

**Self-Perceptions of Twice-Exceptional Students: The Influence of Labels and Educational
Placement on Self-Concept for G/LD Post-Secondary Students**

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ABSTRACT

Research has shown self-concept to be a significant influence of later success in life, yet studies have rarely focused on the perceptions of students in all educational placements and achievements – specifically, those identified as gifted and with a learning disability (G/LD) (Rudasill, Capper, Foust, Callahan, & Albaugh, 2009). Adopting a qualitative case study approach, and guided by the Marsh/Shavelson model of self-concept (1985) and the Social Identity Theory (1986), this study explored 1) how G/LD students perceive the development of his or her self-concept over time and 2) how labelling and educational placement interact with the development of self-concept. A Body Biography and a discussion/ semi-structured interview were used to explore these questions with eight English-speaking post-secondary G/LD students. During the discussion/ semi-structured interview, participants discussed their completed Body Biography and responded to questions focused on self-perceptions of educational placement, labels, social identity, group membership, and self-concept. Findings of the study revealed that participants tended to perceive the gifted and LD components of the G/LD identification as separate components, rather than as a whole identification; participants appeared to consider themselves as part of a gifted *in-group* when reflecting upon their strengths and within a LD *in-group* when reflecting upon their weaknesses; and educational placement experiences exerted a strong influence upon participants' self-concepts, depending on how well they perceived their educational placement experiences met their academic needs. Overall, the domains of self-concept were very closely related to one another, with academic, social, and emotional self-concepts being the most influenced by identification, labels, and educational placement. The findings from this study support the notion that each G/LD student is unique and there is no singular best method of identification, nor is there one specific educational path that meets the educational needs of all G/LD students.

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Chapter 1

*“The big contradiction in my life was that I was really smart, but I wasn’t doing well enough.”
- Amanda*

“I’m also goal-oriented and self-motivated which are my strengths, but they’re my strengths because they have to be cause if (...) you’re combating something that’s working against you, you have to have a goal and you have to be able to self-motivate, or you’re never gonna get anywhere.” - Catherine

“I don’t think many people who have a learning disability would consider themselves smart because that’s not what they’re taught to believe.” - Darren

“I knew I was goal-focused but I really, really, really see that I am very, very goal-focused (...) and that’s my number one and I don’t want to lose sight of sort of where I want to be and what I want to do, with relation to engineering.” - Elizabeth

*“I’m an original, eccentric person, but maybe that’s sort of similar with other gifted people...”
- Felix*

*“Given the freedom provided by a homeschooling education in Manitoba, I would expect other Body Biographies of students that were homeschooled to be very creative and outside the box.”
- Graham*

“I feel like I am perpetually stuck and burnt out. I think much of this comes from staying in an institution that has consistently challenged me in all the wrong ways.” - Hannah

“You know, (...) it’s like all of these very mixed messages happening.” - Isabelle

Labels are socially constructed variables that influence not only how society views an individual, but also how that individual perceives him or herself. (Gates, 2010; Lauchlan & Boyle, 2007; Markham, 2005). In education, labels are formed around those with a specific diagnosis or disability as a way for teachers, parents, and policy makers to understand how to best educate these students. A specific diagnosis may then result in a certain educational placement, which can further perpetuate both the positive and/or negative connotations of a label (Lauchlan & Boyle, 2007). Disabilities are often perceived by society as negative and as an example of someone who is incapable or less than someone without a disability. Conversely, giftedness is perceived as a special and unique attribute to possess. As for an individual identified with both a disability and giftedness, the societal stigmas as a result of labels may pose additional difficulties for that individual. As evident by the quotations provided above, a G/LD

identification and educational label can influence several aspects of one's life as well as self-perceptions of self-concept.

This study sought to explore the self-perceptions of post-secondary students identified as both gifted and with a learning disability (G/LD). The purpose was to explore how labels and educational placement contribute to self-perceptions of social identity and self-concept. Participants of this study included eight post-secondary students who had been identified as G/LD, with varying educational paths and experiences to the point of post-secondary education. The main objective was understand students' self-perceptions regarding the G/LD label with respect to educational experiences.

This chapter will begin with a discussion of the context and background that provided a basis for this study. Next, the chapter will highlight the researcher's approach to completing the study, as well as the researcher's own perspectives and reasons for focusing on this particular topic of study. The chapter will then discuss the rationale of and significance for a study of this nature, concluding with a chapter summary.

Background and Context

While students identified as gifted have strengths, they may also have a range of disabilities resulting in social and academic difficulties. Often, when a disability is identified, support is generally focused towards addressing the disability while the child's giftedness is ignored or unrecognized within the classroom (Chamberlin, Buchanan, & Vercimak, 2007). Particular shortcomings of G/LD research include its dominant focus on identification and placement options (Kay, 2000; Siegel & Ladyman, 2000; Yssel, Prater, & Smith, 2010), and involving parents and teachers as the principal participant samples rather than the students themselves (i.e., Bianco, 2005; Chamberlain et al., 2007; Mann, 2006; Vespi & Yewchuk, 1992; Yssel et al., 2010). Little research has explored the self-perceptions of experiences of twice-exceptional students and considering that up to 20% of gifted students may meet the criteria for this identification (Ziemann, 2009), a change is important. If this issue is not explored, then our ability to understand these individuals is compromised and the first-hand perceptions of students' experiences are not heard, which is vital towards a change in the education of these students.

Self-concept has been explored among students with a range of exceptionalities and while numerous definitions exist, Marsh and Shavelson (1985) propose one of the most well-researched definitions that is based on how individuals perceive their strengths and weaknesses

and is, “formed through experience with and interpretation of one’s environment” (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). Multi-dimensional and hierarchical, the Marsh and Shavelson model of self-concept outlines that self-concept is multifaceted, stable, descriptive, developmental, evaluative, and differentiable (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976). With respect to the *developmental* component, Marsh and Shavelson propose that as an individual develops cognitively and emotionally, his or her self-concept becomes more multifaceted and the individual becomes more competent in categorizing self-perceptions. A main reason for studying student self-concept is its relationship with academic, social, and emotional self-concept outcomes (i.e., Rinn, Plucker, Stocking, 2010; Schneider, Clegg, Byrne, Ledingham, & Crombie, 1989; Zeidner, Shani-Zinovich, Matthews, & Roberts, 2005). Furthermore, self-concept is an important mediating construct that facilitates the attainment of other desirable psychological and behavioural outcomes, with benefits to cognitions of choice, planning, and subsequent accomplishments (Bandura, 1986; 1997). The relationship between self-concept and educational or class placement is important to explore, as students identified as gifted or LD may be educated in a range of settings, which may have varying influences on academic and psychosocial outcomes. When a student is placed in a specific setting (e.g., ranging from more inclusive settings such as indirect support in a regular classroom to a more specialized circumstance such as a special education school) and labelled as gifted, learning disabled (LD), or gifted with a learning disability (G/LD), there is a certain association inherent within the label that is likely to influence the self-concept of that student.

It is important to acknowledge that in addition to educational placement and labels, other factors are involved in the development of self-concept. Research suggests that when teachers of students with LD believe that they are responsible for student learning and feel competent with methods to aid learning, their students have higher self-concepts than if the teachers feel otherwise (Jordan, Lindsay, & Stanovich, 1997; Jordan & Stanovich, 2001; Stanovich, Jordan & Perot, 1998). Similarly, parents are particularly influential in self-concept development with regards to student aspirations and expectations for academic achievement (Patrikakou, 1996). Given that parents and teachers cannot be separated from the educational experience, nor can they be separated from the creation of labels, participants in this study may note these influences as important. However, the focus of this study is on the self-perception of labels and how educational placement influences the development of self-concept for G/LD students. The choice

to focus on labels and educational placement is not to ignore other factors involved in the development of self-concept, but rather to provide greater insight into how labels and educational placement may impact G/LD students in particular.

In essence, this qualitative study explored self-perceptions of the influence of the labels and educational placement experiences on the self-concept of post-secondary students identified as G/LD. By exploring individuals' self-perceptions of the G/LD label and educational placements as a result of the label, a deeper understanding of the interplay between social identity, social comparison, and self-concept development could emerge. Understanding this interplay is very important as it has not been previously explored from the student perspective, and this insight could then be used to inform parents, teachers, and policy makers about a need for change in the education of this unique population.

Statement of the Purpose

Research has not explored the self-concept of G/LD students and/or the influence of labelling and placement on self-concept from the student perspective. It is of particular importance given the needs of this unique population and the fact that students cannot receive supporting educational placement without an identification of being gifted or a LD diagnosis. In a sense, there is a decision of prioritizing one label above the other, and how this prioritization impacts students' self-concept is not clear.

Researcher Perspective

The present study developed from my background in psychology, my interest in the socio-emotional well-being of students, and my own experience with being identified as a student with exceptionalities and a disability. In elementary school, I was identified as an exceptional student with an IEP based on my physical disability and I was recognized as being talented musically and in visual arts. Based on the choice to place me into a regular classroom setting, and the fact that my elementary and high schools did not offer specialized programming or courses to challenge me in these areas, an interest in the experiences of other exceptional students has emerged. In particular, I have chosen to explore the self-perceptions of students identified as G/LD out of an interest to expand my knowledge of exceptionalities. I am in constant search of learning experiences which expand my current understandings of phenomena that surround me, and this study proposed to accomplish this, while highlighting my particular areas of research interests.

Rationale and Significance of the Study

Research has not focused on how students identified with giftedness and a learning disability perceive the influence of labels and educational placement upon the development of self-concept. Regardless of how labels emerge and are applied, there is a consequence. Research shows that students identified as gifted, particularly female high school students, often hide their identification and/or minimize their abilities to avoid being ostracized by their peers (Rudasill et al., 2009). The same is true for students identified as LD, as students may conceal their difficulties from peers in hopes of greater social acceptance (Loeb, & Jay, 1987; Pajares, 1996). Additionally, there is substantial research showing how being identified as gifted, LD, or G/LD affects self-concept and the type of educational placement available to the student (Barber & Mueller, 2011; Bianco & Leech, 2010; Crim, Hawkins, Ruban, & Johnson, 2008; Weinfeld, Barnes-Robinson, Jeweler, & Roffman Shevitz, 2002).

The next chapter will review the extant literature, focusing on students identified as gifted, LD, and in particular, students identified as G/LD. The literature review will also focus on educational placement options, and the interaction of labels, educational placement, and self-concept as it applies to G/LD students.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

A brief outline of the historical development and definitions of giftedness, learning disabilities, and students identified with giftedness and a learning disability will be reviewed. In addition, the literature review will explore educational placement options and labels associated with being identified as an exceptional student (G, LD and G/LD). Finally, the construct of self-concept and its sub-components will be discussed, with a focus on how educational placement and labels influence the development of self-concept.

Students Identified as Gifted

The notion of giftedness was first introduced in 1980 when Francis Galton proposed that adults who exhibited exceptional talent in a particular area were gifted and that children could inherit that potential to become gifted adults. Leta Stetter Hollingsworth (1942) also believed that gifted intelligence could be inherited and further proposed that the environment (i.e., the home and a stimulating educational environment) was crucial to the development of gifted potential for girls in particular. The contributions of Hollingsworth were original for her time, as no other researchers dared to challenge the idea of giftedness as a static and innate trait. Also offering groundbreaking contributions to the area of gifted research was Lewis Terman and his work *Genetic Studies of Genius* (1925). Terman is perhaps best known for his longitudinal study of over 1500 gifted children that began in 1921 at Stanford University and focused on gifted children's educational progress, special abilities, interests, play, personality, and family traits (Terman & Baldwin, 1926). His results showed that gifted children were usually social, well-adjusted, physically taller, and did better in school than their typically developing peers. As the children were followed from childhood through to adulthood, Terman's study suggested that IQ alone was not necessarily a predictor of success, which challenged prevailing stereotypes of giftedness during this time and presented a new perspective into the families of gifted children.

While *giftedness* can be quantified by a standardized test and determined by the outcome of a particular score of 180 or higher (Binet & Simon, 1980), psychometric instruments have broadened the definition of giftedness by including such concepts as creativity (Guilford, 1967) and musical ability (Seashore, 1960) into the definition. Furthering the conceptualization of giftedness, Howard Gardner's *Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (MI) outlined that individuals are capable of at least seven independent and domain-specific forms of intelligence, which include *linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily kinesthetic, interpersonal, and*

intrapersonal. Gardner believed that each individual possesses a unique cognitive profile based on strengths and interrelationships of the various intelligences. Unfortunately, MI theory has been criticized for lacking empirical support (e.g., Waterhouse, 2006), for implying that each person is gifted in at least one of the multiple intelligences, and for intensifying parental desire to nurture these perceived gifts (Bosetti & Pyryt, 2007). However, and most notably, the MI theory has been criticized for a lack of, “axioms, postulates, (...) testable hypotheses, and other paraphernalia of a theory in the hard sciences” (Walters, 1986, p.32). Another important theory in the field of gifted education is the Triarchic Theory of Intellectual Giftedness, posed by Robert Sternberg (1984). This theory outlines three types of intelligences (i.e., componential, experiential, and contextual) as the foundation of giftedness. Componential intelligence refers to analytical thinkers who likely perform well on standardized intelligences tests; experiential intelligence refers to the capacity to deal with novel tasks and situations and to “automatize” responses; and contextual intelligence refers to the ability to adapt, shape, and select behaviours to function effectively in a given environment. The environmental contribution to giftedness was important to Sternberg, as he demonstrated how environment and culture could influence intelligence and giftedness. Expanding upon the definition of giftedness, Joseph Renzulli (1984) proposed a “Three-Ring” conception of giftedness (1984), which above-average ability, task commitment, and creativity in the area of reading (Moore, 2005). For Renzulli, an “above-average ability” includes general and specific abilities. More specifically, general abilities are thought to be skills, which are quantified by standardized or IQ tests, whereas specific abilities are specialized skills best measured by performance-based assessments (Moore, 2005).

Historically, the definition of giftedness had not garnered a clear consensus, and nor does it in the present. However, Ontario defines an exceptional student as, “a pupil whose behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical or multiple exceptionalities are such that he or she is considered to require placement in a special education program by a committee” (Ministry of Education, 2001) and thus students identified as gifted are included within this identification. In Ontario, 7.12% of elementary school children and 12.93% of secondary school children were labelled with exceptionalities in 2007, with the province defining giftedness as:

an unusually advanced degree of general intellectual ability that requires differentiated learning experiences of a depth and breadth beyond those normally provided in the regular school program to satisfy the level of education potential indicated (Ministry of Education, 2001).

While all school boards in Ontario must adopt this definition, specific criterion for identifying students as gifted are developed on a board-by-board basis. For instance, for admission into a gifted program at the Ottawa Carleton District School Board, the child must rank within the 99th percentile for two of the three scales and within the 90th percentile for the third scale of the Canadian Cognitive Abilities Test (Criteria for Specialized Gifted Program, 2011).

Although identification and placement depend on the school board, each definition of giftedness includes the specification of an advanced level of intellectual ability in one or more academic domains. Students with a learning disability are also considered to be exceptional students and literature concerning this type of learner is presented in the proceeding section.

Students with Learning Disabilities

As early as the 1960s, the notion of a *learning disability* merited interest within psychological research (see Philpott & Cahill, 2008). However, in the decades that have passed since its recognition, research has focused on the controversial nature of its definition, identification practices, and the parameters of accommodations (Lerner & Johns, 2009).

In 2008, Kozey and Siegel examined definitions of LD across Canada and found that the interprovincial and territorial LD definition and diagnostic features are at odds with the purposes of education and evaluation (p.167). Furthermore, practitioners struggle with methods of accurate identification with collaborative planning and then meeting the needs of the students (Mellard et al., 2004; Harrison et al., 2005; Lyon et al., 2005; Dombrowski et al., 2006). In 2001, the National Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS; Ministry of Industry, 2002) indicated that a learning disability was the second most common type of disability along with chronic conditions and that 2.6% of Canadian children ages 5 to 14 years were identified as having a learning disability. In an extremely comprehensive definition, which is also very similar to that adopted in Ontario (Ministry of Education, 2001), the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC, 2002) states that learning disabilities:

affect learning in individuals who otherwise demonstrate at least average abilities essential for thinking and/or reasoning. As such, learning disabilities are distinct from global intellectual deficiency. Learning disabilities result from impairments in one or more processes related to perceiving, thinking, remembering or learning. These include, but are not limited to: language processing; phonological processing; visual spatial processing; processing speed; memory and attention; and executive functions (e.g., planning and decision-making).

According to the Ontario definition, learning disabilities may be, “evident in both academic and social situations that involves one or more of the processes necessary for the proper use of spoken language or the symbols of communication” (Ministry of Education, 2001). Furthermore, the Ontario Ministry of Education definition stipulates that the learning disability may not be the result of visual impairment, cultural difference, or a physical disability and there must be a discrepancy between academic achievement and assessed intellectual ability (Ministry of Education, 2001). Each board of education across Canada varies as to its specifications for eligibility for a LD program, with the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, as an example, requiring a student to function, “below the 15th percentile for his or her age group in two of the following areas: reading, written expression, or mathematics” (Criteria for Learning Disability Program, 2011).

Apart from definitions, concerns around the social, emotional, and academic outcomes of students with learning disabilities have also been a focus for researchers. In particular, academic underachievement (Shafir & Siegel, 1994; Wilson & Lesaux, 2001) and lower graduations rates as compared to their peers (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Rojewski, 1999) have been identified as issues for students with learning disabilities. Additionally, LD students are presumed to be at-risk for lowered self-concept due to difficulties with social interactions and academic achievement (Vaughn, Elbaum, & Boardman, 2001). A possible reason for these social and academic difficulties that influence self-concept may be the interaction between educational placement and the social stigmas of the disability.

Given that learning disabilities result from impairments in one or more cognitive processes, defining the parameters of a LD across school boards, identifying students, and providing support to meet the students’ educational needs continue to be important issues within educational settings and research. Identification and the necessity of ensuring suitable programming for these students become even more important when considering a student who may exhibit gifted abilities as well as learning difficulties.

Students Identified as Gifted and with a Learning Disability

In the history of special education, *twice-exceptional* students are a relatively recently identified population of students being served as a special-needs group, with little attention having been paid to them prior to the 1980s. When a student possesses high abilities in one domain and struggles to overcome a learning, behavioural, or physical disability, the student is

considered to be *twice-exceptional* (Kay, 2000; Yssel et al., 2010). For nearly 40 decades, the largest population of high ability learners with disabilities has included those with learning disabilities (Hokanson & Jospe, 1976), and yet there are few qualitative studies that focus on the self-perceptions of these students in terms of their labels and educational placements. More predominantly, the research in this area focuses on the identification processes for these students (Crepeau-Hobson & Bianco, 2011; Waldron, Saphire, & Rosenblum, 1987), as well as the types (and outcomes of) intervention methods and programs (Assouline, Foley Nipcon, & Huber, 2006; Hannah & Shore, 2008; Nielsen & Higgins, 2005; Robinson, 1999; Weinfeld et al., 2002). Additionally, research acknowledges the academic, social, and emotional deficits that these students are presumed to be at-risk for (Baum, Cooper & Neu, 2001; King, 2005; Vespi & Yewchuk, 1992; Yssel, Prater & Smith, 2010), which then prompted Barber and Mueller to ask whether twice-exceptional students are more likely to feel doubly stigmatized (Barber & Mueller, 2011).

In relation to the social and emotional difficulties of G/LD students, research shows that students with LD are at risk for experiencing social difficulties, such as social isolation (Hogan, McLellan, & Bauman, 2000; Stanovich, Jordan, & Perot, 1998), increased peer pressure, interpersonal difficulties, and loneliness (Hogan et al., 2000) as compared to non-identified peers. Students identified as gifted are often perceived as facing similar social concerns (Barber & Mueller, 2011). In particular, students identified as G/LD often show disruptive class behaviours and an overall resistance to school and schoolwork (Neihart, 2008). However, other authors note that G/LD students may also exhibit behaviours associated with giftedness, such as high levels of task commitment, creativity (Renzulli, 1987; 1986), and overall persistence (Baum & Owen, 1988). While the contributions by Renzulli, Baum, and Owen may not be recent by the standards of the present day, the importance of accepting that G/LD students may share similar characteristics with both students identified as gifted and those identified with a learning disability is worthy of consideration. However, even with similarities to other gifted students, G/LD students are more commonly known by the characteristics they share with the LD population (Woodrum & Savage, 1994). This observation has gained support, as a study by Baum, Emerick, Herman, and Nixon (1989) found that G/LD students share more commonalities with children who are LD than with children who are gifted, particularly in terms of characteristics of aggression, carelessness, and deficiencies in spelling, reading, and memory.

Determining the appropriate identification process and educational setting for a student identified as both gifted and with a learning disability is not an easy task, however, the educational experience as a result of placement and the development of labels undoubtedly influences self-concept.

Educational Placement

Educational placement refers to the location/program where students receive education and includes a range of classroom environments from inclusive settings (e.g., indirect support in a regular classroom) to more specialized circumstances (e.g., special education school). Ontario differentiates a special education program from special education services; both of which are provided within a variety of settings, or placements. A special education program is, “based on and modified by the results of continuous assessment and evaluation and that includes a plan containing specific objectives and an outline of educational services that meets the needs of the exceptional pupil” (Ministry of Education, 2001), while special education services are considered to be, “facilities and resources, including support personnel and equipment, necessary for developing and implementing a special education program.” (Ministry of Education, 2001). Thus, in its documentation, Ontario takes into consideration the needs of students with exceptionalities ranging from learning disabled to gifted to the twice-exceptional learner.

Historically, students with disabilities were permitted in the regular classroom for non-academic subjects and removed for any “real” education (Karagiannis, Stainback, & Stainback, 1996; Winzer, 1999). Current literature focuses on methods to educate students identified as G/LD, however research tends to treat these as two separate entities, ignoring the fact that students can be both gifted and LD simultaneously (Baum, Emerick, Herman, & Dixon, 1989; Baum & Owen, 1988; Gallagher, 1983; Whitmore & Maker, 1985). When the school board also views twice-exceptional students in this manner, it complicates the educational placement selection. To help ensure that students with exceptionalities are identified and receive the required educational support in Ontario, the Identification, Placement, and Review Committee is used with G, LD, and G/LD students.

The Identification, Placement, and Review Committee. Each Canadian province has guidelines to identify and place students with exceptionalities into an appropriate educational setting. In Ontario, students are identified by an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) on the basis of a diagnosis. Principals or parents may request involvement of

the IPRC to identify a student because without the identification (or label) the student will not receive academic accommodations or have access to enrichment opportunities. The IPRC applies to students identified as G, LD, and G/LD, and in accordance with Regulation 181/98, all school boards must establish one or more IPRCs. In doing so, the board must appoint a committee that is comprised of a principal and two supervisory officers - one employed by the board and one not employed by the board. After the IPRC has identified the student as exceptional and requiring additional services, the committee considers placement in a regular class with appropriate educational services before considering other placement options (if all involved are satisfied with this decision). The Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2001) highlights five main options that the IPRC may select and these options are outlined in the following table:

Table 1. *Educational Placement Options as Outlined by the IPRC*

Regular Class with Indirect Support	The student is placed in a regular class for the entire day and the teacher receives specialized consultative services
Regular Class with Resource Assistance	The student is placed in a regular class for most or all of the day and is offered specialized instruction, individually or in a small group, within the regular class from a qualified special education teacher
Regular Class with Withdrawal Assistance	The student is placed in a regular class and receives instruction out of the class for less than 50% of the school day from a qualified special education teacher
Special Education Class with Partial Integration	The student is placed in a special education class where the student-teacher ratio conforms to Regulation 298, section 31, for at least 50% of the school day but is integrated with a regular class for at least one instructional period daily
Full-Time Special Education	The student is placed in a special education class where the student-teacher ratio conforms to Regulation 298, section 31, for the entire school day

Even if the IPRC and parents are content with the decision, the student may not be. Research shows that gifted students and students with LD prefer to be challenged, supported, and be educated with like peers (Jones & Hensley, 2012; Vanderbrook, 2006), and that G/LD students need opportunities to work with other gifted students (Yssel et al., 2010). Depending on

the placement selected by the IPRC, the educational setting may not offer challenge, support, and the peers present in the placement may influence the G/LD student's self-concept.

While there is a gap in qualitative studies that explore how G/LD students perceive themselves within specific educational placements, research has examined the social and emotional outcomes of children with LD and educational placement. In general, there is no consensus as to whether the self-concept is affected by educational placement. Some authors have found that it is lower when students with LD are placed in a regular classroom (Butler & Marinov-Glassman 1994; Morvitz & Motta, 1992), while others have found that self-concept is higher for these students when placed in a regular classroom setting (e.g., Forman, 1988; Kistner et al., 1987). In particular, Weiner and Tardif (2004) concluded that children in Grades 4 to 6 placed in more inclusive settings had more positive social and emotional functioning. Specifically, students receiving in-class supports were more accepted by their peers, held stronger perceptions of math competency, exhibited fewer problem behaviours and higher self-concepts than students with LD in Resource rooms.

A meta-analysis conducted by Elbaum in 2002 concluded there to be, “no overall association between self-concept and educational placement” (p. 216). The sole comparison where differences were seen was between students receiving instruction in self-contained classrooms in regular schools and those attending special schools, with the former group exhibiting lower levels of self-concept. Consequently, it is understandable how research in this area is inconclusive and support can be made for each claim. Furthering the support for self-concept not being influenced by educational placement, Vaughn, Haager, Hogan, and Kouzekanani (1992) found that young children who were identified as having a LD did not have lower self-concepts following identification than their non-identified peers. However, when students perceived that that were treated differently (i.e., receiving special education services in a segregated setting) or that teachers had lower achievement expectations, these students felt “dumb”, which then lead to lower self-concepts for the students. Thus, this research by Vaughn et al. (1992) shows that student experiences are highly individualistic and there is no one educational placement that will work for all G/LD students.

In summary, several educational placement options are available to gifted, LD, and G/LD students, which coincides with varying levels of students' social and emotional functioning and self-concept. An Individual Placement Review Committee may aid in the education placement

decision, however if students are placed in a setting where they do not feel supported or challenged, it may impact their self-concept. Furthermore, through the process of identifying students as G, LD, or G/LD and placing students in certain educational environments based on these labels or identifications, students' perceptions self-concept may be influenced.

Self-Concept

The study of self-concept has experienced a lengthy and detailed history in the field of social science research (see Wells & Marwell, 1976; Wylie, 1974). While a multitude of definitions of self-concept exist, the Marsh/Shavelson model (1985) is one of the most well-developed and tested models of self-concept and was the lens through which this study was conducted and analyzed. Developed in response to a poor quality of measurement tools and theoretical models, this hierarchical, multi-dimensional model includes general self-concept as a higher-order factor with several domain-specific self-concepts as sub-components (Marsh, 1989; Marsh & Ayotte, 2003; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). The two main sub-domains of the model include academic and non-academic self-concepts. Academic self-concept is further divided by particular subject area (i.e., English, history, mathematics, and science), while non-academic self-concept is divided into social, emotional, and physical self-concepts (Marsh, 1992). The model assumes that the sub-domains are both correlated with one another and highly correlated with the general self-concept domain (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). Also important within self-concept is the perception of strengths and weaknesses, typically in comparison to others, as well as a sense of group membership related to these social comparisons. In an educational setting, students comparing their abilities to those of their peers is known as the Big-Fish-Little-Pond Effect (BFLPE). More specifically, the BFLPE is described as a scenario of when a gifted child is forced to recognize other *bigger fish* and a situational change occurs to that student's academic self-concept (Huguet, Dumas, Marsh, Régner, Wheeler, Suls, Seaton, & Nezlek, 2009; Marsh & Hau, 2003; Marsh, Trautwein, Lüdtke, & Köller, 2008). A change in educational placement can also result in the students themselves becoming the *bigger fish* in comparison to peers.

In the following sections, self-concept will be discussed and critiqued in response to: 1) the extant literature on general self-concept; 2) academic self-concept and its relationship to academic achievement and the Big-Fish-Little-Pond Effect; and 3) the sub-components of non-academic self-concept of social, emotional, and physical self-concept as whole. In the first two sections, each self-concept domain will be discussed in relation to students identified as gifted,

LD, and most importantly, G/LD. For the non-academic self-concept domain, the discussion will focus on its sub-components rather than dividing the section into a focus on gifted, LD, and G/LD separately.

General self-concept. Often studies concerning self-concept examine self-concept as a whole, or general self-concept, without specifying academic or non-academic sub-domains. Instead, these studies tend to focus on the interaction of many self-concept sub-domains at once. In this case, general self-concept provides an overall or global sense of whether a student's perceptions of the self are more positive or whether those self-perceptions are more negative (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). In a broad sense, and regardless of educational labels, self-concept is thought to decrease during middle to late childhood (i.e., ages 8-11) and to decrease again during early adolescence (i.e., ages 11-13), and then begin to increase during later adolescence (Harter, 2006). A proposed reasoning for the increase in self-concept after adolescence is that individuals then begin to develop a more realistic perception of abilities (Harter, 2006). Literature focused on general self-concept will be examined with respect to students identified as gifted, students identified as having a learning disability, and finally, students identified as both gifted and with a learning disability.

Students who are gifted. Conflicting conclusions have been proposed as to whether students identified as gifted have a higher (Colangelo & Pfleger, 1978; Coleman & Fufts, 1982; Karnes & Wherry, 1981; Kelly & Colangelo, 1984; Lehman & Erdwins, 1981; Maddux, Scheiber, & Bass, 1982; O-Such, Twyla, & Havertape, 1979) or a lower self-concept (Klein & Conner, 1976; Trotter, 1971) than their non-gifted peers. Perhaps it is part due to the participant samples of these studies, with participant groups involving parents and teachers rather than focusing on the students themselves. It is also important to note that while these studies focus on the self-concept comparisons of gifted and non-gifted students, they do not specify whether students with a learning disability or those identified as G/LD are included within the samples. Although non-gifted students in general tend to be overconfident about their abilities, gifted students tend to possess more accurate self-perceptions, the same finding has not been noted for students with a learning disability (Pajares, 1996).

Self-concept is thought to vary with age and gender (Chan, 2001; Harter, 2006; Hoge & McSheffrey, 1991). In terms of gifted students, Chan (2001) administered the Self-Perception Profile to a sample of adolescents ages 12 to 18 and found that global self-worth for the younger

adolescents was more strongly determined by perceptions of physical appearance, while the older adolescents in the sample were more focused on perceptions of academic and social competence. With similar results, Hoge and McSheffrey (1991) determined that social acceptance, physical appearance, and academic competence were the best predictors of global self-worth. Thus, from the gifted perspective, these studies provide support for Marsh/Shavelson model of self-concept (1985), where the sub-domains of self-concept correlate with one another to produce a more general sense of self-concept overall.

Students with learning disabilities. As students identified with a learning disability may experience difficulties academically, socially, or behaviourally, they are presumed to be at-risk for lower self-concept than peers who do not have a LD or gifted abilities (Vaughn et al., 2001). Various studies have explored whether students with a learning disability have a comparable self-concept to that of students without a disability (e.g., Chapman, 1988; Nowicki, 2003; Zeleke, 2004). Predominantly, research relating to a general or global self-concept shows no difference for elementary-aged students (e.g., Bear, Juvonen & McInerney, 1993; Bear & Minke, 1996; Bear, Minke, Griffin, & Deemer, 1998; Hagborg, 1996; Smith & Nagle, 1995; Vaughn, Elbaum, & Schumm, 1996). However, as discussed in the previous section, self-concept is thought to change over time (Harter, 2006), and while this glimpse into the general self-concept of LD elementary students is important, it does not highlight how adolescent and post-secondary students identified as LD might perceive their self-concept.

Perhaps more expected, some authors have concluded that students with a learning disability *do* have a lower general self-concept than students of average achievement (e.g., Beltempo & Achille, 1990; Harter, Whitesell, & Junkin, 1998; Tabassam & Grainger, 2002). Yet, again, these studies focus on LD identification versus no educational label, and thus, a more complete scenario of how LD students perceive their general self-concept in comparison to students identified as gifted or as G/LD is not found within the literature.

In summary, research has focused on the self-concept of students with LD, comparing these students to average-level students and finding either no difference between the two types of students or finding that LD students have lower self-concepts. However, it is important to note that the majority of the studies comparing students with and without LD have not been completed within the last decade and the studies rarely include students who may be G/LD.

Students identified as G/LD. Little research explores the general self-concept of students identified with giftedness and a learning disability. In one early study, Waldon et al. (1987) examined the relationships among academic achievement, self-concept, and the behaviour of G/LD students. Included in the study were parents, teachers, G/LD students (experimental group), and normally achieving gifted students as a control group. Fifty-four students, ages 8 to 12 years, completed a self-concept scale both prior to and during the study, with the experimental group also participating in a university enrichment program. Responses to questionnaire items completed by parents were compared to the children's responses. Overall, the results of the study suggested that in a regular classroom setting, normally achieving gifted students tended to be more disruptive and less respectful to adults and the to property of others, while G/LD students demonstrated more passive behaviours. Even though the study by Waldon et al. (1987) includes a self-perception measure for students, the results were based on how the children's responses compared to those of their teachers (i.e., teachers were more focused on problem behaviours than the students) and the results were biased towards the teacher perceptions, rather focusing on students' perceptions self-concept.

Many of the studies relating to G/LD students focus on parent or teacher perceptions of student self-concept (i.e., Bianco, 2005; Chamberlain et al., 2007; Jordan, Lindsay, & Stanovich, 1997; Jordan & Stanovich, 2001; Stanovich, Jordan & Perot, 1998; Mann, 2006; Vespi & Yewchuk, 1992; Yssel et al., 2010). Other important focuses include the relationship between academic self-concept, educational placement, and academic achievement, as well as the social and emotional implications to self-concept for a G/LD student. Each of these topics will be discussed as the literature review progresses.

In summary, no study to date focuses on G/LD students as the sole source of information and on their self-perceptions of self-concept in relation to identification, labels and educational placement experiences. Thus, further research is required to examine the self-perceptions of G/LD students with respect to self-concept and its sub-components, particularly in how perceptions of identification, labels, and educational experiences influence academic self-concept.

Academic self-concept. Academic self-concept involves perception of academic achievement in school (e.g., Plucker & Stocker, 2001) and is one of the most widely and extensively researched areas of self-concept. In particular, research has focused on its influence

upon student academic achievement (see Fong & Yuen, 2000; Green, Huang, 2011; Ireson & Hallam, 2009; Marsh, 2004; Möller, Pohlmann, Köller, & Marsh, 2009; Nelson Martin, & Marsh, 2006), immediate and long-term education decisions such as the type of class activities pursued, clubs/groups joined, and decisions to register in advanced courses (Rinn et al., 2010). The BFLPE is especially important within this self-concept domain, as comparisons of the self and others in terms of academic achievements has been shown to influence self-concept, both positively and negatively, depending on the situation (Huguet et al., 2009; Marsh & Hau, 2003; Marsh et al., 2008). While the BFLPE is most commonly found within gifted literature the effect of social comparison through academic achievement can also occur for students who are identified as LD and G/LD. However, the exact relationship between self-concept and academic achievement beyond the BFLPE is unclear, with some researchers proposing that students must have prior experience with academic achievement to have a high academic self-concept (Caslyn & Kenny, 1977; Garg, 1992), while others presume that a high academic self-concept is a precursor to achievement (e.g., Marsh, Trautwein, DuBois, & Cooper, 2004). Somewhere in the middle of the opposing views is a third group that proposes the relationship between self-concept and academic achievement is reciprocal in nature (Hamacheck, 1995; House, 2000). Regardless of the relationship, academic self-concept is important to all students, whether identified as gifted, LD, or G/LD. This current section will now explore the literature on academic self-concept, focusing how it impacts students identified as gifted, LD, and finally G/LD.

Students who are gifted. Academic self-concept is of particular importance for academically gifted students since, in general, gifted students tend to have a higher academic self-concept than their less academically talented peers (Hoge & Renzulli, 1993). Notably, academic self-concept is related to course selection (i.e., students with low academic self-concept are more likely to select less challenging classes and programs than those with higher academic self-concepts) (Marsh & Yeung, 1998), decisions to pursue post-secondary education (Marsh, 1991), graduate school (Rinn, 2007), and career aspirations (Betz & Hackett, 1983). Furthermore, a decrease in academic self-concept may result in a decrease in social, emotional, and academic development, as well as general self-concept for gifted students (Harter, 1992).

The relationship between academic self-concept and achievement has been extensively researched. For example, Fong and Yuen (2009) investigated relationships among perfectionism, academic self-concept, and academic achievement amongst fourth and fifth grade children from

selective primary schools in Hong Kong. In total, 331 students were recruited based on the criteria of being a high achiever or a low achiever within the school system and a 37-item questionnaire was administered in a classroom setting to each child. Using strict quantitative analyses, the results showed that perfectionism was directly and indirectly correlated to academic achievement, with academic self-concept as the significant mediator, yet the causal relationship remained unknown. Many years previously, Pottebaum, Keith, and Ehly (1986) had hoped to understand that causal relationship between self-concept and academic achievement with their longitudinal study. Thirty-six sophomores from the first (1980) and second (1982) waves of the National Center for Education Statistics were included in this study, and each student completed questionnaires in the base year of study and a subsequent follow-up questionnaire. Through rigorous quantitative data analysis, the researchers found no causal relationship between self-concept and academic achievement and concluded that, ultimately, social class and ability may play a role in the relationship. Various studies since this contribution have found that other “variables” may also influence the relationship between self-concept and academic achievement. For example, prior academic self-concept been found to have a positive effect on subsequent academic achievement (Valentine, DuBois, & Cooper, 2004), on students’ academic interest (Marsh, Trautwein, Lüdtke, Köller, & Baumert, 2005), and on academic emotions including test anxiety (Goetz, Preckel, Zeidner, & Schleyer, 2008) for gifted students.

