, perceptions, attitudes and beliefs. The self-concept has a degree of stability and consistency which gives predictability to an individual and his behaviour.

Probably the best known Humanistic psychologist is Carl Rogers who made a significant contribution to the self-theory with two basic constructs i.e. the organism and the self (Rogers, 1951). He saw the organism as representing all an individual's conscious experiences and personal conceptions of those experiences which constitute his phenomenal field. The self is a differentiated part of the phenomenal field and consists of perceptions and values of the "I" or "me" as they develop through interaction with the environment, especially through interpersonal relationships. As imbalance or maladjustment occurs when there is a state of incongruence between self and the organism. Rogers postulated that a large discrepancy between the perceived self and ideal self was unhealthy, and the main goal of client centered therapy was to bring the two in greater alignment involving a fuller sense of self-acceptance (Rogers, 1980).

2.2.5. **Social Learning Theory**

The Social Learning Theory largely developed by Bandura in an attempt to understand the self-concept according to behaviouristic principles, saw self-attitudes developing through learning experiences in social settings (Bandura & Walters, 1963). A child learns certain behaviours by imitating his parents (who serve as role models) and by internalising their attributes into his own self-system.

Gecas, Calonico and Thomas (1974) did a study comparing Cooley and Mead's Mirror theory with Bandura's Modelling theory when looking at the development of a child's self-concept. Their results favoured the mirror theory, with a positive correlation having been found between parental evaluation of the child and the child's self-concept. The study did however highlight the importance of parents as models for young children.

Basically there are two schools of thought concerning all these theories, i.e. the self-enhancement theorists and the skill development theorists. The former believes that self-concept causes changes in achievement. The latter believes that achievement explains self-concept and therefore changes in self-concept are caused by, or result from, initial changes in achievement.

To summarise this overview of theories, one can clearly see the complexity of the self as reflected in the great variety of theories and terms which have thus far been developed to describe it. Burns(1982) summarised the self-concept as an abstraction that all human beings develop about the attributes, capacities, objects and activities that they possess and pursue, around which, derived from social experiences, values cluster. He saw this abstraction of self or "me" as developing in the course of experience. The self-concept is thus the evaluated beliefs an individual holds about himself.

2.3. **The Self-concept: Some definitions**

To define the self-concept is not an easy task as we will see from the
myriad of definitions glanced from the literature. But the researcher,
together with the reader, would look at some definitions and see where
common threads lie and try to present the best possible definition that
would be useful in this research project.

Burns (1982) says " the self-concept is the sum total of the views that a
person has of himself and consists of beliefs, evaluations and
behavioural tendencies. This implies that the self-concept can be
considered to be a plethora of attitudes towards the self which are
unique to each individual".

Purkey (1970) concluded that the self is organised and dynamic; that to
the experiencing individual the self is the centre of his personal universe;
that everything is observed, interpreted, and comprehended from this
personal vantage point; and that human motivation is a product of the
universal striving to maintain, protect and enhance the self.

From various definitions of the self given by Lecky (1945), Rogers (1951),
Jersild (1952), and Combs & Snygg (1959), we can arrive at a composite
definition of the self-concept as a complex and dynamic system of beliefs
which an individual holds true about himself, each belief with a
corresponding value.

A person's concept of self is a very personal possession. (Hamachek,
1975). How one views oneself is determined partially by how one
perceives oneself as really being, partially through how one views oneself

as ideally wanting to be, and partially through the expectations one perceives that others have for the person concerned. Social interaction is the primary medium through which we come to know ourselves and thus self-awareness develops that strengthens our sense of self.

Merrel, Cedeno & Johnson (1993) argue that the self-concept refers to both the overall view that individuals have about themselves, as well as their view of how well they function in specific roles or under certain constraints.

Shavelson, Hubner & Stanton (1976) postulated that the self-concept is multi-dimensional and hierarchical. It is based on an individual's perception of self, reflects perceptions formed through interactions with significant others, over-all experience with the social environment, and attributions about one's own behaviour. Thus they suggested that the self-concept can be divided into academic, social and physical components.

The great Client-centred Therapist, Carl Rogers, writes the following:

> The self-concept or self-structure may be thought of as an organised configuration of perceptions of one's characteristics and abilities: the precepts and concepts of the self in relation to others and to the environment; the value qualities which are perceived as associated with experiences and objects; and goals and ideals which are perceived as having positive and negative valence. (Rogers, 1968:136)

Having surveyed the foregoing definitions about the self-concept, the various components of the definitions are contained in the following summary as put forward by Silvernail (1985)

(1) The self-concept is **multi-dimensional**. It includes many subparts, and even those subparts may have more than one dimension. For example, one subpart may be labelled our physical self-concept; but the physical self-concept can further be divided into perceptions of one's physical appearance, physical ability, etc.

(2) The self-concept is **hierarchical.** Certain descriptions and evaluations form the core of the self-concept; that is, they are closer to the essence of one's self. For example, the student's image as an "athlete" may be more central to his being than his image as a "learner".

(3) The self-concept is fairly **stable.** This denotes that one's core perceptions develop early and change little through time. A long history of inconsistent perceptions is needed before these "selves" change. However, as one descends the self-concept hierarchy - that is, moves away from the core images - the self-concept becomes less stable. The physical self-concept is set at a young age and maintains a certain stability, but perceptions of one's physical appearance or agility, for example, change fairly easily with time, growth and events.

(4) Finally, the self-concept is **evaluative**. Not only does an individual develop a description of one's self, but also formulates evaluations of this description. These evaluations placed in the context of the other three features just described, suggest that the core evaluations are

developed early in life and are resistant to change. Other less significant evaluations are constantly being developed, modified, discarded and replaced by others.

2.4. **The dimensions of the Self-concept**

As we have seen that the self-concept is a multi-dimensional, hierarchical construct, we need to examine these different dimensions more closely.

2.4.1. **The Physical Self-concept**

Physical self-concept or body image refers to that aspect which pertains to attitudes and experiences involving the body (Vrey, 1979). It involves an estimation and evaluation of the physical body in terms of social norms and feedback obtained from others. This internalised mental image of the physical self is not always a reflection of reality. It has been shown that people who have negative feelings about their bodies are likely to feel negatively about themselves as total people as well. During adolescence especially, perceived physical attributes or faults have a considerable effect on the development of an individual's overall self-concept.

2.4.2. **The Social Self-concept**

The social self-concept refers to the way in which an individual perceives his status and role in society (Kagan, 1978). This aspect of the self is based on feedback from significant others in an individual's life (parents, siblings, teachers, peers) and consists of

internalised expectations and attitudes regarding a person's role and status (Samuels, 1977).

Gergen (1971) described how an individual's self-feelings are influenced by which social role or status is of major importance at a particular time. During adolescence, for example, the peer group emerges as a major source of feedback, and thereby it is a reference point for the social self-concept.

2.4.3. **The cognitive self-concept**

The cognitive self-concept refers to the knowledge a person has about his personal identity. It involves being able to describe the self a different from others, in terms of personal characteristics, roles, possessions and goals (Cronje, 1984). This aspect of the self-concept is related to the cognitive development , which occurs gradually as the individual becomes more aware of and gains greater meaning from objects or events in his environment (Samuels, 1977).

2.4.4. **Self-esteem**

Self-esteem can be described as "the evaluation that the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself; it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval and indicates the extent to which the individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful and worthy" (Coopersmith, 1967). It is linked to feelings of respect for and acceptance of the self. Low self-esteem suggests self-rejection, self-derogation and negative self-evaluation. There are definite reference points for self-

evaluation namely self-appointed ideals and culturally learned
standards (Beane & Lipka, 1980). An individual may compare the
image of himself with his ideal self-image (the picture of the kind of
person he would like to be). Should his self-image fail to measure
up to the standards of his ideal self, low self-esteem will result.
Self-evaluation is also influenced by society's judgement, which
has now been internalised; as well as an individual's perception of
his relative success or failure at the tasks at hand (Wells &
Maxwell, 1976).

2.5. __The development of the self-concept__

The self-concept is learned; it is not innate (Burns, 1982). There is
almost universal agreement that the development of the self-concept is a
learned process, which proceeds from birth to death as the individual
continually has new experiences and discovers new things about himself
(Felker, 1974; Canfield & Wells, 1976; Ames, 1992). The establishment
of a healthy self-concept is one of the most important aspects of child
development. In reviewing the literature, the following aspects emerge as
important in the development of the self-concept: body image, cognitive
and language development; feedback from significant others, especially in
the parent-child relationship; interpersonal relationships; school
experiences; and the process of identification and sex-role identity
(Hamachek, 1971; Felker, 1974; Samuels, 1977; Hurlock, 1981; Cronje,
1984; Fantuzzo, Davis & Ginsburg, 1995). The relative importance of
these factors will be described accordingly, as each life-stage is covered.