Finally, the BFLPE is often associated with gifted students. Specifically, researchers believe that when a gifted student is placed in a situation where he or she is with other students of the same ability or achievement levels, that student often experiences a temporarily lowered self-concept than when with other students who are not as academically talented (Marsh et al., 1995; Marsh & Parker, 1984). However, more recent research does not support this notion. For example, a longitudinal study including 65 high-ability secondary students found no differences in measures of self-esteem between the gifted and non-gifted students (Vialle, Heaven, & Ciarrochi, 2005). Furthermore, the researchers found no correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement for the gifted group. Regardless, the BFLPE and self-concept continue to emerge in gifted research with elementary students (Tymms, 2001) and for post-secondary students (Rinn, 2007). Thus, it is important to explore the BFLPE within the G/LD population, from their own perceptions, to understand how G/LD students’ self-perceptions of social comparison influence self-concept.

Students with learning disabilities. As previously discussed, students with a learning disability are presumed to be at-risk for lowered self-concept due to their difficulties in social and academic areas, and the stigmatization of the labelling and placement process (Vaughn et al., 2001). When students with LD are compared to low-achieving students, their self-concept may differ significantly (e.g., Clever, Bear, & Juvonen, 1992; Leonardi, 1993; Vaughn et al., 1996; Vaughn et al., 1992). However not all research supports this notion. For instance, La Greca and Stone (1990) found that students in grades 4 to 6 identified as LD rated their self-concept as significantly lower on the Self-perception Profile for Children (Harter, 1985a) than their non-LD, low-achieving peers. Thus, research results present conflicting claims regarding the academic self-concept of students with learning disabilities.

Learning disabilities can also influence decisions for post-secondary enrolment, and as Eckes and Ochoa (2005) noted, the incidence of enrolment in post-secondary institutions has increased over the years for LD students. However, other studies continue to question the preparedness of these students for post-secondary education as compared to their non-disabled peers, simply because of the difficulties they may face in a more difficult environment (Flexer, Baer, Luff, & Simmons, 2008). Further unravelling the complex relationship between self-concept and academic achievement, Fuller, Healey, Bradley, and Hall (2004) investigated the barriers to learning that students with learning disabilities face. Drawing on qualitative methods and the perceptions of experience for 173 post-secondary students, the research identified several barriers to learning. In particular, participants noted that because of their learning disability, they felt they couldn't apply for a field of study that would be "too difficult" or that they had to choose a program that would masque their disability (i.e., selecting a computer-based program wherein the laptop would act as a spell-check for assignments). Overall, the perception of being restricted in program choice at the post-secondary level as a result of learning difficulties was considered to be a barrier in academic achievement, which may promote under-achievement in certain academic areas and settings, and influence academic self-concept (Fuller et al., 2004).

Students identified as G/LD. Based on the review of literature thus far, it is clear that academic achievement influences the self-concept for gifted and LD students. With the understanding that a G/LD student faces both success and struggle in terms of academic achievement in relation to the gifted and LD components of the G/LD identification, it may be fair to assume that academic self-concept is of importance to this population of individuals as

well. After all, the effects of social comparison, success and failure, the BFLPE may also apply to G/LD students. However, this specific area of research continues to be severely underrepresented within the extant literature. Furthermore, the question of how students identified as both gifted and with a learning disability perceive their academic self-concept is yet to be explored. Thus, it is imperative that this area of self-concept receives the same quality of focus as it has for gifted and LD students.

The final section of literature review on self-concept will discuss non-academic self-concept, focusing on social, emotional, and physical self-concepts sub-components of this last domain of the Marsh/Shavelson model of self-concept.

Non-academic self-concept. Within the non-academic self-concept domain of the Marsh/Shavelson model of self-concept (1985) are the following sub-components: social, emotional, and physical self-concept. It is important to note that an individual may have a positive self-concept in one domain and a negative self-concept in another domain (Marsh and Hau, 2003) and each sub-domain is presumed to correlate with one another and to the general self-concept domain (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). The following section will focus predominantly on research relating to the social and emotional self-concepts of students identified as gifted, learning disabled, and G/LD. These two domains of self-concept will be discussed in tandem, as it is often difficult to separate the two domains, especially within an educational perspective. Finally, physical self-concept will be discussed in terms of its contributions to the multidimensionality of self-concept.

Social and emotional self-concepts. The labels *gifted*, *learning disabled*, *G/LD* presumably affect social and emotional self-concept development. Social self-concept relates to social interactions. More specifically, the domain consists of a general social dimension as well as two specific dimensions—one related to peers and one related to significant others (Shavelson et al., 1976). Overall, the social self-concept domain refers to an individual's perception of social competence with respect to social interactions with others and stems from the perceptions and assessment of behaviour in a social context (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Vallacher & Wegner, 1987).

A construct associated with emotional self-concept is self-satisfaction, which is a measure of how satisfied a person is with him- or herself (Loeb & Jay, 1987). Students identified as gifted may be at-risk for lower levels of self-satisfaction since these individuals tend to have a higher potential for negative self-perceptions (Powell, 1982) and this tendency may reflect a

lower emotional self-concept. Additionally, gifted students have been shown to exhibit a stronger dependence upon family members rather than on their friends, to prefer time alone rather than with others (Kao, 2011), and to experience social rejection for exhibiting interests in topics that are not shared by their peers (Baum et al., 2001) - all of which can influence students' emotional self-concept. Similarly, students identified with learning disabilities are often at-risk for negative social interactions such as teasing from their peers (Olenchak, 1995), decreased peer acceptance, and a higher likelihood of peer neglect and/or rejection as compared to non-LD students (see Kavale & Forness, 1995; Swanson & Malone, 1992; Wiener, 1987).

How do students identified as both gifted and with a learning disability navigate within the social and emotional self-concept domains? Relating to the at-risk presumptions for gifted and LD students, G/LD students have also been shown to be at a greater risk for asocial tendencies (Waldron et al., 1987). In particular, research shows G/LD students to be more anxious and personally dissatisfied (Waldron et al., 1987), to be "loners" and to exhibit problem behaviours (Baum et al., 2001), and to have difficulty fitting in with their peers (King, 2005). All of these factors are likely to influence the social and emotional self-concepts of students identified as G/LD. Furthermore, these factors are likely to also influence academic self-concept, as does the identification processes. In fact, research suggests a link between early identification and emotional adjustment, academic outcomes, and a more positive self-concept (Chamberlain et al., 2007; Kay, 2000; Reis, Neu, McGuire, 1994, 1997, 2000; Yssel et al., 2010). Finally, the BFLPE may be incorporated in to these sub-domains of self-concept, as academic achievement or failures (both real and self-perceived) in comparison to peers are likely to influence both sub-domains either positively or negatively, depending on the context.

Physical self-concept. As a sub-component of non-academic self-concept, physical self-concept includes six further components: endurance, balance, flexibility, strength, appearance, and general physical ability (Marsh & Redmayne, 1994). Overall, physical self-concept relates to satisfaction with one's appearance and physical fitness/ability.

In a study by Loeb and Jay (1987), gifted males and females ages 9 to 12 were compared with non-gifted students on a measure of self-concept. While the main focus was on the student, additional information, such as students' behavioural factors, was also included within the data. Findings from this study showed that the male students exhibited lower self-satisfaction in area of physical strength and aggression as compared to their non-gifted male counterparts. In

general, this study wasn't particularly focused on physical self-concept, yet the sub-component of non-academic self-concept emerged as an important finding. Typically, educational research within the gifted, LD, and G/LD fields do not focus on physical concept as a main contributor to self-concept, yet as the study by Loeb and Jay showed, it is an important facet to include as part of this current research study, as findings may focus on an aspect of the self that is not exclusive to academic, social, or emotional self-concepts.

In summary, social and emotional self-concept are important to the educational experiences of students, regardless of educational identification and labels, and may influence perceptions of self-concept. With regards to emotional self-concept, gifted students appear to be the most affected, however the research does not include students identified with giftedness and a learning disability. Physical self-concept is more related to perceptions of one's appearance and physical fitness/ability and it is clear to see that each of the sub-domains of the Marsh/Shavelson model (1985) of self-concept are very strongly interrelated with one another. Thus, it is important to understand the self-perceptions of students identified as G/LD within these domains. The proceeding section will review studies wherein self-concept and the influence of labels and educational placement are included within a single study.

Self-Concept, Labels, and Placement

Identifying a student as G/LD provides a hope that the student will receive the appropriate educational support their gifted and LD needs through a specific educational placement. However, educational placement may act as a label by virtue of the selection process required for a certain placement. Through interviews and psychometric instruments, researchers have found that placement options affect not only how labels internalized, but also to how self-concept develops (Diez, 2010; Jones & Hensley, 2012; Savaria, Underwood, & Sinclair, 2011; Vanderbrook, 2006).

The influence of educational placement on self-concept has garnered mixed conclusions amongst researchers. Some authors contest that there is, "no overall association between self-concept and educational placement," (Elbaum, 2002, p. 216; Vaughn et al., 1992) yet others have found that the influence of educational placement on self-concept is much more complex to conclude as either positive or negative. For example, research suggests that self-concept is lower for students identified as LD when they are placed in a regular classroom setting (Butler & Marinov-Glassman 1994; Morvitz & Motta, 1992), while others have found that self-concept is

higher for these students when placed in a regular classroom (e.g., Forman, 1988; Kistner et al., 1987). In particular, Weiner and Tardif (2004) concluded that children in Grades 4 to 6 placed in more inclusive settings had more positive social and emotional self-concepts. Specifically, students receiving in-class supports were more accepted by their peers, held stronger perceptions of math competency, exhibited fewer problem behaviours, and had higher self-concepts than LD students in a resource room setting. As for gifted students placed into gifted programming, Vogl & Preckel (2014) noted positive effects on social self-concept of peer acceptance, but no effects on social self-concept of assertiveness. Additionally, they suggest that children in gifted classes exhibit more interest in school and reported better student–teacher relationships than gifted peers attending a regular classroom setting.

In further examination of the influence of educational placement on self-concept, Becker, Neuman, Tetzner, Böse, Knoppick, Maaz, Baumert, & Lehmann (2014) investigated how an early transition into academically selective learning environments may influence psychosocial development. In particular, 155 early-entry students who moved to an academically selective secondary school in 5th grade were compared to 3,169 regular students who remained in elementary school until the end of 6th grade based on four psychosocial characteristics previously noted as important in the discussion of ability grouping of high-achieving and gifted students: general academic self-concept, peer relations, school satisfaction, and school anxiety. Through quantitative means and propensity score matching (PSM) analysis, the authors found that early an early transfer to an academically selective environment caused more negative development in academic self-concept and school anxiety, and more positive social development for the students who waited until the end of grade 6 to change environments.

Even with such valuable contributions, each aforementioned study adopts a quantitative approach, although none directly asks the G/LD student about the influence of identification and educational placement(s) on self-concept. Furthermore, save for Becker et al. (2014), the aforementioned studies do not examine how the transition to a certain educational placement influences self-concept. Regardless of the educational placement of choice, gifted students and LD students prefer to be challenged, supported, and to be educated with like peers (Jones & Hensley, 2012; Vanderbrook, 2006). The noted preference of gifted and LD students to be educated with their like peers introduces the idea of social comparison and group membership. To which group within the G/LD identification does the student identify? Often, research focuses

much more intently upon finding the best “fit” for the student (Weinfeld et al., 2002; Yssel et al., 2001), yet social comparison and the BFLPE are important to consider, along with how social interactions and social comparison influences self-concept for G/LD students.

Exploring how social exclusion processes are constructed, Diez (2010) analyzed the perceptions of young adults with disabilities (ages 18-25) to help identify and explain barriers and aids to inclusions in various educational environments. Using a two-phase research design, with a subset of the participants from the first phase (n=48) involved in the second phase (n=12), participants defined exclusion as, “obstacles to inclusion that impeded or limited learning, a sense of belonging and active participation in education processes under equal conditions” (p. 167). Conversely, aids to inclusion were viewed as, “elements which contributed to the social and educational inclusion in the classroom and at school in general” (p. 167). The main importance of this study is the qualitative interview-based methodology that allows the individual perceptions of educational experiences for students with disabilities to be expressed.

Furthering research on educational experiences from the point of view of students with exceptionalities, Vanderbrook (2006) presents the first phenomenological qualitative study to determine the perceptions of five gifted female students in advanced placement (AP) classes and international baccalaureate (IB) programs. While not reflecting on how these programs impact self-concept, the interviewees reveal challenges within the curriculum of AP and IB programs, such as students’ frustration in not being challenged, feeling more intelligent than the educator, selecting less-challenging programs over AP or IB if they perceive a more supportive environment elsewhere, and offering concern about a lack of counselling services beyond university/ college course selection. While this study includes the self-perceptions of students, the study provides more of a critique about the programs rather than insight as to how the programs influence individual development, which highlights a need for asking participants how educational placement(s) and opportunities affect them personally.

Maintaining a focus on the first-hand experiences of students with exceptionalities, one study in particular relates educational experiences to the development of self-concept through the social construction of labels for students with a learning disability. The qualitative study by Savaria, Underwood, and Sinclair (2011) involves in-depth semi-structured interviews with four participants ages 17 to 24 years, each attending either secondary or post-secondary educational

institutions with continued educational supports. Two main themes emerged from the interviews- the construction of identity through experience and the importance of self-knowledge in identity formation for those with disabilities. Although Savaria et al. (2011) examined the self-perceptions of the construction of labels, the proposed study will offer insight into the perspectives of individuals not previously included in studies regarding labels, educational placement, and self-concept within a single study.

In comparing the studies by Diez (2010), Vanderbrook (2006), and Savaria et al. (2011), we see an attempt to generate first-person interview data with exceptional students. However, in each of the studies, the focus moves away from how educational experiences influence or impact the individual directly in terms self-concept. Notably, the research methodologies of the studies allow for personal narratives and first-hand accounts, as well as a dynamic and integrated approach, which will be emulated in the present study.

In sum, a G/LD diagnosis may lead to a specific educational placement, to a label by virtue of being placed into a specific educational setting, and to changes in self-concept as a result of that placement and label. Many studies focus on the identification processes and self-concept of G/LD students, and no current study focuses on the relationship between self-concept, labels, and educational placement for these students. The student perspective of how labels and educational placement influence self-concept is needed. Findings would not only contribute to G/LD research, but it would also deepen our understanding of how labels and educational placement contribute to academic and non-academic sub-domains of self-concept, which is important when considering the needs of G/LD students. The following sections will now discuss methodological approaches to studying self-concept and will then transition to an outline of the theoretical framework of the current study and the two theories that will serve as lenses throughout the data collection and data analysis for this study.

Methodological Approaches to Studying Self-Concept

Often, research concerning self-concept involves quantitative measures and standardized tests such as The Self Perception Profile for Children (SPCC; Harter, 1985), The Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (SPPA, 1988), “How I Feel About Myself” children’s self-concept scale (Piers & Harris, 1964), and The Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (TSCS; Fitts, 1965). Collectively, these measures assess student self-concept based on “high” and “low” self-concept. However, self-concept has also been explored qualitatively, with some focusing on the self-reports of

students (e.g., Barber & Mueller, 2011; Feldhusen & Willard-Holt, 1993; Heilman, 1998; Rinn et al., 2010) and others focusing on the reports of teachers and/or parents (e.g., Loeb & Jay, 1987). This current study is qualitative in its approach, while incorporating a unique method of data collection and a focus on multi-modal forms of self-identity and self-representation.

Multi-modal learning refers to learning across and within domains using various methods and mediums, and how different types of literacies apply and assume importance in different contexts across homes, communities, and schools (Schofield & Rogers, 2004). A Body Biography represents multi-modal learning since students may place fragments of a poem, meaningful words, photos, tactile items, and items of meaning to the individual on to a life-sized outline of a human body drawn on a large piece of paper (see Morawski, 2010; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kummen, & Thompson, 2010; Underwood, 1987). Although the Body Biography has gained popularity in multi-modal learning, such as arts-based literacy programs (Morawski, 2010; Underwood, 1987) and counselling/ therapeutic settings (Bussert-Webb, 2001; Smorti, Risaliti, Pananti, & Cipriani, 2008), it can also be used to conceptualize thoughts that are not easily expressed with words (Bussert-Webb, 2001; Smorti et al., 2008) and the use of a Body Biography will be an integral part of this study.

Theoretical Framework

The framework that guides the present study stems from two main theories. Firstly, the study will draw on the Marsh/Shavelson model of self-concept (1985), which includes several domains of self-concept, dividing self-concept into academic and non-academic self-concept. Each sub-component of the hierarchical and multidimensional model is thought to correlate with one another (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). Academic self-concept includes English, history, mathematics, and science, while non-academic self-concept includes social self-concept, emotional self-concept, and physical self-concept. This is of importance since the student who is G/LD may have higher self-concept in one domain and a lower self-concept in another domain. The Marsh/Shavelson model will prove valuable in understanding how/if these students compartmentalize themselves with respect to the self-concept of their abilities and how self-concept develops as a result of educational (or situational) changes.

The second theory that guides this study is the Social Identity Theory. The Social Identity Theory (SIT) is a cognitive construct wherein the individual answers the question *Who am I?* (Forte, 2007) and captures how identity is derived through group membership (Brown, 2000).

Originated in 1986 by Tajfel and Turner (1986), the theory also postulates that individuals strive to achieve or maintain a positive social identity through social comparison between the *in-group* (i.e., people who are similar to myself) and relevant *out-groups* (i.e., people who are different from myself) (Brown, 2000). Due to the role of placement in developing an *in-group/ out-group* comparison, SIT is important to include in this present study.

Answering the question *Who Am I?* and defining the self based on group membership contribute to the domains of self-concept within the Marsh/Shavelson model (1985). Thus, social comparison within educational placement is likely to influence self-concept, whether the student is gifted, LD, or G/LD.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, extant literature was reviewed and discussed with a focus on giftedness, learning disabilities, and in particular students identified as G/LD. The chapter began with an overview of each identification, as well as outlining particular educational placements available to exceptional students. A particular focus was given to literature on the interaction of self-concept, labels, and educational placement, however no study has examined the self-perceptions of this interaction for students identified as G/LD. The chapter then closed by discussing methodological approaches associated with studying self-concept and an outline of theoretical framework that guided this current study. The following chapter will present the methodology employed during the study, as well as noting the ethical considerations of this study, issues of trustworthiness, and potential limitations.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the self-perceptions of students identified as gifted and with a learning disability (G/LD). Specifically, the study examined how labels and educational placement influenced the development of self-perceptions of self-concept for students identified as G/LD. This study also sought to explore to which group each student identified, examining how the labels of *Gifted* and *Learning Disabled* interact within the G/LD label and how all three labels contribute to self-perceptions of group membership. To provide a better understanding of the perceptions of self-concept of G/LD students, this study addressed two specific research questions: (1) How do the education-related influences of labelling and educational placement interact with the development of self-concept and to which group he or she identifies with? and (2) How does the student identified with giftedness and a learning disability perceive the development of self-concept over time?

The methodology of this research study is described in the following subsections of this chapter: (a) an explanation of the research approach; (b) a brief visual summary of the research design; (c) participant recruitment; (d) data collection methods, data collection instruments, and procedures; (e) data analysis and synthesis; (f) ethical considerations; and finally, (g) issues of trustworthiness, and a chapter summarization.

Research Approach

While self-concept is often measured quantitatively using psychometric instruments, a qualitative approach reveals deeper insights through personal accounts (Marshall & Rossman, 2010), particularly when the researcher cannot directly observe participants (Creswell, 2007). Considering that the main purpose of this study was to explore the self-perceptions of G/LD students, while taking into account individual experiences, it was decided that a qualitative inquiry approach would complement the task of understanding those individual experiences and that it would capture the necessary information to answer the research questions of this study.

Social constructivist orientation. For the purposes of this study, a social constructivist orientation was selected. In this paradigm, the participants seek to understand the world in which they live and work, constructing meaning of a situation through discussions and interactions with others (Creswell, 2007). In terms of research, the focus is on the participants' subjective views of the situation and the researcher develops an understanding of data as it presents itself (Creswell, 2007). To explore these subjective views and perspectives of the individual participants, with the

“situation” being a G/LD identification and subsequent educational experiences, a multiple case study approach was used.

Multiple case study design. Given the purpose of exploring the self-perceptions of a number of participants, a multiple case study design was deemed appropriate for this study. A case study explores an issue in a setting or context, with one or more cases being studied over time (Creswell, 2007). For this study, the *issue* was the development of self-concept of post-secondary students identified as G/LD and the *setting*, or *context*, relates to their educational experiences. Since this was a multiple case study, participants were sampled from the student population of a mid-sized university located in Eastern Ontario, based on those willing to share their educational experiences of being identified as G/LD.

Participants

The following section will outline the participant recruitment process, as well as the steps taken during the participant selection for this study. During participant recruitment and selection it was important to keep the criteria for participation as open as possible, as the incidence of an individual identified as G/LD is quite low as compared to the incidences of students identified as gifted or LD alone.

Participant recruitment. Following the approval of the research proposal, I applied for and received permission from the university’s Research Ethics Board prior to the recruitment phase. Initially, I contacted two student services within the university - one aimed at academic support for students with disabilities and the other focused on community life on campus - and I asked for permission to place recruitment posters on designated campus notice boards. As this initial recruitment phase in 2013 did not merit responses, I sought approval from the ethics board to expand my sources of recruitment. Upon this refinement, and approval of the modifications, the Association for Bright Children (ABC), the local Learning Disability Association, and the Graduate Students’ Association of the university were included as resources in participant recruitment. I presented a proposal of my study to parents of the ABC at one of their gatherings and the association included a recruitment text in their monthly newsletter; the Learning Disabilities Association posted a recruitment text on their website and Facebook page; the university’s Grad Students’ Association emailed a recruitment text to all graduate students as an invitation to participate in the study; and finally, the university’s service supporting the academic needs of students with disabilities distributed an email with a recruitment text to all of its

registered students as an invitation to participate in the study. The recruitment text used by each association and service (see Appendix A) included a description of the study, as well as my email address for interested participants to contact me directly to either learn more about the study or to arrange for a meeting. These efforts resulted in a number of responses from a range of students who were LD-only, gifted-only, ADHD-only, or even responding on the behalf of a friend or a brother. Furthermore, responders came from a range of Canadian provinces, and thus not identified within an Ontario school board as originally stipulated in the recruitment criteria. Therefore, and after two years of participant recruitment, the scope of the study was expanded until the necessary number of participants was met.

Due to difficulties in recruitment, ethics approval was granted in the summer of 2015 by a secondary university in the recruitment city (and approved by the primary university), and recruitment posters were placed at its centre for students with learning disabilities. As the minimum requirement of participants for this study had been received through the primary university by the end of October of 2015, and no emails were received from the secondary university, the ethics file of the latter university was closed in December 2015.

Participant selection. Initially, the study sought to obtain a minimum of eight English-speaking participants who had been identified as both gifted and with a learning disability by an Ontario school board, and then registered at a post-secondary institution in the recruitment city at the time of participant recruitment. However, as the study developed, it became necessary to relax the parameters of the participant criteria, as participants who had been identified outside of the school setting (i.e., by a private psychologist) and those originally from different regions of Canada (i.e., Manitoba, Québec, and Ontario) were included.

Overall, the study involved eight individuals enrolled at a university in Eastern Ontario and one participant from a university located in Québec. This latter participant was made aware of the study by word of mouth by her peers and correspondence was completed via email messages. In addition, the consent form, demographic questionnaire, Body Biography, Body Biography instructions were all sent by mail to this participant. A month later, the participant returned her completed consent form, demographic questionnaire, and Body Biography to the researcher and the discussion of her completed Body Biography was then conducted via Skype.

Also important to note is the fact that data from one participant was not included beyond the recruitment phase. This participant was identified as gifted in the elementary grades,

although her learning disability had been acquired through multiple incidences of trauma to the brain fairly recently. As such, her perspectives were quite different from an individual who has experienced educational labelling and placement with regards to a G/LD identification over their schooling years. However, at the time when this participant expressed interest in this study, no other individuals had been recruited and consideration for relaxing the inclusion criteria was given. Unfortunately, after three sessions with the researcher, this individual still failed to complete all the requirements of the study and as such, her data was not included in the analysis.

Data Collection Methods

The following section will describe data collection instruments of the study, provide a visual summary of the steps taken in the completion of the study, and offer a detailed description of the procedures surrounding the Body Biography and discussion/ semi-structure interview.

Data collection instruments. Each participant completed a demographic questionnaire, a Body Biography, and a semi-structured discussion of their completed Body Biography. A description of each of these data collection instruments will follow.

Demographic questionnaire. The demographic questionnaire (See Appendix D) was a preliminary data collection method focused on demographic and contextual information. By gaining preliminary information about participants, a better understanding of the individual, of the group of participants as a whole, and of their experiences developed. For example, having a family member with an identification (i.e., gifted, LD, or G/LD) could influence how participants perceived themselves within their own identification. Furthermore, having a family member with an identification could influence the educational experiences of the participants if the parents were equipped with the resources and knowledge of how to provide an environment that supports both the giftedness and the learning disability. In addition, the order of the identifications and the time of identifications could influence the educational placement(s), as well as self-concept, rendering this information as important to gather from each participant.

Body biography. Although the use of a Body Biography has gained popularity in multi-modal learning, such as arts-based literacy programs (Morawksi, 2010; Underwood, 1987) and counselling/ therapeutic settings (Bussert-Webb, 2001; Smorti, Risaliti, Pananti, & Cipriani, 2008), it can also be used to conceptualize thoughts that are not easily expressed with words alone (Bussert-Webb, 2001; Smorti et al., 2008), which complements the notions of self-concept and social identity within this study.

In completing a Body Biography, individuals typically place fragments of a poem, words, photos, tactile items, or items of meaning to the individual on to a life-sized outline of a human body drawn on a large piece of paper (see Morawski, 2010; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kummen, & Thompson, 2010; Underwood, 1987). In this study, each participant was given a scroll of paper with a 6-ft tall outline of a human body drawn in pencil, as well as a standardized Body Biography Kit (see Appendix E). It was standardized simply in the fact that the exact same items were found in each kit. Apart from an instructional sheet outlining the parameters of completing a Body Biography for this study, the items in the kit included: (a) Photographic Items, (b) Word Items, (c) Tactile Items, and (d) Other Items. For example, each Body Biography Kit included pipe cleaners, feathers, a selection of felt, stickers, popsicle sticks, a selection of coloured paper, blank paper, tape, glue, scissors, a pen, and a pencil. Other items were arranged on a table in the research room, such as a ruler, markers, pencil crayons, crayons, more sheets of coloured papers, stickers (i.e., musical, outdoor activities, animals, and family-based themes), as well as a wide selection of magazines. It was expected that participants would use the magazines for selecting key words or images to represent sporting activities, extracurricular and leisure activities, or to represent themselves, their friends, and/or their family members.

With the individual arrangement of images, words, and items, William Underwood (1987) states that Body Biographies are, “a vibrant and written metaphor for life.” However, noted within the literature, sometimes the selection and placement of items on a Body Biography may appear too abstract for another individual to understand (Taylor, 2005). Meaning, the individual who completed the Body Biography knows the intent and reasoning behind the item, but an observer, or in this case the researcher, may not. Thus, it was imperative to include a discussion/ semi-structured interview with this data collection method in order to understand the reasoning and intent behind items included on the Body Biographies.

Discussion/ semi-structured interview. The second part of the data collection included a discussion of the completed Body Biography (e.g., what each item on the Body Biography represented and why it was placed in a particular place on the human body), with a semi-structured interview as part of the discussion to ensure that participants discussed self-perceptions of their identification, the influence of labels, group membership, social identity, and self-concept (see Appendix F). Semi-structured interviewing is a flexible technique for small-scale research and while not suitable for studies involving a large number of participants, it is

appropriate in case study research (Drever, 1995). This data collection method allowed participants to integrate and reflect upon their completed Body Biography, focusing on the influence of labels and educational placement on the development of self-concept. The discussion/ semi-structured interview also allowed the researcher to organize the data for analysis within the theoretical framework of the Marsh/Shavelson model of self-concept and the Social Identity Theory to answer the research questions. Specifically, participants' discussion of the completed Body Biography provided verbal recognition of abilities, disabilities, strengths and weaknesses, group membership and identification, and overall, the participants' development of self-concept.

Procedures. In this section of the methodology, a brief summary in the form of a visual representation is provided to outline the overall process of the entire study, followed by the specific procedures of the Body Biography and discussion during the data collection phase.

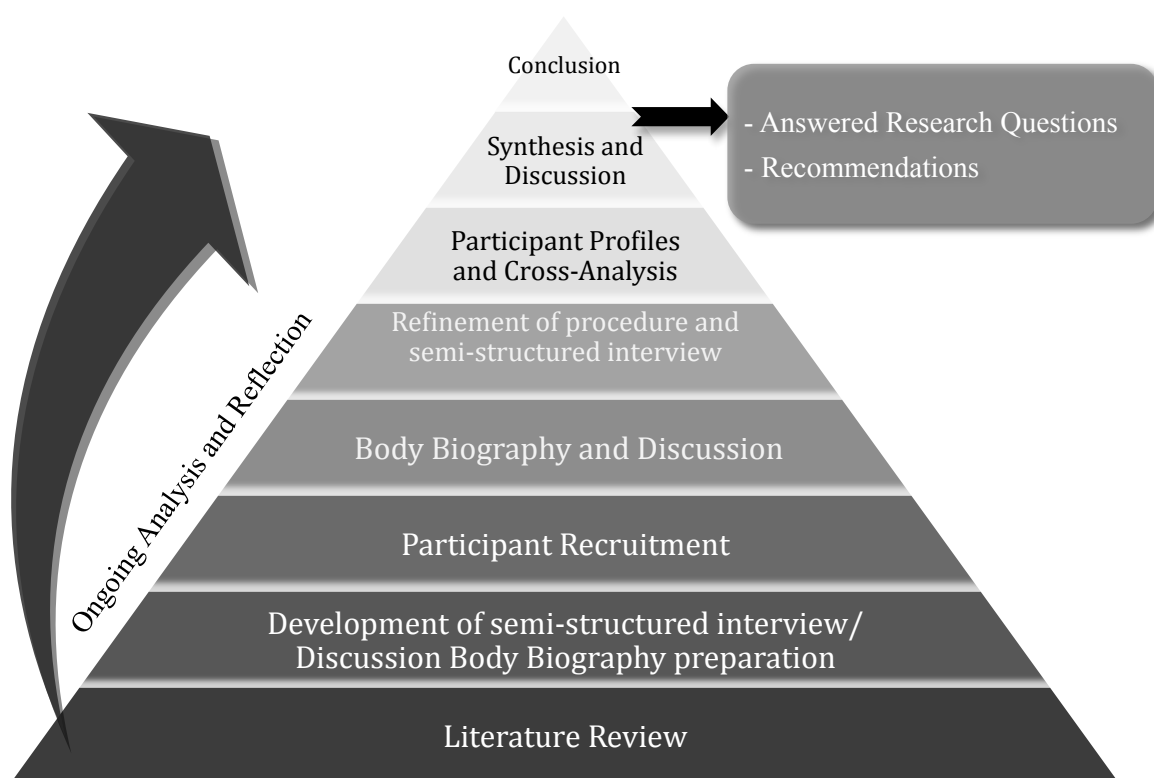


Figure 1. Overall development of the study.

Body biography. Upon contact with individuals willing to participate in the study, participants were made aware of the details of the Body Biography task and a time for the first

session was determined. Before arriving to participate, the researcher discussed with individuals their choice of completing the Body Biography (with the researcher present) in a quiet room on campus either in one session, in two sessions, or by taking the biography home and returning to discuss it with the researcher at a later date. Seven of the participants decided to complete Body Biography task in one session, ranging from 40 minutes to two hours in length. Each session was audio-recorded in its entirety, which allowed the researcher to take into account participants' in-the-moment utterances as they placed items onto their Body Biography. This was thought to provide initial insight into participants' self-perceptions of social identity and self-concept.

Even though a Body Biography Kit (as well as extra items on a separate table), were available for participants to use, before meeting participants were informed that bringing personal items to place onto the Body Biography was permitted. In all cases but one (i.e., the participant who received the Body Biography items by mail), participants had a maximum of one day to prepare their thoughts and to consider which personal items (or items in general) to include on the Body Biography. To that end, two participants did include personal items, which were used in conjunction with the standardized kit. Allowing participants to bring personal items for the Body Biography was meant to introduce a level of self-description to the task that the standardized kit may not have provided. However, the items in the standardized kit (and extra items on the separate table) were chosen with the intent of promoting ideas, while not limiting participants' to one specific type of medium.

Logistically, the body was pre-drawn onto each paper and which granted participants more time to place words and items onto the body. Even though the selection of magazine provided were not replenished after each session, if a participant sought a certain type of image not found in a magazine, then it was written, drawn, or created using construction paper.

Discussion/ semi-structured interview. When participants felt that they were finished their Body Biography, each individual was then offered the choice to either begin the discussion session or to return to campus at a later date to complete the discussion session. All of the participants (with the exception of the one participant in Québec), decided to follow the completion of the Body Biography immediately with its discussion. The lengths of the discussion sessions varied from 30 minutes to a maximum of one hour, and the sequential order of the interview questions also varied, as each discussion was unique to the individual and to his or her self-perceptions of social identity, self-concept, and relating educational experiences.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

Each session with participants was audio-recorded, transcribed, emailed to the participants and participant-reviewed, and then analyzed using Bloomberg and Volpe's (2008) "roadmap" as a guide for data analysis. The "roadmap" facilitated the identification of "big ideas" and themes discussed by the participants, and helped to highlight the meaningful or interesting information, both within and across cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Seidman, 2006). In particular, the transcriptions were colour-coded based on 1) self-concept and its sub-domains, 2) social-identity, and 3) social comparisons. When coding for self-concept, each sub-domain was assigned a different colour and each section, story, or self-perception that related to one of the self-concept domains was highlighted based on the colour it was assigned. In terms of social identity, each self-perception that answered the question *Who Am I?* was highlighted, as well as each perception that related to being gifted, LD, or G/LD. Finally, the coding system for social comparisons included three colours - one for self-perceptions related to being gifted, one for LD, and then one for G/LD. From individual participant profiles, the "big ideas" and themes identified for each individual were then organized within the cross-analysis. Also, mind-maps were created (see Appendix H) to help the researcher visually represent the main themes for each individual participant, which then aided with the cross-case analysis of the data.

The data analysis was guided by analysis for multiple case studies, as well as by the theoretical framework of the study. In particular, the Marsh/Shavelson Model of self-concept was used to examine how the domains of self-concept (i.e., general, academic, and non-academic self-concept) were influenced by the G/LD label and educational placement(s), and how the domains within the model interacted with one another for the participants. In contrast, the Social Identity Theory was used to analyze how participants perceived him or herself in comparison with peer reference groups (i.e., was the focus on the giftedness or on the learning disability?).

Finally, the Body Biographies provided a visual representation to complement the individual explanations of self-perceptions of self-concept, thus supporting the thematic findings during the data analysis by solidifying certain self-perceptions. The Body Biography was the primary data collection source in terms of encouraging participants to conceptualize their self-perceptions of social identity and self-concept, while the discussion/semi-structured interview provided further reflection and clarification by the participants. Thus, the discussion/ semi-structured interview provided the researcher with the bulk of the data to be analyzed and

influenced the emergent themes, discussion, and conclusions of this study.

Ethical Considerations

In a study of this nature, there were several ethical considerations to be mindful of and it was important that participants were properly informed about not only the purpose of the study, but also what was expected from each individual involved, including the researcher.

Written informed consent. The consent form, written in both French and English, (See Appendix C) outlined the purpose of the study, what would be required of each participant, the potential risks of emotional discomfort throughout the process of volunteering personal information, and that they may withdraw from the study at any point. The consent form also informed participants about the benefits of the study to G/LD research, the incentive for participating in the study (e.g., a draw wherein each participant would be offered the choice to have his or her name entered for a chance to win one of six gift certificates from the Rideau Centre (two valued at \$50.00 and four valued at \$25.00)), the assurances of confidentiality and anonymity of each participant, and how the collected data would be stored safely and securely. Each participant completed this form prior to beginning the demographic questionnaire.

Confidentiality. To ensure the confidentiality of the information shared by participants, each individual was assigned a pseudonym for the purpose of the participant profiles, data analysis, and the presentation of the findings within research study. Participants were assured via the consent form that any and all information shared with the researcher would be kept confidential. Furthermore, since each completed Body Biography was photographed for the purpose of publication of the research study, care was taken to blur or crop any identifying information from the photo used in the report and publication.

Data storage. Data for this study included audio recording, transcribed data, as well as the completed Body Biography from each participant (See Appendix G). The digital recordings (i.e., the audio files) and transcripts (i.e., raw and participant-reviewed) were stored on two password-protected computers, accessible only to the research and her supervisor. Completed Body Biographies were kept in a locked office at the university.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the researcher must address four constructs identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as key to ensuring that study findings are, “worth paying attention to” (p. 290). Each of the four constructs and the method of achieving these constructed will now be discussed.

Credibility. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility refers to the degree to which the data collected accurately reflects the phenomenon under examination. The credibility of this study was enhanced in four ways. Firstly, an effort was made to ensure that the purpose of the study, the epistemological approach, theoretical framework, data collection methods, and data analysis were not in opposition to one another. Secondly, within the completion of a Body Biography was the expectation that several different mediums of expression would be used, thus increasing the data sources. Third, participants explained how they completed their Body Biography and the meaning behind the items used, thus giving the opportunity for self-clarification, reflection, and explanation of past experiences. Finally, through member checking, reciprocity, and creating an open relationship with the participants, each participant included in the study was given the opportunity to review the transcripts created from the digital recording of his or her discussion session with the researcher. In this process, participants were given the opportunity to change or alter their ideas and to include any further self-perceptions relating to how labels and educational experiences influenced the development of his or her self-concept. The majority of participants did offer changes to their transcriptions, with Hannah and Graham offering greater detail into their perceptions and Felix changing his transcription to be more grammatically correct. Interestingly, neither Amanda, Darren, nor Isabelle offered any changes. Overall, this process ensured the accuracy of the data of what he or she had intended to describe.

Transferability. The second construct of trustworthiness refers to the degree to which the findings of the study may be applied to another context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The wide spectrum of what it means to be identified as G/LD and the ranging educational placements possible for these students makes transferability difficult. However, through thick descriptions of each participant in the case study (Patton, 1990), it is hoped that the readers may form their own conclusions about the transferability of the participants.

Dependability. Dependability refers to how consistent the research findings are in relation to the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To increase dependability, the researcher did her best to ensure that the data analysis and interpretation methods were consistent. A colour-coded system based on data that related to either social identity or self-concept was used, and this system was refined throughout the process of data analysis. The development of the coding system was monitored through written notes and contributed to a “transparency of method” (Merriam, 2002) considered to be productive in enhancing dependability.

Confirmability. The final construct of trustworthiness refers to confirming the research findings and how “objective” the research is, recognizing that the researcher holds a personal orientation or bias. In terms of confirming the findings, all data (e.g., raw data, transcripts, and data analysis) was cross-referenced as an “audit trail” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and participants were given the opportunity to review their transcripts, thus increasing the confirmability of the study. Furthermore, feedback from the researcher’s supervisor was solicited to review the transcripts during the analysis and development of the themes to ensure that the findings, interpretations, and conclusions were each supported by the data.

Chapter Summary

In sum, this chapter presented an overall description of the methodology used in this study. The chapter highlighted the research approaches and provided a basis for the use of a qualitative case study approach, while also describing the process of participant recruitment and selection - including the reasoning for altering the inclusion criteria. An important part of this chapter included the descriptions of the data collection methods and procedures with respect to the use of a Body Biography and a discussion/semi-structured interview. Finally, the ethical issues of the study and issues of trustworthiness were each considered. The next chapter will present an individual profile of each participant as well as a cross-case analysis of data and an overview of the emergent themes.

Chapter 4 - Participant Profiles and Cross-Case Analysis

This chapter will present a participant profile with images of his or her completed Body Biography for each individual, and continues to a cross-case analysis of similarities and emergent themes. Before presenting the participant profiles, it is important to develop a preliminary understanding of the participants. The responses to the demographic questionnaire offer insight into the participants' learning disability, time and location of identification(s), and educational placements as a result of the identification(s). An outline of these responses is provided in the following table:

Table 2. *Demographic Information for Participants: The Identification*

Participant	Identification	Time of Identification	Location of Identification	Educational Experience
Amanda	Gifted, ADHD, Dysgraphia	Elementary	Ottawa	Mainstream, Gifted, LD, Resource
Catherine	Gifted, Dyslexia, Dyscalculia	Elementary	Muskoka	LD program
Darren	Gifted, Dyslexia	Elementary	Ottawa	LD program
Elizabeth	Gifted, "Perceptual LD"	Elementary	Ottawa	One day a week Gifted program
Felix	Gifted, ADHD, Dexterity issues	Pre-elementary for gifted; CÉGEP for LD	Québec	Mainstream, private, mainstream
Graham	Gifted, Dyslexia	Upon entering university for both	Manitoba	Homeschooled
Hannah	Gifted, Dyscalculia	Post-secondary	Ottawa	Mainstream
Isabelle	Gifted, Dyslexia	Elementary	Ottawa	Arts-based high school, LD programming

Information provided by the participants' responses to the demographic questionnaire also focused on their current stage in life- including age, current program of study, and level of education. It is interesting to note the age ranges of the participants and how the two oldest participants in this study are both completing graduate studies. The table showing the participants' current stage in life is presented below:

Table 3. *Demographic Information for Participants: Current Stage in Life*

Participant	Age	Current University Program	Level of Education
Amanda	42	Political Science	Graduate
Catherine	20	Human Kinetics with a Minor in Health Science	Undergraduate
Darren	21	Political Science with a Minor in History	Undergraduate
Elizabeth	20	Biomedical Engineering	Undergraduate
Felix	22	General Arts	Undergraduate
Graham	22	Globalization	Undergraduate
Hannah	26	Anthropology	Graduate
Isabelle	23	Art History and Gender Studies	Undergraduate

Next, the participant profile of each individual will be presented. Data from both the Body Biography and the discussion/semi-structured interview contribute to the profile. In particular, the profiles will focus predominantly on the approach participants adopted in completing the Body Biography and unique attributes of participants' individual biography. Additionally, the profiles will focus on the influence of labels and educational placement upon their perceptions of social comparison, social identity, group membership and the sub-domains of self-concept within the Marsh/Shavelson model.

Amanda

Upon first meeting Amanda, she appeared to be shy and quiet. However, once she began to complete the consent form and demographic questionnaire, she became very inquisitive and talkative. The conversation during this time focused on ensuring that no identifying information pertaining to who she was would be included in the results of the study.

She discusses having two brothers - one identified as gifted and the other identified as LD and ADHD. However, her own diagnosis includes being identified as ADHD first, gifted second, and then as LD. In discussing her experiences with her diagnosis, she exhibits frustration. For

example, she was frustrated that, “(...) they didn’t identify as “LD” when you were younger, and it became “LD” later,” and that she had been tested so many times during her life, with the scores generally being the same each time. She was also frustrated with the woman who had originally assessed her, as Amanda felt that the woman had not identified all of her difficulties, and as a result, the education system never really found the *right* place for her to be. Thus, Amanda experienced several educational placements. She experienced a Resource placement in Grades 7 and 8, gifted programming beginning in Grade 8, and LD programming (with Resource) in high school. How these placements made her feel is important. At the time, the gifted programming, “(...) opened up possibilities of school being more than just drudgery,” while LD programming was, “actually able to provide me with some concrete help that was appropriate.” In contrast, she did not have fond memories of her experiences in Resource, as she highlights how the educator did not know how to provide support and accommodation for her needs. Although each educational experience is not explicitly represented on her Body Biography, how these experiences contribute to Amanda’s self-perceptions of social identity and self-concept certainly emerged throughout the discussion of her Body Biography.

Body biography and discussion. Amanda was very talkative while completing her Body Biography, asking for items that were not included in the Body Biography Kit, asking about the study and the publishing of its results, and asking about the researcher. After laying the Body Biography paper onto the floor, she spent several minutes walking around the paper before beginning to work. She had a very difficult time knowing how and where to start, and expressed worry about its execution. This worry was generalized to the entire Body Biography and her participation overall, saying, “I’m worried I’m going to screw this up a little bit.” Finally, and with some prompting by the researcher, she began to work on the biography, using markers and crayons as her preferred mediums.

In terms of the items placed on her Body Biography, the items include images drawn with crayons and markers, covering the entire length of the paper. In general, her items represent a wide range of ideas, with both positive and negative aspects represented on the body. As seen in Figure 2, Amanda’s biography includes favourite pastimes and hobbies such as playing Bridge, studying political science, working with computers, and writing in her journals. It also represents her strengths as a gifted individual which include being better than others in specific subject areas, playing Bridge, and continuing her education at the post-secondary level.



Figure 2. Full-length image of Amanda's completed Body Biography

A particularly important item on her biography is *hope*, symbolized by the rainbow, which represents being, "(...) kind of hopeful that at some point, it will work its way out." This provides striking insight into how Amanda views the G/LD identification and this viewpoint

continues to influence her self-perceptions even into the present.

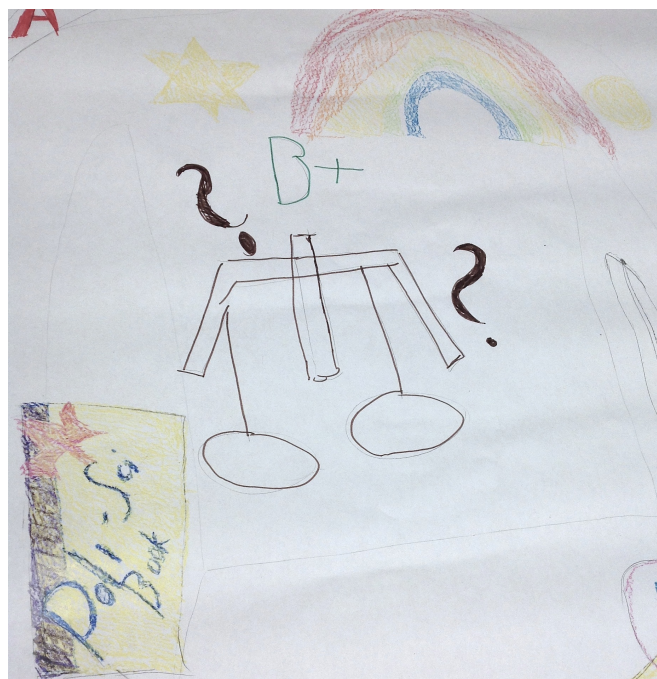


Figure 3. Torso area of Amanda's Body Biography

Two other important items on Amanda's Body Biography include the 'Poli-Sci book', as this shows her strengths and interests, as well as the 'broken sign' in the head of the body. The broken sign represents her self-perceptions of the LD diagnosis, as she, "(...) knew there was something blocking me. And suddenly there was an explanation for at least some of the block." Also, the horizontal red line in the face area of the body represents her unhappiness with her life. This sense of unhappiness appears to transcend throughout her life and to the present.

Another important item on her Body Biography is the scale, with a 'B+' and two question marks drawn beside the scale. Here, Amanda represents, "never really being sure what's good, what's good enough," and how, "It really doesn't matter what I get. I do well and it sort of feel like, 'uggh, the bar goes up'." This theme of self-doubt and never feeling like she is good enough is discussed in relation to elementary grades, high school, and even now at the post-secondary level, and comes from herself, from teachers and professors, as well as from her own parents.



Figure 4. Top of Amanda's Body Biography

Finally, the post-secondary degrees that she has obtained and is working towards obtaining (shown in Figure 4) highlight the importance that she places on education, even though she describes feeling uneasy about having written words in the area of the face of her body.

Based on Amanda's completed Body Biography, it is clear that the G/LD identification is very much a part of how Amanda perceives herself, especially in terms strengths, weaknesses, and social identity derived from comparison to others.

Social Identity Theory. How is the notion of social comparison relevant for a student who has experienced gifted programming, LD programming, Resource, and who is a graduate student with a lifetime of coping with learning difficulties? In terms of *Who Am I?* Amanda sees herself as an unhappy woman in her forties who is still searching for her purpose in life. She identifies strongly with her degrees and with being gifted- yet the LD component of her identification, and how she has been treated throughout her life, clearly influences her self-perceptions of who she is today. It is important to note that she appears to place a lot of blame on her G/LD identification for her current situation in life, lamenting several times about how things might have been different if she had been identified earlier, or even not at all. Amanda has also gained a sense of self through her interests and hobbies. For example, she describes participating in swimming lessons and theatre productions when she was younger, and more recently as an adult, participating in a Bridge club and being interested in computers. These interests and hobbies have provided her with an outlet that are not dependent on her gifted or LD identifications. However, the gifted component of her identification certainly plays a stronger role in her hobbies as an adult than as a child.

To gain further insight into who Amanda is, she was asked to compare her own Body Biography to how she thought individuals identified as gifted only, as LD only, and who had experienced a different educational background might have completed his or her own Body Biography. In comparing her own Body Biography to someone who is identified as gifted only, she immediately focuses on the 'broken' sign in the head area of her body, as well as the refrain from her mother about wanting Amanda to have Ritalin as a child. She also focuses on how gifted only students would not, "necessarily have the confusion regarding the marks," while also proposing that these individuals might still have a favourite book and a religious affiliation. Overall, she fully accepts her gifted identification, and feels that she is *better than average* in both political science and in working with computers.

When asked to propose how her Body Biography might compare to an individual identified as LD only, Amanda discusses similarities in terms of interests. In particular, she focuses on potentially having a shared interest in playing Bridge, having a favourite topic like political science, or belonging to a religious group. However, as a difference, she notes how her computer is, “a real tool of expression,” for her, particularly in terms of the physical aspect of writing. Amanda feels that she, “(...) can’t express [herself] very well without it... in a way that other people would understand,” and that it has become, “really central to me being in school.” Specifically, she felt that others might not share that same dependence. Another difference that she felt would separate her Body Biography from an individual identified as LD only was identifying, “a certain self-worth with degrees,” and how this might be more related to the academic expectations set upon her by her own family. In comparison to those identified as LD only she declares, “I think they’d be happier. The big contradiction in my life was that I was really smart, but I wasn’t doing well enough.” When asked to whom this comparison referred (i.e., her brothers or her peers), she was unable to provide an answer other than it simply being a sense she had within herself. Thus, the expectations placed on her due to her gifted identification were difficult to achieve with her learning difficulties and she was left feeling unhappy and inadequate as compared to others.

Finally, Amanda was asked how her biography might compare to someone who had experienced a different educational background than she had. As someone who had experienced a mixture of educational settings, this was an important question as it revealed several underlying social comparisons within each educational setting. She recounts in Grade 9 refusing to have, “(...) anything to do with Resource. I felt that I had been labelled and I didn’t want that happening again,” as she had already experienced *Resource* in Grades 7 and 8. This resistance to being labelled relates to her sense of social self-concept and not wanting to associate that academic setting as part of her *in-group*. In particular, she explains how she was, “(...) already doing way better than most of his students was, were. He didn’t need to teach me how to write a sentence, or how to punctuate, or how to spell. He really didn’t... know what to do with me.” In part due to this frustration, she then transferred to the LD program at her school, which offered her more appropriate support for her academic needs.

In summary, Amanda appears to define “the self” based on both her strengths as well as her learning difficulties, acknowledging both components of her G/LD identification. She also

defines herself in terms of her academic degrees, even though she never feels as though she is good enough in comparison to those around her. Having experienced gifted programming, LD programming, as well as Resource support, Amanda has more options for *in-group* and *out-group* comparisons than the other participants of this study, which continues to influence how she perceives herself in the present. Thus, how do these perceptions relate to her perceptions of strengths and weaknesses? How do these perceptions related to the domains of self-concept?

Self-concept. How does Amanda perceive her abilities and disability in terms of academic and non-academic self-concept, or self-concept in general? How does she perceive her self-concept in terms of strengths and weaknesses? When asked to discuss her strengths, as represented on her Body Biography, she replies, “Probably the light bulb to some extent. (...) I’m good at Poli-Sci. Better than average. That is a topic that I understand well. And computers... (...) I’m better at computers than average.” Intertwined with her self-perceptions of social identity, she views her strengths as being better than others in specific areas, which relates to her social, academic, and general self-concept. Conversely, she views her weaknesses as being more related to general flaws rather than to inability or disability. For example, she focuses on the ‘broken symbol’, how “the mouth isn’t happy” on her Body Biography and, “(...) the confusion around what is a good grade or what is a bad grade.” However, she sees the positive and the negative in her past-time of journaling, explaining it as, “both a strength and a weakness. It’s a strength in that it allows me to express how I’m feeling, which is good. And it’s a weakness because I need it because I’m not feeling good most of the time.” Overall, it appears that her weaknesses relate to emotional self-concept, with a focus on being unhappy in her life, while her perceptions of strengths rests in academic achievements and social comparisons.

Looking more closely at Amanda’s emotional self-concept, her childhood and familial experiences seem to influence her self-perceptions in this domain. In particular, she places blame on the woman who initially identified her, feeling as though she should have been identified for her difficulties with dysgraphia sooner and how, “ (...) they probably could have used occupational therapy and it wouldn’t [have] been permanent.” This sense of her life trajectory being out of her control and in someone else’s hands contributes to her negative emotional self-concept. The influence of her family, however, has influenced her emotional self-concept in a much deeper way, emotionally. She notes that to her parents:

What I was valuable for was for being smart. And for occasionally being persistent. I got all sorts of Brownie badges. And I stayed in all my school classes even though I failed one class three times. They appreciated that persistence.

This sense of not being valued by her parents certainly contributes negatively towards her emotional self-concept, as well as to her academic and social self-concepts.

In exploring social self-concept more closely, it becomes clear that self-advocacy is a prominent theme, as well as the social comparisons between herself and others. She discusses all the difficulties she has had in trying to receive accommodations throughout her years of education. At the elementary school level, Amanda recounts the struggles of receiving admission into the gifted program, explaining how:

They wanted to keep me out until maybe I started doing better. And after a year and half of that I told my mom, “Look you’re allowed to go back and tell them, ‘I don’t care what you think, now put her in’.” And she did.

The change to a gifted program meant that more of her classes focused on her oral and verbal abilities, which influenced her academic self-concept positively since it decreased her level of boredom her classes and decreased the amount of written work that was required. Once in the high school setting, Amanda discusses wanting to take typing classes to help with her physical difficulties with writing and how she, “kind of got the guidance counsellor to embarrass my parents into letting me take it at night.”

This theme of self-advocacy continues on into her post-secondary experiences, as she provides insight into the types of conversations she has with her professors, saying:

In my case, I said to the professor, “Look, I can ask for time and a half and I can ask for a separate room and I can ask for a computer, or you can tell me it’s multiple choice and I don’t need accommodations. I think it’s multiple choice, is it?” It was multiple choice. So, I didn’t have to appeal over his head, but everybody else in his class did.

Perhaps in addition to self-advocacy, these anecdotes exemplify her negative perceptions of the G/LD identification. Due her G/LD identification, Amanda feels she has had to be her own voice, which is “(...) a lot of work that the other students aren’t having to do.” Thus, this extra “work” influences her social self-concept and social interactions, as well as her emotional and academic self-concepts.

Also contributing to her social self-concept, Amanda describes being the oldest student in her current program and how, “everybody is all so young.” While this notion is mentioned more

in casual discussion, it is important since she reiterates this social comparison several times during her time with the researcher. The reason for the age differential between herself and her peers is that she has taken her time in completing her education, taking breaks to accumulate the necessary funds and to decide which academic goals to pursue. She also discusses having to tend to mental health issues before completing this particular graduate degree.

Summary. Overall, Amanda's self-perceptions of her social identity and self-concept are negative. She describes feeling unvalued by her parents as a child and she places a great deal of weight and self-identity in her academic accomplishments. She does not discuss whether this feeling of being unvalued by her parents was also shared by her two brothers, or whether it was in some way a product of being the only child in the family identified as both gifted and with a learning disability. These feelings of negativity and perceptions of low self-worth also extended to her perceptions of abilities and strengths. Apart from acknowledging that she is *better than average* at political science and with computers, her perceptions of her strengths and abilities also appeared to be more negative than positive. While there is a sense that her LD diagnosis has held her back and has "blocked" her development in some way, she does, however, identify strongly with the G/LD identification, much more so than either of the sub-components of the identification separately. For Amanda, the G/LD identification appears to be held as a singular entity, except when discussing playing Bridge and how gifted individuals are better at playing Bridge than those who are not gifted. Therefore, this strength as a result of her gifted identification has become very important to her self-identity in the present.

It appears as though the dual diagnosis of being G/LD and the resulting educational experiences continue to influence how she perceives her social identity and her self-concept, which reflects how pervasive her experiences as a child were while she was developing her self-identity self-concept. It also shows how difficult it has been for Amanda to overcome her LD and ADHD difficulties in order to achieve academically - even though her social relationships appear to have suffered as a result. However, in terms of her life experiences and where she is today, she emphasizes how, "I would have preferred if in some ways if I hadn't been identified period and I could have been an *average* student."

Catherine

Catherine was a friendly individual who arrived in high spirits and was very enthusiastic about participating in the study. She immediately sat down and began to complete the consent

form and demographic questionnaire with little instruction from or interaction with the researcher. With one brother who is also identified as G/LD, Catherine's own story of her identification began when she was in Grade 4 and was identified by an Ontario school board as having a learning disability in reading written language, short-term memory retention, and mathematics. Later in the same year, she was then identified as gifted in verbal language. She attended elementary and secondary schools in Ontario and while she did not experience a specific LD or gifted educational program, she did complete university-level courses in high school. She discusses how in Grade 8 there were eight other students identified with learning disabilities and how her high school offered a "PALS" program, where, "you have extreme Autism, and you have Down Syndrome, and you have like, you know, have extreme cognitive disabled-disabilities. Where everybody else is just thrown into the pool."

Catherine also offers insight into the educational accommodations she received while in elementary school and high school for her learning disability. She discusses having access to a computer with a specialized spell check program and extra time for writing exams, both of which she continues to receive while completing her degree in Human Kinetics. However, having these accommodations available to her were not always part of her educational experience, as she describes herself as:

(...) very stubborn and I was very much against having anything that would help me. So I have used Word since the beginning on a regular laptop, like a PC. But I did have this one program that I did use in like Grade 3 that would predict what I was going to say and then give- like I'd be typing and then I'd start spelling a word like if I wanted dog, I'd put 'd' and it would give me all the common words that started with 'd'. Then I'd put the 'o' and then dog would pop up and I would pick the word 'dog'. And that was helpful cause I could read but I couldn't spell.

Even though her past educational experiences are not specifically discussed unless directly prompted by the researcher, Catherine's Body Biography and discussion reveal insights into how the G/LD identification has influenced her self-perceptions of her strengths and weaknesses, and her self-concept with respect to the Marsh/Shavelson model.

Body biography and discussion. In completing her Body Biography, Catherine was one of two participants to use almost every item available to her from the Body Biography Kit as well as the extra items located on the separate table. As seen in Figure 5, Catherine used pipe cleaners, popsicle sticks, markers, glitter glue, feathers, construction paper, string, and several images from the selection of magazines. She also made use of the entire body from the head area



Figure 6. Legs of Catherine's Body Biography

Including both the “spaghetti” and the “bog” is extremely important to understanding Catherine's learning disabilities. In particular, she describes the head as having, “(...) numbers



Figure 7. Head and chest of Catherine's Body Biography

Some of the most significant items on her Body Biography included what she refers to as “spaghetti” and “bog” which represent her perceptions of her learning disabilities, and the thought bubble and the word *TALK* which represent her gifted abilities. Other important items include the feathers which represents often feeling “frazzled”, and the house made of popsicle sticks with her family (and pets) drawn inside which represents their support and being close with her family even though she is away from them to obtain her degree in Health Sciences.

and letters... So, I kinda, sometimes I see them all jumbled up. Not when I'm reading, when I'm trying to spell it out, or put my thoughts down on paper, or do any mental math, I find that's all jumbled up,” while, “all the little letters kind of up by my shoulder and “bog” which I underlined is that I had a hard time with reversals for when I was first diagnosed.”

For Catherine, both her learning disabilities and her gifted abilities were represented on her Body Biography, and are very much a part of understanding her self-perceptions of group membership and answering the question, *Who Am I?*

Social Identity Theory. How is the notion of social comparison relevant for Catherine, a student who received accommodations in high school for her learning disabilities, but no specific academic support for her gifted abilities? How do the labels of *gifted* and *learning disability* influence Catherine's self-perceptions? In terms of *Who Am I?* Catherine sees herself as having difficulties with words and numbers, an organized and goal-oriented individual, often flustered, chatty, and an avid skier. In terms of skiing, she used a snowflake cut from white paper to represent being, "a winter person and I teach downhill skiing which I think also helps with the verbal, which makes that work really well. And I think those are Pakenham kids, which I taught there a couple years ago, but now I'm at Camp Fortune." She also sees herself as a horseback rider and laments multiple times throughout her session with the researcher how, "I'm not very artistic," or, "I'm not very artsy." Overall, Catherine's sense of identity is derived from her learning disability, her gifted abilities, her love for skiing, and the skills she feels she lacks.

When asked to compare how her completed Body Biography would be similar and/or different to an individual identified as gifted only, with no learning disabilities, Catherine was thoughtful in her response, proposing that:

I think there's different ways to be gifted. (...) I think that if somebody who was gifted in math, let's say, my Body Biography would be *completely* different because I obviously, uh well not obviously, but I'm *really* not gifted in math. But somebody who was an extremely gifted skier, let's say, that was their thing, it might be sorta similar cause I'm an alright skier. (...) Or somebody who was as meticulous as I am and their gifts were being organized and (...) if my gift and their gifts matched, it would be similar.

In this comparison, she sees herself as very different from someone identified as gifted in mathematics, but more similar to someone who excels at skiing or someone who is very well organized. Catherine appears to hold the different facets of giftedness as important as to whether or not there are similarities between herself and others identified as gifted.

Next, Catherine was asked to reflect on how her Body Biography would compare to someone identified with only a learning disability and no gifted abilities. Here she focuses more on the emotional aspect of identifications and its challenges, noting how the use of feathers represented being frazzled and that those with an LD only may use even more than her. In particular, she felt that the LD diagnosis brought, "a lot of challenges" and she felt that::

It was figuring out what worked for you, what didn't work for you. And when you're younger, you just don't understand why school's hard. Like, I found school really easy up until Grade 4 cause I was reading - when I was in sixth grade, I was reading at a twelfth

grade reading level. So, I'd get *that*, and then all of a sudden, things would be difficult and people's perceptions of you change because you have strengths but then you have weaknesses and you you'd go be, from being very smart to not being very smart (...)

Finally, Catherine was asked to discuss how her biography might compare to someone who experienced a different educational background than she did. She began by proposing that:

(...) the gifted program would probably, like if there were surrounded by gifted people and then found out they had a learning disability, yeah, I think they'd have more struggles. (...) I think that a lot of people that are placed in a gifted program and then pulled out often are found to have learning disabilities after. And then if you weren't identified fast enough, or you don't have the right kind of support, support's huge. A lot of people fall apart. I know in my hometown, we don't have gifted programs, but a lot of the gifted kids go to French Immersion.

That sense of struggling more if you have a learning disability continued as she discussed different types of cognitive disabilities, noting how:

(...) when you're in a gifted program, that might be ok. That might be the best spot for you. Because if you're gonna struggle with the social, you're gonna have social no matter where you go. But at least what you're learning at school is helpful. But if you have a learning disability, sometimes I think the gifted program's, uhm, I think they're gonna (...) struggle more.

She even goes as far as saying that those identified as LD first and then gifted are, "going to be better off," explaining that:

(...) if you're low, let's say, and you're in you have a learning disability, but you're high in some aspects... that's ok, I think, as long as you're around people that are varied. The problem with gifted is if you're low and everybody else is four tiers ahead you, I think that that can be really discouraging.

What is particularly interesting from this last comparison is that she herself was first identified as LD and then as gifted. Even more interesting is the fact that Catherine did not experience gifted programming while in her formative education years, yet she feels that experience of being in a gifted program and then identified as LD would be quite discouraging. She appears to view her experience, being identified as LD and then gifted, as a positive, as an explanation for being "better off" than those who were identified as gifted and then LD. Given this, how does her perception of social comparisons to others, and how she perceives herself overall as a G/LD individual, relate to the domains of self-concept?

Self-concept. How does Catherine perceive her strengths and her weaknesses? How does the G/LD identification and educational experience influence Catherine's perceptions of self-

concept? Many of the items Catherine chose to place on her Body Biography highlight her strengths and her weaknesses, however, she was asked to explicitly discuss how she felt her Body Biography reflects these concepts.

In terms of strengths, she immediately mentions how she'd, "like to say that my ski instructing [is] one of my strengths. (...) I hope..." While the use of "I hope" could imply being unsure as to whether this is a 'strength' for her, even though she has skied as part of a team at provincial and national competitions. Thus, skiing is an important part of who she is.

Her love of skiing also relates to her physical and emotional self-concepts. It relates to emotional self-concept since she feels free and happy while skiing and how, "(...) all of this kind of disapp[ea]r[ars]," with "this" referring to her G/LD identification. Further insight into the domain of emotional self-concept for Catherine also touches on her feeling of being frazzled, as represented by the feathers on her Body Biography. She notes how they, "are basically cause I get flustered if things aren't organized or meticulous or... plans get screwed-up," and she even mentions that getting frazzled easily is a weakness for her. The other main part of her discussion on weaknesses relates to her learning disability and how the letters, words, and string in the head area of her biography, "kinda represents how sometimes my brain is when I'm trying to think of a word or spell a word (...)." This musing also gives insight into Catherine's academic self-concept and is supported by her explanation of how, "when you're combating something that's working against you, you have to have a goal and you have to be able to self-motivate or you're never gonna get anywhere." Thus, she considers being goal-oriented and self-motivated as important in helping her to overcome her learning disabilities in academic settings, which she also denotes as part of her strengths.

Finally, in terms of social self-concept, Catherine discusses her "chattiness", or her gifted abilities in verbal communication, as well as her relationship with her family members. Socially, Catherine finds that she, "(...) advocate[s] for myself a lot. Which helps with the chattiness (laughs). And the advocating, I think, if people don't know you've got issues, sometimes they just look it over, they don't care, which, you know, that's life." In only a few words presented casually, Catherine offers a crucial piece of how others treat her as a result of her learning disabilities, especially when those others do not know or understand. Conversely, the support of her family also contributes to her social self-concept. In her house made of popsicle sticks and the drawn figures inside the 'house', Catherine explains how she was originally trying to

represent “support”, “but then I was like, “no, my family’s rather important to me,” so I put them in the house. I guess the support makes sense in the leg cause they support you (...).”

Thus, Catherine’s self-perceptions of self-concept are very strongly based in her learning disabilities, in her interests outside of the school setting, and in her social interactions with her family members and those with whom she must advocate for herself against. She sees herself as not only being goal-oriented, but *having to be* goal-oriented, and considers this just as much of a strength as her identification of being gifted in verbal communication.

Summary. Catherine offers important insight into how her learning disabilities have influenced her academic goals and achievements, as well as the type of social interactions she must face with those who know and understand what it means to have learning disabilities versus those who do not. However, and interestingly, Catherine notes how she does not typically provide a great deal of information about herself to others. She explains that that, “ (...) when I describe myself to other people, I talk about my ski instructing, and my love of corgi dogs, and (...) a lot about my program,” and how here she, “kind of dug deeper and I thought of things that I probably wouldn’t tell other people.” Overall, it appears as though Catherine sees her gifted identification as only useful when it comes to her “chattiness” and in verbal communications, while her learning disabilities take a higher precedence in forming her social identity and self-concept. For Catherine, she would rather focus less on specific details and when describing herself to others simply say, “Hi, my name’s [Catherine] and I’m goal-oriented.”

Darren

Similar to each of the participants involved in this study, Darren was eager to participate and lend his voice to the study. With his short brown hair and glasses, Darren was a very serious individual and read the consent form and the demographic questionnaire more slowly than the other participants. His main concern overall about the study was whether the personal items he had brought with him would be retained by the researcher.

With a father identified as dyslexic, Darren himself was identified as dyslexic and gifted within a local school board in Grade 3. His first experience in a LD program was in Grade 4 when he was enrolled in a specialized placement which he remained in throughout elementary school, then moving to a similar setting for high school. These programs were small with, “only five or ten kids (...) depending on the year (...).” He then explains how the programs were, “usually for learning disabled kids and these learning disabled kids usually had a gifted aspect to

them. Not necessarily. Some would just show promise.” Having been segregated from other students for such a significant portion of his education is likely to have influenced the development and perceptions of his social identity and self-concept. Now completing a degree in political science with a minor in history, Darren’s educational past and present are very important to how he perceives himself and are very much reflected on his Body Biography.

Body biography and discussion. Darren was one of the two participants of this study to bring personal items with him to place onto his Body Biography. As seen in Figures 8 and 9, those items are represented by symbolic outlines and included two of his favourite books, two photographs of himself, and a photograph of his best friend.

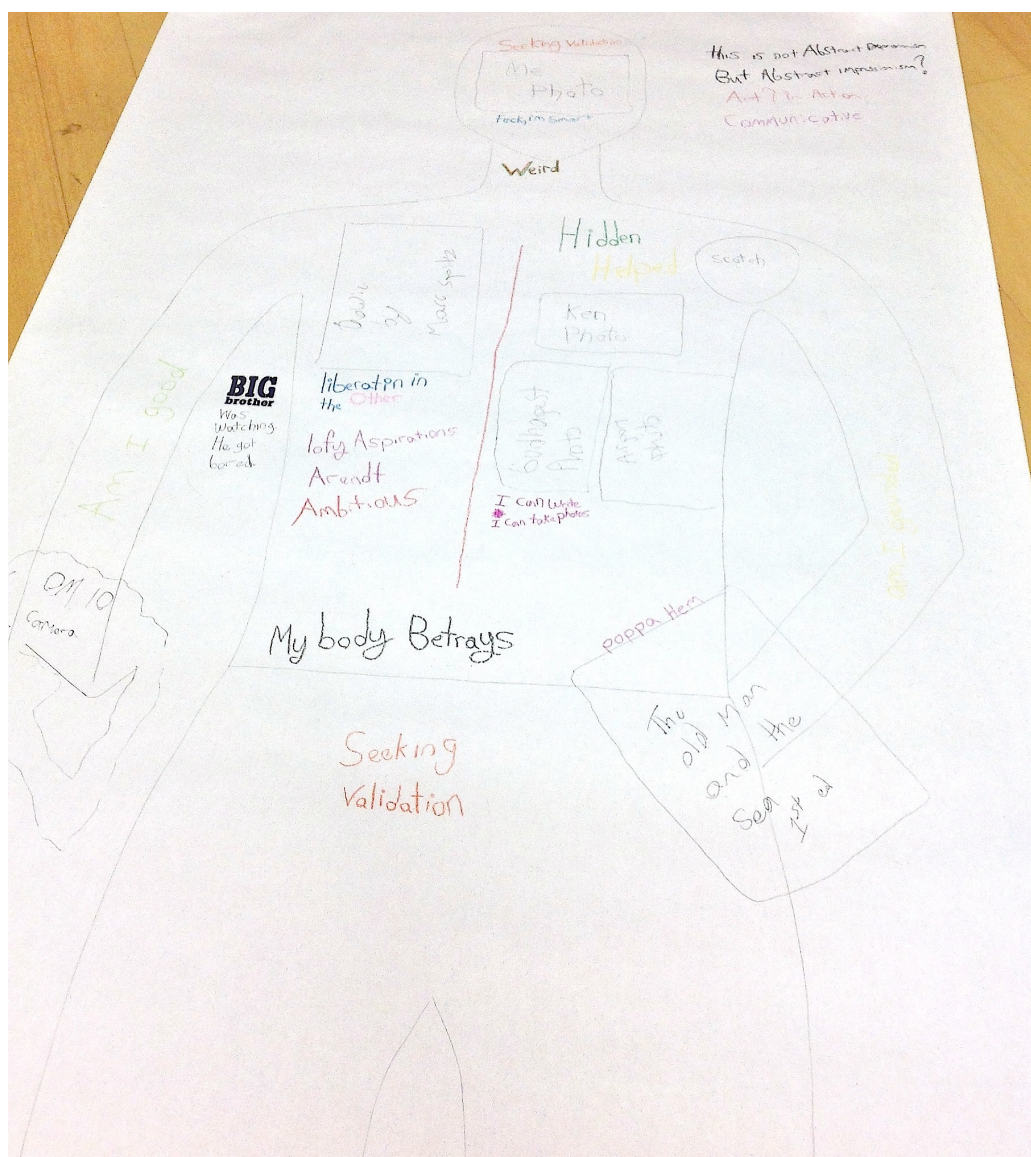


Figure 8. Full-length image of Darren’s completed Body Biography

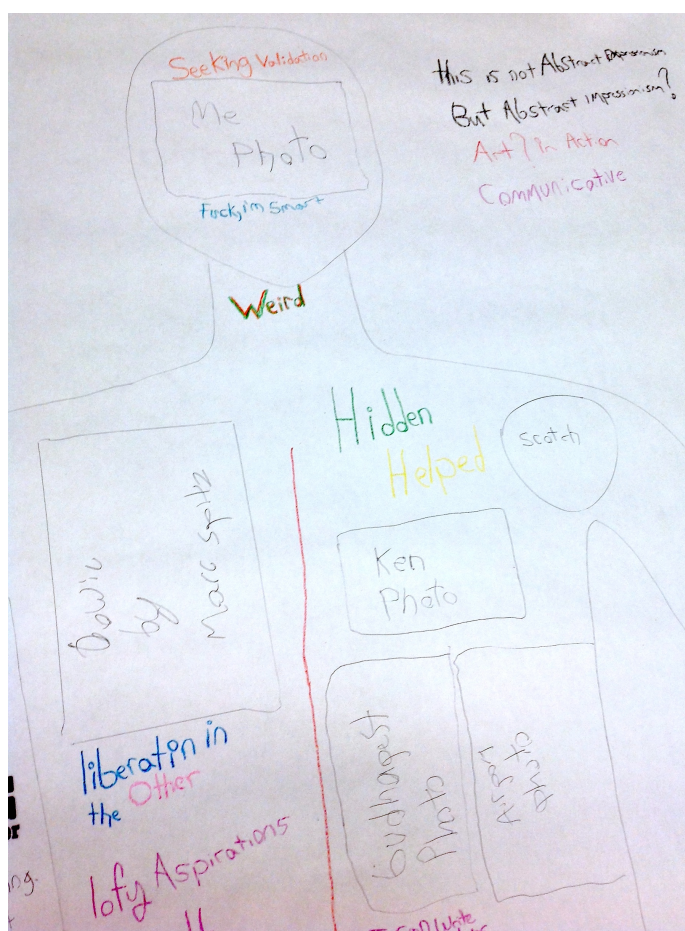


Figure 9. Colour coding of Darren's Body Biography

orange. And except for the red line. That's the scar," and that, "(...) the pink and others is in direct relation to Bowie because he 'othered' himself through his sexuality..." Further discussion with Darren about the words and personal items he chose to place on his Body Biography allowed for insight into *Who Am I?* and group membership to emerge.

Social Identity Theory. How is the notion of social comparison relevant for a student who spent most of his formative education in specialized LD programming? How do the labels of *gifted* and *learning disability* influence Darren's self-perceptions?