2.5.1. **The Self-concept in infancy**

Self-awareness develops once the infant is able to differentiate between the self and the non-self (Hamachek, 1971). This distinction emerges out of the infant's interaction with his care-giver and his exploration of the environment. The infant's growing awareness of bodily sensations helps him define the boundaries of his body, and in turn create his body image which forms the core of the self-concept, is first evident when the infant can view himself as a distinct object , clearly distinguishable from other objects.

Erikson (1967) described the ego's development through a series of eight psycho-social stages. The first stage requires of the infant (ages 0- 1 year old) to develop a sense of trust in his environment and is dependent on the nature of his interactions with his parents or other care-givers, such as siblings and grandparents. If the infant's need for food, proper care, attention, affection and love are met, he will learn to view the world as secure, reliable and nurturing. However, if these basic needs are not met, he will become suspicious, fearful and mistrusting of his surroundings and future interactions.

2.5.2. **The Self-concept in childhood**

The second stage (ages 1- 3 year old) that Erikson describes, has the principal development goal of acquiring a sense of autonomy. The young child's developing motor and mental abilities give rise to new opportunities for exploration and independence. When parents encourage their infant to explore his environment and to be independent, he will grow in confidence and pride in his autonomy and sense of self-

control. Should he lack this support however, and receive parental disapproval or discouragement instead, the infant will begin to doubt his own abilities, adequacy and worth and feel a sense of shame at exposing himself so prematurely and foolishly. Such feelings are the start of a poor self-concept. Self-reliance and self-adequacy are therefore important pillars of the self-concept at this stage (Kagan, 1978).

The strong influence of parents and the home environment on the development of the self-concept in early childhood has been emphasised by many authors (Felsethal, 1972; Felker, 1974; Samuels, 1977; Landman, 1985; Swart, 1988). Parents are the most significant others in an infant's environment and serve as models, feedback agents and evaluators regarding their child's behaviour (Felker, 1974).

The mother is regarded to be the most significant other as the child is dependent on her care for the quality of existence and indeed his survival (Swart, 1988). If the mother treats the child with tender care, love and approval, the child will internalise good feelings toward himself and develop a positive self-concept. If the mother expresses moderate disapproval towards the child, the threat of the withdrawal of her love will make the child very anxious and give rise to bad feelings towards himself.

Felker (1974) proposed three prerequisites for the development of a positive self-concept, namely: (1) experiencing a sense of belonging, (2) feelings of competence and (3) a sense of worth. The infant receives evidence of his worth through the quality of care he receives from his parents. His sense of belonging develops out of the security of his family environment that he experiences, thereby eliciting feelings of competence.

Should any of these areas lag behind or fail to develop, the beginnings of a negative self-concept will be evident.

Samuel (1977) stressed that the way parents, and particularly the mother, treat their children and how they feel about themselves, both have an effect on their children's self-concepts. The early years within the family are regarded as crucial, as the self-concept thereafter follows this direction on a fairly stable course.(Craig, 1976)

The concept of self is further elaborated and refined as children achieve mastery of language. The increasing use and accuracy of pronouns reflect the child's growing ability to conceive of himself as a separate individual with feelings, needs and attributes (Hurlock, 1981). Around the age of two the infant also learns to recognise his name, which has great significance for the development of his identification and self-concept.

Erikson's (1967) third stage of development (between the ages of three and five years old) involves the development of a sense of initiative and the avoidance of a sense of guilt. The young child's growing locomotor and language proficiency permit him to expand his imagination and to explore his world with curiosity. A preoccupation with sexual matters is one feature of this stage. The way parents react to, or deal with, their child's exploratory curiosity is critical for their later development. If they give children opportunities to exercise physical skills, answer their questions and encourage fantasy activity, a sense of initiative is likely to prevail. Should they be restrictive however, and thwart the child's self-initiated explorations, feelings of guilt will develop.

There is strong evidence suggesting that siblings have a profound influence on a child's personality and social development, particularly between the ages of two and ten. Siblings set and maintain standards, provide models to emulate and act complementary roles in relation to each other through which they both develop and practice social-interaction skills (Mussen, Conger, Kagan & Huston, 1984). Research suggests that an only child tends to have a higher self-concept than children with siblings, as they are likely to receive much more attention from their parents and significant others (Felsenthal, 1972)

The child's interaction with significant others, such as parents and siblings, and their feedback to him, emerges as the single most important factor in the development of the self-concept during early childhood. The child has physical, emotional and social dependence on his parents so that they are in a unique position to influence his learning about himself.

Rosenberg (1965) investigated the factors associated with different levels of self-esteem and found that parental indifference was significantly associated with low self-esteem in children. This lack of interest was reflected in a distant relationship between parents and their children. Broken homes and larger families were other factors linked to low self-esteem. When looking at high self-esteem children, the following factors emerged as important: (1) parental interest, concern, warmth and acceptance; (2) children enjoying a close relationship with their parents, wherein they felt valued; (3) and being a male only child.

Coopersmith (1967) did a monumental piece of research in identifying the conditions which facilitate the development of a positive self-concept. The most important of these included: warm acceptance by parents of

their children, parental self-esteem, clearly defined and enforced limits with respect for individuality and initiative taken by children within those limits. Conflict between parents, rejection of the child by the parents and harsh or very permissive discipline were associated with poor self-concepts in children.

Erikson's (1967) fourth psycho-social stage occurs between the ages of six and eleven years old and encompasses the primary years at school. Here the child needs to develop a sense of industry, which involves feelings of competence and success at whatever he does. The child's play becomes much more productive during this short period as he attempts to build , make and understand things. Should he fail frequently at these tasks, he will develop a sense of inferiority and inadequacy regarding his abilities and status amongst his peers. Children who are encouraged to make things, to complete projects, to establish friendships and to discover new interests for themselves are more likely to leave this period enjoying their productivity. Achievements and success experiences enhance the self-concept, whereas failures damage the self-concept and undermine self-confidence(Hurlock, 1981).

The importance of adjusting to the school setting and to expanding peer contacts for the developing self-concept is mentioned by Turner & Helms (1983). The school-aged child is constantly being evaluated and compared with his peers and the feedback he gets about his performance has a significant impact on his self-concept. Here teachers and peers join parents and siblings in becoming the significant others who affect the child's self-concept development by means of their reflected appraisals. Hamachek (1971) remarked that it is within the school environment that the child is "reminded again and again of either his

failings and shortcomings or his strengths and possibilities" (p.177). Research has shown that a mutually reinforcing relationship exists between the self-concept and academic achievement.

Role modelling and identification with significant others are other important factors in the development of the self-concept. This process starts with sex-typing, in which the child imitates or models appropriate behaviour of the same-sexed parent. Once the child has internalised the appropriate masculine or feminine behaviours, sex-role identification is said to have occurred (Mussen, Conger, Kagan & Huston., 1984). After parents, peer group members, teachers and media or pop stars, amongst others, serve as models and identification figures.

2.5.3. The self-concept in adolescence

In the development of the self-concept, adolescence is most probably the crucial and critical stage for the consolidation of the self-concept as the person moves into adulthood. During the period of adolescence, the self-concept is both modified and consolidated and becomes more stable. Adolescence, a period of renewed opportunities for inner growth, can allow a positive reworking of negative childhood identifications and ways of interacting.

Because the adolescent moves closer to his independence, one of the central processes of this period is identity formation, which strives towards the establishment of a meaningful sense of self. An inability to resolve or conclude this search usually result in the person experiencing an identity crisis.

Erikson's (1967) fifth stage is often referred to as the "search for identity". He described the adolescent's main developmental tasks as being the formation of an integrated, acceptable personal identity which is formed by the accrual of his experiences, ego values and identification from previous stages. Adolescents need to clarify their personal values as well as re-assess their social roles. The satisfactory solution of the identity crisis leads to feelings of self-confidence and self-acceptance and a conviction of moving towards a meaningful future. A sense of identity diffusion develops when adolescents feel bewildered by the various demands made on them and react by running away in one form or another. Feelings of inadequacy, isolation and indecisiveness accompany this role confusion. The child who enters adolescence with a positive self-concept has the best chance of making a positive readjustment (Felker, 1974).