In terms of *Who Am I?* Darren sees himself as overly ambitious, smart, and very academically accomplished. He also sees himself as reader (even noting that he is considered well-read by his friends), a published author and photographer, and someone who reveres David Bowie. His hobbies and interests as a published author and photographer are especially important to his social identity, as they form a sense of who he is apart from his G/LD identification and LD difficulties. Additionally, he sees himself as "weird", "hidden but helped", and as "othered".

He was also the only individual of the eight participants to colour-code the words on his Body Biography in relation to emotional or social significance. He explains that colour-coding as, "negative things in orange, green, uh, orange, green and black. Uh... Some of the lighter greens are kind of a mix between good and bad because I used yellow as a good colour." So, like the "Am I good?" and "Am I grounded?" are written on his Body Biography in lighter green colours than the words 'Hidden' and 'Weird'. He then denotes that the, "warm colours [are] for positive emotions, except for the

His perception of being “othered” and how he defines this feeling became clearer when he was asked to hypothesize how his Body Biography would compare to others.

Through social comparisons of his Body Biography to those who may be identified as gifted only, LD only, or who had different educational experiences, it became clear that Darren identifies a G/LD rather than to one label more than another. For example, in comparison to someone identified as having an LD only and no identified gifted abilities, Darren proposes that there would be:

Probably a lot less positive statements. Like, I don’t think many people who have a learning disability would consider themselves smart because that’s not what they’re taught to believe. I mean, they are usually quite smart and smart often in different ways. NASA most hires dyslexics and this other learning disabled people simply because they have a different logic, logic ability that isn’t... very often quite useful for probably solving. But that said, most people who’ve been identified fail to recognize self-worth in terms of academic ability.

However, he also felt, “(...) there’d be quite a few similarities. I’d imagine that, uhm, people with learning disabilities have been made to feel weird or “othered”. Probably most of them seek some sort of validation that they’re worthwhile or decent. Uhm... I guess those would be the strongest similarities.” He applies his need for validation and feeling like an *other* in comparison to who are LD and felt that those with the same identification would share his feelings and perceptions. On the one hand, the gifted component of his identification appears to allow for more positive statements, since he felt those with an LD only would express fewer positive statements, while the LD component of his identification appears to influence his need for validation from others.

Darren was then asked how his Body Biography might compare to an individual identified as gifted, but not with a learning disability, Darren imagined:

(...) they’d be a lot less similar and a lot more different. They’d probably feel a lot more confident. Mmm... Definitely the stuff about other would be off, probably a lot less need to seek validation. Unless they’re crippled by the fact they are smarter than most people. Or appear to be in some area, in which case they’d need to validate that. (...) But, of course, I can’t really speak to that.

In this situation, Darren sees himself as G/LD rather than as its separate components, which is an important part of who Darren is. Finally, Darren offered insights into how students who did not experience the LD programming that he did would be similar/different to his own Body Biography. Overall, he appeared to feel differentiated, noting that:

(...) I saw a lot of that first-hand from stu-, kids who I knew from before I was in the program to kids who, you know, I just saw outside of the program... Honestly, they didn't fair well. Very few made it to university, a lot of them dropped out, a lot of them had low self-esteem... Uh, very low self-worth. So, I'd imagine a lot more negative statements, a lot less positive ones...

While each of these instances of social comparisons were prompted by the researcher, Darren offers one poignant social comparison on his own. When discussing his ambitiousness and how he is different from others with a learning disability, he muses how:

(...) oddly enough as somebody who has a learning disability, a lot of my skills or interests have been academically related, whereas a lot of others ones choose to engage in sports, or music, or something like that. I think it's fairly odd to have someone so traditionally intellectually driven, especially since the school system doesn't favour, like it's not built to help dyslexics.

In summary, Darren appears to define "the self" based on his educational experiences with LD programming and the skills the programs afforded him, in particular being able to read and to have 'ambitious' academic goals. Additionally, his sense of self is rooted in feeling *othered* and in seeking validation from others. The question then becomes: How do Darren's self-perceptions relate to the domains of the Marsh/Shavelson model of self-concept?

Self-concept. How does Darren perceive his abilities and disability in terms of academic and non-academic self-concept, or self-concept in general? Firstly, a dominant theme for Darren was his ability to read. He represents this ability on his biography with one of his most prized possessions - a first edition copy of the *Old Man and the Sea*, by Ernest Hemmingway, or "Poppa Hem" as Darren refers to him. In his reasoning for including this item, he explains that, "I got very into him, uh, as I was trying to write myself. I'm a published author now... Which is kind of important in terms of disability because, well, I couldn't write or read properly until I was... maybe ten?" Furthering his sense of accomplishment in reading, Darren continues on to say that, "I am quite proud of the fact that I can read. I am considered well-read by my friends, which is nice. And, you know, technically I only have a Grade 6 ability to read, but I can read a thousand-paged novel in one night, if I have to." What is especially important about Darren's pride in reading is that ultimately, he feels that the specialized LD programs he attended are, "the reasons why I can read and write effectively." Thus the experiences with these two programs is extremely crucial to the development, and current state of, Darren's self-concept, particularly in

the academic domain.

In terms of non-academic self-concept, Darren appears to spend a great deal of his own time reflecting on his actions and morality, asking himself, “Am I good?” He explains that:

I try to be good, obviously - everyone does. But you know, it’s a question that everyone asks themselves from time to time. It’s an important one to consider. So, that’s there. I’m not sure how much of a relation it has to my disability, but... I think it’s a more universal thing that all humans ask themselves.

This questioning relates to emotional self-concept and appears to be separate from having a learning disability, being a broader search within himself. This search relates to his other internal question of, “Am I grounded?” focusing on, “issues in mental health, self-questioning, etcetera, etcetera.” It would appear that while Darren notes he needs validation from others, he also searches for validation internally in order to find self-satisfaction. While emotionally seeking validation, he also seeks it socially:

I’m usually seeking validation that I’m smart, but also that I fit in with other people. I’ve got a fairly large circle of friends and it goes pretty well, but I think from having been in a small classroom for so many years, I’m always concerned if I can make friends outside of my initial friend group. Which again, I have no reason to... think I can’t, but I *do* believe I can’t.

This is a particularly important insight into Darren’s social self-concept, and it relates back to his experiences in LD programming. He notes how the programs made him feel “hidden but helped” since it segregated him from others and, “you kind of feel like, you know in small classrooms, like you didn’t engage much with the public. You became very interdependent on people you were in the program with.” This commentary provides an interesting juxtaposition to the present, with Darren having described himself as having a large circle of friends, showing how the domains of self-concept do change over time.

Finally, Darren’s discussion also touched on the last domain of self-concept - physical self-concept. Here, he explains the long red vertical line down the middle of the torso of the Body Biography, saying it represents how, “my body betrays (...) is connected both to mental learning disabilities and physical disabilities. I had severe scoliosis for four years, I technically still do, but it’s not visible anymore. That’s what the red line’s about,” and that, “it still kinda affects me cause I’m missing a bunch of lung capacity from it.”

Thus, with such a detailed explanation of his Body Biography and how he perceives his social identity and the sub-domains self-concept, how does his biography reflect, more

specifically, his strengths and weaknesses? When asked to discuss how his Body Biography represents his strengths, Darren easily notes how he is, “aware of what I’m good at, for the most part. I think that I am proud of that, as the items I’ve chosen usually relate to creative outlets and things that I’m decent at.” Conversely, he notes how his biography does not particularly show weaknesses, “because a lot of those I’ve been able to compensate for fairly effectively. Uh, partially through the school system teaching me how to do that.”

Summary. Clearly, Darren’s educational experiences with specialized LD programs have influenced the development of his self-concept and social identity. He is the only participant to have spent most of his formative education (from Grade 4 to the end of high school) within specialized programming and due to the skills he gained through these programs, he is immensely proud of his ability to read and how that allows him to further his academic accomplishments and goals. It is important to note that Darren gives very little acknowledgment or thought towards the role his parents played in his educational experiences and in securing segregated LD programming. Regardless, Darren appears extremely content with the success he has achieved as a result of the LD programming.

The best summation of Darren and who he is comes when asked what he learned about himself from his Body Biography. He begins by saying that he knew most of “this stuff” about himself already, but more importantly, “I guess I’ve got a fairly strong sense of self at least, which is nice to know.” It is positive that while he may struggle to fit in socially, and he may struggle to find self-satisfaction both internally and externally, he is pleased with how his completed Body Biography reflects who he is, his abilities, and his interests.

Elizabeth

Bubbly, petite, and very keen, Elizabeth’s energy and enthusiasm were contagious. She immediately settled in to complete the consent form and demographic questionnaire, completing both very quickly, and seemed genuinely excited to be part of the study.

While completing the demographic questionnaire, Elizabeth discusses having two sisters, one of whom was diagnosed with a “phonetic LD”. In terms of her own diagnosis, Elizabeth discusses seeing a private psychologist in Grade 3 and as being as gifted in verbal skills and “perceptual LD”. She notes that, “when I was diagnosed they’d say, ‘Well sometimes you’ll have difficulty perceiving, uhm perceiving things, [*maybe in questions on tests*]’.” She then goes on to discuss how that this difficulty in “perceiving things” also applies to her social interactions

with others. This type of LD is more commonly referred to as a non-verbal learning disability, however, Elizabeth identifies herself as having a “perceptual LD”. Also important during her identification was the actual *experience* itself. As she recalls:

(...) my parents first got me to be sort of initially tested when I was a kid. It was outside of school because my parents were like, “Oh, something’s different.” So, when I went to see the psychologist, when I walked into the room, she had a picture of *Starry Night*, and I think I was six or seven, and I was like, “Oh, you have a Van Gogh on your wall. It’s *Starry Night*.” And so, she was talking about that and I remembered that so it always kind of stuck with me because I was like, “Oh, I know who that is, that’s Van Gogh,” and I was excited to see that.

While not focusing on the gifted and learning disability identifications, her memory of recognizing the painting by Van Gogh has become an internalized part of her self-identity and part of the realization that “something’s different.” This sense of *being different* and being part of something exciting was a strong presence in her Body Biography and discussion.

Body biography and discussion. Elizabeth’s Body Biography and discussion reveal the story of Elizabeth’s past, present, and future- a future full of hope and dreams and high standards for academic achievement. In terms of completing her Body Biography, Elizabeth worked quietly and steadily, with no interaction with the researcher while she worked. Interestingly, Elizabeth was only one of two participants to use almost every item available to her from the Body Biography Kit as well as the extra items on the separate table. She used pipe cleaners, construction paper, magazine images, stickers, feathers, pipe cleaners, glitter glue, pencil crayons, and a pen. She even used a ruler to measure construction paper in creating one of her items. Figure 10 on the following page shows how she not only made use of items available to her, but she also made use of the entire body drawn on the paper, as there were items and images present from the head to the bottom of the legs. Finally, items were not particularly grouped together, however Elizabeth did place a certain amount of weight into where she placed her items. For example, a heart made of pipe cleaners was placed in the head of the body to represent her interest in artificial hearts, while pencil shavings were placed in the hand, and “Goals” was placed in the leg area to represent her feeling of, “ I gotta get where I’m going (...),” and needing to accomplish those goals. In particular, those goals appeared to focus on being part of research and advances with artificial hearts.



Figure 10. Full-length image of Elizabeth’s Body Biography

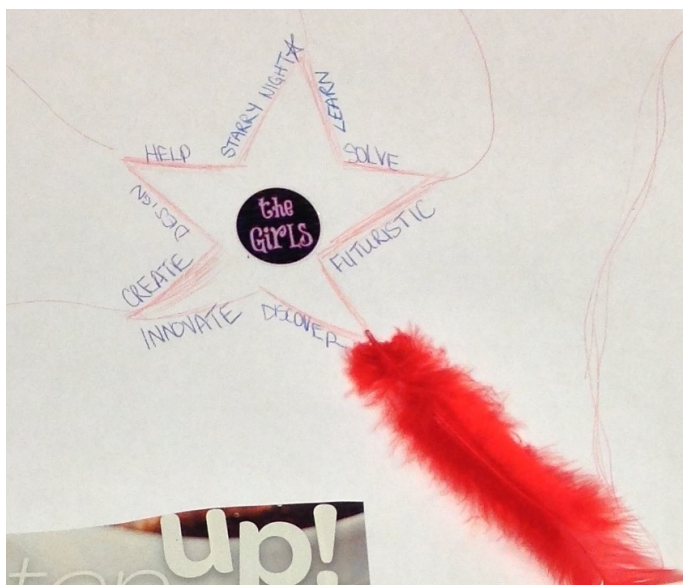


Figure 11. “Heart” of Elizabeth’s Body Biography

While each item on Elizabeth’s Body Biography is important to who she is and how she perceives herself, the most central part of her biography was her heart (see Figure 11). Here, she represents her heart as a star with her sisters represented in the middle by the words ‘the Girls’. She then wrote meaningful words around the heart, noting that, “I love stars, and I think they’re really cool, and they represent dreams. And also because

I’m interested in the artificial heart and I thought that was a cool way to represent, uhm, sort of a different kind of heart.” As for the words around the star, she, “wrote a bunch of words representing, uhm, a lot of things to do with “futuristic”, “solve”, “learn”, “innovate”, “create” and then “discover” to do with the artificial heart and how that will come to be, hopefully.”

Another important piece of Elizabeth’s Body Biography was the use of feathers and lines drawn throughout the body to represent the circulatory system. The feather and lines act as a visual representation of “being different” and feeling as though there is, “(...) something big running through [her] veins (...) something exciting.” Whether this feeling has emerged from past experiences or an inner feeling of being destined for something great, it is an important piece of Elizabeth’s story.

The main themes, when taking into account all of the images and items on Elizabeth’s Body Biography, include being a female, artificial hearts, goals with respect to research/academia, anxiety in social interaction with other females as a result of her perceptual learning disability, the importance of her family, the experiences she has gained through her life, ‘being different’, and ‘taking charge’ of her own happiness and general. How deeply these themes connected to and formed her sense of identity and self-concept became evident as the discussion with Elizabeth continued.

Social Identity Theory. Given the purposeful selection and placement of items on her Body Biography, and the discussion of those items and placements, it is clear that Elizabeth sees herself as a very capable and ambitious female who gets along better with “the guys” in her engineering program rather than with females, and as a researcher at heart with a deep desire to “innovate”, “learn”, “discover”, and “create.” With all of her hopes and dreams and academically-driven goals, she appears to feel as though she is destined for something great.

Being a female, and in particular, a female engineer/researcher studying Biomedical Engineering, is a significant part of the *Who Am I?* component of social identity for Elizabeth. Her symbolic representation on her Body Biography of being a female engineer was completed in pink glitter because, “we always like to wear pink.” This shows a group membership and social identity derived through being a female engineer. Another significant component of her *Who Am I?* self-identity is grounded in her academic goals and achievement. To Elizabeth:

(...) the star kind of represents, like, goals and dreams and reaching for the stars - that kind of thing, right? So, uhm, and that’s sort of where my mind is always - thinking, like, most of the time thinking about what I want to accomplish and working hard for that. And that I think that I’m lucky in that I had a lot of good support and I can reach for the stars.

She also derives a sense of social identity from her interests and hobbies outside of her G/LD identification. For example, she discusses participating in ballet as a child and her love of dance, her ability to surf, and her interest in volunteer work within the community. Each of these activities contribute to Elizabeth’s perceptions of *Who Am I?*

In terms of social comparison between herself and others, a deeper sense of how she perceives being G/LD and her educational experiences certainly emerged. In the most poignant comparison, Elizabeth felt that someone identified as only gifted would understand social interactions better than her and that they wouldn’t have to be as academically goal-driven, noting that, “(...) *because* I’m Gifted/LD, uhm, maybe that is why (...) I *am* more goal-focused, because I know I have to work a little bit harder than maybe somebody who is just gifted.” While a first glance at her Body Biography would not reveal this internal struggle of having to work harder than others, the discussion highlights how Elizabeth perceives her G/LD identification.

In comparing herself to those who with only a LD, she felt they would struggle more academically, have less self-confidence, and focus more on their weaknesses. Finally, for those who experienced a different educational background, she notes that being gifted allowed her to

have certain experiences outside of the school, and to develop a desire to be part of things and to get involved. She felt that those with a different educational background would not have this same desire, simply due to a lack of that experience.

In sum, Elizabeth sees herself as a G/LD individual, noting that her experiences (both educationally and otherwise) have influenced her identity as a gifted female. How do those same experiences influence Elizabeth's self-perceptions of self-concept?

Self-concept. How does Elizabeth perceive her strengths and weaknesses, abilities and disability in terms of academic and non-academic self-concept, or self-concept in general? When asked to discuss her strengths, Elizabeth mentions mathematics, having specific goals, and being very driven to accomplish those goals. She even discusses dancing when she was younger, but notes that that was not part of her current life even though she loved it and was good at it. In terms of weaknesses, Elizabeth conceded that she had not included her weaknesses on her Body Biography, other than an image of a literary quotation and highlighting difficulties with social interactions. When asked to offer another weakness that she could have included as part of her Body Biography, she explains that she is a perfectionist and does not like to acknowledge weaknesses, which reflects not only academic self-concept, but her self-concept in general.

Elizabeth's focus on academics and goals has been mentioned, but how are they related to her academic self-concept in particular? For one, Elizabeth puts a great deal of pressure on herself to remember things like elephants do, noting that, "I always kind of keep that in the back of my head and I always think like, "ok, I wish, you know, never forget" whatever I'm studying or learning like an elephant type thing." Thus, being "smart" and remembering things is very important to her and this ideal contributes to the development of her academic self-concept. A second part of the pressure that Elizabeth puts onto herself relates to the magazine image of the words "Lighten Up". In a poignant moment, she reflects that, "I think that's important to always remember to be happy and whatever," "which is really hard, like on my worst day, which is something that I have struggled with cause I'm kind of a perfectionist, which could maybe be related to my giftedness or also my anxiety, one of the two." While this provides further insight into her academic self-concept (apart from her academic goals and desire to work with artificial hearts), it also provides insight into other domains of her self-concept, such as emotional self-concept (i.e., struggling to remember to be happy and dealing with the anxiety in social

interactions as part of her perceptual learning disability) and social self-concept (i.e., identifying as a perfectionist and as gifted - with no mention of the LD at this point).

Very important to Elizabeth's self-concept development was the parental role in initiating the diagnosis process and providing her with social and emotional support. Looking more closely at social and emotional self-concept, Elizabeth's story focuses on her social interactions. While she is very close with her family, particularly her two sisters, she finds it difficult to socialize and interact with other females. In discussing a quotation on her Body Biography that read, "When I connected the dots between my anxiety and the Grade 6 means girls who had made my life hell, I felt oddly relieved," and she notes that she, "found that really interesting because I feel like I constantly over-analyze, uhm, my relationships with females." Elizabeth then expands on this notion by explaining that:

I have a lot of female friends, but I find I, I have anxiety and I find I always get very anxious with my friendships with females, whereas I don't tend to feel that with males as much. Uhm, and I, I don't know. Sometimes I feel like... uhm... I just, there's often a lot of tension and that makes me feel anx-, I, I get nervous about things, or whatever, did I say something that made them mad or whatever. Uhm, so I just put that in because I thought that was interesting. And, yeah. That's my thing.

The anxiety and negative emotions around her interactions with females relates to both her social and emotional self-concepts and is a significant part of how Elizabeth perceives herself. She attributes these difficulties to her perceptual learning disability, which was one of the few times she discussed her learning difficulties without being specifically prompted to do so.

Further highlighting feeling less anxiety with males, Elizabeth expresses that, "a lot of the people I relate to (...) in terms of goals and dreams and, and sort of how I relate to people by intellect is often males. Which is good with me," and even though, "I have a lot of male friends," "I still think like a female even though I can relate a lot of time to, to males in my program."

Finally, the physical self-concept domain was also touched upon with respect to four specific items on Elizabeth's completed Body Biography: (1) a magazine image of a surfer; (2) the word "family"; (3) the word "experience"; (3) and the word "goals"- all of which were placed in the leg area of the body. Both the image of the surfer and the word 'family' represented being active, while the words "experience" and "goals" represented, "... thinking about sort of like that's where I walk fast," and how she needs to get where she is going in terms of accomplishing her goals.

Summary. Elizabeth's social identification seems to depend on the situations she is faced with. When discussing difficulty with social interactions and the resulting anxiety she feels as a result of those interactions, Elizabeth seems to focus more on her learning disability. However, when explaining how she feels she has to be more goal-driven because she is G/LD, she identifies as G/LD as though the components are not separate. Although, in discussing her academic goals and her past and present educational experiences, she focused far more on the gifted identification. While it cannot be determined why this is so, it is interesting to note the fluidity with which Elizabeth appears to perceive herself. Overall, Elizabeth is very clear and focused on what she wishes to accomplish in her life, particularly in terms of academic accomplishments. While she does not focus on her weaknesses, or provide a great deal of insight into past her experiences with the identification process, the discussion with Elizabeth reveals social insecurities. Whether it is part of overcoming that type of learning disability, or simply part of who she is and how she was raised, she feels she is the director of her own life. She feels as though she is in charge of her own happiness, life-goals and academic achievements, and her determination to accomplish those goals is where her self-concept and social identity are very strongly rooted.

Felix

With his long blonde hair and glasses, Felix was a shy and timid individual who did not express overt enthusiasm for participating in this study, as the other participants of the study had. He was also the only Francophone participant of the study, and as a result, he sometimes had difficulties expressing himself in English. He read the consent form and demographic questionnaire slowly, with very little interaction with the researcher.

Felix's path towards a G/LD identification was long and tedious. As per his recollection, he was identified with gifted abilities before he even began preschool, however the issues related to a diagnosis and its affect on him academically and personally began during high school. He expresses difficulties with organizing his thoughts in a way that others can understand and relying on the use of a laptop. Throughout the identification process, Felix discusses being given incorrect diagnoses and how specialists decided that he was simply "lazy or immature" even though he notes that he was "far from immature" while in high school. Like his father who is "similar, but less extreme", part of Felix's identification includes ADHD, primarily inattentive type (ADD). This diagnosis came after years of not having "the correct" diagnosis for his

systematic method. Instead, he appeared to work as ideas came to him, moving from the very top of the page, to the chest, from one side to the other, and back. In moving around the page, Felix also moved his chair, sliding up and down the table while he worked, rather than moving the paper or working from section to section.

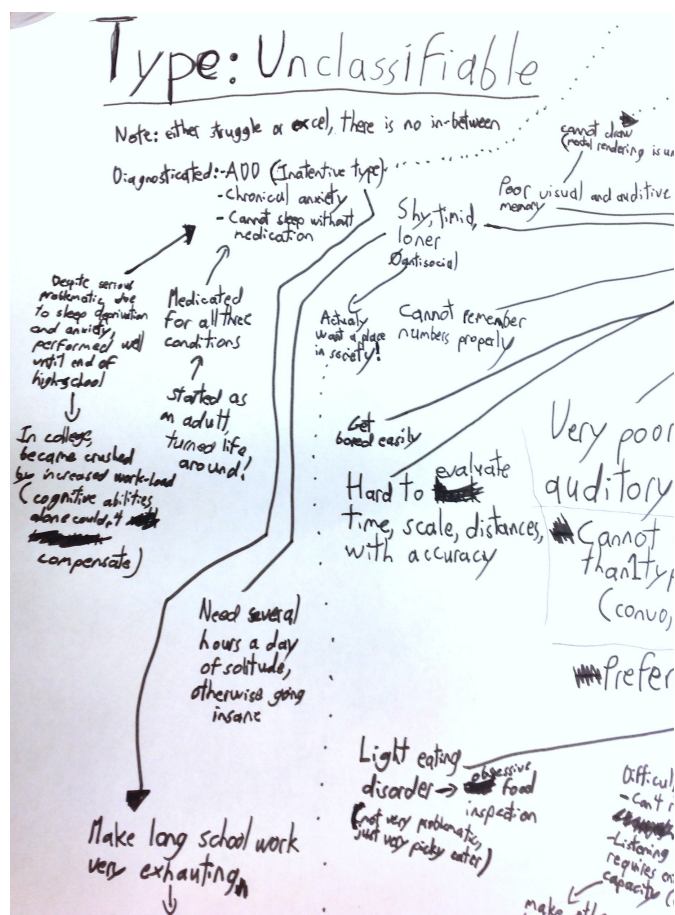


Figure 13. Felix's interpretation of his symptoms

Secondly, Felix chose to complete his Body Biography using simply a black marker to write only words onto the body. There were no images, nor were there tactile items on his Body Biography, but instead he included various words relating to his identification, his interests, and his personality traits, along with lines (dotted and solid) and arrows to connect it all together. Also, he focused more on the head and chest area of his body, with only two items below the waist of the body. Those two items represent an interest in walking for relaxation and how he considers any body part other than the head to be “unimportant.”

With respect to placement of words and overall organization of his Body Biography, Felix explains that the left side is “mainly flaws”, the right side is

“mainly gifted” and the middle section of the chest/torso focuses on his interests and dislikes. Finally, the ideas and themes that were important to Felix, and prevalent on his completed Body Biography, included ADHD and its symptoms, the analytical workings of his mind, his difficulties with auditory attention, as well issues with dexterity and writing, which interfere with several facets of his academic and everyday life. How Felix's identification and education, along

with the themes that he focuses on connected to and formed his sense of self-identity and self-concept became very clear as the discussion with Felix continued.

Social Identity Theory. How is the notion of social comparison relevant for a student who was identified as gifted at a very young age, but who never experienced gifted education? How does the change from a private high school to a public high school with lower expectations influence Felix's social identity? How do the labels of *gifted* and *learning disability* influence Felix's self-perceptions in answering the question, *Who Am I?*

Felix sees himself primarily as French-Canadian. He also sees himself as a shy, timid loner who has ADHD, without the hyperactive component, but struggles very much with the inattentive component. He also sees himself as very creative, as original and eccentric, and even as a political activist. Overall, he notes that people generally have a difficult time defining him, since, "sometimes [they] think I am a hard-core realistic, [theoretic], like, [but also], "you're an artistic person, you do creative stuff and you like these weird things." In terms of those "weird things" he discusses collecting pop culture collectibles and having an interest in learning about and being part of small political groups. With all of these self-identifiers, Felix appears as a very complex individual who has struggled with the identification process. Thus, how does this experience with various times of testing and a series of diagnoses influence how he forms his social identity through social comparisons?

As with each participant, Felix was asked to propose how his Body Biography might compare to one completed by another individual. Specifically, how his Body Biography might

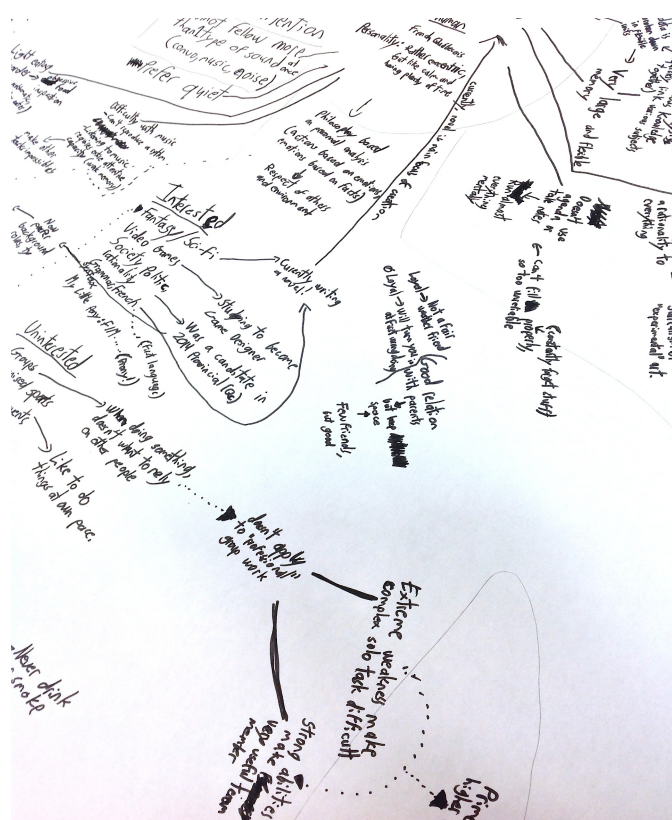


Figure 14. Felix's descriptions of interests/ dislikes, and self-perceptions of strengths and weaknesses

compare to someone identified as only gifted, or as only having a learning disability, or someone who experienced a different educational background than he did. In comparing himself to someone identified as only gifted, Felix proposes that “a lot of gifted people” may have difficulties with knowing how to, “structure their own thought or show it (...),” which is something he struggles with as well. Even though Felix feels that his mind works in a very structured way and that he could learn about any topic if he had the desire to, he also discusses struggling with expressing a thought or an idea in a way that others understand. A second similarity in comparison to those who are gifted presents when he expresses that, “I’m an original, eccentric person,” and, “maybe that’s sort of similar with other gifted people.” Here, he is identifying as a gifted individual and there is no mention of having a learning disability or dexterity issues. Even though Felix tends to focus on himself more than how others would feel or be, he does offer certain similarities between himself and those who are gifted without a learning disability, and he appears to identify strongly with the gifted component of his identification.

In the second comparison scenario, Felix was asked to propose how his Body Biography might be different from someone identified as LD-only. The focus in this case was on his ADHD diagnosis, without the hyperactivity component because, “that’s not myself”. He notes that he has researched ADHD online since he is “personally affected by it,” and that his, “profile looked very similar to a lot of person with ADD. You know the interests sort of stuff, easily bored, uh, but, uh, you know, with good, uh, notice everything, good attention to details (...).” While not directly comparing himself to others, he further discusses how, “I always felt that if I uh, had the hyperactivity disorder, I would have been diagnosed way faster.” He felt while the inattentive component was, “a fairly common build for ADD,” it also impeded or somehow interfered with receiving the “proper” diagnosis for the difficulties he was having, both academically and personally.

For the final comparison scenario, Felix was asked to propose how his Body Biography might compare to someone who experienced a different educational background. Felix did not experience gifted classes, nor did receive extra support for his learning difficulties, however, he did attend both a private and a public high school. In this comparison, Felix focuses on how being in a gifted program, “doesn’t really make people better.” He further explains how, for him:

I never felt limited by, uhh, by being in a mainstream rather than in a, a private [school]. (...) if I wanted to do something, I did it. In fact, the lower expectation in high school

(...) allowed me to, you know, invest elsewhere, (...) be curious elsewhere, (...) in a more general sense than if I had to, (...) perform a lot.

Thus, Felix feels that academically, there is no great advantage to a gifted program nor is there an advantage for students in a private school. To him, if the individual has the desire and curiosity to learn, then that individual should take it upon him or herself to do so, like he did.

In summary, when asked to make comparisons between himself and relevant *in-groups* or *out-groups*, Felix appears to have a difficult time separating his own experiences and reflecting on the experiences of others. However, Felix's own experiences - academic, social, and emotional- as a result of his identification process have influenced his self-perceptions of his social identity. How, then, do these experiences influence his self-perceptions of strengths, weaknesses, and self-concept?

Self-concept. How does Felix perceive his strengths and weaknesses, abilities and disability in terms of academic and non-academic self-concept, or self-concept in general? When asked to discuss his strengths, Felix quite plainly states how, "(...) you can't be good with everything." Explaining this declaration further, he notes that, "sometimes I feel [that] if I'm very [strong] in something and I'm very weak in [an]other thing, I feel it's linked (...)." While this does not explain how he perceives his strengths, it does offer insight into how he perceives his G/LD identification as well as his general self-concept. He accepts that he cannot and does not excel in every area, whether this relates to academic self-concept or to life in general, it exemplifies an aspect of emotional self-concept where he is content with himself as he is. Other strengths that Felix recognizes on his Body Biography include his ability to assimilate information and the "almost bureaucratic" way that his mind works, which relates to his perceptions of both academic and general self-concepts. In particular, when discussing how his mind functions, he explains how:

I have a very large memory. Very flexible. I can always add things. Reconsider it. I break all data into small piece. I can easily modify it and add new ones. Constantly juggling. I see my memory as less of a visual and auditive library and more like a maelstrom of information. I have difficulty with precise fact. [I'm much better] with general connections, with the general thing.

Contrastingly, when asked to discuss his weaknesses, he simply replies, "more on the left side [of the Body Biography]." However, upon examining the words and items that he placed on the left side of the paper, one gains a deeper understanding of how he perceives his weaknesses

and how those weaknesses relate to the domains of self-concept. For example, the left side of the Body Biography features having a slow reaction time and, “rather useless, poor dexterity,” symptoms of his ADD, lack of sleep and anxiety during high school and until he was placed on proper medication for his diagnosis, and how the options are to, “either struggle or excel, there is no in between.” Thus, Felix sees his strengths as his mind and his ability to assimilate information, while he sees his weaknesses including dexterity issues, ADHD and its symptoms as they influence his academic and general self-concepts.

Looking more closely at his academic experiences and the influences on his self-concept, Felix’s discussion on transferring from a private high school to a public high school certainly offers insight into his self-perceptions. In particular, he recalls the event as:

Well, as I remember, at the time, I felt like a huge shame, you know. Like I can’t do it. In the end (...) I don’t feel bad (...) about it. Uh, I think it was the right decision to go in public. It, you know, I wasn’t less smart because I went to the public school. It’s just uh, was a slower pace and helped me get a bearing (...).

This recollection relates to both academic and emotional self-concepts. Academically, he felt like the private high school setting was not a good fit for him, while emotionally, he felt shame in transferring high schools. However, the slower pace alleviated some of his anxiety related to the pressures to perform at the higher academic standard.

Socially, Felix finds it difficult to find common interests with others, which affects his perceptions of social self-concept. More positive contributions to his social self-concept derive from being part of a political group with shared interests and goals, and he describes being close with his parents. His parents in particular have been a significant source of support throughout his social and emotional struggles.

Another important piece of Felix’s Body Biography is his perceived impairment with hand dexterity. He explains that he “lacks dexterity”, has a slow reaction time, and has a poor kinesthetic sense. These difficulties not only contribute to a poor sense of physical self-concept, but they also influenced his academic self-concept while in high school. For example, he found writing essays in high school, as he wrote too slowly so he would have to forego writing a conclusion and/or planning the essay out before writing the final draft. He explains how he would, “...skip the draft completely and just, you know, make a sloppy final copy and it wasn’t too much problem.” Finding a way to compensate for his difficulty, he was able to adapt. However, now in university, he uses a laptop for writing essays and is given extended time.

Summary. Even though Felix focuses very intensely on having difficulties with his hands and dexterity, he still completed his Body Biography by writing words and drawing lines with a singular black marker. His perception of being gifted is strongly tied to how his mind functions and his mental capacities to deal with new information, while his disabilities are situated within his physical limitations and his ADHD symptoms. Thus, he does not appear to see himself as G/LD in a holistic sense. Instead, he appears to compartmentalize the two components. He appears to see the mind as part of the gifted label even though the inattentive difficulties and the inability to process stimuli in specific ways due to the ADHD diagnosis also involves the mind and its ability to function. Conversely, issues with his dexterity and reaction time are seen as the “disability” and involve the body in a more general and external sense.

Overall, Felix has a unique perception of himself and the world surrounding him. He accepts himself for who is and even though he does not explicitly refer to himself as being G/LD, he notes that, “[high] strength comes with [high] weakness,” which is quite an astute summarization of the G/LD dichotomy.

Graham

With his short, dark brown hair, beard, and glasses, Graham arrived eager to participate in the research study. Upon introducing himself, Graham was quick to begin, completing the consent form and demographic questionnaire with enthusiasm. While each question on the demographic questionnaire was answered, not a great deal of detail was provided - a theme that would reoccur throughout his participation. However, his responses to the demographic questionnaire revealed that both his father and his aunt are identified as gifted.

Originally from Manitoba, Graham was identified as gifted and dyslexic upon entering post-secondary education to complete an undergraduate degree in Globalization. While not formally diagnosed as a child, due in part to being homeschooled, he describes memories passed on through family stories that he has internalized as evidence of his ‘giftedness’ and the beginning of his struggle with dyslexia:

Well, when I was maybe two or three, I was, my family likes to say different examples. But the sort of thing I would do was I would take out all my toys, line them up in a parade, and I’d put them away. And then two months later, I would line them up in the same-ordered parade. I’d remember how I’d set up the parade last time. They were amazed at that. And I’d also, say, be able to listen to the news in the background and then next time I would speak to the grown-up I would just remember what I’d heard on the news and spew it back. And so, I would come up to my, say grandma, when I was two

and try to spark a conversation about nuclear waste (laughs). I wouldn't say that I truly understood what nuclear waste was, but I knew that if I picked up some of the key words and spew them back, I could sort of pretend to have deepened conversations. Yeah, so that definitely brought the gifted. And then maybe, uh, when I was six, seven, eight, sort of the difficulty with the writing. Uhm, and the writing as well. So, that probably hinted the dyslexia, but no, uh, the formal, uh, it would be diagnostic? Was for the university. So, that I would have the accommodations.

An important part of Graham's Body Biography and discussion was that he and his brother were homeschooled together by their mother, interacting with other homeschooled children, "say twice a week, and did mostly, like, field trips and oral presentations, and other sports," with the field trips including museums, science laboratories, architectural landmarks within the community, and farms and petting zoos as destinations. Within the homeschooling setting, Graham was given the freedom to explore topics of his own interest and was granted the sensitivity to complete assignments and presentations in ways that best suited him. He describes homeschooling as "student-centered", "open-ended", and as a system that "encourages creativity", which may explain why his Body Biography was focused on the self and his own interests, while not focusing, or even alluding to, his G/LD identification.



Figure 15. "T-shirt" area of Graham's Body Biography

Body biography and discussion. During his participation, Graham was inquisitive about the study, asking about the purpose, the history of and reasoning for a Body Biography, the methodology of the study, and whether the placement of images would be important to its results, and yet he was very guarded about himself in what he chose to include on his Body Biography. The items that he chose to place on the

Body Biography were a representation of his interests (i.e., favourite foods, visual arts, entertainment, and places he has visited), with each item coming from the selections of stickers and magazines available to each participant- the exception being the coloured pipe cleaners that he used to define the edges of the “t-shirt”. Graham was the only participant to organize all the images and items within the confines of a “t-shirt” in the chest/torso area of the body, with the rest of his Body Biography remaining purposefully void of images (see Figure 16).

In discussing his Body Biography, Graham appeared to amuse himself with his responses to the researcher’s questions and presented his items in terms of ‘interconnections’, rather than individually. There was no particular pattern or grouping in terms of where he placed his items in his biography, a strategy that he felt separated him from those who experienced a more institutionalized educational setting. While the aspect of having a learning disability, or even explicit references to giftedness, were not evident as ideas or themes upon viewing Graham’s Body Biography, deeper insight into *Who Am I?*, social identity, and group membership emerged with further discussion.



Figure 16. Full-length image y of Graham’s completed Body Biography

Social Identity Theory. How is the notion of social comparison relevant for a student who was homeschooled until entering university? How do the labels of *gifted* and *learning disability* influence Graham’s self-perceptions? In terms of *Who Am I?* Graham seems to focus more, as mentioned, on interests, rather than character traits or statements of “I am ____”. However, within those images there are glimpses into who Graham is and his self-identity.

Graham sees himself as a well-rounded, put-together, relaxed man who enjoys art (i.e., visual and cinematic), cultural experiences such an outdoor market and immersing himself into

the environment of a vibrant city, travelling, having a good time with friends, and “presenting yourself” well to others. He represents the idea of presenting himself to others with an image of actor Josh Brolin in a suit used to convey, “looking sharp” and an image of a man’s moustache to represent liking “the grooming side” of having facial hair. Interestingly, the notion of presenting himself was not exclusive to maintaining physical appearances. For instance, when asked to note one or two items from his Body Biography that he felt best represented who he was, he selected the image of a man relaxing in the Sun, explaining it as, “ (...) sort of the projection of being relaxed, being chill, sort of being in a desirable location, the vastness of the ocean.” That idea of being relaxed was further perpetuated by an image of a woman reading in her bed, with a glass of wine, and articulating that he values his down time. He also derives a sense of social identity through his athletic skills in martial arts and the places to which he has travelled, contributing to his self-perceptions of being a well-travelled and worldly man.

Exploring further the notion of social identity and how he perceives himself in comparison to others, Graham was then asked to hypothesize how his biography could compare to other homeschooled students. Without hesitation, he noted that, “people with a homeschooled background have a very, say, open-ended education. So, very focused on encouraging creativity.” ‘Creativity’ is a characteristic he used to describe himself earlier in the discussion, thus perhaps showing that he identifies with other homeschooled students who are also creative. Whereas, in comparison to students who experienced more general and institutionalized education, Graham felt that his biography would be, “... more structured, compartmentalized, maybe, say, pictures of a certain theme would maybe be grouped together whereas instead of interconnected?” showing a difference between him and non-homeschooled students. Interestingly, “gifted” and “learning disability” were two concepts not readily apparent through the images Graham chose to complete his biography. Whether this was due to having been diagnosed and identified later in life, being homeschooled, or simply having, “a certain obsession with perfection,” the reason is unknown. However, when asked to compare his biography to gifted individuals (no dyslexia), Graham offers insight into how dyslexia influences his learning:

I - due to my (...) dyslexia I learned definitely much more through uh, like the, the visual. So, uh, sort of a photographic memory and I really like magazines, and comic books, and movies, and fine art. And I definitely learned a lot through that. So as much as I loved to read and I learned a lot through reading, uhm, the writing’s always been more difficult. So maybe for someone who’s only as gifted would definitely have sort of that, that confidence in their writing. And then I would probably see much more sort of

passive, maybe poems or, uh, maybe anecdotes. Stuff like that.

Even though Graham was asked to compare himself to other gifted students, he focuses on himself, while briefly proposing that gifted students may include more words on their biography.

Finally, for students dealing with a learning disability, and not identified as gifted, Graham felt that, “if you’re only identified with the disability, maybe not as much forward thinking? Or no, well... uh... less of a positive future, and more of a negative path,” suggesting that, to him, “giftedness” protects an individual from darker perceptions. That sense of darkness was certainly not evident on Graham’s Body Biography, and with the exception of “a certain obsession with perfection”, it was not part of how Graham sees himself individually, but it is however part of how he sees himself in comparison to those identified with a learning disability.

In summary, Graham appears to define “the self” based on personal interests and appearances, both physically and socially. He focuses on his homeschooling education, but does not, however, define who he is based on the labels of “gifted” or “dyslexic”, unless specifically prompted to do so. Thus, how does this perception of who he is relate to self-concept?

Self-concept. How does Graham perceive his abilities and disability in terms of academic and non-academic self-concept, or self-concept in general? Much of Graham’s academic self-concept is rooted within his homeschooling experience. While not explicitly reflected in his Body Biography in terms of the images he used, it was reflected in, “(...) being very sort of student-centered or sort of self-centered (...)” and in terms of the freedom to, “(...) go and find or the things I like and go and study them,” or in this case, to use images that spoke to him or that were of interest to him in completing his Body Biography.

He does not discuss particular strengths or weaknesses, especially in terms of giftedness or having a learning disability, unless specifically asked or prompted to do so. When asked how he would describe himself, Graham easily responds, “probably smart. (...) Uh, maybe creative, uh... like adventurous. I like trying new things,” and further explains that his Body Biography, “(...) represents my strengths in that, sort of the... the... journalism side would be sort of my curiosity, sort of the yacht and the city’d be more sort of my, my ability to deal well with stress, to go with the flow, to relax.” While meant as a strength, Graham gives insight into his academic struggle by alluding that an image of a woman reading represents, “sort of the study and perseverance, the hard work,” involved in academic achievement.

Graham was then asked to propose two or three weaknesses to discuss with the

researcher, after realizing that hadn't selected images based on, "thinking about a particular weakness." While the first weakness, focusing on perfection, relates to a more global sense of self-concept, the remaining two weaknesses relate to emotional and social self-concept, respectively. Specifically, the idea of needing to work on distancing himself from emotional or negative situations by taking a moment to step back shows that he knows his emotional reactions and recognizes when he needs to alter his emotions. However, this need to regulate his emotions does not align with the notion of being "chill and relaxed", which he appears to prefer to see himself as. Meanwhile, the third weakness related to taking into consideration the feelings of others shows his sensitivity in his relationships and interactions, specifically when he mentions, "(...) maybe being, uh, like a bit curt, not always being, say, the most respectful, maybe being a bit too forward." Graham does not divulge to whom he is referring within these interactions, or if it is simply a general statement towards his relationships, but he does briefly lament on an image of love, noting that it, "made me think of sort of past relationships and sort of hopes for future relationships." Not only does Graham derive his self-concept through his educational experiences, interpretations of negative or emotional situation, and social interactions, but he also derives a sense self-concept through his physical appearance. By maintaining his beard and presenting himself within a "jet-set lifestyle," Graham nurtures a sense of pride, which contributes to his physical and general self-concepts.

Homeschooling not only contributes to his general and academic self-concepts, but it also contributes to his social self-concept. Being educated in an environment of only his brother and his mother provided a very small social group, and a strong dependence on his family for support, encouragement, and self-concept development. His relationship with his mother is a significant one in his life (he does not discuss his father to the same extent) and he discusses interacting with other homeschooled students for field trips and oral presentations; he did not express a sense of missing out on the kind of social interactions he would have experienced if he had attended a public school. Although he was quite capable in his conversational skills, the researcher is left to wonder how the homeschooling experience contributed to such a strong sense of not only social self-concept, but to each self-concept domain.

Summary. A first glance of Graham's Body Biography might lack depth or insight into who he is and how his G/LD identification, and educational experiences, have shaped his self-concept. However, this is not the case. Graham's social identity and self-concept are strongly

rooted within his homeschooling background and the freedom it afforded him to question, explore, and present himself however he pleases. Graham summarizes his Body Biography, and who he is, quite succinctly in saying:

I feel like (...) things that are important to me, sort of my paths of my life, (...) there's a balance to it even if it's not necessarily symmetric. But there's no one part that sort of stands out compared to the others.

Thus, Graham's Body Biography is a reflection of that balance, both visually and in representation. The items and images blended into themes, rather than individual ideas, and he, liked, "how it sort of all meshed together. You can take a step back and sort of have an idea of the whole. The whole as being more than the pieces."

Hannah

Hannah arrived in good spirits and was enthusiastic to participate in the study, even offering her thoughts on how important this study could be for students identified as G/LD. Immediately after completing the consent form and demographic questionnaire, she collected personal items from her backpack that she had selected the night before to place onto her Body Biography. These items included photographs of herself, images of animals, printed poems and song lyrics, as well as pages torn directly from her own personal journal. As the only participant of the study to be identified as G/LD once already in her first year of university, Hannah offers unique insight into her educational experiences and her perceptions the G/LD identification.

Hannah is now completing her third degree and is currently in her last year of a second graduate degree. However, the transition from high school to university was difficult for her and she, "suspected there was (...) something up, because I just, you know, I started to do some research online and I looked like, a lot of this sounds like me." The process of identification began as a result of a conversation with a professor during her first year of undergraduate studies when she was urged by that professor to seek help with the mental health services on campus. The reason why the professor urged Hannah to seek help with the mental health is unclear, however, during her time with the researcher, Hannah does discuss dealing with ongoing anxiety and depression throughout her life. As will be discussed in more detail within her Body Biography and discussion, Hannah disclosed experiencing abuse and violence in her childhood and has some involvement with the foster care system.

After an unsuccessful meeting with a staff member within health services, she turned to

another student service on campus to apply for a Bursary for Students with Disabilities, which is an Ontario bursary for students with disabilities that provides students with permanent disabilities with funding for services and/or equipment to aid with their education. How exactly this type of bursary relates to Hannah's needs, as she has expressed to the researcher, is not clear since she would have been required to provide documentation of her disability and needs to receive this bursary. However, she completed the application and then discusses returning to the university's health services to receive an assessment for learning difficulties. For Hannah, she was simply searching for, "(...) a piece of paper saying something so that I [could] get an accommodation - even that lousy little accommodation of extra time." Unsurprisingly to Hannah, the specialist identified several learning difficulties. "(...) [N]aturally the math was like the worst," along with difficulties with working memory abilities. Yet she scored, "really high on essay writing [and] verbal abstract reasoning." Hannah notes being surprised to find that she had scored high in any area, as she "(...) was just hoping to get just, like, low scores in a lot of things so I could just be like, 'Here. Leave me alone. I suck at this.' Uhm, and just to prove that." Regardless of her initial resistance to being assessed and diagnosed with dyscalculia, she also discusses feeling like there was more, "(...) like there's a lot more dys's in there." Alternatively, the gifted identification was never explicitly written or explained to her by the specialist, and Hannah bases her gifted identification on seeing her results of the tests and then deciding for herself that the scores were within the high percentile range.

The process of identification for Hannah is difficult to follow and understand. In particular, it is unclear how she could have received a bursary for a disability *before* having been 'officially' diagnosed as having any type of disability. It is also difficult to understand how there is no evidence or awareness from adults throughout her childhood and formative education to the first year of university of Hannah exhibiting giftedness or learning difficulties to the degree of having a learning disability diagnosis. However, she lived with different families during her childhood and she may not have stayed within the same school board during her education. So teachers may not have realized that her academic struggles were not merely a result of her familial and home circumstances. Regardless of the past, in the present, Hannah identifies as a G/LD student, although perhaps more of a self-identification than the other participants involved in this particular study. However, the tests that Hannah completed as part of the assessment for learning difficulties were not specifically aimed at identifying giftedness as well. A gifted

identification is not as crucial to learning at the post-secondary level, while a LD may require academic support by the university. Additionally, Hannah felt that the staff member who completed her assessment *should have* told her about her giftedness, but the staff member was more focused on the math disability at the time. Further discussion regarding diagnoses, school experiences, as well as non-academic experiences, reveals insight into how she perceives the *gifted* and *learning disabled* labels, her social identity, and her self-concept in relation to her G/LD identification.

Body biography and discussion. As mentioned, Hannah chose to include several of her own personal items onto her Body Biography and she spent a great deal of time formatting the



items (i.e., cutting them into specific sizes or shapes) before purposefully placing them in specific regions of the Body Biography. Hannah worked very slowly, taking over two hours to complete her Body Biography, however she also had the highest volume of items on her biography, covering almost every inch of space from the top of the page to the bottom of the page. In addition to personal photographs, images of animals (as well as a

Figure 17. Full-length image of Hannah's completed Body Biography

tidal wave and a little girl), printed poems and song lyrics, and pages torn directly from her journals. Furthermore, Hannah chose to write over 50 descriptive words to express her self-doubt, fears, emotional states, strengths, weaknesses, and other character traits. Finally, in terms of the Body Biography Kit and extra items available in the room for participants to use, Hannah chose to create items using construction paper, felt, popsicle sticks, magazine images, as well as stickers and glitter glue.

Several important themes emerged from Hannah's Body Biography and discussion. These themes included personal experiences of childhood abuse and having to grow up too quickly, expectations from others, self-doubt and negativity, depression and anxiety, being strong and resilient, feeling inadequate, being uncomfortable with her body, and an extreme dislike for school and the education system from elementary grades all the way to the university setting. Much of Hannah's focus is on

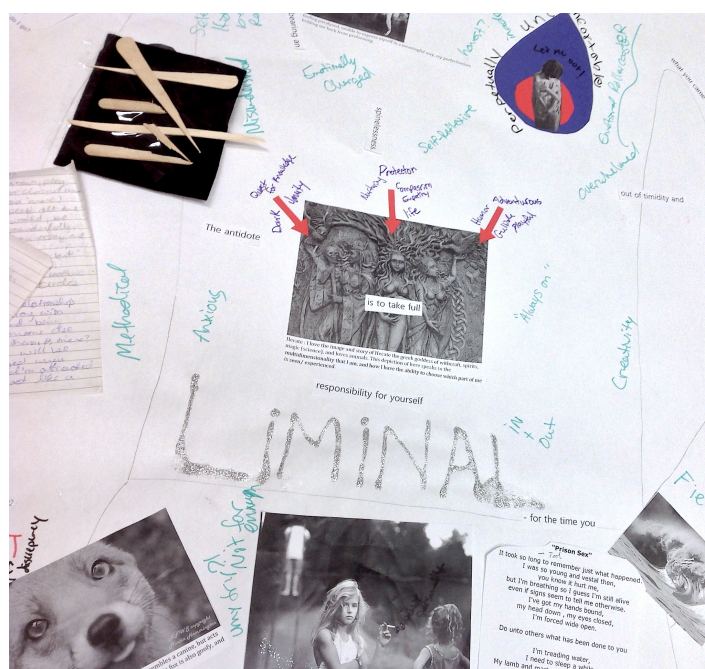


Figure 18. Torso of Hannah's Body Biography

negative aspect of herself and her Body Biography and discussion are infused with dark tones. Whether this is an outcome of the difficult life she has experienced, or simply part of her nature, it is unknown. In particular, Hannah discusses having experienced a home of violence as a young child, and how this interfered with her ability to concentrate in school. The experiences undoubtedly influence how she perceives social identity and self-concept both in the past and the present, however, the focus of this study is on the G/LD identification and its influence on the self-perceptions of social identity and self-concept.

The placement of items was very purposeful to Hannah, with an "emotional centre" to the body and words scattered throughout the body as they are, "in my being." One of the most important sections of Hannah's Body Biography was the bottom of the page. Here, Hannah places a course syllabus with a pencil piercing through the pages in the leg area of the biography.

importantly, she feels that she has a wide range of interests, such as writing poetry and song lyrics, but doesn't feel as though she is good enough, or that she has not been given the appropriate tools and circumstances due to family situations and financial needs to achieve her goals. Even though she gains a sense of self in her poetry and writing, she often feels, "quite paralyzed in my own body because I don't really feel like I'm good at anything." This feeling of inadequacy relates to academic as well as to life in general. Most notably, Hannah identifies very strongly as G/LD and laments about her difficulties with mathematics, however, with all of the words and items placed on her Body Biography, there is no explicit mention of her G/LD identification and how this becomes part of her social identity or social comparison.

Exploring further the notion of social identity theory and how she perceives herself in comparison to others, Hannah was then asked to hypothesize how her Body Biography might compare to individuals identified as gifted-only, as LD-only, and to those who had experienced a different educational background than she had. In comparing herself to an individual identified as gifted-only, Hannah recalls a peer from high school who she was, "extremely jealous of," as he had, "that great ability to just like talk, [to] get himself out of anything." Choosing to compare how he might have completed a Body Biography, Hannah felt his would simply be more verbal than visual. Next, Hannah was asked how her biography might be similar and/or different to an individual identified with only a learning disability. She begins by noting that her biography does not specifically reflect her difficulties with math, even though it does clearly depict her struggles and discontentment with the epistemological structure of the education system. In particular, she declares, "I don't respect that diagnosis, that's why." However, she then proposed that it could be similar in organization, in the, "non-coherency, like kind of being scattered in who they are, because don't think people are just linear." As for a difference, she felt that, "There might be people who are more methodically organized than I," however, she also felt that, "(...) others might also purposely place certain items and pictures in areas to depict a meaning - that, that can be a little more readily obvious, I guess..." In this comparison, Hannah does not seem to focus specifically on individuals identified as LD, but rather on any individual who might have approached completing a Body Biography differently. Finally, in comparing her Body Biography to an individual with a different educational background, Hannah felt that those who receive accommodations are singled out as something different and that they may not have "less of a hate on for school". Overall, she felt that G/LD students who had been identified sooner than

she, and who had received accommodations, “might be *slightly* less insecure.” In particular, she describes how:

(...) school in general would still be a very contested issue. Like, it would still provoke... feelings, like maybe not such positive feelings towards it. You know, having to struggle. And maybe in certain areas it would be easier for them than others, but I feel like that, that school and their abilities might still feel in question. It's just it might be slightly more, well, slightly less insecure about those abilities because, you know, I, maybe some of those programs did help them work on those things. They just know that the tools they're using are just tools, but that they can do so much more.

In summary, Hannah is a complex individual with self-deprecating sense of who she is, focusing on the negative aspects of herself more than the positive ones. When comparing herself to others, she finds it difficult to separate her own experiences from others, with the exceptions of acknowledging how others might be slightly less insecure than she is and that other G/LD students might share her negative attitude towards school. Additionally, Hannah appears to be envious of others, particularly her gifted peer from high school. Overall, Hannah defines herself based on her school experiences, past and present, and how she does not feel she measures up to the expectations that the educational system sets for students. Thus, how does this perception of who she is relate to self-concept? How do these perceptions relate to her sense of strengths and weaknesses, as well as to the domains of self-concept according to the Marsh/Shavelson model of self-concept?

Self-concept. How does Hannah perceive her abilities and disability in terms of and non-academic self-concept, or self-concept in general? How does she perceive her strengths and weaknesses in relation to her G/LD identification? When asked to reflect on how her completed Body Biography represents her strengths, Hannah responds that:

I guess it kind of shows that I have a lot of interests, which in theory should be good. 'Cause I feel like, if given the chance, I feel like I could have a lot to contribute. Uhm, even though I'm not entirely sure what my marketable talents are.

She then explains how her Body Biography highlights, “a positive self-esteem, but also a deeply insecure self-esteem. And it's like a battle. An interesting battle that isn't necessarily awful, cause I've grown a lot from it.” In addition to self-growth, Hannah felt that her Body Biography represents her capacity for self-reflection, which she considers to be another strength. These perceptions of strengths relate to a general sense of self-concept, as well as emotional self-concept, since Hannah is acutely aware of her internal battle of being secure and insecure, but

also of her emotional growth. Conversely, in terms of how her Body Biography represents her weaknesses, she explains how her biography shows her that she is, “keeping myself down in a lot of ways, focusing on a lot of negative and insecure stuff and letting myself (...) be paralyzed so I’m not practicing and producing.” She continues by further explaining that, “It’s being afraid to start something and not trusting myself because I’m not good at finishing things.” Thus, this feeling of paralysis influences not only her academic and emotional self-concepts, but also a more general self-concept in terms of her life.

Socially, Hannah finds relating to others difficult and she feels not only, “hidden and misunderstood,” but as though, “not many are interested in talking about the things I enjoy talking about.” In particular, she feels as though others don’t, “enjoy speaking with me because it’s as if I’m “always on” or ready to get into deep discussions.” Furthering her struggle with social interactions, she explains how, “(...) I can make small chat and talk about things I don’t care about, but that gets really exhausting and boring for me, like, really fast.” These instances of social difficulties even stem back to elementary school, where she had already “experienced so much” in her home life that is was, “really hard to have friends to, you know, I had no one to discuss these things with cause, you know, they didn’t understand or you know, their parents thought I was this creepy lunatic girl (laugh).” Although, in high school she, “found a small niche of friend so that was, that was kinda what kept me going through school.” In terms of family support, she describes not having support from her father (she does not mention her relationship with her mother), and the difficulties of trusting others as she moved within a foster care system. However, she highlights a close relationship with her grandmother and being with a life partner, “(...) who also enjoys discussing the myriad of things I find interesting.” Thus, Hannah’s social interactions may not have always contributed to a positive sense of social self-concept, yet she has managed to find others who accept her as she is, providing her with stability and support and contributing positively to her sense of emotional self-concept.

However, maintaining a positive emotional self-concept is difficult for Hannah, as she appears to struggle with self-acceptance and not allowing perfectionism and familial circumstances to impede her in achieving her goals. She uses an image of an eyeball on her Body Biography to represent, “constantly internalizing things,” and how she uses self-reflection to, “always assess my beliefs, my values, or, you know, kind of what I’ve been though and how I reacted and what I can do to do better next time.” This type of emotional regulation

contributes to her emotional self-concept. She also uses pages torn from her personal journal to represent how she feels she, “ (...) can’t always get out what I’m trying to express and I feel like there’s so much in there, “ and how she is always, “cycling through various emotions throughout the day and try to bring that out in a constructive way is extremely frustrating - cause I want to do something, I don’t wanna be just inside myself.” Perpetuating her feelings of inadequacy, Hannah describes feeling uncomfortable in her own body, which relates to both emotional and physical self-concepts. Partially due to her negative experiences with abuse as a child, she feels emptiness inside, “like, a sad and dull emotion,” and how explains her discomfort in being touched by others. While much of Hannah’s discussion does not relate specifically to her experiences as a G/LD student, she does provide insight into her childhood experiences and the influence of these experiences upon the development of her self-concept.

Finally, academic self-concept is perhaps the most related to her learning difficulties and how these experiences speak to the experiences of an individual identified as gifted and with a learning disability. An over-arching theme for Hannah throughout her time with the researcher was her extreme dislike for school. Aside from her negative experiences in Grade 2 mathematics, she discusses enrolling in advanced placement biology in high school, completing a Bachelor’s of Science in Psychology, a Master’s degree in Human Rights and Conflict Studies, and currently working to obtain a Master’s degree in Anthropology. Regardless of these academic experiences and achievements, Hannah has never felt that she fits within the structure the education system demands of its students. To her, education should not be limited to being, “graded by your syntax, and spelling, and punctuation, and all these nitty-gritty details things that in the end don’t matter,” since, “the merit of your idea (...)” is what should be important. In terms of her identification and the possibility of receiving extra time as part of her educational accommodation at the university, Hannah does not feel that this adequately reflects her own situation. In particular, she laments that, “I don’t necessarily need more time, it’s just this isn’t how I express myself, you know. I much prefer verbal discussions over essays. I hate them.” She is, “(...) not motivated by grades. I don’t care about a grade. (...) I’m motivated by learning something new, being able to talk about it, and, and educate other people.” Overall, her academic experiences have left her with a sense of “why bother?” which also relates to emotional self-concept. However, at some point during her education, she must have received the positive

feedback, positive reinforcement, and the success necessary to consider continuing her post-secondary education even though her perceptions of education remain negative.

Thus, Hannah does not appear to have as strong of a self-concept as other participants included in this study. She focuses more on the negative aspects of who she is, rather than on the positive. However, her personal experiences and academic experiences have been instrumental in developing her sense of self-concept.

Summary. In summary, Hannah does not perceive herself in the most positive view, and she derives her self-concept from her past experiences, both in her personal life and academically. Even though she was not identified with dyscalculia until well into her first year of university, she describes having difficulty with mathematics beginning in Grade 2, continuing on to the present. Perhaps if Hannah had been identified while in the elementary grades, her perception of school and herself would be different. While family turmoil certainly influenced her social and emotional self-concept development, difficulty with mathematics throughout her formative education also appears to have a significant contributing influence upon her self-perceptions of academic self-concept.

Even though Hannah clearly identifies as G/LD, her Body Biography does not reflect either component of the identification. Again, perhaps if she had been identified earlier in her life, this would also be different. Perhaps then, a deeper picture of how these labels have influenced and shaped her social identity and self-concept might have emerged. She has not had the experiences the other participants have had in terms of developing coping strategies and understanding how to navigate education as a G/LD student. Instead, Hannah had found her own way to navigate the educational system and appears content to simply declare, “ (...) I don’t respect that diagnosis,” and to continue on with higher education regardless of her negative perceptions of school.

Isabelle

Living in Montreal during the time of data collection, Isabelle was the only participant who did not complete her participation in person with the researcher. Upon meeting with Isabelle via Skype to discuss her Body Biography, it became clear that she is a very talkative and strong-minded individual who was very happy to be a part of this study and to offer her own insights about the impact of the G/LD label on her past educational experiences and self.

Identified in Grade 1 for not being able to read as well as the rest of her same-aged peers, and she recounts the story as:

So, my parents were like, “What do you mean she can’t read? We read all the time together, she definitely can read.” But I had memorized entire storybooks and was able to tell my parents when they had missed words, like, I would get mad when they missed words, but I still couldn’t read.

As a consequence, Isabelle described enduring, “the first round of testing,” and, “by the time (...) I had finished Grade 2, I was already at the Grade 1 reading level.” She was later identified as gifted in verbal comprehension while in Grade 8, just before entering high school. Isabelle then discussed her high school years, which were comprised of four years at an arts-based high

school and one semester at a private school specializing in individualized learning for students with a range of educational needs. The specialized school allows students to personalize their education and she perceived this change as positive, since her academic needs were then met by completing assignments in ways that best suited her abilities.

Body biography and

discussion. Isabelle received the same Body Biography Kit (by mail) that the other participants of the study had had access to, with the exception of markers and other writing tools, as it was assumed that she would procure her own. Even with access to the kit of items, she did not use the items and chose instead to draw or write her items. In completing her biography,



Figure 20. Full-length image of Isabelle’s completed Body Biography

she explained that she had been aware of not including photos or other tactile items because she, “felt, like... it was... almost better to have like... everything for me being, like, handmade and hand-drawn and, like, from my own, uhm... perspective of it.”

Another interesting point about Isabelle’s Body Biography, as compared to other seven participants, is that she chose to focus on a particular time in her past, rather than on the present. Specifically, she focused on her high school experiences and having attending two different high school settings. Although, most of the discussion centered on her time at the arts-based high school rather than the LD-focused high school.

The items/words that she include on her biography were extremely significant to her perception of her high school experiences and they were placed onto the body with intention. One of the most important items placed on her Body Biography was the word “Potential”. This word, as she notes, still elicits an adverse reaction in her, as well as a certain amount of anxiety. She explains how, “it has come to be like a very triggering word for me,” and that, “It was like, so bad for my, like, self-esteem and for, like, the way I perceived myself,” just

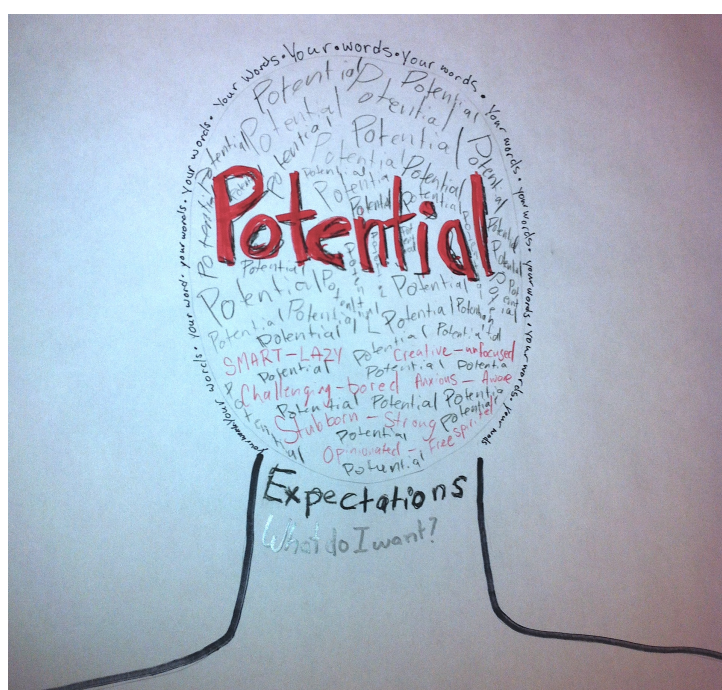


Figure 21. Perceptions of “Potential” represented on Isabelle’s Body Biography

because everyone was like, “you’re so smart and so whatever, but why can’t you do things?”

A second important piece of Isabelle’s Body Biography includes the written words in the head area as well “Expectations” and “What do I want?” in the neck area, which for Isabelle relates to:

(...) the whole, like, everyone telling me what to do and just never being able to voice what I wanted. (...) And just not having the space to do that, or not knowing how to do that. Like, being a 15-year old, or 16-year old, figuring out what, and then figuring how to say what you want is super difficult.

In moving downwards through the Body Biography and discussing each of the items Isabelle chose to include, one begins to see just how significantly and negatively the LD component of the G/LD label and identification impacted her high school experiences. For



Figure 23. Chest/torso area of Isabelle's Body Biography

example, Isabelle uses a belt drawn around the waist of the body as a metaphor, "(...) for me for feeling very restricted," and a set of scales to represent how high school was, "(...) very much a balancing act all the time." In particular, she discusses balancing her interactions with teachers, facing boredom in classes, and the simple fact of how an arts-based school creates high-pressured situations.

Written in the arms in blue marker are the words "Bored" and "Overwhelmed." While the colour of these words has no significance, the words themselves, however, further the notions of balance- academically, socially, and emotionally- while navigating her way through her high school years.

Finally, in both legs on the body are her drawings, or "doodles," which are, "at the bottom because it's like a very grounding thing for me." She describes how she would doodle, "all the time," in class and how her teachers, "would get so mad," at her for it. Even though she does not doodle as much now that she is in university, she views it as part of how she processed information during high school.



Figure 23. "Doodles" on Isabelle's Body Biography

Each of the items Isabelle chose for her Body Biography were selected with intent and purpose, and represented the negative experiences she had while in high school. Thus, how do these items, and those experiences as a result of her G/LD identification, contribute to answering the question *Who Am I?*, to her sense of identity within group membership, and her self-perceptions of self-concept and its sub-domains?

Social Identity Theory. How is the notion of social comparison relevant for Isabelle? How do the labels of *gifted* and *learning disability* influence her self-perceptions? In terms of *Who Am I?* Isabelle sees herself as someone who cannot tolerate bullying and someone who is often uncooperative with adults, often challenging them and needing their respect in order to give it back to them. She also sees herself as reflective, introspective, a perfectionist, a keener, and someone who loves to learn but who often finds herself, “very easily overwhelmed,” in trying to find an appropriate balance in the current phase of her life. Finally, she sees herself as G/LD, often focusing more on the LD component of the identification and its impact not only on her interactions with others, but also in her ability to succeed academically.

In terms of group membership, Isabelle focuses on her small group of close friends from high school as well as being part of choirs during her time at her arts-based high school. Here Isabelle gained a sense of who she both socially and within her extracurricular activities. Isabelle was then asked to consider various social comparisons between herself and students identified as gifted-only, as LD-only, and those who had experienced both a similar and different educational background to herself. In particular, when asked how her Body Biography might compare to someone identified as gifted-only, with no learning disability, the frustration both academically and socially due to the G/LD dichotomy was apparent as she notes that, “they wouldn’t have been as caught up with (...) getting stuck in the state of, like, wanting to do well and feeling like they couldn’t, and the challenges would be different.” Additionally, she proposes how, “people don’t tend to understand very well when you can be really, really good at one thing and then horrendously bad at others,” explaining the dichotomy of being intelligent, but not testing well. To Isabelle, it can leave others under the impression that you either, “don’t care,” or “you’re lazy, you’re not applying yourself,” and people, “don’t assume that it’s difficult for you.”

As for individuals who are identified with a LD, but not as gifted, Isabelle felt that the comparison would be similar in the fact these individuals would also feel restricted in the

approaches to learning in elementary and secondary schools. In proposing differences, however, Isabelle discusses how, “that pressure wouldn’t be there in that the same way,” but it really:

(...) has a lot to do with your parents and how they see academics and things like that. And it has a lot to do with like, your friends and your social settings, so it’s kind of hard to make a general relationships, but that’s what I would say.

Since Isabelle experienced two different educational settings throughout her teenaged years (i.e., the arts-based high school and the LD-focused high school), she was asked how her Body Biography might compare to an individual who had experienced the same kind of educational background as she had, as well as to those had experienced a more traditional educational path. Firstly, in comparison to those who had experienced a similar educational path to her own, she felt that many of the differences between her and *them* would be due to personal character traits. For example, she felt that she internalizes, “a lot of things so, maybe other people wouldn’t have taken those things quite as seriously.” Furthermore, she felt that much of her discord with teachers was due to acting out when she didn’t feel respected and, “other people may not have had those issues because they’re a little bit more cooperative with teachers.” However, the most significant difference was in relation to her experience at LD-focused high school as opposed the arts-based high school. She notes that others who fit into a more structured system may not have had the same difficulties, but for Isabelle:

(...) the way that my brain works doesn’t fit into the paradigm of high school, and the way that you have to take classes, and the way that things are segregated, and you have to do this in this way.

As for similarities between herself and others who experienced a similar educational background, Isabelle notes again how she had more, “issues with, probably, the institutional aspect of it,” than other students. She also explains that she likely feels more discontentment than others for how adults and specialists:

(...) spend a couple hours with you probably everyday or every couple days, but (...) don’t really know you, but somehow feel that they should be able to speak about your experience and your life (...).

This discontentment about someone else having a say in what Isabelle needed and wanted during her high school experience is an extremely significant theme for her. That sense of being restricted, being quieted, and not having a say in what she felt was best for her was something that she struggled with and still seems to hold on to in the present. Furthermore, she touches

upon her mental health struggles and how, “anxiety and stuff is typical with my friends that I know who are also in gifted (...).” Overall for this comparison of similarities between herself and those who experienced a similar educational path, Isabelle focuses on the adults involved in making decisions for her because of her LD, as well a gifted *in-group* between herself and other gifted students who also experience anxiety.

Finally, when asked to compare herself to those who experienced an entirely different educational path, Isabelle felt that, “(...) if I had gone to [the LD-focused high school] my entire education, my perception of school would be completely different, as would high school.” This is an incredibly powerful offering by Isabelle, as the question was to compare how students with a different educational path would be similar or different, but instead, Isabelle focuses on how *she* would be different if *she* had experienced the different educational path. Also, it highlights the negative perceptions Isabelle has regarding her high school experience while at the arts-based high school and the difference in attending the LD-focused high school.

Her discussion on the differences of students who did not experience the same education then changes to how, “teachers aren’t educated very well in how to deal with disabilities, people don’t believe it,” and, “that the really rigid systems are not made for pretty much most people.” Her focus is on how others don’t understand, how the school system doesn’t understand, and how, “high school doesn’t allow at all to make your own education, or like have any sort of fluidity.” Finally, she discusses the differences in terms of spending four years in an arts-based school where, “the expectations are a lot higher,” and there’s, “definitely more pressure than like other types of high schools.”

In summary, it is clear that Isabelle views the freedom given to her during her time at the LD-focused high school as important to her, as is mutual respect between herself and her teachers, and being listened to by individuals who “think” they know what she needs and wants better than her. It is also clear that in the social comparisons Isabelle was asked to make, she has a difficult time separating her own experiences from what other students might have experienced. In terms of her participation, Isabelle appears to identify more as LD and much of the conversation around social comparisons focuses on how she was not listened to and how she felt restricted by the adults involved in making decisions for her, *because of* her learning disability and difficulties. Thus, she tends to focus more on the negative aspects of learning disabilities on the high school experience and perhaps identifies more, at least during high

school, with the LD component of the G/LD identification.

Self-concept. How do Isabelle's past high school experience influence her self-perceptions of her strengths and weaknesses? How do her social and academic experiences influence her self-concept and its sub-domains? To help answer these questions, Isabelle was asked to discuss how her Body Biography represented both her strengths and her weaknesses. Firstly, in discussing how her biography represents her strengths, she explains that it represents her creativity, introspection, and self-awareness, the latter being something she notes as having to work hard to maintain. Overall, she felt that her Body Biography was a good representation of her strengths and abilities and being able to, "(...) look back at those times and distance myself from them and realize, like, the good and the bad. Uhm... kind of, like, learn from those things."

Conversely, Isabelle felt that a lot of her weaknesses were not necessarily shown in her Body Biography. However, without prompting from the researcher, she discusses, "(...) taking other people's criticisms too harshly and, like, looking for understanding when I'm not gonna get it," as a weakness from her high school experiences and how she has worked on this since that time period. A second weakness for Isabelle during high school was, "(...) allowing other people to really influence the way that I feel and the way that I think about myself (...)." Both of these reflections relate to her social and emotional self-concept during her time spent in high school.

Other weaknesses that Isabelle mentions are related more strongly to academic self-concept, as they include procrastination and often missing deadlines. As well as, she notes that she tends to be a perfectionist and:

(...) if something's not done to like a standard of mine, I'm like, "No, I can't hand it in" I can't. I get like really, really anxious and I can't in something that's a 'B' paper. I can only hand in 'A' papers. So, like, we won't hand it in. That's the reasonable response.