The changes and consolidation which take place in the self-concept development during adolescence are due to various factors including: rapid body growth, physical genital maturity and it's accompanying sexual drives, cognitive development towards greater abstract thought processes, the need to settle on a career identity, the demands society place on the adolescent and being confronted with a variety of conflicting possibilities and choices in life (Jones, 1980; Turner & Helms, 1983).

Adolescents' new cognitive skills enable them to analyse their own thoughts and motives of others. This ability to be self-reflective and analytical combined with adjusting to rapid physical changes, result in adolescents experiencing an intense self-consciousness and a strong concern about being liked and accepted. Montmayor & Eisen (1977) noted that adolescents describe themselves in abstract terms according

to their own personal beliefs and interpersonal characteristics, whereas younger children use more concrete terms, such as their appearance and possessions.

During puberty, before the full onset of adolescence, the body image becomes a focal point. Hansen & Maynard (1973) relates that body image becomes an important factor in self-concept development as puberty occurs, and much of the adolescent's self-worth derives from perceiving that his body fits the norm. Appearance is an important determiner of self-esteem, with individuals who accept their bodies, being more likely to manifest high self-esteem than those who dislike their bodies (Hamachek, 1971; Hurlock, 1975). Late maturing adolescents frequently encounter adjustment problems and are more likely to develop poorer self-concepts than their early maturing peers. They tend to be overly concerned with social acceptance, but are less popular with their peers (Turner & Helms, 1983)

Hurlock (1975) described certain conditions which she saw as influencing the adolescent's self-concept: (1) age of maturing ,(2) appearance, (3) internalising appropriate sex-role behaviour, (4)names and nicknames, (5) family relationships, (6) peers and (7) level of aspiration. A close relationship with the same sexed parent is seen as desirable as it enhances identification and the development of sex-appropriate self-concept. Unrealistically high levels of aspirations held by parents or the adolescent himself, are damaging to the self-concept as they invite failure and feelings of inadequacy. Hurlock saw the developmental tasks during adolescence as being the following:

(a) Accepting one's physique and accepting a masculine or feminine role.

(b) Establishing new relations with age-mates of both sexes.

(c) Gaining emotional independence from both parents and other adults.

(d) Achieving assurance of economic independence.

(e) Selecting and preparing for an occupation.

(f) Developing intellectual skills/concepts necessary for civic competence.

(g) Desiring and achieving socially responsible behaviour.

(h) Preparing for marriage and family life.

(i) Building conscious values in harmony with an adequate scientific world picture.

The successful resolution of these tasks leads to feelings of happiness, confidence and self-esteem.

The self-concept develops through interaction with significant others and the adolescent tends to see himself as he thinks other people see him. For the working class student, his significant other or role model does not inspire him to like himself, because he is constantly put down and made out to be worthless. Many researchers have emphasised the important role played by parents in the development of the self-concept during adolescence. Rosenberg (1965) found that parental interest and concern were significantly related to the adolescent's self-concept, while Coopersmith (1967) emphasised the factor of good communication between parents and children. Gecas (1971) identified parental affection and support to be consistently related to positive self-evaluations in adolescents. When the affection and support came from the mother, they were more likely to perceive themselves to be persons of worth and when it came from the father, it had a stronger impact on evaluations of themselves as competent and effective individuals. Gecas (1972) later

qualified that parental support was significantly related to adolescent self-esteem, only in situations where adult frames of reference were used: that is in the family, the classroom and with other adults. It was not an antecedent of adolescent self-esteem in the peer context. Gecas also found important contextual differences in self-esteem, with subjects reporting highest feelings of self-worth when in the presence of friends and lowest self-esteem when in school classrooms. Which clearly shows that there are different dimensions to the self-concept, and different dimensions feature stronger at different times and situations in a person's experiences.

Vrey (1974) also emphasised the quality of the adolescent's family relationships in influencing his personality development. He saw the totality of parent-child relationships as culminating during adolescence, so that the self-concept at that stage represented a reflection of the love, security and respect an individual had received during his childhood. If the adolescent had experienced rejection, hostility or being made to feel inferior during his childhood, he would have difficulty establishing new relationships, be fearful and lack confidence. His resulting social incompetence would further damage his self-concept. This is exactly what the student in a working-class environment experiences daily, which breaks down his self-esteem and further exacerbate his negative self-concept.

Rutter, Graham, Chadwick & Yule's (1976) study showed that parents continue to have substantial influence on their children right through adolescence. They stated that although peer group influences increase markedly through adolescence they tend to rival, but not replace, parental influence.

It is unmistakeably the biggest factor influencing adolescent's self-concept, namely parental behaviour. Parental absence, be it a deceased or incarcerated father, a drunk or overworked parent, would be a big blow to the self-concept development of the adolescent, which is the case in most working-class families. Van Heerden (1995) found that adolescents who came from families where they were accepted by their parents definitely thought of themselves in more favourable terms and had greater self-regard as compared to the adolescents who had been rejected by their parents. Parents are not the only significant others to have an impact on the adolescent's self-concept development. The peer group also hold a position of power and importance, with it's influence reaching a peak at the middle of adolescence (Hansen & Maynard, 1973). The adolescent is very conscious of the ideas and opinions of his peers, especially concerning their evaluation of his appearance and abilities. His self-concept is therefore greatly influenced by the extent to which he fits in with and feels accepted by his peer group (Craig, 1976). Funder (1980) did a study correlating adolescent's self-descriptions with peer's descriptions of them and found the two to be highly correlated, which supports the looking-glass theory as postulated by Cooley (1902). Peer interactions are important because they provide the adolescent with a support system and a forum for experimenting with a changing self-identity (Jones, 1980).

Adolescence is typically characterised by an intense self-examination as well as an interest in interpersonal relationships, with adolescents being highly influenced by the type of feedback they receive from significant others. Jones (1980) noted that adolescents' self-esteem is related to the degree to which they experience a sense of significance, in terms of being

important to and cared for by others, as well as a sense of competence and power.

Thorbecke & Grotevant (1982) investigated gender differences in adolescent identity formation and found that the issues of seperateness and autonomy were important for males' self-concepts, whereas being part of a network of relationships was important for females. Burns (1982) reported similar differences, describing the major source of females' self-concepts as being interpersonal, through social competence; while the major source of males' self-concept is individual, through achievement and being independent. The consequences of a low self-concept include poor social skills and social incompetence, interpersonal problems, high sensitivity to criticism, lack of confidence, unassertiveness, depression, anxiety, general maladjustment, isolation and poor school performance (Rosenberg, 1965; Black, 1974; Jones, 1980)

> In essence, if a person is accepted, approved and liked for what he is and he is aware of this, then a positive self-concept should be his. If others, parents, teachers, ridicule him, belittle him, reject him, criticise him, for his behavioural and physical attributes, then little self-respect or self-worth is likely to accrue. As a person is judged by others, so he comes to judge himself.
> (Burns, 1979:183-184).

An overview of the research shows conflicting findings regarding the stability of the self-concept during adolescence. Engel's (1959) findings support stable development of the self-concept during adolescence, although she stipulated that individuals with negative self-concepts

tended to be more unstable than individuals with positive self-concepts. Carlson (1965), Monge (1973), Vrey (1974) and Coleman (1980) all concluded that the self-concept was essentially constant throughout adolescence. Turner & Helms (1983) regard the self-concept as remaining fairly stable during adolescence, especially when it is positive. They state however, that an individual with a low self-concept may experience further self-concept deterioration as he grows older. The most recent support comes from Savin-Williams & Demo (1984) who concluded that the adolescent self-concept remains relatively stable over time, with growth occurring at a gradual pace towards maturity.

Opposing this view of stable development, are authors such as Blos (1962; 1967) who view adolescence as a time of great upheaval and change. Bernstein (1980) argued that there is a major transformation in the development of the adolescent self-system after the age of fifteen towards greater differentiation, abstraction and integration. Phillips & Zigler (1980) found older children to experience an increased real - ideal self-image disparity. Ellis & Davis (1982) described the changes in self-concept across the adolescent age span as representing a solidification of identity and an expansion of awareness of the self and the world.

Adolescents living in a working class environment are at a distinct disadvantage concerning their self-concept development. Their early experiences within their families were mostly negative; being exposed to neglect, an unstable environment, marital discord, physical abuse, parental rejection or indifference and eventual family break-up (Apple, 1984; Brown, 1987). Children coming out of this environment have normally never experienced the parental love, affection, acceptance, respect, support, interest or environmental security necessary for the

development of a positive self-concept. The feedback they have received from significant others has been mainly negative. The poor parent-child relationship results in exposure to negative modelling behaviour and identification opportunities (Coleman, 1969; Dawes & Donald, 1994). From this background, a child can only develop a negative self-concept, which in turn influences his performance at school and achievements in life in general.