Overall, Isabelle sees her strengths as being creative, retrospective, self-aware, and learning from the past. However, her weaknesses involve being influenced by others, taking criticisms too personally, and being a perfectionist, which results in missing academic deadlines.

Looking more closely at Isabelle's self-perceptions, one begins to see how closely intertwined the sub-domains of self-concept are for Isabelle. For example, during Isabelle's time with the researcher, she discusses her relationship with her "weird friends" from high school, being teased for wearing special glasses for reading, anxiety as a result of being a perfectionist, defying teachers when she feels she is not respected, and feeling like her voice was not heard

during her teenaged years at high school, and an extreme dislike for the word “potential.” One of the strongest examples of how the sub-domains of self-concept are so closely intertwined for Isabelle involves being teased for wearing special glasses to read when she was in public school. Interestingly, this memory comes from when she was in public school, not high school, even though she was very clear about focusing on her high school experience. After Isabelle was initially diagnosed with dyslexia, she was given glasses with coloured lenses, which, “really helped me when I was, like, in elementary school.” Due to teasing from her peers and being told by the teacher that she could not wear the glasses in class, she stopped wearing them. Thus, social, emotional, academic, and even physical self-concepts are all involved in this situation.

Even when she described defying or purposely challenging her teachers, both when she was in high school and even now while in university, multiple domains of self-concept are involved. She explains that she only acts out when she doesn’t feel respected by the teacher or professor, and that she tends to do better in classes where she gets along with the authority figure. Thus, social, emotional, and academic self-concepts are involved.

Feeling like her voice was not being heard when she was in high school was another important topic for Isabelle. She describes, “being constantly drowned out by other people and them telling me I was lazy and telling me whatever,” and how in the school setting she, “wasn’t really getting any sort of like positive validation.” Also during this time, she describes feeling “overwhelmed” and “burdened” by the word “potential”, by school in general, and the daunting task of integrating with her peers socially. Thus, once again, the social, emotional, and academic self-concepts are all very closely intertwined with one another.

Isabelle does not appear to remember her experiences at the arts-based high school very fondly, as she did not feel respected or heard by the adults surrounding her at the time. She also felt overwhelmed and burdened by how her G/LD label had given her the extra label of ‘potential.’ Many of the stories and memories that Isabelle offers to are strongly related to emotional, social, and academic self-concepts, with very little focus on physical self-concept. Furthermore, Isabelle’s stories and memories highlight just how inter-correlated the sub-domains of the Marsh/Shavelson model of self-concept are, as combined they give insight into the unique experiences and complexities that make Isabelle who she is today.

Summary. Isabelle is a very complex individual with a negative outlook on an education system that she feels does not include her. Overall, Isabelle focuses more on the LD component

of her identification than on being gifted. She does not offer insights into her gifted abilities specifically, or even why she attended an arts-based high school when her gifted abilities were identified as verbal comprehension skills. However, her parents must have played a significant role in selecting this high school as the best choice for her, as they must have also supported the change to the LD-focused school. In conclusion, one of the most poignant offerings from Isabelle is that having a G/LD identification is, “like all of these mixed messages happening.” This not only reflects what it was like conversing with Isabelle about her Body Biography and past experiences, but it also highlights the dichotomy of a G/LD identification.

Cross-Case Analysis and Emergent Themes

The participants of this study represent a unique perspective into what it is like academically, socially, and emotionally to be identified as G/LD. Each of the participants experienced a different path of identification and education, and each participant offered unique insight. With the participants having experienced homeschooling, private schools, specialized programming for learning disabilities, gifted programming, a broader range of experiences are represented. Even with such variation, specific themes became apparent as important to self-identity and self-concept for the eight participants of this study. Thus, even with differing life paths and experiences, meaningful similarities across participants were found. The following section describes the six main themes that emerged from the interview data with the participants. Each theme touches on what is it like academically, socially, and emotionally for these post-secondary students identified as gifted and with a learning disability, relating to how the socially-constructed labels and educational experiences influence his or her self-perceptions of self-identity and self-concept.

I Am Different. The most over-arching theme across participants was the sense of being different from others. Whether this notion arose from being told by specialists and adults that they are different in comparison to others, from being segregated educationally based on the labels of gifted and/or learning disabled, or from an innate and internal feeling, almost each of the participants describe this feeling in some way in their own respective lives.

For Isabelle, her discussions focused on the experiences after being identified as both gifted and with a learning disability, and especially on her years as a teenager in high school. It was during this time that she remembered being told quite explicitly by doctors and specialists that she was different, and she has continued to internalize and carry this with her as part of her

self-identity and self-concept. However, this perception of being different is not limited to the opinions of her doctors and specialists. For example, Isabelle freely referred to herself and her high school friends as the ‘weird’ ones and noted how this was especially meaningful when the comparison group is other students at an arts-based high school. In contrast, Elizabeth’s perception of being different was described as though there was something different running through her veins and as though she was destined for innovation and discovery in her future. Clearly, she internalized this perception of difference *from within* her and it has become an important part of her self-concept and social identity, and a motivating influence in her current and future academic goals. She noted that because of her difference from others, she was in a gifted program and it afforded her the opportunity to leave the school once a week for enrichment activities. In her opinion, these activities cultivated a desire to be involved in things such as volunteering for the Heart and Stroke foundation and a love for research. In particular, she felt that others who were not part of this gifted program would not have shared in these activities and involvement.

To Graham and Felix, *I Am Different* meant being unique, creative, and original. While Graham based his uniqueness, identity, and self-concept within his homeschooling experiences, Felix experienced a more traditional educational background and based his sense of being different within his ADHD diagnosis. The sense of a learning disability being responsible for feeling different from others is also applied to Darren. As someone who experienced specialized LD programming from Grade 4 until the end of high school, Darren described being segregated from others and feeling as though the only people he interacted with were teachers and his peers with similar difficulties. This is a very clear example of how placement as a result of educational labels creates a difference between students, and how this separation from others can influence social identity and self-concept.

Also impacted by the perception of being different from others, Amanda framed the feeling in terms of academic *in-group* and *out-group* comparisons. For example, she felt that she was *better than average* at using and understanding computers and in the subject area of political science. Furthermore, she also felt that her gifted abilities allowed her to be a better bridge player than if she were not gifted, which provided her with a strong sense of group membership.

Finally, Hannah’s perception of *I Am Different* was multidimensional. Firstly, she identified as G/LD, however, this may have been more of a self-identification than a traditional

one as compared to the other participants of this study. However, while she identified as LD, she stated how she did not accept the diagnosis, and she appeared unsure as to where her social identity within an *in-group* and *out-group* group membership was situated. Also contributing to her sense of *I Am Different* were her childhood experiences with abuse and violence in the home. While these factors did not directly relate to the focus of this study, they may have contributed to her hesitation to embrace the LD component of her G/LD identification due to a lowered perception of self-acceptance.

Summary. Regardless of how participants were made to feel different, that perception of being different from others was an important emerging theme in the participants' development of self-concept and overall sense of self. Feeling different from others influenced not only their academic achievements by enhancing their sense of abilities, it also appeared to empower them to overcome the learning disability component of their identifications. However, not all the participants' perceptions of being different were positive. For some the G/LD identification, and the LD component in particular, created a negative consequence to their self-perceptions. Overall, the label of G/LD influenced the educational paths of the participants and *both* labels contributed to how the participants viewed themselves as being different from others.

Do I Fit In? A second predominant theme for the participants of this study was that of social difficulties and the question of *Do I Fit In?* The theme also incorporates social comparisons between relevant *in-groups* and *out-groups*, as well as identity within group membership in order to form a sense of where the participants felt they belonged socially.

The most poignant expressions of social difficulties came from both Elizabeth and Darren. Elizabeth described her social difficulties as being related to her perceptual learning disability and she felt as though she often misinterprets interactions with other females as a result. This caused her to feel anxious in her social interactions and influenced her self-perceptions of social self-concept. As for Darren, he described feeling as though segregation in specialized LD programming rendered him more socially self-conscious in making friends, even though he described himself as having a large circle of friends in the present. The main issue for Darren was the separation from others who were not in the same LD programming, which, similar to Elizabeth, continued to influence his self-perceptions of social self-concept. While Elizabeth attributed her social difficulties to her learning disability, Darren attributed his social difficulties to his educational placement *as a result of* his learning disability.

For Hannah and Felix, social interactions with others were seen as physically draining and exhausting. Felix did not discuss having friends or a particular social group other than his political group membership during a previous election campaign. Here, in this political party, he found a common motivation between himself and others. Having that common interest was important to him, as he discussed difficulty in finding that common direction and shared interests with others very often. Finding shared interests with others was also important for Hannah, as she described wanting in-depth conversations with others whom she perceived as simply not interested in those types of conversations with her. Thus, she lamented about her difficulties in relating to others, finding others with similar interests, and how emotionally draining it is on her to make small-talk with others, which influenced her sense of social self-concept. However, whether her social difficulties were due to the G/LD label or simply a part of who she was remained unclear.

Isabelle also found it difficult to interact with others, particularly her same-aged peers when she was younger. She described a recurring scene from her elementary school where she would call her mother each lunch hour to avoid interacting with her peers. In a second scenario, Isabelle shared her experience in wearing special glasses with coloured lenses to help her while reading. Her peers teased her for wearing the reading glasses and the teacher informed her mother that she could not wear the glasses in her classroom. Thus, Isabelle's learning difficulties were the cause of being socially ostracized and teased by her peers, which affected her social identity and social and emotional self-concepts.

Finally, Amanda discussed her social difficulties more in terms of group membership and not fitting in to specific academic groups. An important refrain for Amanda was that she was older than the other students in her current post-secondary program, making it difficult for her to relate to and interact with these individuals. The reason for the age difference between herself and the other students was due to her learning disabilities and not only needing to take more time to complete her degrees, but also needing longer breaks of time away from post-secondary education in between each degree.

It is important to note that throughout these positive and negative social interactions, parental and family support played an important role in the participants' self-concepts. For example, many of the participants discuss being close with their parents and/or siblings and many discuss how their parents have supported them in times of emotional, social, and academic

difficulties. However, the self-perceptions of family support were not always discussed by participants (i.e., Darren), and for Amanda and Hannah, these self-perceptions were not positive. For Amanda and Hannah, they did not perceive support from their parents and this contributed to negative interactions with their parents and towards negative perceptions of social and emotional self-concepts. Thus, these social interactions in particular contributed very heavily to the development of a positive social, emotional, academic self-concept, and general self-concept.

Summary. Whether it was difficulty in interacting with and relating to others, in making friends, or in finding it physically draining to interact with others, almost all of the participants of this study noted their difficulties with social interactions. Only Graham did not perceive himself as having any social difficulties and he presented himself as a man with many friends and an exciting social life. Graham did not have the same opportunities for social comparisons between himself and his peers because of his homeschooling background. So, could his homeschooling environment have provided a cushion from having to interact as closely with same-aged peers as the other participants in this study who experienced a more traditional classroom setting did? Or, is it possible that being in an environment created to suit his needs somehow helped him to be more easy-going and relaxed (as he presented himself to be) and to make friends more easily than the other participants in this study? Regardless of the reasons as to why, the majority of the participants described issues of not fitting in, being teased, and having poor interactions with peers, these interactions appeared to influence participants' social identity, as well as emotional and social self-concepts.

Am I Good Enough? A third central theme that emerged amongst from the data was participants' concern with academic achievement. In particular, the theme incorporates the pressure and expectations participants felt to perform academically, setting goals to meet those academic expectations, perfectionism, and seeking validation from others as a gauge of how they compared to others academically.

Feeling the pressure to perform was particularly salient for Elizabeth. Her main focus throughout her discussion was on academic goals and achievement. She had great hopes and aspirations to create, learn, and innovate, and she discussed having to monitor her goals to ensure that she reached those aspirations. However, there was a deeper reason for having to monitor her progress towards her academic accomplishments. She explained that she has to 'Take Charge' of her own future and be more goal-focused than others *because* of her G/LD identification, saying

that, “I have to work a little bit harder than maybe somebody who is just gifted,” which creates emotional and social implications in her life. Elizabeth’s discussion of struggle is further perpetuated by her self-identification as a perfectionist, “which could maybe be related to my giftedness or also my anxiety, one of the two.” Very similarly to Elizabeth, both Catherine and Darren also discussed having to monitor their progress towards academic achievements and goals, and for both the necessity for this was related to finding compensatory methods to overcome their learning difficulties. However, Darren’s goals and progress towards academic achievement also relied on obtaining validation from others to prove his intelligence in spite of his slow progress in learning to read and continued difficulties with dyslexia. Thus, the labels of *gifted* and *learning disabled* have played a role in the pressure to perform academically, although it appears that for Elizabeth, Catherine, and Darren that the pressure comes more internally than from others imposing expectations upon them. However, it is important to note that these feelings of internal pressures likely developed from someone else initially (i.e., parents or teachers) and as the participants have aged, they have internalized the expectations as their own.

In contrast, Isabelle, Felix, and Amanda each felt that the pressures and expectations to perform academically came more from the expectations of others rather than internally and interestingly, each of these participants experienced more than one educational setting during high school. For Isabelle, she discussed (quite vehemently) her dislike for the word ‘potential’. She explained how she came to interpret this word negatively, as she felt there were academic expectations she could not meet because of the dichotomy between her gifted abilities and her learning disability. She also discussed feeling as though she did not fit into the paradigm of school and the complexity of knowing she was intelligent but not meeting the academic expectations of her teachers and the classroom requirements. Not until she moved to a school focused on LD programming did she finally feel supported for her learning disability and given the freedom to express her knowledge however she pleased. Thus, the change to a more specialized school lowered the academic expectations others imposed upon her and she felt happier academically in this type of environment. Similarly, a change to a different academic environment proved advantageous for Felix as well. He discussed having begun high school in a private school setting, but felt that the pressure and academic expectations were too much for him to handle at the time. Thus, he transferred to a public school setting, which made the school environment much easier for him to navigate, both academically and emotionally.

Conversely, the change to different educational settings did not necessarily render Amanda's academic experiences as any more positive. Amanda experienced gifted programming, LD programming, and Resource support during her education, and while she noted positives about the gifted programming (i.e., she was less bored) and the LD programming (i.e., there was more academic support), she was not particularly content with either program and nor was she content with the Resource support. In terms of Resource support, she felt that she was more academically advanced than her peers in this setting and that the educator was not equipped to meet her specific academic needs. However, regardless of the educational setting, the sense of not being good enough compared to others and academic comparison was still prevalent. For example, she mused that, "I never feel I'm doing good enough. It really doesn't matter what I get. I do well and it sort of feel like, 'uggh, the bar goes up'." That constant search for achievement, but never being sure when it is *good enough*, created academic and emotional stresses for Amanda, especially when considering, according to her own interpretations, that her parents only valued her, "(...) for being smart," and occasionally persistent.

Graham and Hannah also felt the academic pressures within the theme of *Am I Good Enough?* although with differing perspectives. For Graham, he focused on being a perfectionist, aligning with how he created a "perfect" sense of who he was in his dialogue, but did not provide a great deal of information about this. Thus, this leaves the researcher to infer a certain struggle of comparing himself to others in achievement that is inherent within perfectionism. Whereas for Hannah, the story is much more complicated. Even with a later identification than the other participants, she shared a sense of being a perfectionist as a child and not being able to perform to the standards of the curricula set out for her. However, the perception of not being good enough as compared to others extends beyond academic achievements, as it involved multiple facets of her life. Due to her childhood experiences, she appeared to have a predisposition for doubting her self-worth and abilities, which were prevalent themes within her discussion.

Summary. Regardless of experiences or perceptions of and within the theme of *Am I Good Enough?* each of the participants in this study felt academic pressures to perform. These pressures were perceived as either internal expectations that required diligent self-monitoring and specific goals, or as pressures and expectations imposed upon them by educators and the education system. In particular, the fit between educational setting and educational needs

appeared to be a significant influence on not only academic achievement itself, but also to participants' emotional well-being and self-satisfaction.

If I Had Been... A fourth central theme amongst the participants involved thoughts and musings as to how their lives could have or would have been under altered circumstances. These different circumstances refer to other educational placements, as well as to the time and type of identification that they had been given. While some of the participants conceptualized their educational experiences as negative and wished that something had been different, others viewed their educational experiences as positive and perceived the trajectory they experienced as the best fit for their needs.

If I Had Been... was particularly salient theme for Amanda, Felix, and Isabelle - all of whom lamented several times throughout their discussions about how their lives could have and would have been if under altered circumstances. For example, Amanda focused on how her life would have been different if she had not been identified at all - no giftedness, no ADHD identification, and no learning disability label. She felt that she would have been happier to have simply been *average*, and that much of her social and emotional difficulties were due to the G/LD identification. Similarly, Isabelle felt that she had received a great deal of negative feedback from her arts-based high school, with little positive validation for her efforts, which influenced her both emotionally and academically. Whereas, the school focused on LD programming provided her with more support and a smaller environment, which was, "more conducive to my learning environment as well and my creativity," and she was happier. Most importantly, however, Isabelle felt that if she had attended the LD-focused high school all along, she would have perceived her educational experiences more positively because the LD-focused high school offered a much better fit for her educational needs than more structured paradigm of the arts-based high school.

Similarly, Felix also experienced an educational placement change, however, his focus within this theme was on wishing that he had been identified sooner - a notion that was also shared by Hannah. For Felix, he went through several years of being given various identifications, and not until his year in CÉGEP was he properly diagnosed as gifted, having ADHD, and having a motor impairment - all of which influenced his educational experiences for several years before this comprehensive identification. Conversely, Hannah knew she had difficulty with mathematics in her elementary grades, yet she was never identified as having a

learning disability until her post-secondary education. Not having that explanation and validation for the learning difficulties was a source of stress academically, socially, and emotionally for both Felix and Hannah. While it is unclear as to how the academic trajectory could have or would have been different for both Felix and Hannah, Felix did note that the change to a public high school granted him a slower-paced environment with lowered expectations, which suited his learning needs better than the private high school did.

Finally, this theme also relates to the participants who felt that their educational experiences *were* the best fit for their learning needs and the *If I Had Been...* notion was actually perceived in a more negative sense, rather than as a wishful one. For example, Darren, who experienced specialized LD programming from the middle school grades to the end of high school, he felt that students who had a learning disability like himself who did not experience the specialized programming, “did not fare as well,” in terms academic achievement, self-esteem, and self-worth. For Darren, the specialized programming was the *reason for* his academic accomplishments and why he felt he was able to navigate within the world successfully. Similarly, Elizabeth attributes being placed within the gifted population at her high school for allowing her to gain experiences outside of the school that others who were not identified as gifted did not experience. What was particularly salient for Elizabeth was the fact that these experiences cultivated a deep desire to become involved in research and the community, and thus the notion of *If I Had Been...* was not perceived positively. Nor did Catherine view the alternative placement at her high school as an enticing situation. The students at Catherine’s high school identified with severe learning disabilities and cognitive impairments were placed into a specialized program, which she did not view as an appealing placement option. For her, placement into the *PALS* program would have been a very negative scenario and she was content with the educational path that she had experienced instead. Furthermore, Catherine’s insights into the order of her gifted and LD identifications also related to the *If I Had Been...* theme. In particular, she felt that being identified as LD and then gifted was far better than the alternative, as these individuals would be “better off” and they would feel less discouraged.

The most content with his education path, however, was Graham, who felt that homeschooling had been the best experience one could possibly have and there was no direct reflection of the *If I Had Been...* theme within his discussion. For Graham, this type of education

allowed him the freedom to excel in his strengths and find alternative methods of learning and completing assignments in terms of his learning disability.

It is also important to note the important role of parents within this theme. In particular, without parental consent and a decision for their child to be placed into a certain educational setting, these participants would not have experienced gifted programming, LD programming, a Resource setting, a private school, a regular classroom environment, or even homeschooling. For example, Darren's parents must have believed very strongly that the best educational placement for him was the segregated LD-program setting; Isabelle's parents must have supported her enrolment into an arts-based high school even though her gifted abilities were not documented as within the visual, vocal, or theatre arts, and they must have supported her change to a more LD-focused high school; and Amanda's and Felix's parents must have also supported their children's educational placement and setting changes. Could their lives have been different under altered circumstances and different educational placements? Is it possible that even in a different placement 1) the participant would have been as equally content as they were in the one they *had* experienced, or 2) the participant would have been as equally discontent and would have still wished or longed for a different educational experience? It is not possible within the realm of this study to answer these particular questions, however, we can assume that parents chose the educational placement and setting that they felt best met their child's academic needs. We can also say that in these choices, participants' self-concepts were influenced both positively and negatively, depending on their own perceptions of how their academic needs were met.

Summary. Educational experiences as a result of labels and the identification themselves were two of the main contributing influences towards participants' acceptance of the past or lack thereof. While some of the participants conceptualized their past educational experiences as negative and wished that circumstances had been different for them, other participants viewed their experiences as positive and perceived the trajectory that they experienced as the best fit for their needs. Thus, it appears that while each student is different in terms of their academic needs, they need to feel supported and encouraged in their learning environment, and they need the validation of knowing what type of disability or adversity they are facing in order to overcome their difficulties to succeed academically.

Do You See Me? Do You Hear Me? A fifth emerging theme from the data focused on participants feeling invisible, hidden, unheard, and the emotional consequences of each feeling.

Additionally, the participants discussed a need for self-advocacy as a result of these feelings and as a compensatory method to ensuring their voices and needs were both heard and met.

Feeling invisible, hidden, and unheard were themes of particular importance for Amanda, Isabelle, Catherine, Darren, and Hannah. Much of Amanda's discussion focused on instances of self-advocacy, beginning when she was in early grades of education and continuing on into her post-secondary education. These instances of self-advocacy involved educational placement choices, the methods of testing and assessments that she felt teachers and professors should have provided for her, and the instances even extended as far as convincing others to permit her to enrol in a typing course after school to compensate for her difficulties in writing assignments and tests due to her learning difficulties. She appeared to have had few qualms over the years in voicing her needs and wants (with respect to her educational path and needs), and discussed voicing those needs to her parents, teachers, and professors. Isabelle also discusses voicing her needs to her parents, teachers, and professors, however her self-advocacy skills developed later than Amanda's. *Hidden* and *unheard* is how she described herself during her high school experiences until she began at the school for LD students and she was given more of a say in her learning. One of the most significant frustrations for Isabelle was a discontent with adults and specialists making all the decisions about what was best for her. In her opinion, there was very little consideration for her own input. Yet, apart from issues relating to her learning disabilities and difficulties, Isabelle described herself as someone who stood up to teachers and often challenged them. Why her ability to advocate did not extend to her learning needs is unclear, however the experience at the specialized LD high school may have nurtured a better understanding of how to voice her needs when she was surrounded by educators who were more sensitive to learning disabilities.

Catherine's examples of self-advocacy were much less focused on the self, and more focused on being a voice for students with learning disabilities. For instance, Catherine shared that her gifted abilities were in verbal communication skills, which she perceived as being helpful to not only several facets of her life, but especially to her ability to self-advocate. She discussed how others treat her, particularly when they do not know or understand what it is like to have a learning disability, and explained that, "sometimes they just look it over, they don't care", which also related to feeling hidden. However, the perception of feeling hidden was notably more prominent for Darren, as he summarized the experience of being in a specialized

LD program as both positive and negative, or as “hidden and helped.” It was positive in the sense that he credits the program with his ability to read and write, however, he views it as negative for having segregated him from others. That segregation and separation made him feel, “(...) very interdependent on people [that he was] in the program with,” and influenced both his social and emotional self-perceptions, especially when trying to make friends.

Hannah’s perception of feeling hidden was very similar to Darren’s, both academically and socially. Even though Hannah was in a regular classroom environment throughout her formative education, she felt as though she was invisible and that she could not make friends. While this was in part due to her familial experiences and the perceptions of her peers’ parents towards her and her family, she still shared the feeling of being hidden.

Summary. The participants discussed feeling invisible, hidden, and unheard as a result of their G/LD identifications and educational experiences. Some participants felt that others (i.e., specialists, educators, parents, and adults in general) had too much say in deciding what was best for them. Others felt that because of their G/LD identification, it segregated them from others or that it meant others viewed them and their abilities in a certain way. Parents in particular played the advocacy role on behalf of their child, advocating for them to be placed within certain a educational placement, even if that placement may have lead to their child feeling hidden and/ or unheard. Self-advocacy then became an important theme for these participants, as it was a way to voice their needs, wants, and opinions to others or for others in similar situations. The ability to self-advocate came more naturally to some over others, however, it was an effort made by the participants to feel less hidden and invisible. For those who still felt hidden and invisible, various factors were involved, such as a specialized educational placement or simply a matter of life circumstances outside of the school environment. It is interesting to note that specialized LD programming made Darren feel hidden, while it made Isabelle feel heard. Perhaps the opposing perceptions are simply due to the time at which (and how long) the specialized placements were experienced. It is also interesting to note that feeling unheard, hidden, and invisible to adults was not discussed by Graham. Again, one is left to wonder about the influence of the homeschooling on Graham’s self-perceptions and self-concept. In particular, perhaps the student-focused homeschooling environment where his mother tailored his educational environment to his needs provided a setting for Graham to feel appropriately seen and heard, unlike the other participants who did not experience homeschooling.

I Am More Than My G/LD Identification. The sixth and final theme that emerged from the data focused on participants' perceptions of the G/LD identification. In particular, this theme refers to participants finding a sense of self outside of academic achievements and distinct from the G/LD label, which appeared to have developed through a variety of means. Whether those means were creative (i.e., photography, writing, poetry, drawing), athletic (i.e., martial arts, swimming, surfing, skiing, horseback riding), or simply through hobbies and interests (i.e., knitting, reading, traveling, bridge, being a collector of pop culture items), each of these activities contributed positively to participants' self-concept, forming a sense of the self as successful outside of academic experiences. The activities appeared to have contributed to positive self-perceptions of physical, social, emotional, and general self-concepts. Some participants even discussed finding a sense social identity, self-concept, and group membership through volunteer work within the community, participating within certain political groups, or even having a group of individuals with whom the participant met with every week to play bridge. The main importance of this theme is that participants were able to define themselves in ways that were not limited to being gifted or to having a learning disability, which may contribute to a more well-rounded sense of self and self-concept.

Summary. Self-perceptions of self-concept and group membership were not limited to experiences within school and academics. Instead, the participants of this study were able to find strengths and form positive self-concepts through participation in sports, hobbies, and group membership with others who shared their interests.

Chapter Summary

The chapter began with the presentation of the demographic information gathered via the demographic questionnaire. Two individual tables were created to reflect the elements concerning participants' identification processes (i.e., time and place of identification, type of identification, and educational placements experienced before/ after the identification) and participants' current stage in life at the post-secondary level of education (i.e., age, current university program, and undergraduate versus graduate level of studies).

Next, the chapter presented the participant profiles of each individual, focusing on participants' approach in completing the Body Biography and unique attributes of his or her biography that separated them from others. Additionally, the profiles focused on the influence of labels and educational placement upon self-perceptions of social comparison, social identity,

group membership, and the sub-domains of self-concept within the Marsh/Shavelson model (1985) for each participant.

The chapter then discussed the cross-case analysis and emergent themes from the Body Biography and discussion/semi-structured interview data. The six main themes were identified as: 1) I Am Different; 2) Do I Fit In?; 3) Am I Good Enough?; 4) If I Had Been...; 5) Do You See Me? Do You Hear Me?; and 6) I Am More Than My G/LD Identification. In the next chapter, the discussion will continue with an interpretation and synthesis of the findings, situating the findings within the data as well as answering the research questions.

Chapter 5 - Discussion, Interpretation, and Synthesis of the Findings

This study sought to investigate the influence of labels and educational placement on the self-perceptions of self-concept of eight post-secondary students identified as gifted and with a learning disability. From a theoretical perspective, the Marsh/Shavelson Model of Self-Concept and the Social Identity Theory were integral to both the framework and the analysis of this study. Formed within a constructivist orientation, and using qualitative methods, the study was guided by the following two research questions: 1) How do the education-related influences of labelling and educational placement interact with the development of self-concept and to which group the individual identifies? and; 2) How do students identified with giftedness and a learning disability perceive the development of their self-concept over time?

The purpose of the current chapter is to provide deeper insight into the findings from the participant profiles and the cross-case analysis. Based on the data and cross-case analysis, it became evident that situating the discussion within the two research questions would not be ideal. In particular, it is not possible to separate the “over time” component delineated by the second research question from the first research question, as it was naturally reflected upon by participants during their discussions. Thus, the outcomes of the cross-case analysis, the interpretation, and the synthesis of the six main themes emergent from the data are presented below in response to the first research question as it relates to the theoretical framework and extant literature, with the understanding that the second research question fits within the first.

How Do the Education-related Influences of Labelling and Educational Placement Interact with the Development of Self-Concept, and to Which Group the Individual Identifies?

To answer this research question, the six main themes emergent in the cross-case analysis were used, as the themes offer unique insight into the self-perceptions of a G/LD student and the educational experiences as a result of the identification. Following this, the research question will be further explored and answered within a broader discussion focusing on the interplay of labels and educational placement on self-concept.

I Am Different. Typically, the participants of this study discussed the perception of being different from others in relation to the process of being identified as G/LD. For some of the participants, the feeling of difference from others began at the time of the identification process; perhaps partly due to the inherent connotation of both the gifted and the LD labels in the first place, but perhaps also due to the educational placements or opportunities as a result of those

labels. For others, the identification did not occur until just before beginning post-secondary education, or even during the first year for one participant, and thus they had less time to integrate the meaning of these labels within their experiences. Regardless of when the identification occurred, G/LD students have been found in previous research to feel as though they are different from others, “as if they are one of a kind” (Nielsen & Higgins, 2005). In being assigned the label of G/LD student, certain implications are imposed upon the individual - expectations that are created by both the gifted component and the LD component together and separately. The subsequent placement into a gifted program or an LD program, based on the student’s needs, further amplifies the perception of being different from others.

Research has examined the relationship between educational placement and self-concept, with mixed results. Some studies have concluded that there was, “no overall association between self-concept and educational placement,” (Elbaum, 2002, p. 216) and that younger children identified as having a LD did not have lower self-concepts following identification than their non-identified peers (Vaughn et al., 1992). Yet, others have found that the influence of educational placement on self-concept is much more complex to conclude as positive or negative. For example, some authors have found that self-concept is lower for students identified as LD when they are placed into a regular classroom setting (Butler & Marinov-Glassman 1994; Morvitz & Motta, 1992), while others have found that self-concept is higher for these students when placed in a regular classroom (e.g., Forman, 1988; Kistner et al., 1987). In particular, Weiner and Tardif (2004) concluded more inclusive settings fostered more positive social and emotional functioning and were more accepted by their peers, held stronger perceptions of math competency, exhibited fewer problem behaviours and higher self-concepts than students with LD in resource rooms. In the case of this present study, the relationship between educational placement and self-concept depended on participants’ perception of how well their academic needs were met. Specifically, participants had more positive perceptions of self-concept when they perceived that their academic needs were met. Graham, however, provided a different insight into the educational experiences of a G/LD student from the homeschooling perspective. In particular, he based his uniqueness, identity, and self-concept within the freedom of homeschooling. Even though his educational path was different from the other participants of this study, he too shared the perception of difference from others, and perhaps even more so than others. As early as the 1980s research has shown that that students who are homeschooled have a

much higher self-concept than those who are not homeschooled (Taylor, 1986), a finding that continues to be shown in more recent research as well (see Romanowski, 2006).

In terms of group membership, participants perceived themselves as separate from others, and yet, many participants identified most strongly within the gifted label. Meaning, the *in-group* was viewed as gifted peers, while the *out-group* tended to be perceived as their non-gifted peers. However, participants' perceptions of group membership often depended on the situation. In particular, the more positive perceptions of the self were often associated within the gifted *in-group* and the more negative perceptions of the self were often associated within the LD or G/LD *in-group*. Relating to the social identity theory, this supports the prediction that perceptions of group identification can sometimes be a self-protective internalization for individuals with disabilities (see Nario-Redmond, Noel, & Fern, 2013).

Additionally, placement offered another dimension to the *in-group/ out-group* self-identity. For example, Amanda, who experienced several educational placements, always felt different from those around her, as though she did not fit into any of the placements she experienced, which made her feel negatively towards herself and towards others, and thus contributed towards her negative perceptions of self-concept overall. In terms of educational experiences, research shows that gifted students and students with LD prefer to be challenged, supported, and educated with like peers (Jones & Hensley, 2012; Vanderbrook, 2006). Perhaps these findings offer support for Amanda's perceptions of not fitting in with her peers, since no singular placement that she experienced offered challenge, support, and to be with G/LD peers. Conversely, Elizabeth did not require a label or an educational placement to feel different from others - her perception of difference was something she felt from within and contributed to a strongly positive self-concept. However, without the *gifted* label and a gifted program, would this feeling have been as validated and would it still exist within her? Would this feeling contribute as significantly as it does to the positive self-perceptions of self-concept that Elizabeth still continues to nurture today?

For others, the official diagnosis had not occurred until just before entering the university setting (or during post-secondary education for one participant) and for these participants (i.e., Graham, Felix, Hannah) they had experienced years of feeling different from others without having a specific label attached to the strengths and difficulties they had experienced during the elementary and high school grades. Many studies have focused on the identification of G/LD

students (Crepeau-Hobson & Bianco, 2011; Waldron, Saphire, & Rosenblum, 1987), offering support for the positive outcomes of early identification to later success and self-concept. Research also examines the positive consequences of intervention methods and programs to supporting academic needs and enriching students' self-concepts (Assouline et al., 2006; Nielsen & Higgins, 2005; Robinson, 1999; Weinfeld et al., 2002). For Graham, this late onset of identification was not as important since his educational setting allowed for a tailored approach to his education, which contributed to a very positive self-perception of self-concept for him. However, for Felix and Hannah, the late onset of a diagnosis was perceived as confusing and frustrating and for Hannah in particular, the experiences contributed to a strong dislike to school and thus a negative academic self-concept and a negative self-concept overall.

Regardless of the circumstances surrounding how and why participants were made to feel as though they were different from others, each participant shared this feeling and this feeling influenced perceptions of strengths, weaknesses, social identity, and the domains of self-concept.

Do I Fit In? The social concerns for the participants of this study related to both the LD and gifted components of their identification, although sometimes as separate influences. For example, it was because of the LD identification that Darren was in a segregated classroom and struggled to interact socially with others; it was because of Elizabeth's perceptual difficulties that she has struggled in the past and continues to struggle with social interaction; it was because of her LD identification that Amanda had to take more time than other students to complete her post-secondary degrees and was now much older than her peers in the her current program; and it was because of the LD identification that Isabelle wore special glasses with coloured lenses for reading and was teased by her peers. Alternatively, it was because of the gifted identification that Isabelle struggled to interact with her peers in elementary school; it was because of the gifted identification that Felix and Hannah found social interactions with others draining due to a lack of common interests; and it was because of her gifted identification in verbal communications that Catherine perceived herself as interacting with others so effectively. Thus, it appears that in regards to social interactions, the positive or negative consequence of labels and educational placements to participants' self-concept depends on the situation.

The social difficulties of gifted students and those identified as LD have each been well documented within the literature. In particular, gifted students have been shown to have better rapport with their gifted peers over non-gifted peers, express a greater attachment to family than

to friends, prefer time alone than with others (Kao, 2011), and may be socially rejected for being interested in topics not shared by their peers (Baum et al., 2001). Conversely, those identified as LD have been shown to be at risk for teasing by peers (Olenchak, 1995), are less likely to be socially accepted, are more likely to be neglected and/or rejected by their peers than those not identified as LD (see Kavale & Forness, 1995; Swanson & Malone, 1992; Wiener, 1987). Additionally, those in contained special education classes like Darren have been shown to experience greater social rejection than students in a regular classroom setting or those who experience a pull-out method of education (Vaughan et al., 1996; Wiener, Harries, & Duval, 1993; Wiener, Harris & Shirer, 1990; Stone & La Greca, 1990; Coben & Zigmon, 1986). Thus, students identified as G/LD almost appear to be at a pre-determined disadvantage for lowered social self-concept. In fact, G/LD students have been shown to be at a greater risk for asocial tendencies (Waldron et al., 1987), more anxious and personally dissatisfied (Waldron et al., 1987), becoming loners and exhibiting problem behaviours (Baum et al., 2001), and simply not fitting in with their peers (King, 2005). Furthermore, students who are rejected children by their peers are at risk of anxiety and depression, which impacts perceptions of social self-concept (Spilt, van Lier, Leflot, Onghena, & Colpin, 2014). As for this study, peer teasing, not fitting in, and a lack of common interests with their peers were discussed, which aligns with the research and highlight the ongoing influence of labels and educational placement on self-concept.

The one participant who did not share in these difficulties was Graham, who was the only participant to be homeschooled prior to post-secondary education. The socialization of homeschooled students has been called into question previously (see Medlin, 2000; Romanowski, 2006), highlighting how these students are missing interactions with peers to the same degree as those who experience a more traditional school environment. However, homeschooled students tend to have a higher self-concept than those who are not homeschooled (Taylor, 1986) even though research has shown that homeschooled students, “feel they have few friends and are socially isolated” (Shirkey, 1987). However, this feeling of isolation has not been supported in more recent studies, which have shown that homeschooled students prefer their experiences to traditional school settings (Shirkey, 1987) and they find other ways to keep in touch with peers, such as using emails (Natale, 1995). These later studies suggest more positive social and general self-concepts for these students, which offers a closer reflection of Graham’s portrayal of himself and his social interactions.

In terms of group membership, the G/LD label appeared to influence the perceptions of *in-group* and *out-group* more strongly than the educational placement. For example, Elizabeth saw her LD as the reason for her social difficulties and thus she identifies more strongly as LD in social situations than she does as gifted. It was also the LD label that indirectly caused Isabelle's peers to tease her and thus causing her to be considered the *out-group* by her peers. Also, the LD label was the reason for Darren's segregation from non-LD peers, and thus his group membership became (and continues to be) his LD peers. Yet, the gifted label was of particular importance to Amanda in her social interactions. For example, in her present day socialization, Amanda perceived the members of her bridge group to be of high intelligence and this helps them to be better players than non-gifted individuals, the *out-group*.