2.6. **The self-concept and Academic Achievement**

Adolescents generally establish self-confidence and self-satisfaction as a consequence of success at school. Low self-concept scores often result from repeated academic, social, or physical failure (Burns, 1982).

The self-concept is seen by writers as being a key variable in academic achievement and many argue that the two are directly correlated. However, one of the problems with this area of research concerns the matter of whether or not school achievement is related to a globally perceived self-concept or rather to a more specific self-concept of ability (Mboya, 1989; Marsh, 1992). Brookover, Erikson & Joiner (1967) in a study of urban 'seventh graders', achieved a significant positive relationship between self-concept of ability and achievement averages, and also found that this relationship persisted even when measured intelligence was controlled. Also, specific self-concepts, were found to be related to specific areas of academic achievement and, in some cases, these were better predictors of achievement in the subjects than the general self-concept of ability (Mboya, 1995). Finally, self-concept was significantly and positively related to the perceived evaluation of significant others.

Purkey (1970) has also obtained high correlations, but with the strongest correlations being found between low self-concept and low achievement. However, Purkey and others maintained that the causal connections between the two cannot be achieved and that the relationship is reciprocal, not unilateral.

Spears & Deese (1973) have also mentioned research findings which have revealed more positive self-perceptions in disadvantaged children. Yet the relatively low achievement of disadvantaged children is well documented and self-concept is supposed to be related to academic achievement. In the light of the above, these authors have concluded that for a disadvantaged child, school achievement is not so likely to be congruent with other activities which dominate his life.

It was further suggested by Spears & Deese (1973) that the evaluation which a person places on his school achievement is related to self-fulfilment or self-maintenance. Self-concept can be expected to predict success in school only when the activity is important to self-maintenance; if the self-concept is of adequacy, then success is achieved; if the self-concept is of inadequacy, then failure results. This highlights the importance of the criterion activity, in this case, academic achievement, in judging the individual's self-concept. With this in mind, Spears & Deese (1973) argue that it is therefore not surprising that disadvantaged subjects had positive self-concepts even though such children generally show poor academic achievement.

Depite the different viewpoints regarding the relationship between self-concept and academic achievement, most researchers agree that teachers

specifically and the school in general, have a role to play in the development and nurturing of a healthy self-concept within the child. School organisation has been shown to affect the self-concept as well as the home environment and community the child grows up in (Canfield & Wells, 1976).

To summarize briefly, we note that the self-concept as a multi-dimensional, hierarchial construct, is regarded as one of the most crucial constructs in the development of a person's experience. It's influence spreads far and wide, having a profound impact on a person's behaviour and ultimately his achievements. It cannot be denied that the self-concept is a significant factor influencing the whole child's existence and therefore we need to look more closely at why the disadvantaged child from a working-class environment, does not achieve so much, even though they sometimes score high on the positive side of the self-concept scales.

2.7. **The self-concept and Socio-economic Status**

The relationship between education and social class, has been a focal point recently in the study of Educational Psychology. One of the main reasons for these studies, has been to demonstrate why an adequate account of educational experiences of ordinary working-class students can only be achieved by transcending inadequate existing theories (Jackson & Marsden, 1962; Rosenberg & Kaplan, 1982; Brown, 1987).

There are some people who believe that the present school system operates to the disadvantage of children from a working-class background, because it is geared for middle-class children inculcating

middle-class values which are irrelevant or unworkable in a working-class environment (Brown, 1987; Eitan, Amir & Rich, 1992). Brown went further and says that in a society where social inequality is entrenched through poverty, squalid overcrowded housing conditions, malnutrition and unemployment, it is inevitable that children starting with this disadvantage will not make much progress in a school system that treats them as foreigners and aliens.

The term 'social class' (Brown, 1987) refers to hierachically ranked cultural groupings. In their study of family life and social change, Duncan, Featherman & Duncan (1972) suggests that it is probably fruitful to think of social classes primarily as broad cultural groupings which cannot be reduced to distinctions between occupational categories, because there are also important regional factors to be taken into account.

Children from working-class backgrounds have lower internal standards for judging the adequacy of their achievement and are less involved in achievement experiences than middle-class children; hence their poorer achievement is felt to be less of a threat to their self-esteem and consequently there is less motivation for change (Duncan, Featherman & Duncan, 1972).

Thus, children in Trowbridge's (1970) working class group had high positive self-concepts even with low achievement. He tested over thirty seven hundred third through seventh grade low and middle socio-economic status students. It has be hypothesised that the cases where lower socioeconomic status students appear to have higher self-concepts than middle-class socioeconomic status(SES) students can be attributed

to the fact that researchers used a general self-concept measurement rather than a multi-dimensional self-concept measurement.

Trowbridge's (1970) findings indicated that the self-concept of low SES students was significantly higher than those of middle SES, and he offered the followinbg three explanations for his findings: (1) Lower SES students may have lower aspiration levels and consequently derive greater satisfaction from their performances. (2) Lower SES students may not blame themselves for bad experiences, while middle SES students may view their shortcomings as being their fault. (3) By answering the statements negatively, students were protecting their negative self-concepts. When students perceive that they are doing their best work and the teacher judges the work as poor, this has a negative effect on self-concept. But, if the student holds a lower perception of himself, he can better accept failure.

Duncan, Featherman & Duncan (1972) set out to test this social class self-concept relationship arguing that working-class children have more positive self-concepts than middle-class children because they have lower internal standards for judging their achievement experiences. Their hypothesis was supported and found that negative evaluations actually raised the self-concepts of the working-class group. Burns (1982) writes that this result seems best explained by the theory that working-class children are defensive concerning negative evaluation; threats to self-esteem are blocked out and positive feelings toward the self are exaggerated.

If this is true, it implies that children from working-class backgrounds are not impervious to middle-class expectations or standards when they

are present; they are well aware of them, rather than having low standards or expectations (Burns, 1982). Instead, they may be reacting to the fear of not meeting such expectations with defense mechanisms against this kind of anxiety being activated which, in turn, leads to reporting more positive self-concepts than one might expect under such conditions.

To summarize from this discussion, the researcher observed that there is considerable evidence which indicates a direct relationship between academic achievement and self-concept; that is, higher achievement is accompanied by higher self-concept and low achievement by low self-concept, but there were also studies that showed the contrary, against all expectations.(Silvernail, 1985). In some other cases, the student's gender and socio-economic status influences his self-concept, but much more research needs to done to find out how it influences the self-concept.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

In this chapter , the overall aim, a description of the samples involved in the study, the particular measuring instrument used, the procedure followed to collect the data and the statistical methods used to analyse the data will be discussed.

3.1. Overall Aim

The overall aim is to investigate the relationship between the self-concept scores and the school subjects scores of the students in this study.

3.1.1. Sub-aim

The sub-aim is to determine if there is a difference between the self-concept scores of males and females in this study, as it relates to their academic achievement.

3.2. Aims & Hypotheses

3.2.1. Aim 1:

To find if there is a correlation between the self-concept mean scores and school subject scores of the students in the study.

Hypotheses:

H₁   There will be a high correlation between the SDI scores and school subject scores.

H₂   There will be a low correlation between the SDI scores and

the school subject scores.

H₀   There will be no correlation between the self-concept scores and the school subject scores.

3.2.2. Aim 2:

To determine if there's a difference between the self-concept mean scores of males and females.

Hypotheses:

H₁   Males self-concept mean scores are higher than females self-concept mean scores.

H₂   Females self-concept mean scores are higher than males self-concept mean scores.

H₀   There is no difference between the self-concept mean scores of males and females.

3.3. METHOD

3.3.1. Sample

For this study, 202 adolescents from a high school in the Cape Town suburb of Lavender Hill were chosen to be part of this study. The subjects selected (n=202) were pooled by taking every alternate name on the class lists from all the Standard 8 - 10 class groups. These were made up of 27 Standard 8 pupils, 87 Standard

9 pupils and 88 Standard 10 pupils. There were 123 females and 79 males and their ages ranged from 15 to 20 years old.

Table 1 = Sample Distribution (n=202)

	Males	Females	Total
Standard 8	10	17	27
Standard 9	34	53	87
Standard 10	35	53	88
Total	79	123	202

3.3.2. Measuring Instrument

3.3.2.1. **The Self Description Inventory(SDI)** of Mboya (1993[b]) (Appendix A) was used to measure the self-concept of the students in this study. The SDI consists of 50 statements to which students respond on a response scale which varies from 5("I agree very much") and 1("I disagree very much"). The eight subscales that the SDI is designed to measure are based on the multi-faceted model of Shavelson, Hubner & Stanton (1976) A brief description of the SDI subscales and examples of items are as follows:

SDI(1) Relations with family: (FMLY) = 11 items

Students' perceptions of their interactions with their family. Examples are: "My family loves me"; "I feel my family does not care for me"; and "I feel I am an important member of my family".

SDI(2) General School (SCHL) = 11 items

Students' perceptions of the interest in and enjoyment of school in general.

Examples are: "I like most school subjects"; "I enjoy the time I spend in my class" and "The work I do at school is very important to me".

SDI(3) Physical Abilities (PHYS) = 6 items

Students' perceptions of their skills and interest in sports and physical activities.

Examples are: "I enjoy sport and games"; "I am a good athlete" and "I feel energetic most of the time".

SDI(4) Physical Appearance (APPR) = 4 items

Students' perceptions of their physical appearance.

Examples are: "I am satisfied with my appearance"; "I like the way I look" and "My friends do not find me attractive".

SDI(5) Emotional Stability (EMOT) = 4 items

Students' perceptions of their emotional stability.

Examples are: "I do not cry very easily"; "I get hurt easily when someone shouts at me" and "Most of the time I feel unwell".

SDI(6) Music Ability (MUSC) = 6 items

Students' perceptions of their interest in and enjoyment of music.

Examples are: "I love music"; "When music is played or when people sing I feel good" and "Music to me does not make a difference".

SDI(6) Relations with Peers (PERS) = 4 items

Students' perceptions of their interactions with peers. Examples are: "I am well liked by others of my age"; "It is difficult for me to make friends" and "I feel I am not well liked by others of my age".

SDI(8) Health (HLTH) = 4 items

Students' perceptions of their physical well-being. Examples are: "I am in good health"; "I care for my body to the best of my ability" and "I feel happy with the state of my health".

The reported reliability or internal consistency varied between 0.76 and 0.92. (Mboya, 1993[b]).

3.3.2.2.   To establish the **Academic Achievement Profile** of the students their end-of-year examination results (the percentages obtained in each of their six subjects every senior student takes and their aggregate percentage) for 1996 was the measure used to assess their academic achievement. All students in the senior phase do six academic subjects and their performance is evaluated in an examination at the end of the year to determine if they have been successful in progressing to the next standard.

3.3.2.3.   **A Biographical questionnaire** was also completed by all students in this study in order to establish their socio-economic status in the community (Appendix B). Socio-economic status was judged by a scale adapted from Warner, Meeker & Eells(1960).

3.4. Procedure

As the researcher was also the Guidance Counsellor of the school, both the Self Description Inventory and the Biographical Questionnaire were completed by students in the Guidance period of 45 minutes.

3.5. Statistical Analysis

The following techniques were used to analyse the data:

3.5.1. ANOVA

Analysis of Variance is a statistical strategy in which the total variance in a set of scores is analysed into various sources. An Analysis of Variance was computed of the SDI scores and the school subject percentages obtained by the students.

3.5.2. Mean

The mean is the arithmetic average of the scores in the sample, obtained by summing the scores and dividing by the number of scores in the sample (or, as it is

sometimes called, M). In this sample, we have the arithmetic averages of the SDI scores and the school subject percentages.

3.5.3. Standard Deviation

The Standard Deviation of a set of scores is the square root of the set's variance. This is a measure of variability in a set of scores. (The SDI-scores and the school subject percentages).

3.5.4. Correlation Analysis

Correlation refers to the co- or joint relationship between (or among) two or more variables. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient was utilised to establish if a correlation exists between the SDI scores and the percentages of the school subjects of the students in this study.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was computed using the raw data of the SDI(Self Description Inventory) and percentages of the end-of-year examinations results of the students, to determine if a difference exists between the self-concept scores and the academic achievement results of the male and female subjects of this study.

Analysis of Variance(ANOVA) is a statistical strategy in which the total variance in a set of scores is analysed into various sources. Each of the factors in a factorial design is a source of variance, as are each of the possible interactions. Variance not accounted for by the main effects and interactions is unexplained error variance. These sources - main effects, interactions, and error - add up to the total variance in the scores, both mathematically and conceptually.(Neale & Liebert, 1980).

In this study we are looking at the interactions between the different dimensions of the self-concept as measured by the SDI and the percentage scores of the different school subjects the students take. An ANOVA allows us to see, whether there is a difference between the scores of the males and females in this study group. The F-values have not been reported upon because they did not show a significant interactive effect between gender and standard.

4.1. Socio-economic Status

The best manner of establishing socio-economic status (SES) is by individual, so that criteria being used may be applied to each specific person or family. A common criteria for classifying families as to SES is the occupation of the breadwinner. A frequently used measure for this method is one developed by Lloyd Warner (1949). This procedure is often used because actual family income figures, the obvious ideal criterion, are almost impossible to obtain.

The occupational level codes (adapted from Warner, Meeker & Eells, 1960) was applied to this study and yielded the following results.(Table 2)

Table 2 = Occupational Level of Breadwinner

No.	Category	Number in Sample	Percentage
5	Professional, requiring graduate / post graduate education	00	00,00%
4	Lesser professionals not necessarily requiring graduate education	03	01,49%
3	Skilled clerical, sales, administrative occupations	34	16,83%
2	Manual skilled workers	133	65,84%
1	Unskilled workers	19	09,41%

** Unemployed = 13 (06,43%)

The following table (3) gives us an indication of the reported salary categories of the breadwinners.

Table 3 = Salary Category of Breadwinner

No.	Salary Category	Number in sample	Percentage
A	Less than R250 per week	47	23,27%
B	R250 - R499 per week	88	43,56%
C	R500 - R749 per week	52	25,74%
D	R750 - R999 per week	02	00,99%
E	More than a R1000 per week	00	00,00%

** Unemployed = 13 (06,43%)

Table 4 = Breadwinners

No.	Relationship	Number in Sample	Percentage
1	Mother	102	50,49%
2	Father	75	37,12%
3	Sister	09	04,45%
4	Brother	02	01,00%
5	Grandmother	06	02,97%
6	Grandfather	03	01.48%
7	Uncle	02	01,00%
8	Nephew	02	01,00%

** Unemployed = 13 (06,43%)

From the previous three tables one can clearly see that the students in the sample are fairly representative of families from a working class background.

4.2. Self-Description Inventory

4.2.1. SDI (1) = Relations with Family

Table 5 = SDI (1) Relations with Family & Standards

Standard	Males		Female		Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
8	45.3	2.3	41.9	1.9	p = 0.2514
9	46.1	1.3	42.5	1.0	**p = 0.0338**
10	44.7	1.3	43.2	1.1	p = 0.3412

Table 6 = SDI (1) Relations with Family & Age

Age	Males		Females		Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
16	46.9	2.3	39.9	1.6	**p = 0.0118**
17	45.3	1.9	42.4	1.1	p = 0.2117
18	45.0	1.6	45.0	1.4	p = 0.9840
19	46.4	1.8	42.3	1.9	p = 0.1257

In this category of the SDI, for each standard, males have higher mean values than females, although only for Standard 9 is the difference significant (p=0.0338) **(Table 5) (Standard 9 = Male mean = 46.1 (SD = 1.3) ; Female mean = 42.5 (SD = 1.0) p = < .05)** The same trend is indicated for the different ages, but only at Age 16 is there a large difference, males having a significantly higher mean than their female counterparts (p = 0.0118) **(Table 6). (Age 16; Males mean = 46.9 (SD = 2.3) ; Female mean = 39.9 (SD = 1.6) (p = <.05).**

4.2.2. SDI(2) = General School

Table 7 = SDI(2) General School & Standards

Standard	Male		Female		Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
8	41.3	1.6	43.2	1.3	p = 0.4804
9	42.1	0.9	44.1	0.7	p = 0.0831
10	41.8	0.9	43.2	0.8	p = 0.2092

Table 8 = SDI(2) General School & Age

Age	Male		Female		Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
16	41.8	1.6	43.1	1.1	p = 0.4772
17	42.4	1.3	45.0	0.8	p = 0.0940
18	43.0	1.1	43.9	0.9	p = 0.4951
19	40.7	1.2	39.8	1.3	p = 0.6346

Here we found that females have higher mean values than males for each Standard **(Table 7)** and Age group **(Table 8)** , except for age 19. However none of the differences are significant.