Thus, the assigning of a label and the experience of their educational placement have influenced participants' self-perceptions of social and emotional self-concepts through peer teasing and not fitting in with others. It has also influenced with whom participants felt they could interact and what topics participants could discuss with others by way of common interests. Furthermore, for some participants, the label meant a placement within LD programming or gifted programming, and this created natural group memberships, influencing perceptions of emotional, social, and academic self-concepts.

Am I Good Enough? For the participants of this study, the pressure to achieve academically and the emotional burden as a consequence was particularly striking, and contributed not only to their academic self-concepts, but also to their social, emotional, and general self-concepts. In particular, the participants discussed perfectionism, anxiety, and mental health issues. Whether anxiety and mental health issues are specifically related to the influence of labels and educational placement experiences as a result of a G/LD identification is difficult to determine, however the issue of mental health was discussed by several of the participants. For example, Isabelle discusses having the "potential" to perform and not being able to achieve to the level that other expected from her (because of her LD) to be a main source of frustration, confusion, and stress. The psychological and behavioural consequences of the relationship between depression and self-esteem, and the outcomes of stress and coping with academic self-concept, are each supported in the literature (see Gallagher, Harradine, & Coleman, 1997; Kanevsky & Keighley, 2003; Plucker & McIntire, 1996). Research has also explored the relationship between perfectionism and self-concept, showing it to be directly and indirectly

correlated to academic achievement, with academic self-concept acting as a mediator (Fong, & Yuen, 2009). In general, it is believed that individuals, "... are more likely to accomplish more if they feel competent in what they do, are self-confident, and feel positively about themselves" (Möller, Pohlmann, Köller, Marsh, 2009).

However, the relationship between academic achievement and self-concept is much more complex than achieving when an individual feels competent and positively about themselves - especially for a student identified as both gifted and with a learning disability. For example, the gifted component of the G/LD identification appeared to hold a specific connotation of what others (i.e., teachers), and the participants themselves, expected in terms of academic achievement for the participants of this study. Conversely, the LD label was, for the most part, not described as something that held the participants back from achieving academically. Of particular importance is the fact that while these participants may have formed negative perceptions in the past around academic self-concept due to the emotional burden of having to perform, each participant has experienced enough positive reinforcement and success prior to post-secondary education to feel as though they are equipped with the appropriate learning skills and coping mechanisms to continue their academic achievements in both the present and the future. In relation to students with learning disabilities and post-secondary enrolment, Eckes and Ochoa (2005) noted that the incidence of enrolment has increased over the years and that this reflects better transitions between high school and post-secondary institutions. However, other studies continue to question the preparedness of learning disabled students for post-secondary education as compared to their non-LD peers (Flexer, Baer, Luff, & Simmons, 2008). Given the unique and heterogeneous educational paths that these participants have experienced, the fact that each participant has been successful enough to make it the to post-secondary level is encouraging and dispels the question of preparedness while supporting the notion of Eckes and Ochoa, as these students in particular have generally experienced positive academic transitions.

How, then, are labels and educational placement from the perspective of academic performance related to social comparison and group membership for these participants? For one, educational placements provide an inherent *in-group*, and a change in educational setting forces a change in the perception of *in-group* and *out-group* identification. The educational setting provides the student with peers who may or may not achieve greater academic success than themselves, depending on the setting. This fluctuation in social comparison and reference point

of academic success was a source of frustration and stress for some. For others, the placement they experienced suited their academic needs and they were content. These latter participants still felt pressure to perform, yet they were content with their past when asked to imagine how their experiences could have been different had they experienced a different placement. For some, a change in educational placement reduced the academic pressure, which then improved academic self-concept, as well as emotional and general self-concept. Amanda felt that she was too academically advanced for the LD program and for the Resource setting, yet she could not succeed to the level of the other gifted students in the gifted program. She did not appear to have been content in any educational placement that she experienced and each placement option appeared to contribute negatively to her self-perceptions of academic, emotional, social, and general self-concepts. Regardless of the educational placement experienced, or the changes to educational settings, self-concept continued to change and develop.

Ultimately, finding the “right” fit for students’ academic needs was a crucial influence upon perception of self-concept, which has been a point of study for many years (see Weinfeld et al., 2002; Yssel et al., 2001).

If I Had Been.... Very much rooted within the experience of labels and educational placement, this theme provided a glimpse into the self-perceptions of how the participants’ lives could have or would have been different under alternate circumstance. The alternate circumstance in this case refers directly to labels associated with the identifications process (i.e., being identified sooner, being identified with a different label, or not being identified with any labels and simply being viewed by the school system as an average student) and the educational placement (i.e., if I had been in another placement, I would have been happier and I would have fared better academically vs. if I have been in another placement, I would not have been happier nor would I have fared any better academically).

With respect to this current study, having participants reflect on how their educational experiences may have been different *if* something in the past had been altered provided interesting insight to participants’ self-perceptions of the G/LD label and their individual educational paths. For some participants, the idea of a different educational path was not appealing, while for others, they felt that a different label or a different placement could have made an enormous difference in the social, emotional, and/or academic struggles they faced as younger students. For example, Elizabeth and Graham were particularly content with their

educational experiences, and interestingly, during their discussions, both focused more on their gifted experiences, and were not as willing to focus on their difficulties. Both held the gifted component their G/LD identification in high regard and both appeared to identify more with gifted students and focused (overall) on positive self-perceptions of self-concept. Conversely, Amanda and Hannah both described negative feelings towards school in general, towards school placement experiences, and neither felt like she had anything great to contribute to society. Both Amanda and Hannah harboured more negative self-perceptions of self-concept, however, neither participant described many positive experiences for their childhood, and this may have also affected their individual self-concepts in the present.

For Isabelle and Felix, both experienced one significant change during their high school experience - Felix from private school to a public school and Isabelle from an arts-based school to specialized LD programming. The changes in placement meant a change in both social identity and in self-concept. With the change, Felix felt that he could cope better within a slower-paced educational environment, which increased his academic self-concept, as well as influencing his general and emotional self-concepts for the better. Alternatively, Isabelle was now separated from her friends, which influenced her social self-concept, yet she was supported for her learning difficulties, with similar peers, and she was able to succeed more academically than she had before. All of these consequences influenced her general, social, emotional, and academic self-concepts positively.

Unfortunately, there are no studies that support this particular theme within the G/LD literature. Perhaps the lack of literature support for this theme is due to the fact that no other studies to date have asked participants so explicitly about social comparisons between the self and others, with 'others' being those who are identified as gifted-only, LD-only, or who had experienced different educational placements and paths from themselves. Inherent within these questions is a certain amount of reflection from the participants and placing oneself into the mindset of another individual. However, the responses from the participants to these questions were more emotionally charged than simple social comparisons. That being said, sometimes a label can provide an explanation for learning difficulties, which may then be perceived by the individual as, "comforting, reassuring, relieves the stress and ambiguity, [and] sometimes reduces the anxiety since "problem" is no longer puzzling or inexplicable" (Archer and Green, 1996). Although, the counterargument is that labelling may, "rubber-stamp students' lack of

confidence in their own abilities in trying to deal with the difficulties” (Gillman, Heyman, and Swain, 2000). Labels can also provide individuals with a sense of belonging to a group, improving social interactions and fostering group membership (Finlay & Lyons, 1998). However, as one accepts the identity of the group, that label can also lead to teasing and may cause emotional stress as certain aspects of the individual are made aware to others.

Identification with a label is only one component of the issue, though. The label may then lead to certain educational placements, which may further the stigmatization G/LD students may feel and thus influence self-perceptions of social identity and of self-concept. The educational placement as a result of the G/LD label is only a temporary phase in life, and for some the educational placements changed at least once during their formative education. However, the point to be made is that the experiences individuals have after high school can influence self-concept as well. The new experiences can also alter the self-concepts participants formed while in the elementary or high school grades. Yet, at the same time, some self-perceptions may never change, and the individual may approach new experiences with pre-conceived expectations about themselves as a result of those expectations. Thus, the interplay between labels, educational placement, social identity, and self-concept are very tightly bound. Overall, it depends on the self-perceptions of individual student of the label and of the educational placement, the resources of the school, and how well the placement supports the academic needs of the student. However, in order for the students to have developed self-perceptions regarding the placement(s) experienced or not experienced, it is important to acknowledge the role of parents. Without parental consent (as per the IPRC process), participants would not have experienced the placement they did. For example, Darren’s parents must have given their consent for him to have spent so much of his formative education in a segregated LD program; Isabelle’s parents must have felt that the arts-based high school was best for her at the time, and then decided to enrol her at the LD-focused high school; and Amanda’s parents must have supported each of her educational placement changes. Participants appeared to have had very little sense of the parental role in the course of their educational experiences. This is perhaps a function of the questions asked within the discussion, or may be simply that participants do not perceive their parents as influential in the relationship between labels, placement, and self-concept.

Do You See Me? Do You Hear Me? The influence of labels and educational placement on self-concept and group membership within this theme was quite evident for the

participants of this study. In particular, it was *because of* the identification that adults (i.e., parents, teachers, and specialists) felt they needed to make decisions for the participant on his or her behalf, which left some participants feeling empowered and others feeling hidden and unheard. For the participants who felt empowered by their ability to self-advocate for their academic needs and wants, the consequence to self-concept was much more complicated. In particular, Amanda's description of self-advocacy appeared more confrontational than simply voicing her wants. In Amanda's description of her self-advocacy, her focus was on how she "forced", "made", or "embarrassed" her parents and teachers into allowing her to do things such as participating in a gifted program in elementary school or having a professor select multiple choice as the main test format at the university level. Socially, these instances appeared to have a negative impact on her self-concept, yet they provided provide a positive sense of self-concept in that she was able have her needs met on her own terms. As much as Amanda seemed to like having that sense of control over others, she also perceived the need for self-advocacy as negative and directly related to her G/LD identification. She felt as though the whole process of self-advocacy was a hassle and something that those not identified as G/LD do not have to do, which touches on resiliency literature - that of having to succeed "against the odds" (Miller, 2002). However, Amanda also used her self-advocacy skills to help others. Specifically, she described herself as a social advocate during undergraduate degree for students with learning disabilities, which appeared to have contributed positively to her sense of self and self-concept, particularly socially.

Similar to Amanda, Catherine also tied her ability to self-advocate directly to her identification. While the need to self-advocate may have arisen from the academic needs associated with her learning disability, she perceived self-advocacy as part of her gifted abilities in verbal communications, as part of her "chattiness." Had she not been identified as gifted in verbal communication skills, would she be as vocal in being heard and in expressing her academic needs to adults? Given that research shows that students identified as G/LD do tend to self-advocate more than other students (Dole, 2001), one is lead to assume that self-advocacy may be related to, or part of, the consequence of being identified as G/LD.

The participants who felt hidden and unheard as a result of their G/LD identification and placement experiences offered differed insight into its consequence on self-concept. Specifically, the self-perception of being hidden and unheard contributed negatively towards social,

emotional, and general self-concepts. For example, Darren's segregation from others in his LD programming created a natural sense of being hidden from society and unheard within the gifted community. While academically he was content, he noted the consequence of his placement to his emotional and social self-concepts. Conversely, Hannah felt that her unidentified G/LD label was the reason for her poor academic self-concept during the elementary and secondary grades, which contributed to her negative feelings towards education, even though she is now completing a second master's degree. Thus, again, this theme touches on resiliency, as well as self-determination. Given the fact that her G/LD identification occurred much later in comparison to the other participants, it is difficult to conclude whether or not this feeling of being hidden and unheard is due to the G/LD consequences or due to her home situation and life experiences, which were not described as positive experiences. However, research suggests a link between early identification and emotional adjustment, academic outcomes, and a more positive self-concept (Chamberlain et al., 2007; Kay, 2000; Reis, Neu, McGuire, 1994, 1997, 2000; Yssel et al., 2010).

For Isabelle, the influence of the G/LD label and educational experiences on her perception of being hidden and unheard was complex. She felt very strongly against adults being her voice and those same adults not listening to her wants and needs, which, similar to Amanda, was a source of frustration and impacted her sense of identity and self-concept. However, Isabelle described her ability to self-advocate as something that developed over time and came with more experience in knowing how to voice her needs, which again touches resiliency research. In particular, it touches upon reframing, which refers to, "reinterpreting the learning disability experience in a more positive or productive manner" (Gerber, Ginsberg, & Reiff, 1992). Feeling hidden and unheard, while negatively impacting her social, emotional, and general self-concepts as a child and teenager had become, through reframing, a source of positivity for her as she felt more confident over time in making sure her voice is heard. In fact, she felt so confident as she developed her voice that she described confronting teachers and professors quite unabashedly, which then impacted her social interactions with others negatively but still contributed to a positive sense of self. Personal factors such as verbal skills and a "delineated understanding of one's disability" (Morrison & Cosden, 1997) have been shown to protect individuals with learning disabilities from negative societal and emotional outcomes, and to promote resiliency in the face of obstacles due to a disability (Morrison & Cosden, 1997). Of the

participants who discussed the influence of the G/LD label and educational placement on perceptions of being empowered or hidden, each individual showed a deep understanding of their learning disability and how it impacted their abilities in the past and in the present.

In terms of group membership, whether the participants felt empowered or hidden and unheard, the *out-group* became the parents, teachers, specialists and adults to whom the participants had to voice their needs and individuals not identified as G/LD and who did not have to self-advocate for their needs. Although, for Darren the perceptions of *in-group* and *out-group* were more focused on the segregation of his educational placement, rendering his *in-group* as LD students and the *out-group* as all other students, even those identified as gifted.

Overall, some participants discussed the ability to self-advocate as though it was something they had accomplished from as early as elementary grades, while others discussed it as something that developed over time, and thus contributed to a shift from a more negative self-concept to a more positive self-concept. Based on the findings of this study, the positive or negative impact on self-concept depends on 1) the individual; 2) the willingness of adults to take into account the wants and needs of the G/LD student; and 3) the type of social interactions the G/LD student has as a result of self-advocating for their needs.

I Am More Than My G/LD Identification. Regardless of positive or negative experiences in a classroom environment (or a homeschooling environment for one participant), or self-perceptions of pressures to achieve academically, each participant in this study described positive outcomes of participation in extracurricular activities. The activities described by the participants began as early as elementary grades, and while the activity may have changed from then to now, the participants continued to immerse themselves in non-academic endeavours. Some activities were on-going, while others were solely when the participant was younger. However, being a part of organized sports or activities, or a part of a political campaign, not only contributed to positive self-concepts, but it also contributed to a piece of the *Who Am I?* question within the Social Identity Theory. Some activities allowed for continued identification within the activity (i.e., Darren being a published author and photographer; Catherine's identification as a "skier"), while other activities were more recent in development (i.e., Amanda's self-perceived group membership within her Bridge group; Felix's self-identification within a specific political party). When participants answered questions with "I am a skier" or "I play in a bridge group every week" or "I am a political activist", it 1) provided a depth beyond simply describing

oneself as “G/LD”; 2) created a sense of group membership with others who may or may not also be gifted, LD, or G/LD; and 3) contributed positively to each participants’ self-perceptions of social, emotional, and general self-concepts.

Identity may be defined by the attachment of meanings to oneself by the self and by others in society (Gecas & Burke, 1995). Research shows that G/LD students gain a sense of self-concept from extracurricular activities outside of the school (Dole, 2001). This supports the sixth theme from the findings of this study, as the participants discussed a wide range of activities, from sporting groups and activities to more interpersonal activities such being a published writer and photographer. Research also suggests that it is imperative for twice-exceptional students to spend time with other twice-exceptional students since they do not always fit into the general, gifted, or LD population, yet for these participants the G/LD identification and label was not as important to them once they had found an activity or hobby of interest. Furthermore, the exact activity was not significant to the research, however, being a part of a club or group lent itself to self-perceptions of group membership and social identity, and each one contributed positively to participants’ self-concepts.

Even though studies have demonstrated the necessity for G/LD students to have support for both academic abilities and learning difficulties (i.e., Baum et al., 2001; Baum et al., 1989; Baum, Owen, & Dixon, 1991; Howard, 1994; Neilsen, 1994; Neilson & Mortorff-Albert, 1989; Suter & Wolf, 1987), it appears as though having an outlet outside of the school environment is just as important to forming a positive social identity through group membership and a positive self-concept that is not solely based on one’s label and educational experiences. Specifically, participation in extracurricular activities has been shown to lead to higher grades, more positive attitudes towards school, and higher academic aspirations (Darling, Caldwell, & Smith, 2005). The Darling et al. study does not include a G/LD population in its sample, however the findings may be extrapolated to a certain degree. The activities discussed by the participants of this current study appeared to contribute positively to finding an *in-group* that was not dependent on the G/LD label and educational experiences because of the label. The activities not only contributed positively to participants’ general self-concepts, but also to their social, emotional, and even physical self-concepts. Depending on the activity, each sub-domain of self-concept described within the Marsh/Shavelson model were involved in a positive way. In sum, these

activities allowed the individual to find other interests and other strengths outside of academic expectations and socially constructed group membership stigmas.

Overall synthesis. How were participants' self-perceptions of self-concept influenced by the G/LD identification, label, and educational placement? The individuality and uniqueness of this particular population make it difficult to extrapolate the findings to the G/LD student population as a whole, however commonalities between the participants were found as emergent themes developed. These commonalities reflect the extant literature of G/LD students and they highlight the influence of labels and educational placement on the self-concept for the individuals in this study.

Overall, the participants perceived their G/LD label as its two separate components rather than as a unified identification. For most, the gifted component was perceived as an asset and related to their strengths, while the LD component was perceived more negatively and associated to their weaknesses in navigating within the world. However, both the gifted and the LD components contributed negatively and positively towards participants' self-concepts.

The gifted label influenced academic self-concept with respect to high expectations from the self and from others to perform academically. On one hand, these self-perceived expectations contributed negatively to emotional and social self-concepts (i.e., participants perceived finding common interests with others and social interactions in general as difficult and emotionally confusing or draining). However, on the other hand, the gifted label appeared to contribute positively to participants' general and academic self-concepts (i.e., participants gained confidence in their strengths, academic successes, and appeared to base self-identity within a gifted group membership). Similar to the gifted label, the LD label also influenced participants' self-concepts - both negatively and positively. For example, the LD label contributed negatively towards academic, social, and emotional self-concepts (i.e., by virtue of having to overcome a disability, struggling against biases and societal expectations, self-advocating for their needs, and educational segregation from others), while the LD label contributed positively to academic self-concept only when they perceived their educational support as having met their LD needs.

Perhaps participants' tendency to separate the gifted and LD components within the self is a reflection of how the education system continues to focus on the gifted abilities *or* the learning disability, rather than the G/LD identification and educational needs as a whole. The issue of "fit" has been a long-researched area, with the main conclusions focusing on the

individuality of G/LD students and no singular consensus regarding addressing their individual needs (see Nielsen & Higgins, 2005; Rydstrom, 2010; Weinfeld et al., 2002; Yssel et al., 2010). In some cases there is no one best fit, as mirrored by the participants of this study who experienced more than one educational setting in hopes of a better academic fit. The label was the reason for the educational placements and segregation, for expectations of the self and of teachers to perform to a certain level academically, and for sometimes requiring a change in educational placement to meet more of their academic needs than a previous setting offered. In terms of self-concept, the label then provided a strong influence on participants' need to constantly re-assess their strengths and weaknesses in positive ways. However, some of the participants in the study were perfectly content with the educational path they had experienced and felt as though they had obtained the "best fit" for their needs, which is interesting since these experiences included a variety of placements - gifted programming, LD programming, a regular classroom setting, and homeschooling. Clearly, finding the appropriate educational setting for a G/LD student is a difficult task and depends on each student individually. However regardless of the placement, the positive and negative influences of educational placement on participants' self-concept, as a result of the G/LD identification and label, are undeniable.

Marsh and Hau (2003) note the importance of thinking and feeling positively about the self and the benefits of these perceptions on choice, planning, and subsequent academic accomplishments. However, the influence of educational placement on self-concept has garnered mixed conclusions amongst researchers. Some authors have found no relationship between self-concept and educational placement (Elbaum, 2002; Vaughn et al., 1992), and mixed results for positive (Butler & Marinov-Glassman 1994; Morvitz & Motta, 1992) and negative (Forman, 1988; Kistner et al., 1987) consequences to self-concept when LD students are placed within a regular classroom setting. Yet, for the participants of this current study, the educational path (negative and positive experiences included) appeared to have helped participants to develop the compensatory tools necessary for them to continue to the post-secondary level of education. Perhaps contributing to participants' development of compensatory tools and continued education was the validation of receiving an "official" diagnosis. For example, the label provided an explanation for participants' difficulties and their strengths and resulted in participants feeling better about themselves. Even though perceptions of being labelled was not always positive, the G/LD label and resulting educational placement created two opposing situations: one of

empowerment and another of a feeling hidden and unheard within society. Regardless of the perceptions of educational experiences, struggles, or instances of empowerment, each participant must have developed a strong enough self-concept (i.e., general and academic) through positive reinforcement and support (i.e., from parents and teachers) to have felt confident enough to overcome their learning difficulties and enrol into post-secondary education.

Labels and educational placements create a natural social comparison of *in-group* and *out-group*, and these social comparisons influenced participant's self-concepts. When a gifted child is forced to recognize other *bigger fish*, a situational change occurs to that student's academic self-concept (Huguet, Dumas, Marsh, Régner, Wheeler, Suls, Seaton, & Nezlek, 2009; Marsh & Hau, 2003; Marsh, Trautwein, Lüdtke, & Köller, 2008). A change in educational placement can also result in the student him or herself becoming the *bigger fish* in comparison to their peers. Some of the participants experienced being the big fish in the little pond effect, while others experienced being a smaller fish in the pond.

Early versus later identification is important to presence of the *BFLPE* in this study. Those who were identified earlier in their education had an explanation and a source of validation for their difficulties and strengths. For some participants, the gifted label perpetuated feelings of being the *bigger fish* in their individual classroom setting, which increased positive perceptions of self-concept. In contrast, those who were identified later were left to question their strengths and difficulties in comparison to their peers and they were left to feel like the *smaller fish*, which had a negative influence their academic and emotional self-concepts. Additionally, those who felt as though they were the *bigger fish* were more likely to focus on their gifted identification, whereas those who struggled more during their formative education appeared to perceive themselves more as the *smaller fish* in the pond.

It is important to also note the *BFLPE* within the homeschooling environment. As a unique perspective of educational placement for one participant, it appeared that homeschooling provided Graham with a profound sense of being the *bigger fish* in comparison to the peers he has now at the post-secondary level. The only immediate peer prior to his present environment was his brother, and the student-focused structure of homeschooling allowed him to be the only peer with whom he compared himself to on a regular basis. Thus, the homeschooling environment held an exceptionally strong and positive influence upon his self-concept and to perceiving himself as incomparable to others.

In terms of to which group the participants most strongly identified with within their G/LD label, it was to their gifted counterparts. In their discussions with the researcher, some participants were more focused on their gifted label, and often trying to steer the conversations away from their learning disability. Interestingly, this preference for concealing difficulties from peers and others has been noted as an observation amongst students with a LD, as they hope to gain greater social acceptance (Loeb, & Jay, 1987; Pajares, 1996), and perhaps to avoid the social stigma of a disability. That being said, the participants identified more strongly with their LD counterparts during the instances where the conversation was focused on their LD and they associated more of their negative attributes and weaknesses within this group membership.

While the G/LD identification and educational placement certainly influenced the development of self-concept, an important reaction to the G/LD label and placements by the participants was a shared feeling of being more than simply a label. Participants focused on their how their interests, participation in sporting activities, and individual hobbies contributed to their perceptions of strengths, identity, group membership, and self-concept. In particular, these interests, activities, and hobbies helped to foster a positive social identity and self-concept amongst the participants. Furthermore, the perceptions of these interests and activities, and hobbies were less focused on social comparisons of the self versus others and more focused on how participation in these interests, activities, and hobbies contributed to a sense of *Who Am I?*

Interaction of self-concept domains. How do the domains of the Marsh/Shavelson model of self-concept, which are presumed to interact with one another, interact for these participants? It is clear that for these participants, the domains and sub-domains of the self-concept model are very much intertwined and are very strongly rooted within educational experiences as a result of their G/LD identification. Most dominant was the interplay between academic self-concept and the sub-domains of non-academic self-concept - emotional and social self-concept. It is also important to note the positive contributions of interests, sporting activities, and hobbies towards self-concept. In particular, these activities appeared to act as a buffer against other potentially negative influences upon self-concept and its sub-domains.

Upon first glance of the data, it seemed that physical self-concept was of less importance to the participants, however, it became evident that physical self-concept was often associated with their non-academic hobbies and interests, which then influenced participants' social, emotional, and general self-concepts. Physical self-concept was also important when participants

discussed mental and physical health, as well as physical ailments and difficulties. Marsh and Hau (2003) note the multidimensionality of self-concept and how one person may have a positive self-concept in one domain and a negative self-concept in another domain, and that one global measure does not properly illustrate the domains of self-concept. This was certainly true for the participants of this study as well.

Chapter Summary

How do the education-related influences of labelling and educational placement interact with the development of self-concept and to which group the individual identifies? How do students identified with giftedness and a learning disability perceive the development of their self-concept over time? In answering these research questions, several themes emerged as well as unique insight into the self-perceptions of self-concept for the eight post-secondary G/LD students of this study. Labels and placement appeared to contribute very strongly to self-perceptions of self-concept and social identity, and each of the domains and sub-domains of the Marsh/Shavelson model of self-concept appeared to be extremely dependent upon one another.

Chapter 6 - Conclusions and Recommendations

In this final chapter, I will examine the contributions to research within this study, discuss relevant recommendations and study limitations, and offer suggestions for future research. The chapter will then close with final thoughts from the researcher.

Contributions of the Research

By exploring the self-perceptions of educational placement and labels on the development of self-concept of students identified as gifted and with a learning disability, this study contributes to the understanding of self-concept, social identity, and G/LD research. Within G/LD research, this study provides further insight into the socio-emotional experiences in relation to labels, educational placement, and the influence of academic expectations on G/LD students' socio-emotional development, which is important not just for general self-concept, but for other aspects such as academic achievement, social relationships, and emotional health. In particular, this study was singular in its attempt to generate first-person research involving G/LD students using a Body Biography as a form of data collection and without input from other sources (i.e., parents and/or teachers). In focusing exclusively on students' self-perceptions and experiences through a qualitative approach, a voice was given to these students, and while the conclusions of this study may not be extrapolated as a whole to all G/LD students, the study does provide insight for educators and families working with students identified as G/LD, particularly as they make educational decisions that impact student well-being.

Finally, this study makes contributions towards multi-modal knowledge and research methods through the use of the Body Biography. For example, there are no documented studies with this approach within the area of G/LD research, nor has it been documented as a data collection method within self-concept research of students with giftedness or a LD. Furthermore, the Body Biography provides an alternative method of self-description and self-reflection in terms of social identity and self-concept, particularly when used with the semi-structured interview/discussion for participants to explain the reasoning and intent behind the use of each item and to provide further insights into their educational experiences and self-perceptions.

Limitations

As with any research study, limitations influence the findings and its conclusions. It is important, as it is with any study, to recognize factors that may limit or weaken the study, to assess their potential influence on the research study, and to understand their influence upon

future research. Even though great care during the process of the study was taken by the researcher to mitigate those factors, limitations still occur within any study.

Variability in identification criteria. Seeking such a narrowed group of post-secondary students identified as both gifted and with a learning disability was a considerable challenge to completing this study. Thus, the criteria by which participants were selected for this study needed to be fluid. Originally, the study sought to include eight English-speaking students who had been identified as G/LD while attending an Ottawa-based school board. However, in this study, participants originated from different parts of Ontario as well as from different provinces within Canada. The importance of this is that the definition of what it means to be a G/LD student, and its components of giftedness and LD, are similar but not entirely consistent across the Canadian provinces and territories. As a consequence, this variability within the identification reduces the type and breadth of conclusions that can be drawn with respect to the experiences of G/LD students.

Research bias. No matter how stringent a researcher is during the procedures, data collection, and analysis of a study, the researcher's own biases will influence the interaction with the participants and interpretations of the data, thus influencing the conclusions of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Krieger, 1991). An effort was made by the researcher to keep the procedures of the study as similar as possible with each participant, while providing participants with enough freedom to discuss their individual experiences and perceptions. In terms of data analysis, a coding system was created to promote consistency and accountability from one participant's data to the next. It is important to remember that, and especially in qualitative research, the analysis and conclusions of the study are a reflection of the researcher's own interpretations, which is therefore a limitation of the study

Interviewer bias. Researcher bias can also occur as interviewer bias, influencing how the researcher interacts with each participant, how information is related to the individual participants, and how the data of each participant are analyzed in comparison to the others. During the discussions with the participants, an effort was made to create a comfortable and open environment for participants. The approach, while professional, was focused on allowing the participants to guide the discussion as much as possible, which created different types of discussions and interactions between the researcher and each participant.

Transferability. A third limitation of this research study is that of transferability. Given the heterogeneity of the sample with respect to educational experiences, identification processes, defining the G/LD components within different school boards, and participants coming from a variety of locations and provinces within Canada, the transferability of the findings are limited. What this study does offer, however, is insight into the self-perceptions of self-concept and social identity, as related to labels and educational placement, for the eight participants and the findings of the study are supported by the literature in this field.

The Hawthorne Effect. Sometimes participants feel compelled due to perceptions of societal pressures and/or expectations to provide data that they feel may be more socially acceptable, even if this information is falsified or enhanced to present a better self to the researcher. (McCambridge, Witton, & Elbourne, 2014). This particular limitation is of importance to note since labels, a focus of this study, are a socially derived construct, which can lead individuals to feel less socially accepted. In an effort to minimize this effect, the researcher reassured participants that there were no incorrect answers and only their perceptions were of importance, which the researcher hoped would provide a space for participants to offer the truest self-perceptions possible rather than what one may feel are socially accepted self-perceptions.

Body biography. A Body Biography as a data collection instrument is not typically associated with G/LD research, nor is it common within social identity and self-concept research. Each individual used a different approach in completing the Body Biography task and there was variability in the amount of detail participants produced in the final product, and as a result, some of the completed Body Biographies did not stand alone very well (i.e. Graham and his t-shirt of interests) and a discussion of the completed biography was necessary to gain insight into the experiences of the individual beyond the items on the piece of paper. Thus, this type of data collection, as with any, might limit the results of the study, particularly if participants are not comfortable with completing visual representations of the self. It is also possible that some G/LD students purposely avoided participation based on this specific type of data collection.

Even with the acknowledgement of limitations, using a Body Biography as a method of data collection also offered strengths to the study. For one, it allowed participants to express their thoughts and perceptions in a way that best suited them. For example, one participant used solely the magazines for images, another used only markers and written words, and some used a variety of the selection of items provided to them. Another strength of the Body Biography was that the

interaction between the researcher and the participant was guided by how the participants completed their biography and their self-perceptions of social identity and self-concept. Thus, the ability to tailor the Body Biography task to each individual is an advantage when students identified as G/LD may have a wide range of strengths or weaknesses, self-perceptions, and educational experiences.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have emerged from the data and analysis of this study, and highlight gaps that continue to exist within the extant literature or issues that continue to exist within education.

Identification variability. Within the emergent themes of the data, was that of participants' experiences with the identification process. Some participants were identified during the elementary grades and some later - closer to (or during) the post-secondary level of education. Some participants described a relatively smooth identification process, while others detailed a more frustrating, confusing, and tedious process. While variability in the definitions of giftedness and learning disabilities continue to exist within education, and within the provinces of Canada, the results of this study suggest that a more cohesive and clear identification process would be advantageous to relieving some of the participants' emotional and academic stress which in turn influences the development of self-concept. Perhaps a diagnostic approach that includes both gifted and LD components within the assessment would help to identify the students in need of academic support sooner. Or, perhaps more discussion between practitioners (or those responsible for student identification/diagnosis) and the students could occur, explaining the process and the meaning/implications of being diagnosed as G/LD.

Educational placement. While a variety of educational placement options exist for students identified as *twice-exceptional*, not all school boards offer each of these placement options to their students. Thus, location influenced the type of placement that students could experience. Also, participants' discussions revealed that their placement options either focused on the gifted label *or* the LD label (or no label). While most expressed contentment with the placement they had experienced, some did not feel that one placement completely supported both their gifted and LD needs. For some, a change in placement alleviated their academic and emotional stresses, which then improved their overall self-concept, yet one participant felt that no placement option really meet her needs. Thus, it appears that school boards continue to

separate the G/LD identification into separate components and this is not always the best outcome for the student. The academic needs of each G/LD student varies, which makes it difficult to find one program or placement to meet the needs of each student. However, the data of this study suggests that G/LD students would likely benefit (socially, emotionally, and academically) from a placement option that supports both components of the G/LD label.

Societal perceptions. Another notion found within the emergent themes was that of societal perceptions of what it means to be a G/LD student. In these scenarios, the focus was predominantly on the LD rather than on the gifted abilities. Some participants discussed being advocates for others with learning disabilities, with no mention of advocates for the G/LD label as a whole. These social perceptions also influenced participants' own perceptions of academic achievement, potential, and overall expectations. Since the academic strengths and difficulties of G/LD students features such variability, it is not always possible for a G/LD student to fulfill the academic expectations imposed upon them by the gifted label. Thus, recommendations may include greater sensitivity amongst educators, parents, and the students themselves to understand the academic needs and educational constraints/limitations G/LD students.

Socio-emotional risk. Particularly apparent for the participants of this study was the influence of the G/LD label and the consequences towards an individual's socio-emotional well-being. In the recent decades where G/LD students have been a focus of research, the issue of socio-emotional risk remains an important point of concern. Thus, it is imperative that a greater focus be given to implementing support methods for the social and emotional needs of these students in addition to identification processes and providing academic support.

Suggestions for Further Research

As discussed, research concerning students who are identified as both gifted and with a learning disability tends to focus on identification processes, intervention methods and programs, and acknowledging the academic, social, and emotional deficits that these students may experience. In terms of self-concept, the sample in these studies often includes parents, teachers, and peers, rather than from the G/LD student him or herself. Given the discussions with the participants of this study, each one appreciated a researcher taking the time to talk to them directly and they appreciated the data collection methods of a Body Biography and its accompanying discussion/semi-structured interview. Thus, I would recommend using this data collection method to other researchers as a way to explore the self-perceptions of G/LD students.

Also given that very few studies focus on the self-perceptions of G/LD student in relation to their feelings towards labels, placement, and their own strengths and weakness, the findings of this study suggest that developing a deeper understanding of these perceptions would be of benefit to parents, teachers, and policy makers when considering the social, emotional, and academic needs of these unique individuals.

A second suggestion for further research in relation to this study would be to include a larger number of participants. The population of students identified as G/LD is small in general, and the researcher struggled to find enough participants. However, perhaps with a wider breadth of recruitment sources, and widening the age range of the study (i.e., include younger children), may increase support for the findings of this study as well as increasing its transferability to the G/LD population as a whole.

Finally, a lack of consistency around identification processes meant that participants were either tested several times during their education or were not ‘officially’ identified until much later in their educational experiences. Thus, a longitudinal study of the development of self-concept over time and how placement changes from elementary grades to the post-secondary level of education influence self-concept in the moment and overall, taking into account the time of identification, may be of value to explore.

Final Thoughts

Overall, the research questions of this study were answered by showing that self-concept was influenced by labels, and educational placement. In particular, social, emotional, and academic self-concepts were the most influenced and participants had more positive views of self-concept when they felt their educational needs had been met. Also, with respect to social identity, participants tended to perceive the *in-group* as other gifted students and the *out-group* as other LD students. Viewing gifted student as the in-group relates to Social Identity Theory since participants were maintaining a positive sense of self through the more socially desirable attribute of giftedness over a LD. While the conclusions may not extrapolate to all G/LD students, the study does provide insight for educators and families of G/LD students, particularly as they make educational decisions that impact student well-being

Even with the population of students identified as both gifted and with a learning disability growing, this group of individuals continues to be under-represented within educational research. When research and education identify and label a G/LD student for the

purposes of placement within gifted or LD programming, or a regular classroom environment, there are both research and practical implications towards the student social, emotional, and academic self-concepts. In particular, this study highlights the need for educational programs that support both the gifted and the LD components of a G/LD dual diagnosis, as well as exploring potential methods of supporting the social and emotional needs of these students throughout their educational experiences.

The issue of “fit” and identification have long been a critical point of discussion, in part due to the heterogeneous nature of the G/LD population. However, the findings of this study provide a unique voice for the self-perception of experiences with respect to labels and educational placement of these students. More importantly, the study highlights the need for the voices and educational needs of G/LD students to be heard by parents, teachers, policy-makers, and the G/LD students themselves. In terms of research, it is crucial to begin to move the focus away from gifted *or* with a learning disability, or even higher versus lower self-concept in comparison to other students, and to focus more on programs within the school to support the G/LD identification as a whole entity, without having to choose one identification over the other, as this may help to foster more positive self-perceptions of self-concept for these students.

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Appendices

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Appendix A: Recruitment Text (French and English)

A1. French Recruitment Text

Projet de recherche : **EXPRIMEZ-VOUS!**

INVITATION: Les étudiants post-secondaires qui ont été identifiés comme étant surdoués et avec des difficultés d'apprentissages pour participer à mon projet de recherche de maîtrise, qui s'intitule, **Perceptions du concept de soi d'étudiants doublement exceptionnels: l'influence des étiquettes et des placements en éducation pour les étudiants post-secondaire surdoués ayant une difficulté d'apprentissage**

Le but de l'étude: D'explorer les perceptions des étudiants ayant les étiquettes surdoués et en difficulté d'apprentissage ainsi que les expériences qui influencent le concept de soi pour ces étudiants

Les participants doivent parler couramment l'anglais. Vos réponses resteront confidentielles!