4.2.3. SDI(3) = Physical Abilities

Table 9 = SDI(3) Physical Abilities & Standards

Standard	Male		Female		Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
8	19.8	1.4	19.0	1.1	p = 0.6424
9	22.3	0.8	18.3	0.6	**p = 0.0001**
10	22.4	0.8	18.2	0.7	**p = 0.0001**

Table 10 = SDI(3) Physical Abilities & Age

Age	Male		Female		Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
16	22.6	1.3	20.2	0.9	p = 0.1319
17	21.7	1.1	18.7	0.6	**p = 0.0266**
18	23.1	0.9	16.9	0.8	**p = 0.0001**
19	22.4	1.0	18.0	1.1	**p = 0.0052**

Males have significantly higher mean values than females for all Standards **(Table 9)** and Ages **(Table 10)** except for Standard 8 and Age 16.

For Standard 9 the Male mean = 22.3 ; (SD = 0.8), and the Female mean = 18.3 ; (SD = 0.6); the significance was p = <.01.

For Standard 10 the Male mean = 22.4 ; (SD = 0.8), and the Female mean = 18.2 ; (SD = 0.7); the significance was p = <.01.

For Age 17 the Male mean = 21.7 ; (SD = 1.1), and the Female mean = 18.7 ; (SD = 0.6); the significance was p = <.05.

For Age 18 the Male mean = 23.1 ; (SD = 0.9), and the Female mean = 16.9 ; (SD = 0.8); the significance was p = <.01.

For Age 19 the Male mean = 22.4 ; (SD = 1.0), and the Female mean = 18.0 ; (SD = 1.1); the significance was p = <.01.

4.2.4. SDI(4) =Physical Appearance

Table 11 = SDI(4) Physical Appearance & Standards

Standard	Male		Female		Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
8	16.5	0.8	14.9	0.6	p = 0.1453
9	16.4	0.5	16.4	0.4	p = 0.9909
10	16.7	0.5	15.6	0.4	p = 0.0712

Table 12 = SDI(4) Physical Appearance & Age

Age	Male		Female		Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
16	16.5	0.8	15.3	0.6	p = 0.2389
17	16.1	0.7	16.2	0.4	p = 0.8379
18	16.6	0.6	15.9	0.5	p = 0.3652
19	16.7	0.6	15.4	0.7	p = 0.1716

Males have mostly higher mean values than females for the different Standards and Ages, but the differences are small and not significant. **(Tables 11 & 12).**

4.2.5. SDI(5) = Emotional Stability

Table 13 = SDI(5) Emotional Stability & Standards

Standard	Male		Female		Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
8	14.4	0.9	10.4	0.7	p = 0.0007
9	14.4	0.5	10.0	0.4	p = 0.0001
10	14.5	0.5	11.3	0.4	p = 0.0001

Table 14 = SDI(5) Emotional Stability & Age

Age	Male		Female		Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
16	15.3	0.9	9.9	0.6	p = 0.0001
17	13.6	0.8	11.1	0.4	p = 0.0065
18	14.5	0.6	10.8	0.5	p = 0.0001
19	15.3	0.7	9.9	0.8	p = 0.0001

For all Standards and Ages, males have higher mean values than females and they are significant for all Standards and Age Groups. (Tables 13 & 14).

For Standard 8 the Male mean = 14.4 ; (SD = 0.9), and the Female mean = 10.4 ; (SD = 0.7); the significance was $p = <.01$.

For Standard 9 the Male mean = 14.4 ; (SD = 0.5), and the Female mean = 10.0 ; (SD = 0.4); the significance was $p = <.01$.

For Standard 10 the Male mean = 14.5 ; (SD = 0.5), and the Female mean = 11.3 ; (SD = 0.4); the significance was p = <.01)

For Age 16 the Male mean = 15.3 ; (SD = 0.9) and the Female mean = 9.9 ; (SD = 0.6); the significance was p = <.01)

For Age 17 the Male mean = 13.6 ; (SD = 0.8), and the Female mean = 11.1 ; (SD = 0.4); the significance was p = <.01)

For Age 18 the Male mean = 14.5 ; (SD = 0.6), and the Female mean = 10.8 ; (SD = 0.5); the significance was p = <.01)

For Age 19 the Male mean = 15.3 ; (SD = 0.7) and the Female mean = 9.9 ; (SD = 0.8) the significance was p = <.01)

4.2.6. SDI(6) = Music Ability

Table 15 = SDI(6) Music Ability & Standards

Standard	Male		Female		Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
8	23.2	0.9	25.2	0.8	p = 0.1112
9	23.5	0.6	24.2	0.4	p = 0.3221
10	24.5	0.5	24.8	0.4	p = 0.5943

Table 16 = SDI(6) Music Ability & Age

Age	Male		Female		Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
16	24.0	0.9	24.6	0.7	p = 0.6026
17	22.7	0.8	24.4	0.5	p = 0.0641
18	24.6	0.6	24.9	0.6	p = 0.7483
19	23.7	0.8	24.6	0.8	p = 0.4314

For all Standards and Ages, females have higher mean values than males, but the differences were not significant. **(Tables 15 & 16).**

4.2.7. SDI(7) = Relations with Peers

Table 17 = SDI(7) Relations with Peers & Standards

Standard	Male		Female		Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
8	16.0	0.7	14.6	0.6	p = 0.1430
9	14.7	0.4	15.6	0.3	p = 0.1189
10	14.9	0.4	15.3	0.3	p = 0.4691

Table 18 = SDI(7) Relations with Peers & Age

Age	Male		Female		Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
16	15.9	0.7	14.9	0.5	p = 0.2871
17	14.9	0.6	15.8	0.4	p = 0.2269
18	14.9	0.5	15.2	0.4	p = 0.7120
19	14.2	0.6	15.5	0.6	p = 0.1100

For all Standards and Ages, except for Standard 8 and Ages 16, females have higher mean values than males, but the differences are not significant. **(Tables 17 & 18)**

4.2.8. SDI(8) = Health

Table 19 = SDI(8) Health & Standards

Standard	Male		Female		Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
8	16.7	0.8	16.7	0.6	p = 0.9831
9	16.3	0.5	16.2	0.4	p = 0.9138
10	15.9	0.4	16.3	0.4	p = 0.5332

Table 20 = SDI(8) Health & Age

Age	Male		Female		Significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
16	16.7	0.8	16.7	0.6	p = 0.9740
17	15.3	0.7	16.4	0.4	p = 0.1647
18	16.3	0.5	16.2	0.5	p = 0.8564
19	16.3	0.6	15.7	0.7	p = 0.5176

There are no clear trends here and the differences between genders relating to Standards and Ages are small and insignificant.. **(Tables 19 & 20).**

4.3. School Subjects

A Pearson Correlation co-efficient computation was done to determine if there is a correlation between school subjects and the

SDI. When analysing the correlation between the SDI and the different school subjects, the following trends were found.

With regard to Gender, there were no significant correlations between the school subjects of the females and the SDI(Self-description Inventory). It was only with the males doing Physical Science, **(See Table 21)** that a strong positive correlation emerged with SDI(3)(Physical Abilities) which were significant at the 05% level **(r = 0.81 / p = <.05).** There was also a strong negative correlation between males doing Physical Science and SDI(1)(Relations with Family) **(r = 0.78 / p = <.05)**

Table 21 = Males

SUBJECT	N	SDI	CORRELATION	SIGNIFICANCE
Physics	7	1	-0.79	p = 0.0391
Physics	7	3	0.81	p = 0.0266

Amongst the different Standards **(Table 22)** it is only in Standard 9 that we find significantly positive correlations . There is a strong positive correlation between Woodwork and SDI(7) (Relations with Peers)**(N = 4 / r = .98 / p = < .05)**; between Typing and SDI(4) (Physical Appearance)**(N = 13 / r = .72 / p = < .01)**. A strong negative correlation was found between Physical Science and SDI(4)(Physical Appearance) in the Standard 9 group **(N= 4 / r = -.75 / p = < .05)**

Table 22 = Standard 9

SUBJECT	N	SDI	CORRELATION	SIGNIFICANCE
Woodwork	4	7	0.98	p = 0.0198
Typing	13	4	0.73	p = 0.0047
Physics	8	4	-0.75	p = 0.0319

With regard to the different Age Groups, between SDI and school subjects, two significantly positive and one significantly negative correlations were found. Positive correlations were found in the 15 year old Age Group **(Table 23)** between History and SDI(1)(Relations with Family)**(N = 3 / r = .99 / p = < .05)** and also Typing and SDI(6)(Music Ability)**(N = 4 / r = .99 / p = < .01)**. Strong negative relationships were found between Accountancy and SDI(5)(Emotional Stability)**(N = 7 / r = -.84 / p = < .05)**

Table 23 = Age 15

SUBJECT	N	SDI	CORRELATION	SIGNIFICANCE
History	3	1	0.99	p = 0.0264
Typing	4	6	0.99	p = 0.0029
Accountancy	7	5	-0.84	p = 0.0179

In the 16 year old Age Group **(Table 24)** there is only one strong negative correlation between Geography and SDI(5)(Emotional Stability).**(N = 12 / r = -.73 / p = < .01)**

Table 24 = Age 16

SUBJECT	N	SDI	CORRELATION	SIGNIFICANCE
Geography	12	5	-0.73	p = 0.0067

In the 17 year old Age Group **(Table 25)** positively strong correlations were found between Physical Science and SDI(5)(Emotional Stability) **(N = 4 / r = .98 / p = < .05)** and Home Economics and SDI(6)(Music Ability).

(N = 13 / r = .73 / p = < .01)

Table 25 = Age 17

SUBJECT	N	SDI	CORRELATION	SIGNIFICANCE
Physical Science	4	5	0.98	p = 0.0198
Home Economics	13	6	0.72	p = 0.0047

In the 18 year Age Group **(Table 26)** strong positive correlations were found between Woodwork and SDI(1) (Relations with Family) **(N = 7 / r = .77 / p = < .05)**and SDI(4)(Physical Appearance) **(N = 7 / r = .81 / p = < .05)**

Table 26 = Age 18

SUBJECT	N	SDI	CORRELATION	SIGNIFICANCE
Woodwork	7	1	0.77	p = 0.0409
Woodwork	7	4	0.81	p = 0.0244

Only strong negative correlations were found as significant in the 19 year old Age Group **(Table 27).** Between Mathematics and SDI(7)(Relations with Peers)**(N = 9 / r = -0.76 / p = < .05);** between Accountancy and SDI(1) (Relations with Family) **(N = 10 / r = -0.74 / p = < .05);** and between Business Economics and SDI(7)(Relations with Peers) **(N = 7 / r = -0.84 / p = < .05)**

Table 27 = Age 19

SUBJECT	N	SDI	CORRELATION	SIGNIFICANCE
Mathematics	9	7	-0.76	p = 0.0164
Accountancy	10	1	-0.73	p = 0.0148
Bus Economics	7	5	-0.84	p = 0.0179

In the 20 year old Age Group **(Table 28)** only one positive and one negative correlation emerged , between Biology and SDI(5) **(N = 8 / r = 0.70 / p = < .05)** and Geography and SDI(7) **(N = 8 / r = -0.76 / p = < .05)** respectively.

Table 28 = Age 20

SUBJECT	N	SDI	CORRELATION	SIGNIFICANCE
Biology	8	5	0.71	p = 0.0487
Geography	8	7	-0.76	p = 0.0278

4.4. Summary

The highest mean scores for the school subjects were obtained in **Home Economics** (55.1667), **Typing** (54.7073) and **Afrikaans** (52.4950).

The highest mean scores for the SDI(Self-Description Inventory) were obtained in SDI(1)**(Relations with Family)** = 43.7277; SDI(2)**(General School)** = 42.9455 and SDI(6)**(Music Ability)** = 24.3465.

The SDI item that featured the most in significant correlations was SDI(5) (Emotional Stability) (13 times).

The interpretation and conclusions will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

Even though the relationship between self-concept and academic achievement has been well researched, some studies show a significant relationship between the two (Purkey, 1970; Burns, 1982; Silvernail, 1985; Mboya, 1986), while others have failed to obtain any substantial relationship (Davidson and Laing, 1965; Spears & Deese, 1973; Endler & Minder, 1977).

The results of the present study did not obtain a strong significant relationship, but a few valuable lessons can be learnt from the results. Firstly, this researcher worked from the premise that the self-concept is multi-faceted and multi-dimensional, as many researchers do nowadays (Shavelson, Hubner & Stanton, 1976; Burns, 1979; Shavelson & Bolus, 1982; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985; Mboya, 1993[b]; Vispoel , 1995). As such, the eight sub-dimensions of the SDI (Self- Description Inventory) was taken and correlated with the academic achievement of the students.

As shown from the results in the previous chapter, contrary to expectations, no significant correlation was found with SDI(2) which is General School (Students perceptions of their interest in and enjoyment of school in general). Thus, if the enjoyment of school had nothing or very little to do with any of the subjects they pursued, then one can surmise that these students come to school to socialise, to enjoy the time with their peers and friends and that they derive very little enjoyment from the actual schooling or educational process.

The SDI-component that featured the most in strong correlations was the **SDI(1) (Relations with Family)** These refer to students' perceptions of their interactions with their family. It could be that the family plays a much more important role in how students perceive themselves than the role the school play. There were strong positive correlations with the subjects **Physical Science**, **Woodwork** and **History**. These subjects are normally male-dominated and therefore we might conclude that these boys were much more positively involved with their families. A strong negative correlation between **SDI(1)** and **Accountancy** , indicate that they have good family relationships, but poor performance in Accountancy.

Strong positive correlations were also found in **SDI(4)** and **SDI(7)** which refers to students' perceptions of their **physical appearance** and their **relations with peers** respectively. One significant observation in this regard is that the school subjects which showed a strong relation with the above-mentioned SDI's were **Typing** (girls only subject) and **Woodwork**(boys only subject). This once again indicates that adolescents are very concerned about their appearance, but for the different genders it could be for totally different reasons. For boys it could still be to keep up that masculine image of doing manual work and for girls it could be poise and elegance in doing administrative/secretarial work. Students' perceptions that they were emotionally stable correlated positively with subjects such as **Accountancy**, **Geography** and **Biology**. These subjects are more practically orientated and these students who were more activity-orientated were more emotionally stable.

With regard to the secondary aim of this study, male mean scores were significantly higher than female scores with regard to physical ability, but

not significantly higher in respect of physical appearance. This could be because males are more involved with physical activities where strength is needed than their female counterparts. Not surprisingly, male mean scores were also significantly higher than female mean scores concerning emotional stability. Females being the sensitive type and males not inclined to show much emotion, it seemed that males were emotionally more stable than females.

There were no positively significant correlations between **SDI(2) (General School)** or **SDI(8) (Health)** and any of the school subjects. Even though we would have expected that **SDI(2) (General School)** at least would have correlated prominently with their school subjects, that was not the case. Many reasons could be forwarded to explain this possible lack of correlation, but it is recommended that the SDI should be administered more than once to test for consistency.

This study was very valuable in that the significantly positive correlations, made very interesting reading and could be a motivation for further investigation because more analysis needs to be done. For instance, family relationships came out quite strong, whereas generally in a working-class environment, family ties may not be that strong because the parents and their children do not spend a lot of time together due to long working hours for financial survival. Also the educational standard of the parents is not so high and in some cases the children have more education than their parents. Because of the parents' limited ability for meaningful communication of school-related topics, the children find it difficult to converse in this direction. Many of these families are single-parent families where the mother finds it difficult to attend to the needs of her children. But this could also be the reason for

that appreciation of the family structure and the strong correlation found in this study.

5.1. Limitations of the Study

Criticism of previous research into the self-concept is often levelled at the measuring instruments and their validity and reliability. In the present study this could also be the case, as the primary and only self-concept measuring instrument used, was the SDI(Self Description Inventory) of Dr M M Mboya (1993[b]). The author reports that the reliability and validity ranged from .74 to .95. The reliability and validity of the SDI is relative and needs to be used much more extensively to verify it's consistency. Because of it's relative newness and not being widely applied, the instrument has it's limitations and further investigation and application is definitely required regarding the validity and consistency of the instrument. The SDI should have been administered more than once to the same students to verify for consistency, and also to see if their perceptions change over time.

Another limitation in this study could have been language comprehension. The school where the study was administered is an Afrikaans medium school and the SDI is written in English, the question of understanding the statements correctly could also have been a problem.

The school is in a disadvantaged area and most of the students come from a working-class environment. Nelson (1965) sees the development of a positive self-concept as being reliant on a number of factors, one of which is the demands a person's environment places on him. In a working-class environment the demands are such that the person finds it

very difficult to express himself. But one school may not be representative of the whole working class community, therefore generalising would be dangerous.