Partager vos expériences en 2 sessions d'une heure!

La première session: Offrir des informations démographiques et placer des items qui me décrivent sur un dessin grandeur nature d'un corps humain

Le deuxième session: Discuter la tâche terminée.

Les participants seront inscrit dans un tirage au sort pour les prix qui incluent des certificats cadeaux d'une valeur de 50\$ et d'autres!

Si vous avez des questions ou voulez participer, s'il vous plaît, contacter:

mlummiss@uottawa.ca
jwhitley@uottawa.ca

Megan Lummiss
Dr. Jessica Whitley (superviseur)

A2. English Recruitment Text

Research Project: Let your voice be heard!

LOOKING FOR: Post-secondary students identified as gifted and with a learning disability to participant in a MA research project entitled “Self-Perceptions of Self-Concept of Twice-Exceptional Students: The Influence of Labels and Educational Placement for G/LD Post-Secondary Students.”

PURPOSE: To explore the self-perceptions of how the labels “gifted” and “learning disabled”, and educational experiences influence the self-concept of post-secondary G/LD students.

Participants must be fluent in English. Your responses will be confidential.

Share your experiences in two 1-hour sessions!

First session: Provide demographic information and place items that describe YOU on a life-sized drawing of a human body.

Second session: Discuss your completed drawing.

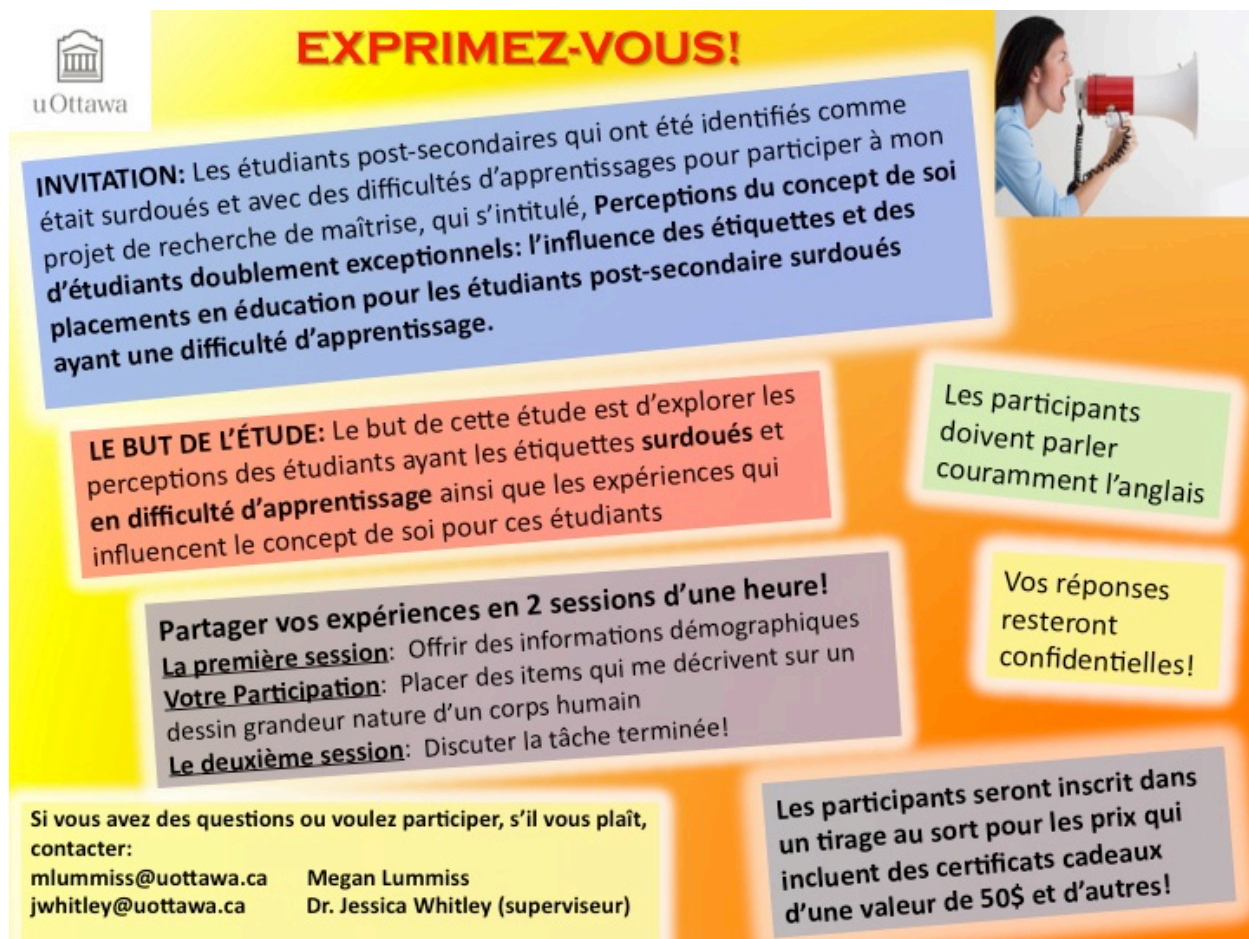
Participants will be entered into a draw for prizes, including \$50 gift certificates and more!

If you have any questions, or would like to participate, please contact:

mlummiss@uottawa.ca	Megan Lummiss
jwhitley@uottawa.ca	Dr. Jessica Whitley (supervisor)

Appendix B: Recruitment Poster (French and English)

B1. French Recruitment Poster




uOttawa

EXPRIMEZ-VOUS!

INVITATION: Les étudiants post-secondaires qui ont été identifiés comme étant sourdoyés et avec des difficultés d'apprentissages pour participer à mon projet de recherche de maîtrise, qui s'intitule, **Perceptions du concept de soi d'étudiants doublement exceptionnels: l'influence des étiquettes et des placements en éducation pour les étudiants post-secondaire sourdoyés ayant une difficulté d'apprentissage.**

LE BUT DE L'ÉTUDE: Le but de cette étude est d'explorer les perceptions des étudiants ayant les étiquettes **sourdoyés** et **en difficulté d'apprentissage** ainsi que les expériences qui influencent le concept de soi pour ces étudiants

Partager vos expériences en 2 sessions d'une heure!
La première session: Offrir des informations démographiques
Votre Participation: Placer des items qui me décrivent sur un dessin grandeur nature d'un corps humain
Le deuxième session: Discuter la tâche terminée!

Les participants doivent parler couramment l'anglais

Vos réponses resteront confidentielles!

Si vous avez des questions ou voulez participer, s'il vous plaît, contacter:
 mlummiss@uottawa.ca Megan Lummiss
 jwhitley@uottawa.ca Dr. Jessica Whitley (superviseur)

Les participants seront inscrit dans un tirage au sort pour les prix qui incluent des certificats cadeaux d'une valeur de 50\$ et d'autres!

B2. English Recruitment Poster



LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD!



LOOKING FOR post-secondary students identified as gifted and with a learning disability to participate in a MA research project entitled, *"Self-Perceptions of Self-Concept of Twice-Exceptional Students: The Influence of Labels and Educational Placement for G/LD Post-Secondary Students."*

PURPOSE: to explore self-perceptions of how the labels "gifted" and "learning disabled", and educational experiences influence the self-concept of post-secondary G/LD students.

Share your experiences in just two 1hr sessions!
First session: Provide demographic information and place items that describe **YOU** on a life-sized drawing of a human body.
Second Session: Discuss your completed drawing!

Participants must be fluent in English!

Your responses will be confidential!

If you have any questions or would like to participate, please contact:
 mlummiss@uottawa.ca Megan Lummiss
 jwhitley@uottawa.ca Dr. Jessica Whitley (supervisor)

Participants will be entered into a draw for prizes, including \$50 gift certificates and more!

Appendix C: Consent Form

C1. Blank Copy of Consent Form

Title of the study: Self-Perceptions of Self-Concept of Twice-Exceptional Students: The Influence of Labels and Educational Placement for G/LD Post-Secondary Students

Researcher: Megan K. Lummiss
University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education
mlummiss@uottawa.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Jessica Whitley
Associate Professor
University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education
Tel: (613) 562-5800 x4963; jwhitley@uottawa.ca

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Megan K. Lummiss, MA Candidate in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to explore perceptions of how the labels “gifted” and “learning disabled” and educational experiences influence self-concept for post-secondary students previously identified as G/LD.

Participation: My participation will consist essentially of two sessions with the researcher, each of which will be audio recorded. In the first session, I will provide demographic information about myself (e.g., age, whether siblings have an identification, time/order/location of my own identification, and the type of educational placements I experienced throughout elementary and secondary school) and I will be given the opportunity to begin the task required for this study, a body biography. To complete the body biography, I will be asked to place items that describe myself onto a life-sized drawing of a human body. I may decide to start the task at the end of the first session, remaining at the University of Ottawa in a quiet room, or I may complete the entire task at home and return to the University of Ottawa approximately two weeks later for my second session with the researcher. Depending on my choice, the first session may last 30 to 60 minutes.

In the second session, I will be asked to explain “why” I selected certain words, photos, or mediums to represent myself with the body biography and I will be prepared to do so. If I choose to participate in this second session, it will last approximately 60 minutes.

Risks: My participation in this study will entail that I volunteer personal information, and this may cause me to feel emotional discomfort. I have received assurance from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize these occurrences. If I experience any discomfort as a result of this study, I will be referred to the Student Academic Success Services (SASS) at the University of Ottawa (sass@uottawa.ca; 613-562-5101).

Benefits: My participation in this study will expand on the existing understanding of self-concept development for G/LD students, with the introduction of Body Biography as a novel method of data

collection. The study will also provide first-person insight into how labels and educational placement influence this development and how a G/LD student perceives him or herself.

Incentive: To thank you for your contribution to the research project, you will be given the option to enter your name in a draw to win one of six Rideau Centre gift certificates valid at any store at the Rideau Centre, with two valued at \$50.00 and four valued at \$25.00. This draw is open to all participants who choose to enter their name in the draw, regardless of full participation or withdrawal from the research project.

Upon completion of participation by all participants, names will be randomly selected amongst those who have chosen to enter and each winner will be informed by email. To win a prize, the individual must correctly answer a skill-testing question. If the individual cannot be reached within 14 days from the date of the draw, the prize will be awarded to the next name that is randomly selected and so on until all the prizes have been awarded or all the possible participants have been contacted. The odds of winning a prize are 3:4. The prizes must be accepted as awarded or forfeited and cannot be redeemed for cash.

Your name that you provide as participants, while will be kept anonymous for the purposes of the study, will be the one used when you enter the draw and is collected solely for the purposes of contacting you if your name is selected in the draw. Your name and the contact information you provide (i.e., email) will be kept confidential and then destroyed once the prizes have been awarded.

Please note that we reserve the right to cancel the draw or cancel the awarding of the prizes if the integrity of the draw or the research or the confidentiality of participants is compromised. The draw is governed by the applicable laws of Canada.

Confidentiality and anonymity: I have received assurances from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for a Master's thesis and related publications and that my confidentiality will be protected and that no information that can identify me will be published or made public. Both sessions with the researcher will be audio recorded and transcribed, and my anonymity will be protected through the use of pseudonyms of names and places. I will have the opportunity to review transcripts of my individual sessions with the researcher and I am aware that a photograph will be taken of my complete body biography. The researcher will ensure that any identifying personal information will either be blurred or cropped from the final photograph used in publication. I am also aware that any personal item placed on the body biography will be retained by the researcher as data.

Conservation of data: The data collected will include digital recordings of interviews, completed body biographies, transcripts, and researcher notes. Data will be kept in a secure manner (i.e., locked filing cabinet on campus and password protected electronic files) and will be stored and kept secure for five years after the thesis is defended, and will be accessible to only the researcher and the supervisor for this research project.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time without suffering any negative consequences and any personal items used in my completed body biography will at that point be returned to me. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be destroyed.

Acceptance: I, _____, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Megan K. Lummiss of the Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa, and under the supervision of Dr. Jessica Whitley.

- ☐ I understand that the researcher will photograph the body biography for publication
- ☐ I understand that the researchers will keep the personal artefacts (i.e., personal photographs) placed on my completed body biography until the written component of the research project is completed

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5

Tel.: (613) 562-5387,

Email: ethics@uottawa.ca

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant signature: *(Signature)*

Date: *(Date)*

Researcher signature: *(Signature)*

Date: *(Date)*

Appendix D: Demographic Questionnaire

D1. Blank Copy of Demographic Questionnaire

Name:	
Age:	
Current Program of Study and University:	
Area of giftedness:	
Type of learning disability:	
Family members with an identification? (e.g., siblings or parents)	
Time of identifications (e.g., elementary, secondary)	
Order of identifications (e.g., Gifted first, LD first)	
Location of identifications (e.g., Where in Ontario; which school board)	
Educational placements before identification	
Educational placements after identification	

Appendix E: The Body Biography Kit & Instructions

E1. The Body Biography Kit

Instructions	- to explain to participants that he or she may place any type of words, photographs, and/or tactile items onto the body biography to represent his or her conceptualization of labels and educational placement in the development of self-concept
Photograph Items	- families - friends - teachers - school settings - sporting activities, games, extracurricular and leisure activities, etc. - magazines for participants to use
Word Items	- describing physical attributes (both negative and positive) - describing personality traits (both negative and positive) - the words “Gifted” and “Learning Disabled” - inspirational words/ phrases / quotations / song lyrics - poems
Tactile Items	- fabric swatches - pipe cleaners - feathers
Other Items (in each kit)	- blank paper - coloured paper - stickers - popsicle sticks - paper clips
Other Items (not in the kit, but available in the room)	- tape - scissors - glue - markers - pens (blue, black, red) - pencil crayons - magazines

E2. Body Biography Instructions

Body Biography Instructions

In completing a body biography, you the participant, will have the opportunity to personalize a life-size drawing of a body to reflect yourself. In doing so, you may fill the page with photos, poems, phrases, quotations, or even tactile items to represent how you perceive yourself with respect to the labels “Gifted”, “Learning Disabled”, and “G/LD”, and your educational experiences. You may choose to draw on experiences from elementary school and continuing to the present, or you may choose to focus on one stage in your life in particular. There are no rules or right or wrong answers to this task- have fun and be prepared to discuss the final product! To help get you started, you have been given a Body Biography Kit, which provides you with example items to use on your own body biography. Feel free to use all or none of these items, as you wish!

Note: There are no restrictions for the volume of material you may decide to place on the page; you may use any type of medium at your disposal (in the Body Biography Kit or from your own home) to represent yourself upon the piece of paper.

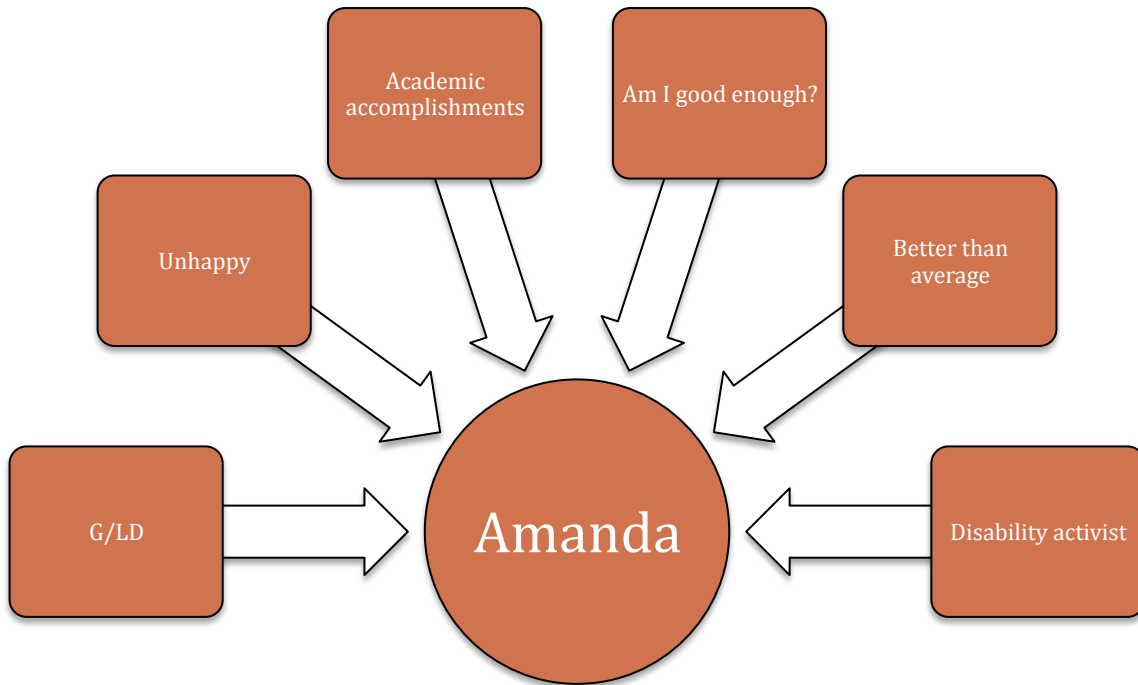
Appendix F: Semi-structured Interview Questions & Relation to Research Questions

	Body Biography	
Q01	Where did you start on the body biography (the top to bottom, the bottom to top, the outside to the inside, the inside to the outside, or completely random)	Introductory
Q02	Could you please walk me through each item on your body biography, explaining why you chose that photo/word/item and how it represents you as a G/LD individual and your educational experiences?	Introductory
Q03	On what region of the body biography did you spend the most time?	Marsh/Shavelson Model of Self-Concept; Social Identity Theory/ BFLP
Q04	Which region of the body biography do you feel represents you the best or the most? Why?	Marsh/Shavelson Model of Self-Concept; Social Identity Theory/ BFLP
Q05	How does the way in which you completed the body biography represent your strengths?	Marsh/Shavelson Model of Self-Concept
Q06	How does the way in which you completed the body biography represent your weaknesses?	Marsh/Shavelson Model of Self-Concept
Q07	How did activities outside of the school setting influence how you represented your strengths and weaknesses on the body diagram?	Marsh/Shavelson Model of Self-Concept
Q08	Based on your body biography, what type of educational placement had the greatest effect on how you perceive yourself now? How has this changed over time?	Marsh/Shavelson Model of Self-Concept
Q09	What part of your body biography would be the most similar as compared to someone who experienced the same educational placement as you? How is your body biography different?	Social Identity Theory/ BFLP
Q10	What part of your body biography would be the most similar as compared to someone who experienced other educational placements than you? How is your body biography different?	Social Identity Theory/ BFLP
Q11	What part of your body biography would be the most similar as compared to someone identified as Gifted?	Social Identity Theory/ BFLP

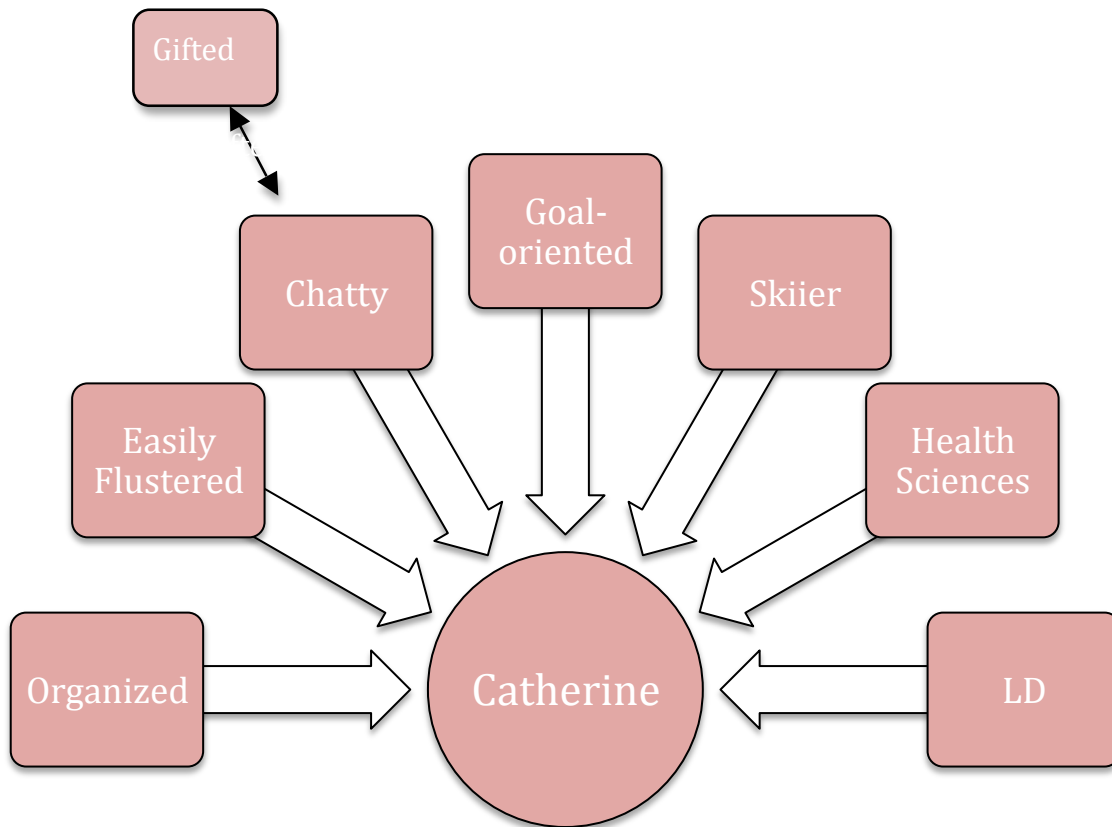
	How is your body biography different?	
Q12	What part of your body biography would be the most similar as compared to someone identified with a Learning Disability? How is your body biography different?	Social Identity Theory/ BFLP
Q13	Why did you choose to place (x, y, z) outside of the body on the paper?	Social Identity Theory/ BFLP
Q14	Why did you choose to place (x, y, z) in this particular region of the body?	Marsh/Shavelson Model of Self-Concept
Q15	If the participant has not made use of inside/outside the body diagram: Why did you choose to place everything inside the body?	Marsh/Shavelson Model of Self-Concept; Social Identity Theory/ BFLP
Q16	Which one photo, word, item on the body biography do you feel represents you the best and why?	Marsh/Shavelson Model of Self-Concept; Social Identity Theory/ BFLP
Q17	In completing the body biography, what did you discover about yourself?	Marsh/Shavelson Model of Self-Concept; Social Identity Theory/ BFLP
Q18	After having discussed your completed body biography, is there something that you would like to add?	Marsh/Shavelson Model of Self-Concept
Q19	(EXTRA, IF NEEDED) Why did you choose (x, y, z) to be on your body biography to represent yourself?	Marsh/Shavelson Model of Self-Concept; Social Identity Theory/ BFLP

Appendix G: Mind Maps

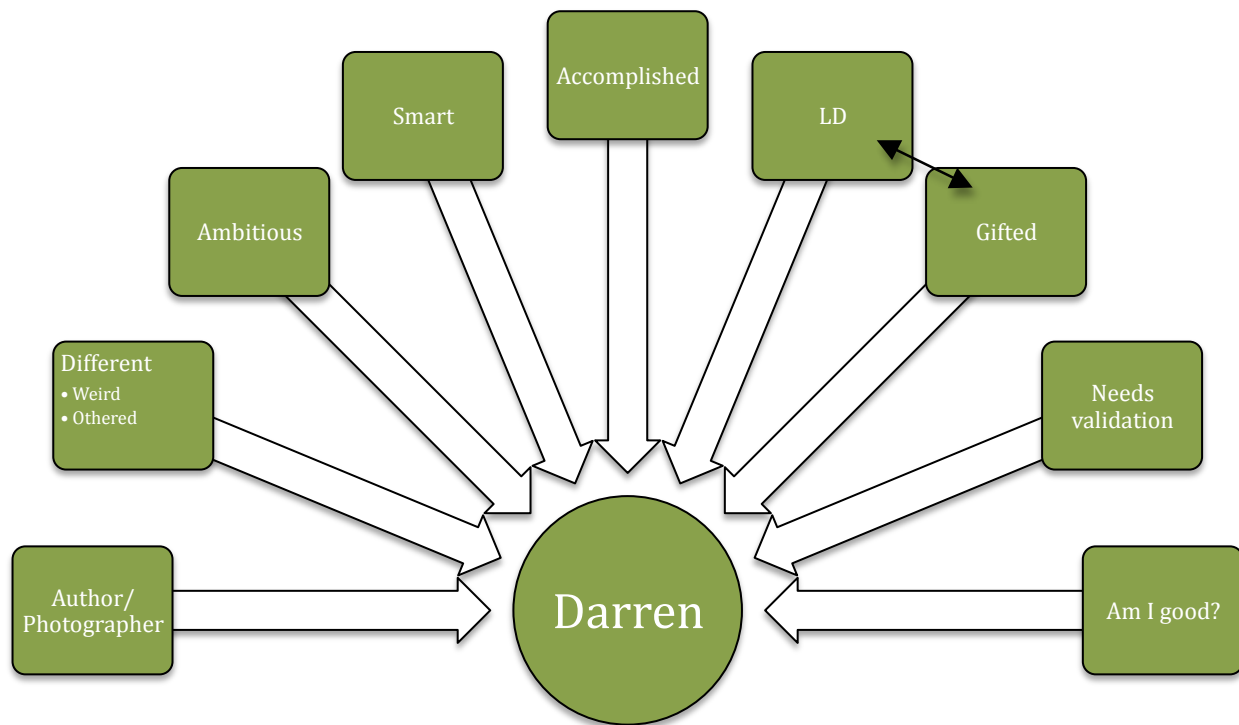
H1. Mind map of the main themes emergent from Amanda's completed Body Biography and discussion/semi-structured interview. The mind map also shows how the G/LD label was perceived more as one complete entity for Amanda, rather than as its individual components.



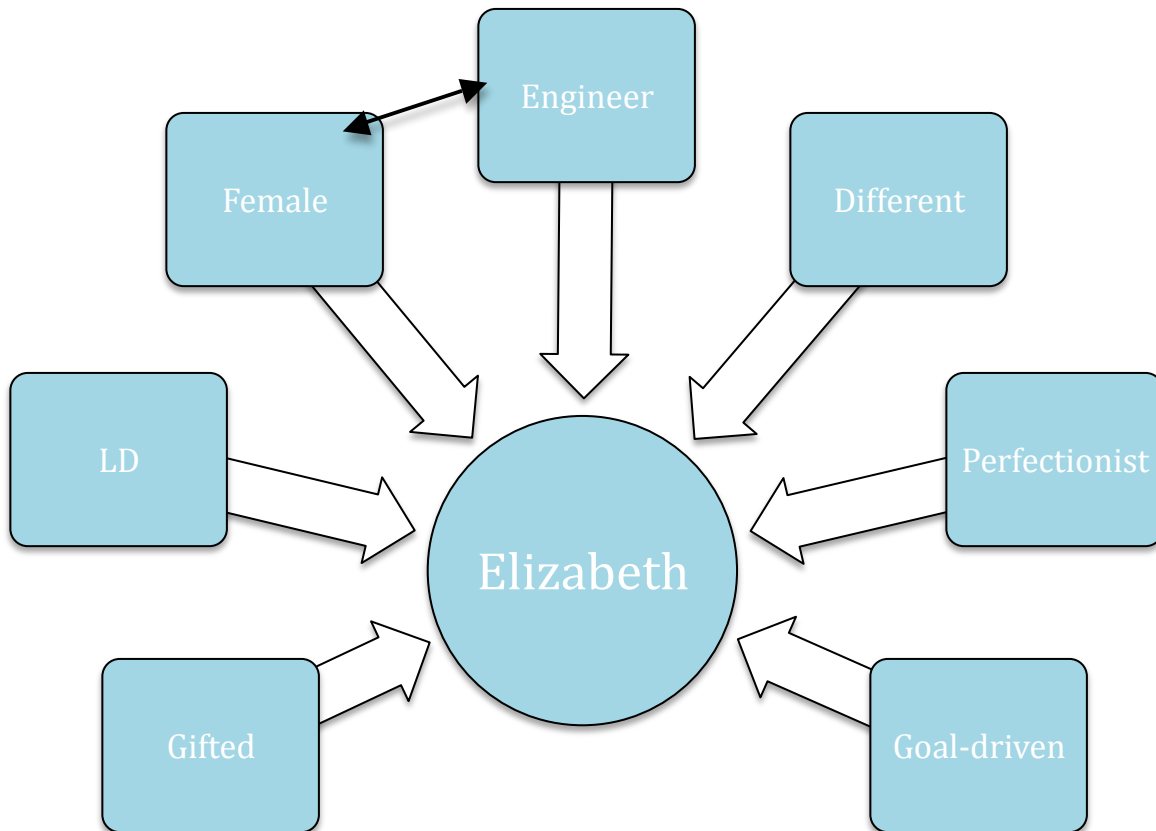
H2. Mind map of the main themes emergent from Catherine's completed Body Biography and discussion/semi-structured interview. The mind map also shows how the G/LD label was perceived more separate components and how the gifted label was directly associated with her "chattiness".



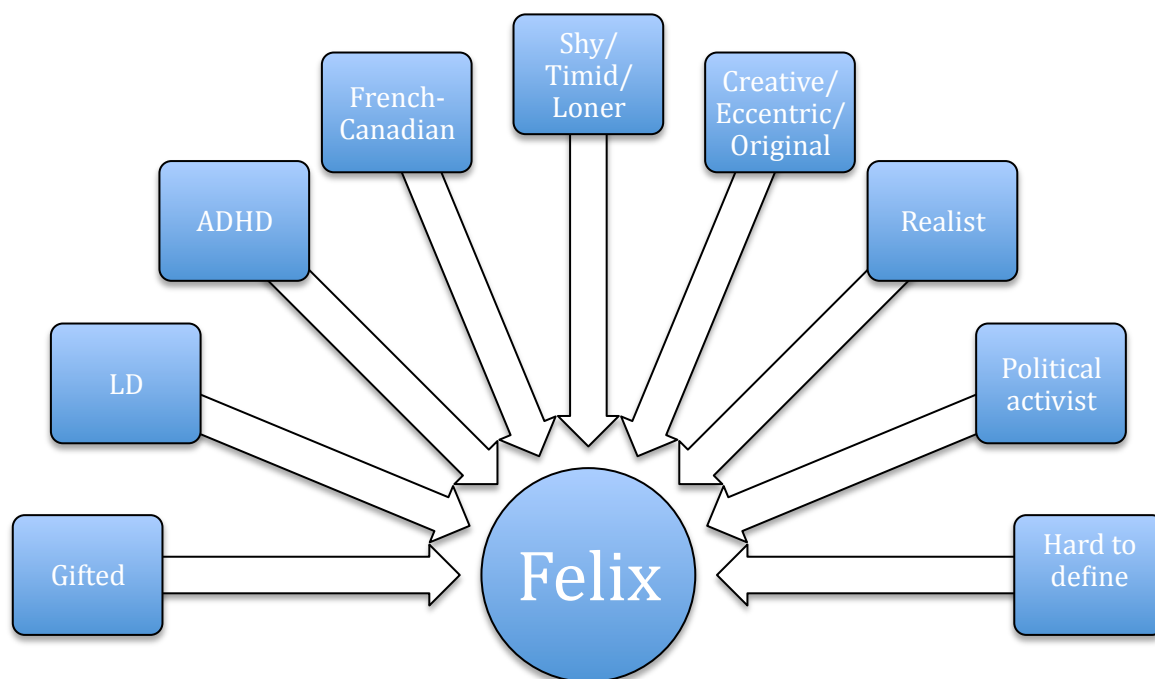
H3. Mind map of the main themes emergent from Darren's completed Body Biography and discussion/semi-structured interview. The mind map also shows how Darren perceived the G/LD as two separate components, and yet, very closely related to one another.



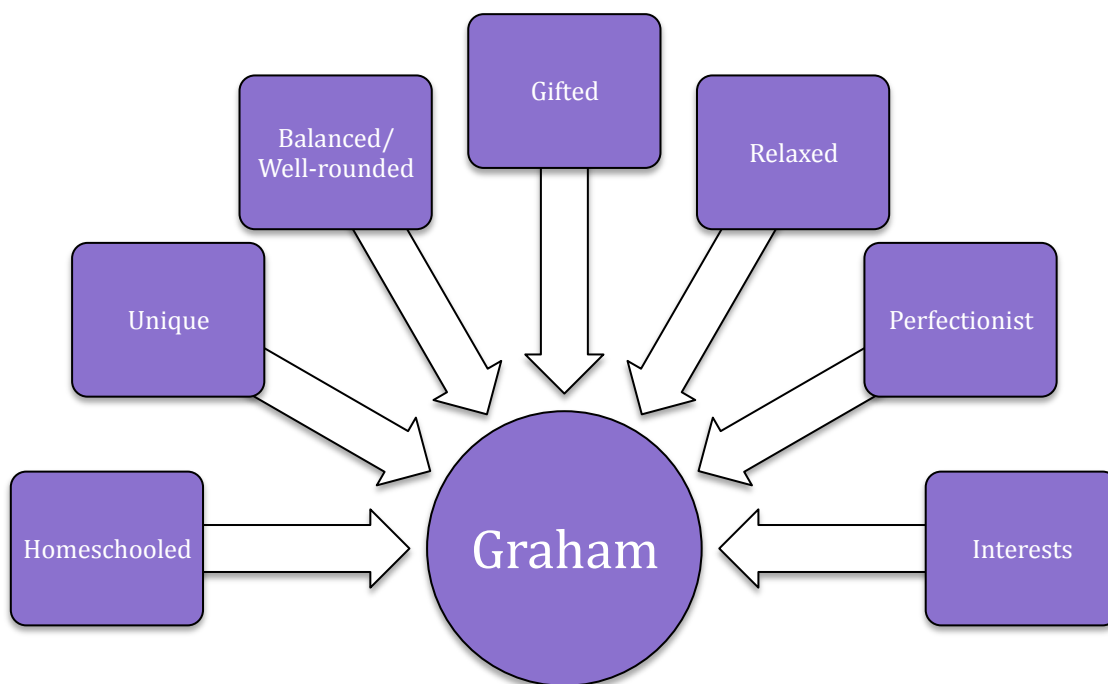
H4. Mind map of the main themes emergent from Elizabeth's completed Body Biography and discussion/semi-structured Interview. The mind map also shows how Elizabeth perceived the Gifted and LD labels as individual components. The diagram also shows Elizabeth's perceived importance and relationship of being a female and being an engineer.



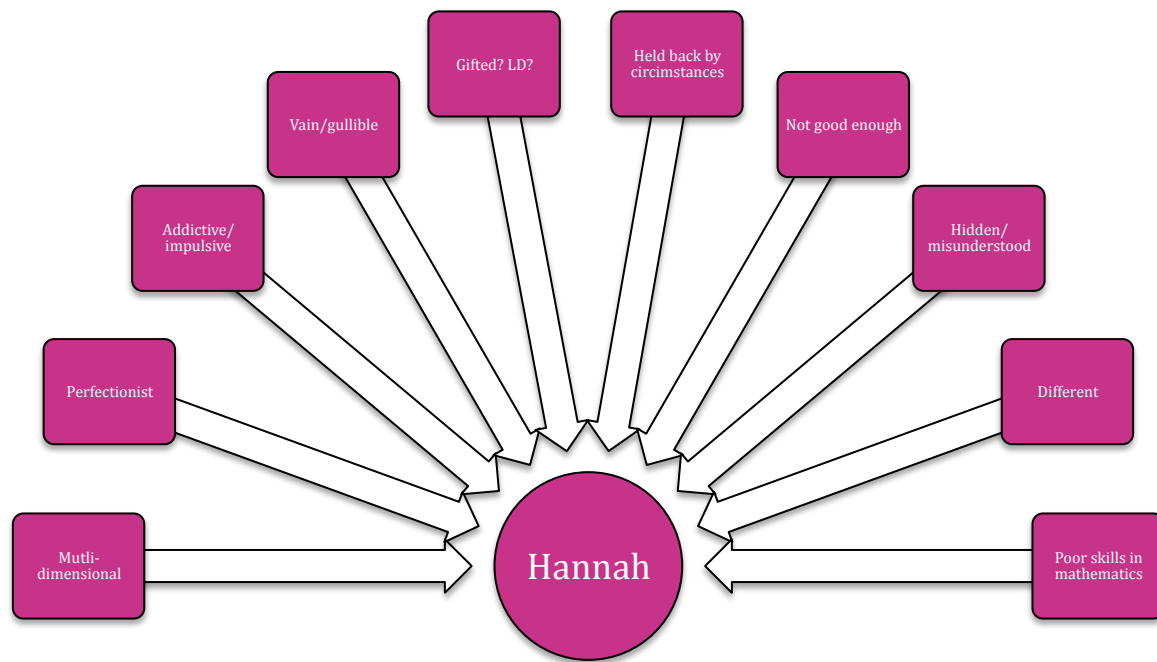
H5. Mind map of the main themes emergent from Felix's completed Body Biography and discussion/semi-structured Interview. The mind map also shows how Felix perceived the Gifted and LD labels as individual components. The diagram also highlights the importance of two further labels - ADHD and his identification as French-Canadian.



H6. Mind map of the main themes emergent from Graham's completed Body Biography and discussion/semi-structured Interview. The mind map also shows how Graham perceived the Gifted label to be of far greater importance than the LD label, as his discussion was less focused on his disability and more on his strengths and interests.



H7. Mind map of the main themes emergent from Hannah's completed Body Biography and discussion/semi-structured Interview. The mind map also shows how Hannah questioned her G/LD identification and focused more on personal attributes (both positive and negative) during her session with the researcher.



H8. Mind map of the main themes emergent from Isabelle's completed Body Biography and discussion/semi-structured Interview. The mind map also shows how Isabelle perceived her G/LD identification more as a dichotomy of gifted potential versus learning difficulties.