Only one end-of-year examination result was taken as the academic achievement of each student, whereas a longer period, like a whole year's work would have been a better reflection of a student's academic performance and achievement.

5.2. Recommendations

In conclusion, the present researcher, would like to present the reader with certain observations which have been acquired during the course of this study.

1.   Every individual has the right to a positive self-concept and schools as the educational institution should have as a specific goal the positive enhancement of the self-concept. The present researcher is strongly convinced that the self-concept is the key to educational success.

2.   Testing the self-concept in schools and giving feedback to the students would be of great help in giving them direction for their lives while still at school. Research (Canfield & Wells, 1976;Burns, 1982; Silvernail, 1985; Mboya, 1995) has demonstrated that teachers can improve students' self-concept through such methods as making positive comments and creating an atmosphere of acceptance and security in the classroom.

3.   Future research should pay more attention to the multi-dimensionality of the self-concept and as such get a clearer picture of the correlations revealed in any investigation. Specifically, the self-concept of academic ability(general school) should be tested for correlations with the students' academic performance and achievement. The impact of the self-concept on academic achievement may not be generalizable, but rather may be a function of a specific dimension of the self-concept.

4.   The question can be asked that since students' behaviour changes over time due to changes in the environment, the present researcher would investigate whether the self-concept of academic ability(general school) and academic achievement change a year or two later? A longitudinal study patterned after the design of this study is recommended.

5.   For a greater measure of stability and consistency, at least two measures of academic achievement or a profile of continuous assessment of the students should be used in future research. For example, a reliable standardized IQ test, assignments, tests and formal examination marks could be used together with teacher appraisals. This procedure will strengthen studies of this nature.

6.   It would be more valuable to have a study that identifies which specific dimension of self-concept and how it relates to academic achievement.

7.   Future research should be designed to go into greater depth to determine causality of the findings of the present study.

5.4. The Way Forward

In conclusion, the present researcher feels that even though students from an impoverished environment are hampered in developing a positive self-concept, they can, with a structured program of intervention, be helped to develop and nurture a positive self-concept. This would give them a greater chance of being successful, not only in school subjects, but in life in general. Training teachers to improve the estimates of students' academic potential may be an effective strategy for increasing the self-concept of academic ability (general school) and academic achievement of students.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, there are two schools of thought , the self-enhancement theorists and the skill development theorists. The former believes that an educator who facilitates change in a student's self-concept, will in turn lead to an improvement in the student's achievement. The latter group of theorists believe that educators who identify methods for improving a student's academic achievement will help the student enhance his self-concept.

With South Africa adopting the OBE (Outcomes-Based Education) system, skills development will be of crucial importance for the student. Even though a positive self-concept is implied in the critical outcomes of OBE, it should be stated explicitly as a specific outcome in the new curriculum.

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APPENDIX A

SELF DESCRIPTION INVENTORY

CONFIDENTIAL

NAME: ....

CLASS:...

SCHOOL:..

AGE:...

PLEASE TICK WHICHEVER APPLIES:

MALE		FEMALE	

- This is a time for you to look at yourself. This is not a test.
- There are no right or wrong answers and everyone will have different answers.
- Please read each statement and decide your answer. There are five possible answers to each statement: "I agree very much", "I agree", "I am not sure", "I disagree" and "I disagree very much".
- Choose your answer to each statement and put a tick [　　] in the column with the answer you have chosen.
- Two examples are given below:

EXAMPLES:

	I agree very much	I agree	I am not sure	I disagree	I disagree very much
1. I love reading					
2. I do not like food					

- If you want to change an answer you have marked, you should cross out the tick and put a new tick in the area you have chosen. You should have one answer only for each statement.
- Please do not leave out any statements.
- If you have any questions, please ask the facilitator.
- There is no time limit, work at your own pace.
- Please work on your own. DO NOT TALK to your neighbour once you have started.

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South Africa, 1992.

	I agree very much	I agree	I am not sure	I dis-agree	I disagree very much
1. My family understands me					
2. I am well liked by others of my age					
3. I think I can do all of my classwork					
4. I enjoy sports and games					
5. I would like to change the way I look					
6. I feel that I am not well liked by others of my age					
7. It is easy for me to make friends					
8. My family does not understand me					
9. I like the way I look					
10. I avoid sports and games when I can					
11. I love music very much					
12. My family loves me					
13. I enjoy doing work in most school subjects					
14. I do well at sports and games					
15. I do not like my family very much					

	I agree very much	I agree	I am not sure	I dis-agree	I disagree very much
16. I do not cry easily					
17. The work I do at school is very important to me.					
18. I am in good health					
19. I feel my family does not care much for me					
20. I am not good at sports and games					
21. I feel that if I am given a chance I can be good in music					
22. I often cry					
23. I look forward to going to school.					
24. It is difficult for me to make friends					
25. I am a good athlete					
26. I am not happy with my appearance					
27. I feel I am an important member of my family					
28. Most subjects I find very difficult to learn					
29. I am satisfied with my appearance					
30. Even if I am given a chance, I don't think I can be good at music					

	I agree very much	I agree	I am not sure	I dis-agree	I disagree very much
31. I would not go to school if it was my choice					
32. I enjoy the time I spend with my family					
33. When music is played or when people sing I feel good					
34. I do not enjoy doing work In most of my school subjects					
35. I enjoy the time I spend in class.					
36. I enjoy listening to people singing or playing music					
37. Not much love is shown towards me by my family					
38. I hate most school subjects					
39. If I have children of my own, I want to bring up the way my family did with me					
40. I feel guilty because I do not look after my body					
41. I do not get hurt when someone shouts at me.					
42. Music to me does not make a difference					
43. I feel happy with the state of my health					
44. I will never raise my children the way my parents raised me.					
45. I do not care about the work I do at school					

	I agree very much	I agree	I am not sure	I dis-agree	I disagree very much
46. I care for my body to the best of my ability					
47. I get hurt easily when someone shouts at me					
48. I like my family					
49. I like most school subjects					
50. I am a leader in sports and games					

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION

APPENDIX B

UNIVERSITEIT VAN WES-KAAPLAND
M.ED (OPVOEDKUNDIGE SIELKUNDE)
BIOGRAFIESE VRAELYS

SOSIO-EKONOMIESE ONDERSOEK

INSTRUKSIES

**Hierdie vraelys is opgestel vir navorsingsdoeleindes om vas
te stel in watter sosio-ekonomiese groep julle huisgesin
val. Vul dit asseblief noukerig en eerlik as moontlik in.
LET WEL: Dit is net vir navorsingsdoeleindes! Moet nie jou
naam op hierdie blad skryf nie!**

Sirkel jou gepaste antwoord.

1. **In watter ouderdomsgroep val jy?**

   16   17   18   19   20   21

2. **In watter standerd is jy?   8   9   10**

3. **Wat is jou geslag?   Manlik   Vroulik**

4. **Wie is die broodwinner in julle huis? (D.w.s. op wie se
   geld maak julle die meeste statt in die huis?)**

   Ma   Pa   Voog   Stiefpa   Oupa   Ouma

5. **Wat is die broodwinner se werkstitel? (Bv. Messelaar,
   voorman, tealady, domestic worker, fabriekswerker, ens.)**

   ....

6. **Wat behels die broodwinner se werk? (Beskryf kortliks
   wat die persoon eintlik in sy/haar werk doen.)**

   ....

   ....

7. **Wat is die plek of persoon se naam waar die broodwinner werk? (Bv. Plessey, Pick-a-Pay, Mrs White(Tokai), ens.)**

....

8. **Watter standerd het jou ouers/broodwinner die skool verlaat?**

   Pa: ....

   Ma: ....

   Broodwinner: ....

9. **Was enige van jou ouers of die broodwinner op kollege, technikon of universiteit?**

   Ja   Nee

10. **Het enige van jou broers of susters matriek geslaag?**

   Ja   Nee

11. **Waar woon julle?(Bv. Lavender Hill, Seawinds, Montague Village, Cafda, Steenberg, Coniston Park, Retreat, ens.)**

....

12. **In watter salariskategorie val die broodwinner. (As jy nie weet nie, kan jy 'n skatting maak.)**

   Minder as R250 per week/Minder as R1000 per maand ....

   R250 per week/R1000 per maand   ....

   R500 per week/R2000 per maand   ....

   R750 per week/R3000 per maand   ....

   Meer as R1000 per week/Meer as R4000 per maand   ....

Baie Dankie vir jou tyd en samewerking
Dit word hoogs waardeer.

Mnr I Leedenberg
(Skoolvoorligter - M.Ed Navorser)